SOCIAL WORLD of ANCIENT ISRAEL
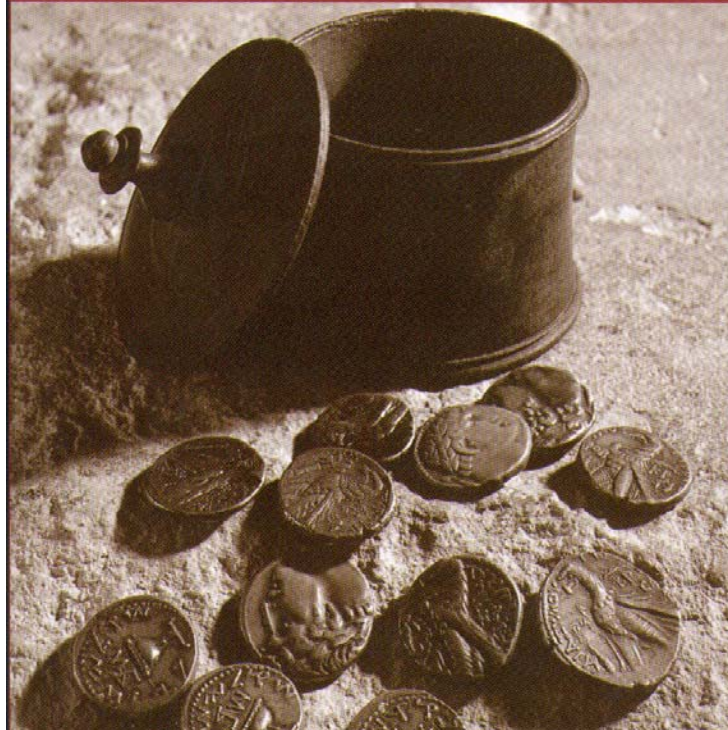
1250–587 BCE

VICTOR H. MATTHEWS AND DON C. BENJAMIN

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Reviews

Victor Matthews and Don Benjamin have compiled a very helpful survey of a number of social institutions of early Israel. As the dates in the title indicate, the survey only includes institutions in l the first two periods of Israel, that is, "early Israel" and "the monarchy," and one hopes that another volume will pursue the equally interesting task of outlining social institutions of what may be called "occupied" Israel. In any case, in order to appreciate the orientation of this work, it is helpful to survey the topics that are covered.

In Part 1, entitled "Ancient Israel as Villages," the arrangement of the chapters is as follows: "The Father" and "The Mother" are discussed as aspects of "village politics"; "The Farmer," "The Herder," and "The Midwife" are discussed as aspects of "village economics"; "The Host and the Stranger," "The Chief," and "The Legal Guardian" under "village diplomacy"; "The Elder" and "The Widow" under "village law"; ".The Wise and the Fool" arc categories of the discussion of "village education."

Part 2 is entitled "Ancient Israel as a State." and deals with the following institutions: "The Monarch" and "The Virgin" as aspects of "state politics"; "The Priest" and "The Slave" as aspects of "state economics"; "The Prophet" under "state diplomacy"; "The Lawgiver" under "state law"; and "The Storyteller" under "state education."

Before this survey of topics begins, the introductory chapter (entitled "Anthropology and the Bible") surveys a number of important issues and sets the methodological tone for the work as a whole. This chapter also, it must he said, rushes through a virtual minefield of difficult issues, and this reviewer wondered if all of the explosives were successfully avoided. To say that the world of the Bible is different front ours is, of course, an important opening thought. To go on, however, with generalizations about "their world" -- to assert, e.g., their lack of interest in history, or to say that "linear logic or problem-solving was unknown in the Ancient Near East" (p. xv) -- leads to some troubling hermeneutical questions about making assumptions about the "ancient" mind as opposed to the "modern" one (a comparison that is too closely associated, by the way, with hastily presumed differences between an "Eastern" and "Western" mind.

On the last point, one wonders about statements like the following: "Our world promotes change, while the Bible endorses stability" (p. xvi). On what level is thus true? Certainly not on a redactional level, since the *theological* attitudes of the editors of the text seem to prefer, for example, the prophetic sources of instability as opposed to the established temple or monarchical institutions of stability. There is also, of course, the Israelite conception of a God involved in such historical "change" as liberation from Egypt, which is often contrasted to a Canaanite social conservatism based on nature/agricultural religiosity.

Finally, it is a bit startling to read the following statement about Western ideas of "history": "For modern Westerners, histories are objective or uninterpreted presentations of the military, political, economic, or cultural events of a nation . . . . History is the genre of 'what happened?' Story is the genre of 'what does it mean?' One does not exclude the other, but they

are different. The historian is a scientist." (pp. xvii-xix) Surely after all the work in both the sociology of knowledge and post modernist emphases on the importance of context, we should expect a more carefully nuanced appreciation of the class, gender, ethnic, and power relations that are aspects of all "history," making it another form of "story." We now know that the proud European inspired tradition of …history" is clearly as much "story," with all its presumptions, judgments, values, and power relations, as is any ancient textual presentation. Indeed, the author's presumptions about what "we" are (European background members of the majority in North America?), as opposed to the ancient "them," raises serious questions about the way that the following descriptive chapters should be read.

As far as the chapters themselves are concerned, much of the information and arrangement of topics is quite interesting and helpful. Each chapter provides sample verses to illustrate the institution being discussed, and, when relevant, teats from other Ancient Near Eastern civilizations are cited. Occasionally, the authors compile their own summaries of ancient protocol -- e.g., for fathers or mothers of u household -- which are highlighted in the test. (Some actual photographs or illustrations would have been helpful in some cases, particularly when discussing village life.) The authors make good and helpful use of relevant anthropological materials -- studies, e.g., about the social and economic aspects of herding cultures and agricultural village life. (I was particularly pleased to see extensive use of F. Barth's important studies.) The presentation of this material nicely supplements tile biblical discussions, and these chapters could well stand alone as assigned readings in undergraduate Bible courses.
Some of the topics, however, come as somewhat of a surprise. "The Virgin," as a social category, is an interesting subject to place in juxtaposition with "The Monarch." If I understood the reasoning here, then I find thus to be one of tile more questionable arguments of the book. Can we speak of the virgin, understood in social and political terms, as "the most politically significant woman in Israel as it state" (p. 176), particularly when one thinks of the significance of, e.g., Jezebel? Or was Jezebel an exception that proves the rule?

These specific questions aside, and in spite of the methodological questions raised earlier, it is possible to appreciate this work for what it is -- a basic, concise survey of institutions in early and monarchical Israel. Many of the chapters could be useful resources for undergraduates seeking a clear, concise, and illustrated introduction to these topics as a starting point for more nuanced and detailed discussions.

Frank H. Gorman, Jr. Lexington Theological Quarterly 1995: 55-56

The Social World of Ancient Israel seeks to provide a selective view of life in ancient Israel that is based on social scientific models of interpretation. It focuses on village life in early Israel (1250-l000) BCE) and state life in monarchical Israel (1000-587 BCE). The two parts of the book discuss comparable areas of daily life in the two periods. Part 1 has chapters on the father, the mother (Village Politics); the farmer, the herder, the midwife (Village Economics); the host and the stranger, the chief, the legal guardian (Village Diplomacy); the elder, the widow (Village Law); and the wise and the fool (Village Education). Part II has chapters on the monarch, the virgin (State Politics); the priest, the slave (State Economics); the prophet (State

Diplomacy); the lawgiver (State Law); and the storyteller (State Education). General discussions of particular roles are followed by exegetical comments on specific texts designed to demonstrate the interpretive possibilities of the sociological analysis.

The book seeks to clarify important aspects of Israel's social life for contemporary, non-specialist readers in a straightforward and simple fashion. It contains a wealth of information and insightful exegetical comments. There are problems, however, which demand that the book be used with caution. One finds the phrase, "in the world of the Bible," throughout the book. This is an extremely static view of social life and assumes a cultural unity and social cohesiveness that need to he demonstrated rather than assumed. Related to this is the tendency to collapse and level distinct historical traditions. For example, in the discussion of "the mother" in Israel (pp. 22-36), descriptions are drawn, to list only a few examples, from Genesis. Leviticus, Deuteronomy, Judges, Proverbs, and Hosea. It is not clear how texts reflecting such a variety of distinct historical contexts, some of which reflect a "monarchical" or "post-monarchical" setting, can supply sociological evidence for the life and role of the mother in the village. In the discussion of "the priest" (pp. 187-98), the exegetical discussion focuses on the story of Hannah and Eli at the Shiloh sanctuary. In that the discussion is presented in the context of "state" economics, it is not clear why a "pre-monarchical" story is an appropriate example. The discussion of "the priest" emphasizes the economic role that the temple and the priesthood played in Israel. Texts, however, are used that reflect very clear and distinct theological and ideological biases and very distinct historical situations and groups (e.g., Deuteronomy, Leviticus, and 1 and 2 Chronicles). Sociological analyses are not exempt from addressing the critical problems associated with the historical origins and theological agendas of the biblical writing. Further, the discussion of "the priest" does not reflect the history of conflict among the priestly groups in Israel. The result is a historical leveling that produces overly general statements. Such general statements do not reflect the concrete nature of social life which is, of course, one of the primary concerns and goals of sociological analysis.

Ferdinand E. Deist, <u>Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages</u> 20 (1994): 219-222

For a long time there has been a need for Matthews and Benjamin's kind of book. At least in the historicist paradigm of interpretation it would be a grave error to read biblical literature as if it were of modern, Western origin. But even those who subscribe to a post-structuralist or deconstructionist paradigm would find this kind of book useful, since, in order to say anything at all about a particular work's meaning, one has to, at least momentarily, curb the process of deferring by constructing a "frame" for the discussion. And few scholars would doubt that the cultural world of a work constitutes a necessary component of such a frame.

Since Pedersen and De Vaux nothing really comprehensive has been published on the cultural world of the First Testament. Useful as they are, these earlier works are not based on a recognized theoretical framework. This is especially true of De Vaux's <u>Institutions.</u> Incidentally, Matthews and Benjamin, like Pedersen, employ the notion of power as a colligatory concept for the description of ancient Israelite society. The definitions of the notion differs considerably, though. Whereas Pedersen's concept derives from the philosophy of culture Matthews &

Benjamin borrowed their definition from anthropology. After a brief introduction to "The Bible and Anthropology" (pp. ix-xxiii) and a useful section on ancient Israelite society (pp. 1-5), they discuss, first, a few institutions of village life and then of life under the monarchy.

The institutions of Israelite social life are discussed under the following headings:

village politics (the fatter and tile mother)
village economics (the farmer, tile herder, (lie midwife)
village diplomacy (the host and the stranger, (the chief, the legal guardian)
village law (the elder, the widow)
village education (the wise and the fool).

The institutions of the state are discussed under the headings:

state politics (the monarch and the virgin)
state economics (the priest and the slave)
state diplomacy (the prophet)
state law (the lawgiver)
state education (the storyteller).

The book contains a very useful 52 page bibliography as well as indices of concepts, authors and biblical references.

The discussion of some of the institutions are really useful, such as the father and mother, the farmer , tile chief, the elder, etc. Several of them are, for me, problematic, though. I fail to see the relevancy of, for instance, the midwife, the widow, the virgin, and the slave as social *institutions*. One of the reasons for my difficulty to understand these categories as social institutions (compared to, for instance, priests and parents) is the absence in the book of an explicit cultural or social anthropological *model* with reference to which the authors identified and in terms of which they interpreted social institutions. For instance, according to which anthropological model can one classify widowhood as a social institution (p. 133)? The authors seem to have had some trouble in producing all argument for an *institutional* position for the host and the stranger (pp. 82ff). What is presented in this chapter as "village diplomacy" seems more like tile description of *custom* than of institutions. A last example: I fail to understand tile logic of discussing name-giving, clothing and physical appearance (pp. 145-148) under the heading "village education." Even if one could argue with the authors that name-giving has to do with assigning "social labels" and clothing with status, education involved much more than merely preparing children to fit their social labels. A clearly stated anthropological model would have made it much easier to follow and evaluate their line of argument. It would, for instance, have helped the reader to understand why the authors chose to focus on so-called institutions, while the social *life* of a people or a group involves much more than mere institutions. They may, for example, hold particular world views, subscribe to particular values, hold specific religious views, etc. all of which have a bearing on their social life. Similarly the environment and climate they live in have, like the available resources, an influence on their social life.

A second fairly basic problem concerns the assumption underlying this study regarding

tile status of Israel as a people. In the light of studies by Errgelken (BN 52:47-63), Skjeggestad (SJT 6:159-186) and Lemche *(Nielsen Festschrift* 1993:76-89) and others before them a study like this should at least consider the question whether Israel may be treated as a separate *ethnic* entity or whether Israelites should be seen as a social class in *Syro-Palestinian* society as a whole.

Closely linked to the previous point is a third concern. The authors tend not to distinguish between various ages in the history of Israel or between the *literary* picture of Israel painted in the Hebrew Bible and the *historical* Israel. It is a well known fact that Israel underwent significant social changes between tile 9th and the 7th centuries and again in the sixth century. The book, however, treats the group as a static entity. It is also a well-known fact that the final form of the Hebrew Bible dates from Roman times and that it had undergone various reworkings during the Neo-Babylonian, Persian and Hellenistic Ages. This fact, is however, not reflected in the book.

Apart from these more theoretical objections I have a number of reservations about certain customs which the authors suppose had existed in Israelite society. What follow are a few examples from the section on village culture that may serve as an indication of the kind of questions raised by the book. Is it really true that Israelite fathers "negotiated" through *midwives* with the divine assembly for a child (p. 68)? And even if this could be proved to have been the case, why would a child, whose life had been negotiated with the divine assembly, be considered stillborn until its biological father "adopted" it (p. 10-11)? The authors supply no biblical references for these "customs". In the case of the alleged adoption they refer to the Qur'an and two authors, one of whom (Wolff 1984) has unfortunately been omitted from the bibliography. The texts cited on pp. 72-73, apart from not illustrating adoption by the *father,* do not prove the existence of an adoption *rite,* but rather merely present *literary/folkloristic* explanations for names given long ago to their babies by the ancestors. In the matter of the social standing of the mother (pp. 23-24) I had the feeling that the authors "protested too much" - perhaps to defend the Bible? " ... the world of the Bible may ... not be liberated, but it is liberating" (p. 23). The fact is that, in patriarchal societies, even though functions are distributed in a complementary way, institutions are structured *hierarchically* and authority functions top-down. In this context the worth of an individual (e.g. a mother) depends on the *function* assigned to him/her by the system and not by his/her position in the hierarchy. The existence of sacred prostitution (p. 29) is another custom that is at the least debatable, while the authors' explanation for the Israelite prohibition against prostitution, namely to distinguish subsistence culture from the influence of surplus cultures, sounds to the somewhat far-fetched. Whether the custom of "holy war" should be rationalized in terms of a deterrent to violence (p. 98) is another open question. Personally I prefer Liverani's cosmological explanation for the ancient Near Eastern philosophy of war to the one presented here. Further, if the tribe was primarily "an army at war" that did not concern itself with food production and procreation (p. 97) and if it was the *clan* that concerned itself with questions of inheritance (p. 9), it seems strange that the *tribe* would be responsible for appointing a legal guardian to look after the property of a man who died without an heir (p. 11 l). It is equally debatable whether the "foolish women" of Proverbs 7-9 may be understood to have included wives that could not bear children (p. 133) and whether prostitutes shared the same state of liminality as the widow, the orphan and the poor (p. 133). While various laws and admonitions instruct citizens to have empathy for the widow, the orphan and the poor, there is no

law protecting prostitutes. If they shared the same status of liminality, this would have been a strange ruling.

There is no question about the importance of this kind of contribution to biblical scholarship. We badly need books on the social life in ancient Syro- Palestine. The reservations expressed and criticisms leveled above should therefore not be seen as cynical comments. On the contrary, they are intended as a small contribution to a pioneering work on an important branch of Ancient Near Eastern Studies.

J. Andrew Dearman, Interpretation: a journal of Bible and theology (1995): 302-304

These two volumes are examples of a methodological emphasis in biblical studies on the "social world" of the Bible. The term even appears in both titles. Identical terminology, however, does not lead necessarily to identical methodology, as a comparison of the volumes demonstrates. The volume by Gottwald [The Hebrew Bible in Its Social World and in Ours, 1993] is a collection of previously published papers and book reviews, combined with written versions of class and public lectures delivered during the last twenty years. The subject matter includes the origins of Israel, the prophetic literature, social theory in biblical studies, and even the significance of Jesus' death in light of studies concerning human sacrifice. It is arranged under two primary categories: (1) The Hebrew Bible in its Social World and (2) The Hebrew Bible in our Social World. Matthews and Benjamin follow a topical approach to their subject, while citing a number of social science studies, and they seek to interpret daily life in Israel during the premonarchic and monarchical periods. They, too, arrange their material under two primary categories: (1) Ancient Israel as Villages and (2) Ancient Israel as a State.

An earlier volume by Norman Gottwald, The Tribes of Yahweh: A Sociology of Liberated Israel, 1250-1050 B.C.E. (1979), was a massive, ground-breaking work, combining sociological analysis and Marxist theory in an investigation of Israel's origins. It is clear in retrospect that some of the conclusions reached by Gottwald in that volume are now held by a number of scholars in the field (e.g., that early Israel was a tribal society indigenous to Palestine. that there was no military conquest of Canaan by early Israelite tribes). Approximately thirty percent of the essays in the newly published volume concern the origins of Israel explicitly, and several other chapters presuppose his conclusions on the matter when evaluating another subject (e.g., the prophets). The reader will see Gottwald at work, patiently engaging both supporters and detractors alike in his continuing efforts to understand the emergence of Israel in Canaan and the social changes the biblical communities would undergo in subsequent years. Chapter 2, for example, is Gottwald's review of the third edition of A History of Israel by John Bright (1981). Some of Bright's conclusions, he writes, are better reserved for the theologian or philosopher and are not properly historical judgments (even so, Gottwald calls the work "the best overall account in English" [p. 26]). Moreover, in spite of the fact that Bright was cognizant of the theory of Israel's revolutionary origins, Gottwald concludes that Bright's work "will only become the full-bodied synthesis he aims for when he discovers that the social revolutionary `key' turns the covenantal religion lock" (p. 26).

In reading Gottwald's essays, one recognizes why some scholars did not previously, and do not now, assess the relevant evidence the way Gottwald does; in large part, they believe his methodological presuppositions drive his historical analysis and dictate many of his conclusions. To turn around Gottwald's criticism of Bright (or others) for failure to recognize the social-revolutionary key, perhaps it can be said of Gottwald that he has locked ancient Israel into the role model of proletariat consciousness-raising. The issue of the proper combination of value judgment and methodological precision is deep and many-sided, and Gottwald has recognized its centrality. But has he seen correctly the contours of his own combination of value judgments and methodology In two places he addresses this crucial question directly. The first comes in the volume's Prolegomenon, originally Gottwald's address to the Society of Biblical Literature in 1991, entitled "How My Mind Has Changed or Remained the Same." The second occurs in Chapter 1, an interview that appeared originally in Bible Review 5/5 (1989), pp. 26-34. In the Prolegomenon, he identifies himself as a historian first and then as a scholar who has learned from modern liberation movements to see Israel's history in the light of social conflict. In the interview Gottwald states that he is a flexible Marxist, using Marxist principles like road maps to help understand social change. In both places, he compares his use of Marxist principles to the use of Freudian principles in psychology. Freud made mistakes, of course, but only deeply ingrained prejudice and ignorance would dismiss Freud completely. One wonders whether Gottwald has been surprised at the recent and vocal discussion about Freud among behavioral scientists. Some, in fact, have claimed that Freudian analysis is completely bankrupt. Would Gottwald dismiss such claims as ignorance or prejudice?

The volume by Matthews and Benjamin is arranged for the student of the Hebrew Bible (student here includes scholars interested in the anthropological analysis of Israel's social institutions). Each chapter is introduced by a lucid summary of anthropological theory on a given subject. Relevant biblical material is then analyzed in light of the introductory comments. This model of presentation works better in some chapters than in others. For example, Chapter 5 ("The Midwife") has a wide-ranging introduction to the social phenomenon of midwifery, but it is never clear to the reader how much of the general subject matter is reflected in the biblical texts themselves. Consider the following [over-] statement (p. 74): "The creation of the people primeval, the formation of the state, the education of the young, the formation of Christian churches, the burial of the dead, the resurrection, child sacrifice, and the desecration of cemeteries during war are all procedures modeled on the services of midwives." Chapter 4 ("The Herder"), however, is more successful in its combination of theory and textual analysis, and its success is also more indicative of the book as a whole.

Matthews and Benjamin get high marks for readability. Their volume is also enhanced by several good indexes and bibliography. It can be read straight through or consulted for its wisdom on specific subjects.

T.R. Hobbs, Biblical Theology Bulletin 25 (1994): 146

This is an interesting and valuable book from a publishing house increasingly known for its publication of new methods of interpretation, and from two authors with a growing reputation in

"Social World" studies of the First Testament. As the title suggests, the authors are more interested in reconstructing the social world of ancient Israel than conducting "social science interpretation" of the Bible. There are values and drawbacks in this limitation.

The authors have chosen to treat their topic in a broad diachronic way, using the transition of tribal society "village life" to monarchy in ancient Israel as a watershed for institutions and the personnel who populate them. A simple social grid is constructed -- politics, economics, diplomacy, law, and education -- and applied to both distinct periods in the history of ancient Israel. The result is a picture heavily influenced by the functionalist approach to sociology. Within these general categories it is the personnel who become the main focus of attention. Thus, in Part 1, "Ancient Israel as Villages," the role of the father mother (politics), farmer, herder, midwife (economics), host and strange; chief, legal guardian (diplomacy), elder, widow (law), and the wise and fool (education) are discussed. In Part II, "Ancient Israel as State," the corresponding roles of monarch, virgin, priest, slave, prophet, lawgiver, and storyteller are sketched.

Given these limitations of presentation, the book is an important addition to the shelves of biblical students and scholars. It is graced with a fine bibliography and is characterized by a thorough knowledge of the world of the First Testament. It also includes many important references to parallels found in other societies of the ancient Near East.

Some surprises in reading the book were the inclusion of "Legal Guardian" in Part I under the sub-heading of "village diplomacy" rather than "village law," and a truncated discussion of state officials under "state diplomacy" in Part II. The section is devoted almost entirely to prophets. An additional surprise was that although sentences of the book of Proverbs are mentioned twenty-five times in the index, no mention is made of the book in the final section on "state education."

This reviewer found three more important points of criticism. The first is a repetition of the tendency of some biblical scholars to regard the premonarchical period of Israel's history in idealistic terms. Words like *egalitarian (p. 4)* and *democratic* (p. 97) crop up occasionally. They are misnomers for a society that finds some reflection in ethnographic studies of traditional Mediterranean societies today. One presentation of the development of "Hebrew" village society in the hills of Judah regards the move as a reaction to the city-state system of the Canaanites. This is clearly reflected in the present volume with the comment, "There would be no monarchs, no soldiers, no slaves, no taxes, and no war" (p. 5). But this is an image that owes much more to the tractarian writings of Thomas Paine than to the available material evidence. It tends to make a virtue out of ecological and environmental necessity. Nothing in the available material evidence suggests *motives* for the growth of population in the hill country at the end of the Bronze Age and the beginning of the Iron Age. To impose them is a common practice among biblical scholars.

A second point of criticism concerns the limitations of the book to the institutions and personnel of ancient Israel. Traditional, preindustrial societies are not simply a network of interacting institutions. They are also based upon shared values about what is right and wrong, about who belongs and who does not, and accordingly about who can do what to whom. Social systems, whether family, the priesthood, or the military, tend to reflect these values. To this

reviewer's mind, a more helpful model of society with which to examine ancient Israel (or any other society, for that matter) is Edward Hall's "Map of Culture," which takes into consideration values associated with use of space, designations of social status, and a variety of activities from war to play. Honor and shame, the fundamental values of the ancient Mediterranean world, receive only incidental acknowledgment in the volume by Matthews and Benjamin. The notion of "sacred space," linked so closely to notions of purity in high context societies, is mentioned only in passing.

A third point of criticism concerns historiography. Little attention is paid to this throughout the book, and this is unfortunate. Writing is an act of bureaucracy. Codification of laws, writing of "sagas" and stories of the past belong in a literary community such as developed only in the monarchy or later in ancient Israel. Attention ought to have been given to the fact that such written material is inevitably tendentious in its presentation. Even what is known of the "Ancient Israel as Villages" comes not from the 13th to 11th centuries BCE, but from the perspective of the monarchy, many generations and indeed centuries later. Questions regarding the nature of ancient Israelite society before the monarchy are being raised afresh among scholars and need to be addressed. Keith Whitelam's study on "The Defence of David" (JSOT 23 [1984]) and others like it need to be discussed in a volume of this kind. Instead the impression provided in this volume is of a distinctive transition from Village Life to Monarchy. This is a mistake the present reviewer confesses to making in his A Time for War (1989). The matter now needs to be revisited.

These criticisms, though seriously intended, should not detract from the obvious value of this work. It represents a vast amount of knowledge and interpretation in a manageable form. College and university students will find much in the book if it is used judiciously. It presents a view of ancient Israel through a different lens. Its use of biblical illustrations to conclude each chapter is generally well done and provides new insights into familiar stories.

John L. McLaughlin <u>Toronto Journal of Theology </u>11 (1995): 231-232

This volume examines representative features of Ancient Israel's social world. After outlining the ways in which the Ancient Near East differs from modern Western society (agricultural vs. industrial, communal vs. individual, etc.), Matthews and Benjamin consider two phases in the organization of Israel, villages (1250-1000 BCE) and a monarchical state (1000-587 BCE), for which they reconstruct typical social functions within five general categories: politics (the distribution of power), economics (the management of resources), diplomacy (interaction between individuals and communities), law (the resolution of problems) and education (the preservation and transmission of culture).

The basic component of a village was the extended household, in which power was divided between father and mother. The father's primary sphere of action was external; the mother's internal. Village economics were controlled by the farmer and herder, who managed agriculture and husbandry respectively, and by the midwife, who exercised a combined medical-legal role. The "host" handled external diplomacy and peaceful relations with strangers,

while the village chief was the military leader and protector who responded to any external threats. Within the village community a "legal guardian" was appointed to care for any household whose male head had died without producing a male heir, even fathering an heir to whom the household could be returned once he came of age. The elders of the village oversaw the administration of legal justice. For instance, a widow was a marginalized individual whose perseverance could elicit justice from the elders against the rich and powerful. Village traditions were transmitted through labels of honour and shame such as "wise" and "fool."

In the state, both external and internal power resided in the monarch. The virgin served as a symbol of the political power of both households and states to enact alliances through marriage. A principal agent of state economics was the priest, who collected and distributed resources through a combination of sacrifices and taxes. Slaves, whether prisoners of war or debt, provided the surplus labour pool required for the larger landholdings in a state. The prophet played a significant role in diplomacy, representing the state in the divine assembly and communicating its determination as to relations of peace or war with other states. The prophet also monitored the state's own conformity to the divine will, thereby acting as a check against the power of the king. Legal authority was centralized in the monarch as a divinely appointed lawgiver, who could delegate authority to judges. Traditions were preserved by the storyteller.

This volume is well organized and presented with clarity. Copious headings and frequent use of shaded boxes for summary points, ancient texts, etc. allow quick orientation to relevant points. Each chapter highlights a particular social role, followed by an illustration of this role at work in specific biblical texts. This yields a number of interesting perspectives -- Yahweh as a hired herder who faithfully fulfils his covenant with Israel; as a village livestock owner, in Psalm 23; or as a midwife assisting at the birth of Israel in Psalm 139; Isaiah 26:16-19; Wisdom 7:1-6, etc. These textual discussions are a clear indication of the exegetical value of attending to the social world of the Bible, and even make up for the few instances when the theoretical component is overly brief (e.g., less than two pages on the widow followed by more than seven pages dealing with various illustrative texts).

This is a fine example of social-scientific methodology in biblical studies enhanced by the indexes of terms and ancient sources, despite the latter's restriction to biblical texts. The general reader will not be overwhelmed by technical discussions while the trained professional will find much of value for deeper analysis.

In this, their second collaborative effort (the first was *Old Testament Parallels: Laws and Stories from the Ancient Near East,* 1991), Matthews and Benjamin examine key social institutions in two phases of the life of ancient Israel, Israel before the monarchy (1250-1000 BCE.), which they call "Ancient Israel as Villages" and during the monarchy (1000-587 BCE), which they label "Ancient Israel as a States". Both authors have long been involved with the application of models and theories from the social sciences, especially anthropology, to the study of ancient Israel and the Hebrew Bible. This volume is a successful attempt to show how a care-

ful examination of the social world of ancient Israel can inform biblical interpretation.

As teachers, both authors know that students can be overwhelmed with too much material to cover in too short a time. They have elected, therefore, a selective rather than an exhaustive approach. They select only representative social institutions. There are criteria for the selection of these institutions: (1) those that are most important for understanding the world of the Bible and (2) those most often misunderstood by Bible readers today The two parts of the volume are linked by selecting institutions from five comparable areas of daily life: politics, economics, diplomacy law, and education. For each institution, they then reconstruct one or more functions in a refreshing and innovative way that makes them very accessible. They do this by treating the institutions as if they were typical individuals in the biblical world. For example, in the area of the communal institution of village politics, the typical individuals are "The Father" and "The Mother." When treating state politics, the figures become "The Monarch" and "The Virgin."

After an introduction that deals with anthropology and the Bible, each of the eighteen chapters of the book is organized in a similar way. Each begins with "an anthropology" and ends with "an ethnography" In "the anthropology;" the authors describe how social institutions functioned in the ancient Near East. Chapters conclude with "an ethnography" that reads one or more biblical passages in the light of an understanding of the social world that was their matrix.

Many existing resources dealing with social institutions in ancient Israel are inaccessible to the average reader, requiring special knowledge of cultural anthropology and/or Semitic languages. By contrast Matthews and Benjamin succeed remarkably well in providing access to a wide range of social data in a format that is eminently usable. They do this, however, in a way that does not oversimplify the complexity of social institutions in the ancient world. They provide the reader with information about the latest methodologies of cultural anthropology, while exposing the deficiencies of earlier anthropological models. They also provide an opening for the scholar who wishes to pursue topics in more depth by means of an extensive bibliography that runs to some fifty-three pages. The authors also include a most helpful index of literary and social scientific terms. Archaeological information is handled critically and carefully. Drawing on their first coauthored book, the Matthews and Benjamin also draw extensively on parallels from ancient Near Eastern literature.

This volume is "user friendly" and employs many techniques that make it a valuable teaching tool. There is liberal use of subheadings in every chapter. For example, the anthropoiogical section of the chapter on "The Father" has seven subheadings in the space of its ten pages. While the reader may be disappointed to find no photographs, maps, or line art of any kind in this volume, interesting use is made of numerous shaded text boxes, a kind of paper version of computer hypertext. Most of these text boxes enclose biblical passages; others include ancient Near Eastern textual material and "protocols" (distinctive characteristics of the typical individuals who are the subject of each chapter).

In the preface the authors state: "We have tried to write a book which will be easy to understand and easy to use." They have done so! *The Social World of Ancient Israel* is a useful guide for introducing students from late twentieth century Western culture to the people of the biblical world-both to their mythos, the stories they tell, and to their ethos, the way they lived.

Too often students of the Bible study only the mythos, and anthropologists focus only on the ethos. Matthews and Benjamin keep mythos and ethos connected out of the recognition that stories make sense only when understood within their social matrix, and social institutions can be understood only when they are interpreted in stories.

K.C. Hanson (Creighton University) <u>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</u> 57 (1995): 355-357

Since the publication of the groundbreaking works by N. K. Gottwald and R. R. Wilson in the late 1970s, there have been few monographs in which ancient Israel is studied with social-scientific methods. One thinks of works by some American authors besides Gottwald and Wilson: T. W Overholt on prophecy, J. W Flanagan on David, F S. Frick on the formation of the Israelite state, and C. L. Meyers on women. Apart from B. Lang in Germany and N. P Lemche in Denmark, Europeans have participated little in this line of research (H. W Wolfl's *Anthropologie des Alten Testaments* [Munich: Kaiser, 1973] is primarily philological rather than anthropo-logical in its methodology). One of the most important results of this work is greater access to comparative ethnographic data and the employment of coherent social scientific methods. Matthews and Benjamin have taken on the formidable task of presenting a coherent overview of ancient Israel's society during the pre-monarchic and monarchic periods. They have aimed their work primarily at the general reader in order to be of use in undergraduate and seminary instruction and in other lay contexts. Their strengths as teachers shine throughout the volume. This is really the first synthesis since R. de Vaux, *Les institutions de l Ancien Testament* (2 vols.; Paris: Cerf, 1958-60; Eng. *it.* 1961), and it is a welcome advance (especially didactically) beyond its predecessor.

The organization of such a work reveals a great deal of what the authors are up to. This volume is divided into two halves: "Ancient Israel as Villages" and "Ancient Israel as a State", these correspond chronologically to the periods of early Israel (1250-1000 *B.C.E.)* and of the monarchy (1000-587 *B.C.E.)* respectively. Each of the two parts is subdivided into five sections dealing with five institutions: politics, economics, diplomacy, law, and education; each of these sections is in turn composed of one to three chapters (eighteen in all) treating social roles identified with those institutions. This immediately identifies the authors' approach as a structural-functionalist one (though they do not make this explicit). One may compare a similar treatment of social roles for a complex society in A. Giardina ed., *The Romans* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

We have many things to be thankful for in this volume. It is clearly written and very accessible to educated readers of all levels. M. and B. do a thorough job of defining their terms and alerting the reader to relevant social-scientific literature; this is also to say that they have pulled together an impressive and helpful bibliography. Furthermore, their exegeses of biblical texts at the end of each chapter are stimulating and well done. They bring together a prodigious amount of data; I found especially lucid their treatment of the farmer. They also alert the reader all along the way to contrasts between ancient Israelite and modern Western societies. And finally, their "protocols," a provocative heuristic device, summarize the relevant issues succinctly.

In the preface the authors state that they know further study will call for refinement, correction, and challenge; in that vein I offer some questions and some suggestions for improvement which might inform future editions. (1) It would be helpful for the authors to make explicit their presuppositions and their methodological orientation. (2) The primary organizational division between villages and state requires clarification. The authors correlate the structural shift to successive chronological periods, but this leads to the false impression that the institutions and roles in part I were replaced or superseded by those in part 2 -- an issue they do not address until p. 160. Furthermore, one can argue that we have no direct access to "pre-monarchic" materials; they are mediated to us by monarchic, exilic, and postexilic redactors. (3) Chronological factors need to be explicated further with regard to the citation of texts. Biblical legal texts are often cited as background evidence for narratives without any mention of the complex tradition history of these laws (e.g., on p. 197). This issue is further complicated when texts from several different periods are brought as evidence for a social role. In the chapter on "father," for example, texts ranging from the Code of Hammurabi to the Qur'an are cited. This is not inherently illegitimate, but the reader needs to be given direction on both the function and the control of comparative materials. (4) By restricting themselves to a structural-functionalist approach, M. and B. have left aside many issues of social conflict. Particularly striking in this regard is the chapter on the priest, where various issues of power and conflict require analysis: conflicts between priestly groups, conflicts between priests, monarchic authorities, and prophets, and the priestly exercise of control over the peasants' surplus. (5) By organizing everything around social roles, M. and B. have left aside or subordinated such fundamental issues as values (e.g., honor and shame, and purity), rituals, and symbols. (6) The characterization of pre-monarchic Israel as "egalitarian" (p. 4) I find anachronistic and romantic. This goes along with the equally problematic contention that early Israel had no slaves, since one of the earliest legal paragraphs concerns Hebrew (household) slaves (Exod 21:2-6). (7) The beginning reader needs an explanation of the protocols as ideal types, which are necessarily variable among different social groups and in different regions and periods. (8) Given the importance of kinship at every level of society, it is difficult to agree that "the two most important institutions in the Mediterranean world were the village and the state" (p. 1).

A few minor points also call for comment. The loss of diacritical marks on European names (e.g., Ahlstrom, Pospigil, Rofe) is unfortunate. It is unclear to me why Sir 39:1-11 should be called "beatitudes for storytellers" (p. 248) rather than an encomium for Torah scribes. An index of the protocols would have been helpful.

This excellent book brings the findings of the social sciences to the study of the Hebrew Bible. Its two sections deal with the first two periods of ancient Israel: early village life (1250-1000 BCE), and the royal state (1000-587 BCE). Both sections treat five social institutions: politics, economics, diplomacy, law, and education, each of which is explained through sketches of representative individuals. For example, village politics is characterized by the father and the mother, state politics by the monarch and the virgin. Each chapter first describes how the institution functioned in the ancient world and then applies this information to relevant biblical passages. The

information provided is extensive and well documented, yet the book is enjoyable reading. The bibliographical references are impressive and the index of literary and social scientific terms is quite helpful. This important contribution to the study of ancient Israelite culture is indispensable or teacher and student alike.

Wilma Ann Bailey (Messiah College) <u>The Christian Scholar's Review</u> 25 (1995): 96-98

No one can understand the biblical text without first being knowledgeable about the society and culture within which it crystallized. Matthews and Benjamin have collected an enormous amount of material from the biblical world, the broader ancient Near East (both textual and archaeological) and anthropological studies to illuminate the social world of ancient Israel. The first one hundred and, fifty-four pages are devoted to the life of the village and the second eighty-nine to the life of the state, with a nicely done summary of the emergence of the biblical text in the last few pages. The authors have chosen to concentrate on five institutions -- politics, economics, diplomacy, law and education – by examining a particular role that relates to each. For example, under village economics the roles examined are farmer, herder and midwife. Under state economics the chosen roles are those of the priest, and the slave. The stated purpose of the authors for organizing the book in this manner is to "remind the reader of the communal character of the biblical world" (p. ix). Each chapter begins with a. general description of the social institution under study (the anthropology) and, ends with an illustration in operation by examining a particular text or texts from the Bible (the ethnography).

This book well illustrates both the strengths and weaknesses applying social-scientific methods and results to the biblical text. Social-scientific study provides models of how institutions generally function in society or in specific societies. But sociological models are not hard and fast rules. For example, in all societies men function from time to time in tasks normally assigned to women, and women in tasks normally assigned to men, because of the necessity of the moment. You cannot take a sociological construct and force it to apply to every specific situation, particularly, when the situation context is a literary construction. For example, in a chapter titled "The Host and the Stranger" the authors use the prose account of the story of Jael and Sisera as an illustration. They provide a nice description of the role of the host and the function of that position. Jael, they determine, is not acting as a host because women did not function in the role of host (p. 90). They conclude that Jael is protecting herself from rape by Sisera. Although there are sexual undertones in the story as the authors propose, a straight reading assumes that Jael has feigned the role of host and taken a political position favoring the Israelites. She becomes a warrior on their behalf. Taking another example, under "Village Politics" the role of women in ancient Israel is cast under the chapter title, "The Mother." The authors document a broad and nuanced role for woman as "mother" in decision-making within the family, farming, herding, managing the household, manufacturing consumable products and tools, teaching and mediating disputes. An example for the Egyptian tale of the "Sufferer and the Soul" is used to verify the authority of the woman in the household vis-à-vis that of the man (pp. 25-26). The biblical text accompanying the general description is that of Sarah and Hagar. It is an appropriate choice since both become mothers. Citing evidence from ancient Near Eastern culture the authors affirm Sarah's right to choose a surrogate in order to obtain a child.

However, Sarah is described as entering into a "covenant" with Hagar. Although Hagar initially accepts Sarah's covenant to bear her a child, she later reneges. She understands the kicking of the child in her womb as a declaration of independence (p. 33). There is, however, no evidence in the biblical text that any kind of covenant was entered into. Hagar is Sarah's property, and she breeds her for her own benefit. The meaning of the text is significantly altered to fit the model of covenant. Again, under the heading "The Widow," the authors use the concept of liminality to explain why priests could not marry widows, citing Leviticus 19:29 (p. 133). But priests could marry widows of other priests according to a nearly contemporary document (Ezek 44:22). Perhaps purity or descent rather than liminality was the ruling concept.

In their biblical interpretations, Matthews and Benjamin often come up with new insights that at times seem right on target, such as the discussion of Abram and Lot as covenant partners (pp. 306 ff), but at other times seem downright bizarre. In the anthropological section of the chapter on "Village Diplomacy," they describe the tactics of battle. "Most often," they write, "either the chief single-handedly attacked with an unorthodox weapon or ambushed the unsuspecting enemy with only a portion of the tribe's warriors" (p. 99). Are they implying hat typical battles were fought by a sole warrior with the jawbone of an ass or a left-handed double-edged sword? This statement is not a social scientific description of how battles were fought in ancient Israel; it is a reflection on a theological interpretation with the biblical text. It is a fusion of theology and anthropology.

Throughout the book the authors do provide valuable information about the social context. They focus on women in ancient Israel much more than other works of this type, and for that they are to be particularly commended. The fresh insight they bring should provide for stimulating discussion.

Victor Eldridge <u>Journal of Religious History</u> 18 (1994): 227-229

The authors' stated purpose in this work is to examine representative social institutions which they consider important for understanding the world of the Bible. They aim to show what social sciences can do for the interpretation of a text. The study is restricted to what is identified as the period of village life in early Israel (1250-1(100 BCE) and the period of the Israelite state (1000-587 BCE).

Five comparable areas of daily life are selected, namely politics, economics, diplomacy, law and education. Politics is defined as the distribution of power to protect and to provide for the village or the state. In the villages of early Israel power was distributed to households by a 'father' and a 'mother'. The first chapter deals with the role of the 'father' and the second with that of the 'mother'. When Israel became a state, power was distributed to the monarch, the subject of Chapter 12. A married or marriageable woman or 'virgin' (Chapter 13), was a symbol of the state to be provided for and protected by the monarch.

Economics is defined as the power over the land and the children of the village and the state. So the farmer (Chapter 3) is responsible for agriculture, the herder (Chapter 4) for domestic

animals, the mother and midwife (Chapter 5) for children. Taxation and slavery were important economic institutions which developed the natural and human resources of the state. The priest (Chapter l4), seen very much as a state official, collected taxes for the land through the sacrificial system and stored the excess at the temple treasury. The slave (Chapter 15) provided the state with labourers or, in the case of slave wives, children.

Diplomacy, the power to deal with the stranger, to trade and to make war, was in the hands of the host (Chapter 7) who is seen as the architect of village diplomacy. The chief (also Chapter 7), based on the 'judge' figure in the book of Judges, and the legal guardian (Chapter 8) dealt with extraordinary threats to the ability to work land and to bear children. There is a heavy emphasis on the role of the kinsman guardian in Levirate marriage, an institution designed to safeguard the family inheritance. In the state the monarch conducted war and foreign relations, including trade. The prophet (Chapter l6) monitored the trade and war policies of the monarch, in the case of the classical prophets usually from a negative stance.

Law is the power to solve problems with one's neighbours, which in the village was the concern of the elder (Chapter 9) and the widow (Chapter 10). The state used the lawgiver (Chapter 17) for the same function. Education is defined as the power to hand on cultural traditions to later generations. Labels like 'the fool', 'the wise' (Chapter 1 I), 'clean' and 'unclean' were used to hand on these values. The state used a storyteller (Chapter 18).

Each chapter begins with an anthropology, that is an attempt to describe how a social institution functioned in the ancient Near East. It ends with an ethnography, that is an attempt to read one or more biblical texts 'whose interpretation is enriched by understanding the world which it reflects' (p. ix). One of the helpful techniques used is the frequent use of highlighted insets which are either a summary of the major issues in each role studied or extracts from ancient and modern sources referred to in the book. There is a very extensive bibliography of fifty-three pages and three indexes relate to literary and social scientific terms used, modern authors and ancient sources. Oddly this latter does not include any other than referred to in the book. There is no general index. The system of annotations used is by bracketed reference to the bibliography so no expansion of the text is possible in footnotes. Some assumptions, which might be considered open to debate, are supported only by a reference to a secondary work, always a frustration with this type of annotation.

To the authors the Hebrews were farmers and herders from civilization centres in the foothills and the plains of Syria-Palestine and not nomads from the desert. They came from inside, not outside Palestine. No satisfactory attempt is made to explain the origins of the Exodus traditions which are so central in Israel's religious traditions or how the covenant with Yahweh was formed. Instead, everything links the Hebrews to Canaanite culture. There is also a rather simple image of how tribes and clans were formed. Households with similar traditions formed clans, more an educational community than anything else. Villages which shared natural resources, such as springs, and which cooperated in working out how these were to be preserved and shared, formed a chiefdom or tribe. Nevertheless, the more valuable material in the book is that which deals with village life. In dealing with the state there is a tendency to rely too heavily on the biblical material without as rich a use of extrabiblical ancient Near Eastern parallels.

The degree to which the authors achieve their aims rests on the section with which each chapter concludes, the attempt to use the method to add extra significance to the interpretation of biblical texts. This varies, as one might expect. Some are unusual interpretations. For example, in Chapter 2 Hagar (Genesis xvi) is seen as a mother whose perseverance allowed her to form a household. She sets out to obtain land and children and she accomplishes her goal. Sarah subjects her to trial by desert ordeal which Hagar passes with Yahweh's help.

Other such 'ethnographies' are less convincing. Chapter 3 attempts to illustrate the role of the farmer by using Isaiah v. 1--7, called the 'Hymn to Yahweh as Farmer'. The exegesis is based on the presupposition that prophets always intended their pronouncements, seen as verdicts of the divine assembly, to be directed at monarchs and not to the people, even if they were delivered to the people. This hymn is more obviously addressed to the people in condemnation of the abuse of human rights-

The treatment of Psalm 23 is helpful in its presentation of Yahweh as the herder who faithfully fulfils the stipulations of the herding contract, but the attempts to see Yahweh as a midwife in Psalm 139, Psalm 8 and Isaiah xxvi. 10-19 are more difficult to accept. The treatment of the story of Jael and Sisera in which the laws of hospitality are dealt with under the heading of 'the host' is a new and helpful approach but the attempt to find a useful passage to illustrate the role of the widow fails badly. Similarly the use of the Abram and Lot story (Genesis xiv) to illustrate the role of a slave is unsatisfactory, as is the use of Jeremiah xxxvi in the final chapter to establish Baruch as the king's storyteller.

Despite this unevenness the authors are to be applauded for trying to establish their approach as a viable one. There are new insights into many biblical passages and much of the anthropological material is of great value. The book makes a very useful contribution to our understanding of the biblical world. Any work which broadens the perspective of the interpreter, as this work does, deserves close study.

Philip R. Davies Journal for the Study of the Old Testament 64 (1994): 122

Accounts of Iron Age Palestine drawing on the Bible are more problematic than when 'biblical archaeology' reigned. How far do literary (as opposed to documentary) texts yield social history (and of what kind)? What is the 'world of the Bible' so often referred to here? M and B. divide Iron Age Palestine into two phases: pre-state (villages) and state – an understandable distinction, but tricky; did states get rid of village life? Were there no city-states in Palestine before the Iron Age? And do the powers ascribed to or claimed by ANE and biblical 'kings' always match reality – e.g. looking after virgins (x)? If so, how…! Was the Iron Age a time of "established religions and not religious pluralism" (xix)? (Did cities and villages even have the same religions?) Direct archeological evidence of Iron Age Palestinian society is, of course, so sparse that Early and Middle Bronze Mesopotamia or Late Bronze Egypt have to serve mostly as the "world of the Bible", while "ancient Israel" itself is mostly elaborated from the Bible. The description here is systematically divided into politics, economics, diplomacy, law and education, functions illustrated by typical figures (monarch, slave, midwife, etc.). M and B

know their ANE, their Bible and anthropological categories well, and give us some sound opinions and an excellent bibliography. But the reader should approach this quite useful book armed with an awareness of the many methodological problems.

Benjamin and Matthews have undertaken a social-scientific study of two periods of Old Testament life, focusing on the social institutions of early Israel and the monarchy. Matthews and Benjamin propose an inseparable connection between the particularity of a family with its various members and the universality of the state and its many functions. The first half of the volume is devoted to Ancient Israel as Village and the second half to Ancient Israel as State. Village politics is shaped by the role of father, mother, farmer, herder, midwife, host and stranger, chief, legal guardian, the wise and fool, while State politics is shaped by the role of the virgin, monarch, priest, slave, prophet, lawgiver, storyteller.

The authors provide anthropological definitions of the five comparable areas of politics, economics, diplomacy, law and education as found within Village and State. These definitions are designed to capture the essence of both Village and State. For example, in the context of the Village, diplomacy is the power to deal with a stranger, while in the State, diplomacy is the power to trade or make war. It is the intent of the authors to remind modern audiences, which are so shaped by individualism, that in fact the Bible is communally oriented. Within the five areas selected for examination Matthews and Benjamin use the common issue of power. The authors begin with the presupposition that the modern audience is not particularly knowledgeable about matters regarding the social world of this period. It is the premise of the authors that the social-scientific aspect of anthropology has been either neglected by scholars with regards to this period of ancient Israel, or it has been ineffectively explored. They are interested in exploring the inextricable connection between mythos (the story which a people tell) and ethos (the way in which a people live). The authors argue that in order to understand properly any culture, ancient or modern, both mythos and ethos must be studied together. To this end, each chapter begins with an anthropological discussion and ends with an ethnographic discussion so that the reader is able to see the richness which is gained as a result of interpreting the biblical text in the larger cultural environment of the biblical world.

In looking at the social world of the Bible, the authors provide an exhaustive supply of ancient Near Eastern references to establish and corroborate their argument. For example, in the discussion of the role of the father in
the biblical world, they cite excerpts for the *Hymn to Ra* as father (p. 10) and the *Enuma Elish* story (p. 20); Yahweh as midwife is seen to have parallels in the story of *Atrahasis, Hymn to Aton* and the story of *Aqhat* (pp. 76-78). The treaties of *Ramses 11* and *Hattusilis 11 (p. 164)* are cited as examples in the discussion of the notion of foreign covenants. The *Anubis and Bata* story from Egypt and the cuneiform tablets from Nuzi are both used as means of documenting the role of Jacob's legal sophistication. In the story of Jephthah and his daughter, Matthews and Benjamin focus on the fact that with the death of his daughter, Jephthah is left without an heir, and the authors alert readers to a parallel motif in Homer's *Iliad,* where Agamemnon nearly

sacrifices his daughter Iphigenia to the god Artermis. The point is that the ethos of the Bible is indelibly linked to the larger social world out of which it comes.

In seeking to understand the manner in which power is used and distributed in Israel, Matthews and Benjamin explore the role of the power brokers who constitute the household. The authors weave historical roles of household members with biblical narratives which underline these roles. In discussing the multilayered role of the father, they briefly discuss the role of the father in the stories of Jacob, Leah and Rachel, and Jephthah and his daughter. Even though one cannot escape interpretive nuances in the discussion, the emphasis is clearly on the sociological role of the character. The hermeneutical difficulties which underlie the actions of the respective fathers are for the most part left unattended and the focus falls squarely on the fathers' legal and sacrificial rights.

In setting the stage for the discussion of the mother in the Bible, the authors insist that while both father and mother have indispensable roles to play in the world of the Bible, there is no perfectly egalitarian society in which gender plays no role. In their estimation the generalizations today about the role of women in the Bible grant less to women than in reality existed. Thus they conclude that "The mother of a household in the Bible had significant power and authority over decision-making and problem-solving for both land and children. Patriarchy in ancient Israel was based not on subordination and exploitation of women, but rather on the efforts of all the men and women in its household to survive" (p. 23). This position will clearly not find favor among all scholars, and perhaps it is not helped as this is in itself a generalization without much support.

Matthews and Benjamin have done a superb job at employing a social-scientific method in an innovative way. The detailed study of the selected persons and institutions allows the reader to enter into the complex social world of the Bible. They have successfully created a synthesis of mythos and ethos. The bibliography of over 1000 entries is extraordinary and among the best that I have seen in this subject area. The book fills a significant need in providing an accessible introduction for the beginner and an exhaustive amount of material for the scholar, and it should take its legitimate place alongside other resource material for biblical interpretation.

Bing B. Bayer (Southwest Baptist University) Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society 39 (1996):157-158

In their preface the authors declare that their purpose is to discuss representative social institutions of early Israel and the monarchy to show the reader what the social sciences can do for the interpretation of the Biblical text. The book is structured into two parts: "Ancient Israel As Villages" and "Ancient Israel As a State." Early Israel was a village culture, whereas the monarchy was a city culture or a state.

For early Israel these particular social institutions are discussed: father, mother, farmer, herder, midwife, host and stranger, chief, legal guardian, elder, widow, the wise and the fool. For the monarchy, these institutions are discussed; monarch, virgin, priest, slave, prophet, lawgiver,

storyteller. Each chapter first explains the current anthropological understanding of the social institution and then the application of that understanding to specific Biblical texts.

The authors have successfully achieved their goal of illustrating how the social sciences help with interpretation. Positive examples are numerous. Particularly enlightening is the idea that hospitality was not merely a means of loving your neighbor but also a means to determine whether strangers were friends or enemies. In the chapter on midwife the authors make the tantalizing suggestion that the "Rock" metaphor in Deuteronomy 32 refers to birthing rocks, and so Yahweh is the midwife bringing Israel into the world.

While the application of anthropological models to the Biblical text is appropriate and necessary, the authors have occasionally overextended their methodology, forcing the Biblical data into particular sociological models.

In the chapter on the mother, the authors claim that there were few priests in early Israel because every available male was needed to clear the land and, likewise, females did not become priests because they were needed to bear children, the future work force. According to their model, female priests were the product of surplus cultures built on slavery. In short, the organization of the priesthood was based on economic concerns rather than theological ones. This argument is a *non sequitur*. Throughout history people have endured hardship because they hold certain values. Hence a high value on worshiping Yahweh distinctively and appropriately in Israel would have overridden economic necessities. The authors are also hard pressed to explain why during the surplus economy of the monarchy women priests still did not emerge.

In the chapter on the herder the authors claim that the Abram-in-Egypt pericope (Genesis 12) celebrates Abram and Sarai for the virtue of cleverness in negotiating with and outwitting Pharaoh by receiving a generous settlement to leave Egypt. This interpretation, based on the anthropology of the herder, forces the Biblical text into a cultural model. While the cultural model may exist, the Biblical text itself celebrates Yahweh as the hero, not Abram. Abram is the culprit, His silence after Pharaoh's rebuke is a telling indictment against him. The goods given to Abram are not a generous settlement to leave Egypt but either an expression of Pharaoh's good-will or the bridal price given to a brother.

Also in this chapter is the conclusion that Psalm 23 does not celebrate Yahweh as the shepherd but Yahweh as the herder. In other words, Yahweh faithfully carries out his covenant as the contract herder on behalf of the owner-Israel or the monarch. While the authors identify "the speaker . . . not as a herd animal, but rather as a livestock owner" (p. 63), they later inconsistently refer to the speaker as sheep without explaining how the referent has changed. In addition the authors surprisingly use John 10:12 to support their interpretation when in fact this passage declares the opposite. Jesus is the good shepherd precisely because he is not a hireling but the owner who has a vested interest in his sheep.

Finally, the placing of some social institutions into either a village culture or a state culture gives the false impression that the institution only existed in, or at least distinctively characterized, that particular culture. For example, almost every passage discussing the midwife, a village institution, is from the monarchical era or later. At its best, this structure emphasizes the discontinuity over the continuity of social institutions in Israel. At its worst, the structure is more

pedagogical than real.

Overall this is a valuable book for introducing the student to the agricultural and oriental mindset that many scholars see as pervading the OT. The authors' conclusion are often insightful, at times questionable, but almost always stimulating.

Josephinum Journal of Theology ns 4 Wint-Spr 1997: 68-70

…Victor Matthews and Don Benjamin …center their discussion on people and social roles. The parent, farmer, widow, the wise and the fool, the monarch, the prophet, and several other prominent roles in ancient society are profiled in detail. These last two books [John J. Pilch and Bruce J. Malina, Biblical Social Values and Their Meaning: a handbook 1993] complement each other very well.

Modern research into the social world of the Bible is a rewarding and interesting study. These works by Pilch [The Cultural World of Jesus: Sunday by Sunday], Pilch and Malina, and Matthews and Benjamin will acquaint the reader with this scholarship in a pleasant and interesting manner and serve as fine aids to homily preparation.

Richard S. Hess, Themelios 1995

Hendrickson has produced three volumes that explore important aspects of OT Israel from a variety of social scientific perspectives. Dearman's volume is divided into two parts. The first part traces the history of ancient Israel from the patriarchal 'traditions' to the period of the Maccabees. The second part examines the variety of theological emphases found in the historical, prophetic, wisdom and apocalyptic texts (for the latter, the whole chapter focuses on Daniel). I missed a developed discussion on the family, but this seems to reflect the weighting toward religion in the 'religion and culture' of the title. The author's awareness of recent discoveries and exegetical approaches results in a competent survey from a liberal Protestant perspective.

Matthews and Benjamin explore the world of the OT by examining a variety of roles (father, mother, farmer, herder, *etc.)* that Israelites assumed. The approach is useful, providing insights, for example, into the rape of Tamar (the virgin) and into the Immanuel passage of Isaiah 7 (the prophet). However, the book contains unproven assertions. For example, Matthews and Benjamin describe changelessness as a value in the biblical world and contrast it with the changefulness of our own age (p. xvi). However, the changing styles of the material culture, clearly seen in the pottery forms, suggest that this assumption should be considered cautiously. Hebrews are not the same as the Hapiru (p. 200), nor for that matter do the British refer to the American Revolutionary War as the Rebellion (p. 207). If used with caution, readers will find many stimulating insights.

Simkins's work examines the OT's teaching on ecology. He includes a useful survey of creation accounts in other ancient Near Eastern cultures as well as those within the Bible. This includes prophetic texts that describe God's new creation. Simkins is most concerned to disprove the theological notion that the God of the OT is a deitv of history and not of creation. To this end he marshals relevant biblical texts, especially theophanies that demonstrate divine manifestation in and through natural elements. He does not deny that divine revelation occurs through historical acts but he does argue that contemporary deities revealed themselves in similar forms. This argument remains open to dispute. It is not sufficient to cite other authorities. Simkins would have helped his case by examining the ancient texts themselves. Had he done so, he might have discovered that, while other deities are found active in historical narratives of neighbouring cultures, references to their historical deeds are far less frequent in non-'historical' literary genres of those cultures than in comparable texts in the Bible *(e.g.* psalms and prophecy).

Ralph W. Klein, <u>Currents in Theology and Mission </u>1997:537-538

The authors explore the social institutions of Israel, both in their early villages and under the monarchy. In each case they focus on politics, economics, diplomacy, law, and education, and they reconstruct ideal types -- such as the farmer, the herder, and the midwife under village economics -- to illustrate the fruits of cultural anthropology. A chapter on "the virgin" under state politics deals with married or marriageable women in the royal household who served as living symbols of the state to be protected by the monarch. By raping Tamar, for example, Amnon laid claim to the power, wealth, goods, and service she represented and so forged an alliance between their households against David. Midwives not only helped women bear children, but their examples also taught the whole community how to understand God whose work in creation resembles that of midwife (Isa 26:16-18; Ps 8:1-9; 139:1-24). The authors emphasize the contrast between the biblical and the modem world and present their materials in a most accessible way.

J.-L. Ska, S.J., <u>Novelle Revue Theologique</u> 1995: 117-118

Apres <u>Old Testament Parallels: Laws and Stories from the Ancient Near East</u> (voir *NRT, 1993, 261),* les deux A. s'attaquent ensemble aux structures fondamentales de la societe biblique depuis les origmes d'lsrael comme peuple jusqu'a l'exil. L'ouvrage, destine a un large public, comprend une breve introduction sur 1'anthropologie biblique et deux parties principales. Dans la premiere, les A. exposent les principaux aspects de la vie des villages: politique, economie, diplomatie, loi et education. La seconde reprend les memes themes a propos de 1'Etat. Il s'agit la des deux institutions sociales de la societe biblique. La politique traits des structures de pouvoir et autorite; 1'economie de is production et de la distribution des biens de subsistance; la diplomatie des rapports avec les membres estrangers au groupe; les lois reglent les problemes qui surgissent a 1'interieur d'un groups; 1'education a pour but de transmettre une culture aux generations suivantes.

L'introduction compare aussi le monde biblique avec le monde occidental moderne. En simplifiant sans doute quelque peu, les A. presentent le monde biblique comme un monde ancien

et non pas moderne, oriental et non occidental, immuable et non changeant, agricole et non industriel, limite et non renouvelable, communautaire et non individualiste.

Les A. poursuivent un but tres louable et ce manuel devrait rendre de bons services a tous ceux qui veulent obtenir une premiere information sur la societe biblique,et par consequent mieux comprendre l'arrierefond des textes de l'Ecriture. Cette connaissance fait trop souvent defaut et conduit a de nombreuses meprises. Comme tout ouvrage de vulgarisation, celui-ci se montre pedagogique. Par exemple, il utilise souvent des encadres pour illustrer le contenu des divers chapitres; il donne de nombreux exemples, tires de la Bible, des textes du ProcheOrient ancien ou d'autres cultures proches de celles de la Bible. L'information est abondante; la bibliographie couvre plus de 50 pages.

Toutefois, le lecteur doit aussi etre conscient qu'il n'est pas possible, dans un ouvrage de ce genre, d'introduire toutes les nuances ou les prcecisions d'ouvrages plus specialises. En outre, certaines affirmations ou certaines conclusions reposent sur des hypotheses qui ne sont pas parta-gees par tout le monde. II serait sans doute lassant de le repeter a longueur de pages. Nous pensons notamment a l'installation d'Israel dans la terre de Canaan, aux theories ethnologiques sur les societes egalitaires et leur possible application a la societe primitive d'Israel, a l'origine de la royaute, le rapprochement entre coutumes patriarcales et d'autres textes du Proche-Orient ancien (Nuie, entre autres) comme a l'interpretation sociologique de nombreux textes, pour ne citer que quelques points. La prudence est donc de mise. Mais l'orientation generale, avec son insistance sur les contraintes economiques d'une societe de subsistance et les interferences entre les aspects prives et publics, personnels et juridiques, recueillera les suffrages du plus grand nombre des lecteurs.

A. J. Levoratti, <u>Revista Biblica</u> 1995:127-128

El mundo cultural en que fue escrita la Biblia difiere considerablemente del mundo en que hoy la leemos. Estas diferencias son multiples y variadas. Asi, por ejemplo, mientras que la sociedad moderna cambia constantemente y se muestra favorable al cambio, en el mundo de la Biblia se valoraba la estabilidad. Hoy la tendencia al cambio impulsa la economia, dictamina sobre los gustos y configura los estilos de vida: nadie quiere realmente vestir ropa anticuada, conducir un automovil viejo o mostrarse partidario de ideas ya superadas. En el mundo de la Biblia. por el contrario, el cambio era una amenaza y un peligro.

La posicion de las personas en el contexto social constituye otra diferencia importante. Hoy los censos confeccionan listas de individuos, y en las sociedades modernas una persona sola (varon o mujer) puede abrirse camino y llevar una vida tolerable y hasta feliz. E1 mundo de la Biblia. en cambio, estaba estructurado grupalmente: los censos registraban familias, y el individuo sin un clan, sin una aldea o una tribu era poco menos que un convicto sentenciado a muerte. Tanto desde el punto de vista social como economico, la subsistencia del individuo aislado era practicamente imposible.

En el mundo de la Biblia la religi6n impregnaba todas las esferas de la vida. Cada hora del

dia tenia su significado religioso: no habia estacion del ano sin celebraciones cultuales, y los eventos ordinarios o extraordinarios de la vida familiar se realizaban en conformidad con un ritual. No habia separacion entre las instituciones religiosas y el Estado, ni existia lo que hoy se hadado en llamar "cultura secularizada". De ahi que en todas las dimensiones de la vida social, en el antiguo Israel, se haya puesto de manifiesto algun aspecto de su religiosidad y de sus practicas religiosas.

En razon de esta notable distancia cultural, todo lector de la Escritura (incluso el que la lee por motivos puramente religiosos y sin mayores preocupaciones de caracter historico o cientifico) debe hacer un esfuerzo para remontarse imaginativamente al "mundo de la Biblia". Si quiere entender algunos pasajes de los evangelios tiene que saber, por ejemplo, que era un fariseo, un levita o un samaritano, y la inmensa mayoria de los textos biblicos le resultaran casi por completo ininteligibles si no cuenta con alguna informacion sobre las costumbres y las instituciones de la epoca biblica. Tales nociones, poseidas al menos vagamente, son la condicion indispensable para una comprension adecuada de los textos, y cuanto mas se amplien y profundicen los conocimientos sobre el mundo social y cultural de la Biblia, tanto mayor sera su capacidad de comprensi6n.

Convencidos de esta necesidad, Matthews y Benjamin han tratado de reconstruir, con los auxilios de la antropologia social, el mundo de la Biblia entre el 1250 y el 587 a. C. (es decir, entre la epoca de la "conquista" y la deportaci6n a Babilonia). Los autores proporcionan un importante caudal de informacion destinado a cubrir la distancia cultural que se interpone entre el mundo de la Biblia y el lector moderno, y la lista de los temas tratados es bastante amplia (v.gr., el padre, la madre. el campesino, el pastor, el huesped y el extranjero, la viuda, el profeta, el sacerdote y el narradorde historias). De este modo, *Social World of Ancient Israel* es un buen complemento de otro libro ya publicado por la misma editorial (John J. Pilch and Bruce J. Malina, *Biblical Social Values and their Meaning).*

La cultura es siempre una mezcla curiosa de narrativa y de vida cotidiana, de mito y de ethos. Mito es lo que el pueblo cuenta: ethos es su manera de vivir. Los estudiosos de la Biblia suelen estudiar el primer aspecto, los antropologos el segundo. Pero no se puede entender una cultura, antigua o moderna, sin tener en cuenta los dos elementos constitutivos de las realidades culturales. Los relatos adquieren pleno sentido a la luz de las instituciones sociales que les dieron vida, y las instituciones sociales se vuelven inteligibles cuando se las interpreta en relatos. De hecho, el pueblo de la Biblia (como todos los pueblos) preserva su identidad cultural repitiendo historias y desarrollando instituciones sociales que reflejaban sus valores. Separar el mito del ethos -- es decir, estudiar la Biblia solamente, separadade su mundo social – implica asumir, err6neamente, que las ideas se bastan a si mismas, desconectadas de la realidad material y social.

Cabe notar, finalmente, que el documento de la Pontificia Comision Biblica sobre *la Interpretaci6n de la Biblia en la lglesia* reconoce que la antropologia social "puede ser util para la interpretacion de los textos biblicos, y es efectivamente utilizada para el estudio de la concepcion del parentesco en el Antiguo Testamento, la posicion de la mujer en la sociedad israelita, el influjo de los ritos agrarios, etc. En los textos que presentan la ensenanza de Jesus, por ejemplo las parabolas, muchos detalles pueden ser clarificados gracias a este acercamiento". De un modo particular, el enfoque socio-cultural "permite distinguir los elementos permanentes

del mensaje biblico que tienen su fundamento en la naturaleza humana, y las determinaciones contingentes, debidas a las culturas particulares".

Patrick Rogers, <u>Irish Theological Quarterly</u> 1999: 311-312

This co-authored book, written in Springfield, Missouri, looks at the most prominent social institutions within Israel, from its emergence from the Egyptian delta until the disappearance of the monarchy at the time of the Babylonian catastrophe. Convinced that anthropology is the most helpful lens through which to view the Bible, it aims to clarify these institutions in such a way as to provide help to biblical interpretation.

It follows the classic distinction between the amphictyony (tribal era, with the people living in villages) and the monarchy (when principal influence lay with the royal cities, and government was relatively centralised). Each of its two major sections: Ancient Israel as VILLAGES (part 1) and as A STATE (part 2) is subdivided into five headings: politics; economics; diplomacy; law; education. There is a strong emphasis upon how particular `players' function within these institutions, such as `Father/Mother'; `Prophet/Wise One'; `Host/Stranger'. Chapter headings also include `The Farmer', `The Midwife', `The Legal Guardian', `The Widow', `The Wise and the Fool', `The Priest', `The Monarch', `The Virgin', `The Slave', `The Lawgiver' and `The Storyteller'. All of this gives the book an attractive layout, and clearly indicates that it is a selective, not an exhaustive study of ancient Israel.

Scattered through the book are eye-catching panels, containing either a relevant biblical passage or a rapid summary of the material under discussion. These panels pique the imagination, demanding that we delve into the text. For example, in the introduction on the Anthropology of Villages and States, we read: Politics is the power of a father, mother, monarch, or virgin to protect and provide for a village or state. Economics is the power of a farmer, herder, midwife, priest, or slave to work the land and bear children. Diplomacy is the power of the host, chief, legal guardian, or prophet to make war or to trade with strangers. Law is the power of an elder, widow, or lawgiver to solve problems between neighbours. Education is the power of the wise, the fool, and the storyteller to hand on culture to the next generation.

Even if one is dissatisfied with some or all of these definitions - and this reviewer wonders at the authors' predilection for the term `power' for concepts which might otherwise be defined under such headings as `responsibility', `collective search', `organised system' - they do have the advantage of pedagogic clarity.

Each chapter begins with anthropology and ends with ethnography. The anthropology describes how some social institution (hospitality, fatherhood, prophecy, slavery, priesthood, etc.) functioned in the ancient Near East. Then the ethnography takes up one or more biblical texts, to show how this institution operated in Israel. The hope is that this new awareness of cultural anthropology will enrich the reader's understanding of the Bible.

The need for this anthropological understanding is spelled out in a series of contrasts. The

biblical milieu was an Ancient, not a Modern world; an Eastern, not a Western world; a Changeless, not a Changing world; a Communal not an Individualist world; a world where Ageing, not Youth, is a blessing; a world of Story, not History: a world of Established Religions, not Religious Pluralism. The authors hope that anthropology can open doors between today's world in which the Bible is read and yesterday's world in which the Bible developed, since city people in the Western world `find it so difficult to identify ourselves with the characters of the Bible, to recognise the common element in their lives and ours, to apply to our own situation solutions found by them, when they grappled with problems of their world ... Much that is contained in the Bible - the main source and fountainhead of our religion - has become in our eyes a mere collection of pictures describing a strange and remote world with which we have little in common.'

Whether the book contributes much to resolving this problem which it so well describes, is another matter. Not as painstaking as Roland deVaux's Ancient Israel: its life and institutions nor as detailed a resource as John McKenzie's Dictionary of the Bible, its principal strength may lie in its breezy style, its close attention to established roles (farmer, midwife, widow, priest, etc.), and its citation of a wide range of recent American writing on the sociological and anthropological implications of the Bible.

Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology 88-89

This book provides a profile of each of eighteen main roles within village life (e.g. fathcr, mother, farmer, host, widow) and at the state level (e.g. monarch, prophet, priest, slave). The authors sometimes generalise from limited data or play down the undoubted diversity within each role. Nevertheless, it is a clearly-written, well-informed and accessible introduction to the social world of pre-exilic lsrael mid successfully illuminates much in the Old Testament that seems alien to modern Christians.

Revista Biblica 14 (1997): 273-274

Perspectiva bem concreta da vida social no antigo Israel. Descreve a situacao da cada membro da sociedade, seus direitos. seus deveres, a sua condicao social, a consideracao que merece. etc. Primeiramente, o pai e a mae. Na vida economica: o fazendeiro, o pastor, a parteira, cada qual estudado em pormenores a de maneira bem vivida. Em seguida, a "diplomacia" da aldeia: o hospede, o chefe, o tutor legal (*goel*), o anciao, a viuva, o sabio, o "louco" (homem sem juizo), o rei, a virgem, o sacerdote, o escravo, o profeta, o legislador, o trovador (homem que conta estorias para divertir criancas e adultos). Sao uma serie de "instantaneos" sobre a vida do povo, no dia a dia, E um pouco parecido com J. Pedersen, Israel, its life & culture, mas menos elaborado, mais simples, mais facil a consultar tambem, pois os diversos tipos da vida social estao simplesmente justapostos em capitulos separados. Basta consultar o indice para achar imediatamente o personagem procurado. Muito util em nossos tempos nos quais se procura mais

o aspecto sociologico da Bfblia.

The authors, professors at Southwest Missouri State and Kino Institute of Theology in Phoenix respectively, have elucidated the background of the Old Testament through individual (Matthews, Manners and Customs in the Bible, Hendrickson; Benjamin, Deuteronomy and City Life, University Press of America) and joint (Matthews and Benjamin, Old Testament Parallels: Law and Stories from the Ancient Near East, Hendrickson; Matthews and John Walton, The IVP Bible Background Commentary, InterVarsity) publications. This is a welcome addition to this type of study, which has become deservedly popular of late among students of Scripture.

Rather than dividing the life of Israel up into chronological sections, as the title dates might lead one to expect, they look at different social functions within Israelite society. First is a chapter on "Anthropology and the Bible" which highlights some of the features which distinguish Israel's society from our own, necessitating this type of study. They also very briefly introduce the field of anthropology and its history, specifically as it impinges on biblical studies.

The volume itself is split into two main sections, looking at Israel as a village society and later as a state society. These each are split into five subsections, each consisting of one to three chapters. These are: 1. The village -- village politics: the father, the mother; village economics: the farmer, the herder, the midwife; village diplomacy: the host and the stranger, the chief, the legal guardian; village education: the wise and the fool; II. 'The state -- state politics: the monarch, the virgin; state economics: the priest, the slave; state diplomacy: the prophet; state law: the lawgiver; state education: the storyteller.

The volume concluded with an abbreviation list, a very useful bibliography running to 56 pages, and indexes of literary and social scientific terms, modern authors, and ancient sources.

There is much in the volume which will be intriguing and enlightening for the reader, especially as this sort of sociological analysis applied to the Old Testament is relatively new. Aspects of the text will be enlivened and understanding of them enriched.

The volume must be used with caution, however. The author's view of the historical accuracy and reliability of the text is not conservative, nor is their use of the evidence from outside Scripture. Also, bold statements are made without any Scriptural evidence at all. For example, the authors claim that by setting a newborn firmly onto the ground "midwives reenacted with Mother earth the parturition she had just completed with the human mother. Earthing affirmed the widespread belief that before entering the womb of its human mother, newborns gestated in the soil, rocks, trees, plants, flowers, rivers, and springs (Ps 139:15...; p. 72). This reading of a biblical metaphor in light of some sort of New Age goddess belief does not serve the understanding of scripture at all well.

In spite of such caveats, readers of this journal will be challenged and stimulated by a judicious reading of this book, which could find a place on the shelves of pastors and teachers, as well as some church libraries.

Burkard Zapff (Wurzburg), <u>Biblische Zeitshrift</u> 2 (1997)

Die amerikanische Studie beschaftigt sich vor allem mit dem anthropologischen and sozialen Hintergrund des Alten Israel. Dabei beschranken sich die Vf. auf den Zeitraum zwischen 1250 v. Chr. and der Vernichtung der staatlichen Existenz Judas durch die babylonische Invasion im Jahr 587 v. Chr. Das Ziel der Arbeit besteht nach Auskunft des Vorwortes darin, dem leser zu zeigen, was die Sozlalwissenschaft fur die Interpretation eines Textes zu leisten imstande ist (S. IX).

Den zu behandelnden Zeitraum unterteilen die Vf. in zwei grope Abschnitte: die vorstaatliche Zeit ("Part I Ancient Israel as Villages" S. 1-154), mit kurzer geschichtlicher Einfuhrung (S. 1-5) and die staatliche Epoche ("Part II, Ancient Israel as a State. S. 155-252), ebenfalls mit kurzer historischer Erlauterung der Entstehung des Konigtums in Israel (S. 155-153). Represantativ ausgewahlte soziale Institutionen sollen dabei veranschaulichen, wie sich das gesellschaftliche Leben nicht nur in beiden Zeitraumen, sondern auch in den zwei unterschiedlichen Welten des staatlichen und dorflichen Lebens gestaltete und auspragte (S. ix). Dabei interessieren die Vf. besonders die Bereiche Politik. Wirtschaft. Diplomatie, Gesetz und Erziehung (S. ix). die sie einzeln definieren. Unter "politics" ist demnach "the power of a father, mother, monarch, or virgin to protect and provide for a village or state" (S. x) zu verstehen. An einzelnen Institutionen des dorflichen (vorstaatlichen) und staatlichen Bereichs wird im weiteren veranschaulicht, wie diese Elemente des gesellschaftlichen Lebens im Einzelfall umgesetzt werden. Im Fall des Kom-plexes "Village Politics" sind dies die Institutionen : "The Father" (S. 7-21), "The Mother" (S.22-36), wahrend die Umsetzung von "State Politics" anhand der Institutionen : "The Monarch" (S. 159-175) and "The Virgin" (S. 176-186) beschrieben wird. Methodisch gehen die einzelnen Kapitel in einem zweifachen Schritt vor. Zunachst wird eine anthropologische Beschreibung der jeweiligen Institution vorgenommen, Wie sie sich nach Meinung der Vf. im Alten Orient darstellte (S. xi). Am Beginn steht gewohnlich eine kurze Definition der Aufgaben and Kompetenzen der jeweiligen Institution, der dann eine ausfuhrliche Explikation, meist durch atl oder altorientalische Textzeugnisse unterlegt folgt. So charakterisieren die Vf. z. B. die Institution "The Father" in folgender Weise "to protect and provide for his land and children, the father of the household is authorized to adopt or excommunicate sons and daughters, recruit workers and warriors, negotiate marriages and covenants, host strangers, designate heirs (S. 8). In einem ethnographischen Teil interpretieren die Vf. einen oder mehrere biblische Texte vor dem Hintergrund des im anthropologischen Teil erlauterten Verstandnisses der jeweiligen sozialen Institution. So wird z. B. Ri 4,17-22 (Siseras Tod) vor dem Hintergrund der vorher beschriebenen sozialen Grossen "Gastgeber" and "Fremder" erklart (S. 87).

Bevor die Vf. jedoch in dieser Weise einzelne soziale Institutionen des Allen Israel beleuchten, wird dem Leser die Problematik einer Beschaftigung mit der Welt des Alten Israel vor Augen gestellt ("Anthropology and the Bible" S. xiii-xxiii). Dieses Kapitel macht dabei vor allem auf den radikalen Bruch aufmerksam, der zwischen unserer Welt und der antiken Welt des

Alten Orient besteht. Wesentliche Elemente auf die die Autoren verweisen, sind: "An agricultural, not an industrial world; a limited, not a renewable world; a communal, not an individual world and a world where aging, not youth, is a blessing." Hingewiesen wird jedech zugleich auch auf das verbindende Elemert zwiscnen der biblischen Welt and unserer Welt: "In both worlds there are people searching for their proper place with one another, with nature and with God." (S. xx).

Die Arbeit schlieisst mit einer ausfuhrlichen Bibliographie (uberwiegend Arbeiten aus dem englischsprachigen Bereich), einem Stichwort and Autorenverzeichnis, sowie einem Bibelregister.

Social World of Ancient Israel besticht durch seinen logisch stringenten Aufbau and seine padagogisch gelungene Hinfuhrung zu einern ausserst komplexen Thema. Ausserdem kann man diesem Werk zahlreiche and wertvolle Informationen zur Lebenswelt (z. B. zu der wichtigen Stellung der Hebamme vgl. "The Midwife" S 67-74, oder zum Sklavenrecht, vgl "The Slave" S. 199-205) und zur gesellschaftlichen Komplexltat des Alten Israel and seines Umfeldes entnehmen, die tatsachlich so manche biblisches Texte vor elnem neuen Hlntergrund erscheinen lassen. So werden z. B. Text wie Ez 16.3-5 erst vor dem Hintergrund des Rechtes des Hausvaters. einem Kind die Annahme an Kindes Statt zu verweigern und das Neugeborene zur Adoption durch einen anderen Haushalt freizugeben, verstandlich (S. 11). Ebenso verstehen es die Vf. Die Sichtweise and Bedeutung sexuel!en Verha!tens und die damlt zusammenhangenden rechtlichen Folgen im Kontext der wirtschaftlichen und politischen Verhaltnisse der Grossfamilien zu verdeutlichen (vgl. z. B. "The Virgin" S. 176: "Sexual activity in the world of the Bible was not as much an aspect of personal relationships as an expression of the political power of household.")

So stringent der Aufbau dieser Studie auch zunachst erscheint und so gross die Information ist, die der Leser erhalt, bleiben doch auch Fragen, nicht zuletzt im Hinblick auf die angewandte Methode.

Zum einen betrifft dies den als "Anthropology" bezeichneten ersten Teil des jeweiligen Kapitels, in dem aufgezeigt warden soll wie z. B das Verhaltnis zwischen Gastgeber and Fremden im Alten Orient funktionierte. Es fallt besonders im Bereich dieses Kapitels auf, dass bbereits hier sehr stark mit biblischen Texten, insbesondere met Texten aus dem Buch Deuteronomium operiert wird (vgl. S.82ff.), wahrend Texte aus der Umwelt des Isaels, um die es hier doch wohl an erster Stelle gehen musste, nur am Rande Erwahnung finden (S. 86). Noch dazu ist es methodisch fraglich, bei der Beschreibung des dorflichen Lebens im Alten Israel (1250-1000 v. Chr.. siehe S ix) auf Texte Bezug zu nehmen,. die der staatlichen Zeit zuzuordnen sind. Zwar kann man vermuten, dass bestimmte, im Buch Deuteronomium festgeschnebene Verhaltensweisen betreffs des Umgangs mit den Fremden ihre Wurzeln bereits im vorstaatlichen Israel haben, dies aber elnfach als Tatsache hinzustellen, bieibt methodisch doch sehr fraglich. Es wird gerade hier das grosse Problem deutlich sichtbar, dass wir uber die vorstaatliche Zeit des Alten Israel nur uber Quellen informiert sind, die allenfalls aus der fruhen Konigszeit stammen. Es stellte sich also prinzipielle die Frage, ob man uberhaupt eine (so ausfuhrliche) Sozialgeschichte des fruhen, vorstaatlichen Israel schreiben kann.

Bei weitem grossere Probleme fur den (exegetisch geschulten) Leser wirft die Arbeit zumindest uber weite Strecken im jeweils zweiten Teil der einzelnen Kapitel auf, dem sogenannten ethnographischen Teil. Hier sollen die im anthropologischen Abschnitt gewonnenen Einsichter anhand von ausgewahlten biblischen Texten expliziert werden. Zwar schrelben die Vf. Im Vorwort, dass e shier nicht um "complete exegesis" gehe, sondern lediglich um eine Ver- anschaulichung, wie einzelne der aufgefuhren sozialen institutionen funktionieren, doch zeigen die dann folgenden Ubertragungen, dass sehr wohl eine Auslegung der Texte vorgenommen wird, die z.T. bisherige exegetische Erkenntnis in Frage stellen oder uberhaupt ignorieren muss, um ihre Gultickeit zu behaupten. Zudem ist nicht recht klar, ob die Texte jeweils die Richtigkeit der zuvor formulierten These bestatigen sollen, oder aber unter Ruckgriff auf diese These neu interpretiert werden. So kommen die Vf. zu teilweise ungewohnten, um nicht zu sagen, abenteuerlichen Interpretationen. So nehme z. B. das Weinbergslied in Jes 5, 1-7 an, dass Jahwe vor dem himmlischen Hofrat im Namen von Judas Weinbauern erschienen sei, um Konig Jotam zu verklagen, dem die Weinberge gehoren (S. 46). Dieser habe namlich die Weinbauern um ihre hart erarbeiteten Weinertrage gebracht, um seine Vertrage mit fremden Nationen zu finanzieren (S.49). Jesaja verkunde nun hier den vom himmlischen Hofrat Jotam und allen Konigen Israels und Judas auferlegten Urteilsspruch and dies noch dazu im Bereich des Tempels, wo die Weinbauern ihre Steuern zu hinterlegen hatten (S. 49). Dass eine solche Interpretation die Sachkontur des Textes, dem es um die Gleichsetzung des Hauses Judas mit dem Weinberg Jahwes (ohne irgendeine Erwahnung des judaischen Konigs) geht (Jes 5,7), ausser acht lasst, bedarf wohl keiner weiteren Begrundung.

Doch ist dies keine Ausnahme. So interpretieren die Vf. die Gesohichte vom Tod des Sisera in Ri 4, 17-22 im Kontext des Verhaitnisses zwischen Gastgeber and Fremden. Demnach kommt Sisera nicht ais Gast, sondern als ungebetener Eindringling in das Zelt Jaels (S.90), um sie zum Geschlechtsverkehr zu zwinger, was als Zeichen der Obernahme des Haushalts von Heber zu deuten sei (S.91). Die von Jael Sisera auf dessen Verlangen hin gereichte Milch sei von diesem ale Aphrodisiakum, von jener aber als eine Art Schlafmittel (Hinweis auf den baldigen Tod Siseras) verstanden worden (S.93) Die Totung Siseras durch Jael habe man dann ale Heldentat zu begreifen, da Jael durch sie die Freiheit ihrer Familie bewahrte (S. 94).

Wiederum kann man slch des Eindrucks nicht erwehren, dass hier biblische Texte entgegen ihrer Sinnrichtung interpretiert werden (so deuten die Vf. z. B. den Satz *wt'mr 'ljw swrh 'dnj swrh 'lj* als Versuch Jaels, Sisera gerade davon abzuhalten, in ihr Zelt einzudringen).

Man konnte in dieser Weise fortfahren. Die Problemaiik einer allein aufgrund von soziologischen Thesen vorgenommenen Interpretation der Texte ist deutlich. Zwar muss unbestreitbar bei der Exegese eines Textes die dahinterstehende soziale Welt des Alten Israel mlt in den Bilck genommen warden, dies enthebt jedoch nicht der Pflicht einer Exegese, die den Text als ganzen unter verschiedenen Fragestellungen in den Blick nimmt. Erst im Kontext eines solchen Vorgehens kann auch eine interpretation unter Berucksichtigung sozialer Faktoren ihren wichtigen Beitrag leisten, zumal ja auch sozioiogische Fragestellungen im Alten Israel auf das sachgemasse Verstandnis der Texte angewiesen sind.

Abgesehen von diesen Einschrankungen erscheint Social World of Ancient Israel als geeignete Studienlekture fur jemanden, der sick einen schnellen Einblick in die Komplexitat and

Andersartigkelt der bibliscnen Welt verschaffen mochte.

John J. Bimson (Trinity College, Bristol) <u>Anvil</u> 13 (1996): 160-161

….Matthews and Benjamin have produced an accessible book which keeps the elucidation of the biblical text firmly in view at all times. However, the focus is limited to what the writers call early Israel (1250-1000 BC) and the monarchy (1000-587 BC). The exile and the post-exilic periods are not included. The much earlier patriarchal period is not dealt with either, but there are several references to its main characters; Jacob is treated as a figure of the Middle or Late Bronze Age, whose social setting may be reflected in documents from Mesopotamia and Egypt. However, in common with other scholars who give weight to sociological and anthropological models, the authors do not accept as historical the biblical picture of Israel's origins; they assume that ancient Israel emerged from the indigenous population of Canaan in the guise of early Iron Age villagers in the thirteenth century BC.

The authors introduce their work as 'a book for those who want to understand biblical people better, so that they can better understand the Bible' (1). There is an assumption throughout that the OT accurately reflects the cultures of the various periods which it purports to describe. There is no engagement with other opinions on this matter, and the focus is single-mindedly on 'what the social sciences can do for the interpretation of a text' (ix).

Unfortunately, many of the results in this book are speculative and dubious. A lengthy interpretation of the story of Jephthah (Judges 11:1-40) tells us that his ill fated daughter 'shares in her father's selflessness' by laying down her life for her household. This strikes the reviewer as fanciful; I am much more convinced by readings of the story which allow Jephthah to be anything but selfless. Likewise I am not persuaded by the suggestion that Israel's midwives may have been called 'the rock' (because ancient birthing stools consisted of two stones to support the mother's hips), and that Dent. 32:1-43 is therefore a 'hymn to Yahweh as midwife'!

The chapter on the midwife also raises important methodological questions. It contains a lengthy description of the role of a midwife in the conception of a child. No biblical texts deal with this, so the information is presumably gleaned from the work of anthropologists studying other cultures, but the conclusions are assumed to be valid for ancient Israel. Among other things, we are told that midwives inspected the couple's bed clothes for blood stains, and then presented them to the woman's parents as evidence that fertilization had occurred. There is a reference here to Deut. 22:15, but this passage makes no mention of midwives, and the blood stains serve a very different purpose. By what criteria are anthropological insights brought into relation with the biblical text in this way?

However, in spite of its faults this is a valuable book. There is much here which genuinely illuminates the OT. The chapter on the monarch helpfully charts Israel's shift to statehood and all that it entailed for Israelite society. Chapters on the place of education, the roles of priest, prophet and slave, all contain useful information. In short, it is a book which can be read profitably, but readers should keep their critical faculties about them at all times…..

Matthias Kockert, <u>Zeitschrift fur die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</u>. 108 (1996): 309-310

  V. H. Matthews and D. C. Benjamin, <u>Social World of Ancient Israel, 1250-587 BCE</u> (Peabody/Mass. 1993 Hendrickson Publishers, XXIII + 327 S., geb.). (Das didaktisch augerordentlich geschickt angelegte Studien-Buch behandelt die vorstaarliche and die Konigszeit (ohne Differenzierung zwischen Nord- and Sudreich) in zwei Hauptteilen, die jeweils nach kurzen Darstellungen der geschichtlichen Lage ("Ancient Israel as Villages" and "Ancient Israel as States") in funf soziologisch wichtige Bereiche gegliedert sind. jedes Kap, beginnt mit einem Protokoll der Funktionen der jewedigen Institution, beschreibt deren unterschiedliche Dimensionen (mit Blick auf altorientalisches Vergleichsmaterial, aber auch auf die Entsprechungen in den religionsgeschichtlich relevanten Vorstellungen) and endet mit der Auslegung exemplarischer Texte zur Sache. Auf these Weise behandeln die Vf. unter *"Politics"* (verstanden als das Vermogen zu Schutz and Versorgung) Vater (Gen 25-37; Jdc 11) and Mutter (Gen 16; 21) sowie Konig (II Sam 9; 16,1-4; 19,24-30) and "the Virgin" (II Sam 13-14), unter *"Economics"* (das Vermogen, Land zu bearbeiten and Kinder zu gebaren) Bauer (Jes 5,1-7), Viehzachter (in Gen, Ps, Ez) and Hebamme sowie Priester (I Sam 1-2; 2-4) and Sklave (Gen 13-14), unter *"Diplomacy"* (das Vermogen, Kriege zu fiihren and Handel zu treiben) Feinde and Freunde (Jdc 4,17-22), Fiihrer (I Sam 11) and Vormund (Gen 38) sowie den Propheten (Jes 7), unter *"Law"*, (das Vermogen, Probleme zwischen Nachbarn zu Iosen) Alteste (Dtn 22,13-21) and Witwe (in Qumran; Rt 1) sowie Gesetzgeber (Jet 7; 26), unter *"Education"* (das Vermogen, Tradition der nachsten Generation zu vermitteln) Weise and Toren (Dtn 21,18-21; II Reg 5; 7) sowie Geschichtenerzahler (11 Reg 22-23; Jer 36; mit Ausblick auf die Erzahlwerke in Pentateuch and DtrGW). - Der erstaunliche Reichtum der Gesichtspunkte ist freilich durch den empfindlichen Mangel erkauft, den Ruckschluss von den biblischen Texten, die als Traditionsliteratur kritischer Analyse bedurfen, auf die gesellschaftliche Wirklichkeit der von den Texten imaginierten Zeit unreflektiert zu lassen. So stellt das Buch eher eine ausserordentlich anregende Materialsammlung dar, der die kritische Analyse noch aufgegeben ist, als eine sozialgeschichtliche Rekonstruktion. Das Buch wird mit einer lesenswerten Einfuhrung zu "Anthropology and Bible", eroffnet, die sehr gut den eigentumlichen Charakter einer altvorderorientahschen Gesellschaft gegenuber unserer neuzeitlichen Welt herausarbeitet. Ein umfangliches Literaturverzeichnis (in dem man allerdings die einschlagigen Arbeiten von Albertz, Crusemann, Otto usw. vermisst) and die ublichen Register beschliessen ein Buch, das auch fur das Studium sehr willkommen ist.

Rick R. Marrs (Pepperdine University), <u>Restoration Quarterly</u>

  The *Social World of Ancient Israel* introduces students and interested laypersons to the manifold insights deriving from anthropological and sociological analysis of the OT materials. Matthews and Benjamin categorize village and state life in ancient Israel under five groupings:

politics (the institution for distributing power to protect and provide for the village or state), economics (the power over land and children), diplomacy (the power to deal with the stranger), law (the power to solve problems between neighbors), and education (the power to hand on culture to subsequent generations). In each category they begin with an anthropological overview and conclude with specific ethnographic analyses of pertinent biblical passages.

This is a quite valuable and useful work for students of the OT, not only as a clear and engaging introduction to social scientific study of the OT, but also for an insight into the way in which these general principles and approaches apply directly to particular biblical texts and impact interpretation. The analyses are at times decisive, sometimes bold, and consistently thought provoking. Of some concern is the way in which rather bold and provocative interpretations of texts are presented as "givens" within the scholarly community. However, the authors remind us that the social institutions they reconstruct are typical rather than definitive. The analysis of ancient Israelite village and state life through the lens of various "individuals" (e.g., mother, father. herder, statesman, lawgiver, monarch, priest, slave, widow, et al.) is most elucidating.

This work serves as an excellent introduction to the social world of ancient Israel; it surely accomplishes its stated goals.

PRD, <u>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</u> 64 (1994): 122

Accounts of Iron Age Palestine drawing on the Bible are more problematic than when `biblical archaeology' reigned. How far do literary (as opposed to documentary) texts yield social history (and of what kind)? What is the `world of the Bible' so often referred to here? M. and B. divide Iron Age Palestine into two phases: pre-state (villages) and state -- an understandable distinction, but tricky: did states get rid of village life? Were there no city-states in Palestine before the Iron Age? And do the powers ascribed to or claimed by ANE and biblical `kings' always match reality -- e.g. looking after virgins (x)? If so, how...! Was the Iron Age a time of `established religions and not religious pluralism' (xix)? (Did cities and villages even have the same religions") Direct archaeological evidence of Iron Age Palestinian society is, of course, so sparse that Early and Middle Bronze Mesopotamia or Late Bronze Egypt have to serve mostly as the `world of the Bible', while `ancient Israel' itself is mostly elaborated from the Bible. The description here is systematically divided into politics, economics, diplomacy, law and education, functions illustrated by typical figures (monarch. slave, midwife, etc.). M. and B. know their ANE, their Bible, and anthropological categories well, and give us some sound opinions and an excellent bibliography. But the reader should approach this quite useful book armed with an awareness of the many methodological problems.

Michael A. Lyons, <u>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</u> (March, 1996): 157-158.

In their preface the authors declare that their purpose is to discuss representative social

institutions of early Israel and the monarchy to show the reader what the social sciences can do for the interpretation of the Biblical text. The book is structured into two parts: "Ancient Israel As Villages" and "Ancient Israel As a State." Early Israel was a village culture, whereas the monarchy was a city culture or a state.

For early Israel these particular social institutions are discussed: father, mother, farmer, herder, midwife, host and stranger, chief, legal guardian, elder, widow, the wise and the fool. For the monarchy, these institutions are discussed: monarch, virgin, priest, slave, prophet, lawgiver, storyteller. Each chapter first explains the current anthropological understanding of the social institution and then the application of that understanding to specific Biblical texts.

The authors have successfully achieved their goal of illustrating how the social sciences help with interpretation. Positive examples are numerous. Particularly enlightening is the idea that hospitality was not merely a means of loving your neighbor but also a means to determine whether strangers were friends or enemies. In the chapter on midwife the authors make the tantalizing suggestion that the "Rock" metaphor in Deuteronomy 32 refers to birthing rocks, and so Yahweh is the midwife bringing Israel into the world.

While the application of anthropological models to the Biblical text is appropriate and necessary, the authors have occasionally overextended their methodology, forcing the Biblical data into particular sociological models.

In the chapter on the mother, the authors claim that there were few priests in early Israel because every available male was needed to clear the land and, likewise, females did not become priests because they were needed to bear children, the future work force. According to their model, female priests were the product of surplus cultures built on slavery. In short, the organization of the priesthood was based on economic concerns rather than theological ones.

This argument is a *non sequitur*. Throughout history people have endured hardship because they held certain values. Hence a high value on worshiping Yahweh distinctively and appropriately in Israel would have overridden economic necessities. The authors are also hard pressed to explain why during the surplus economy of the monarchy women priests still did not emerge.

In the chapter on the herder the authors claim that the Abram-in-Egypt pericope (Genesis 12) celebrates Abram and Sarai for the virtue of cleverness in negotiating with and outwitting Pharaoh by receiving a generous settlement to leave Egypt.

This interpretation, based on the anthropology of the herder, forces the Biblical text into a cultural model. While the cultural model may exist, the Biblical text itself celebrates Yahweh as the hero, not Abram. Abram is the culprit. His silence after Pharaoh's rebuke is a telling indictment against him. The goods given to Abram are not a generous settlement to leave Egypt but either an expression of Pharaoh's goodwill or the bridal price given to a brother.

Also in this chapter is the conclusion that Psalm 23 does not celebrate Yahweh as the shepherd but Yahweh as the herder. In other words, Yahweh faithfully carries out his covenant

as the contract herder on behalf of the owner-Israel or the monarch. While the authors identify "the speaker . . . not as a herd animal, but rather as a livestock owner" (p. 63), they later inconsistently refer to the speaker as sheep without explaining how the referent has changed. In addition the authors surprisingly use John 10:12 to support their interpretation when in fact this passage declares the opposite. Jesus is the good shepherd precisely because he is not a hireling but the owner who has a vested interest in his sheep.

Finally, the placing of some social institutions into either a village culture or a state culture gives the false impression that the institution only existed in, or at least distinctively characterized, that particular culture. For example, almost every passage discussing the midwife, a village institution, is from the monarchical era or later. At its best, this structure emphasizes the discontinuity over the continuity of social institutions in Israel. At its worst, the structure is more pedagogical than real.

Overall this is a valuable book for introducing the student to the agricultural and oriental mindset that many scholars see as pervading the OT. The authors' conclusion are often insightful, at times questionable, but almost always stimulating.

International Zeitschriftenschau fur Bibelwissenschaft und Grenzgebiete (1995)

Inspired by the anthropological approach, the two authors sketch eighteen portraits of professions, roles, and social types that make up the fabric of Israelite society: father, mother, farmer, herder, midwife, host and stranger, chief, legal guardian, elder, widow, wise and fool, monarch, virgin, priest, slave, prophet, lawgiver, and storyteller. The individual chapters always start with a general portrait of the social type under discussion and then proceed to exemplify that portrait by presenting passages from the Hebrew Bible. The book is to be recommended to students and researchers alike, for it demonstrates how much we miss if we neglect the anthropological approach. - In the bibliography, the first entry for B. Lang is a book rather than an article (Stuttgart: Kath. Bibelwerk, 2nd edn., 1980).

Wisconsin Bookwatch (March, 1995): 8

Victor Matthews & Don Benjamin scholarly work, the Social World of Ancient Israel, 1250-587 BCE takes a unique look at the social institutions of the world of early ismel and their importance for sound biblical interpretation. Immersing the reader into five major areas of daily life in antiquity (politics, economics, diplomacy, law, and education) Matthews and Benjamin explore how "players" function, such as "father/mother", "prophet/wise one", and "host/stranger".

Theology Digest (1995): 372

Victor Matthews of Southwest Missouri State University, Springfield, Missouri, and Don Benjamin of Rice University highlight how social institutions function in early Israel and the monarchy. They examine ancient Israel as villages -- village politics, economics, diplomacy, law, and education. In the section on the monarchy they examine ancient Israel as a state -- state politics, economics, diplomacy, law, and education. In each section they describe the institutions and illustrate them from the Bible and similar institutions in other countries of the Near East. They include a 53-page bibliography and three indexes.

Joel F. Drinkard, Jr. <u>Review and Expositor</u> 92 (1995): 383

Social World of Ancient Israel presents a new way to look at the Old Testament. Rather than our more traditional views which tend to be either historical or theological in approach, Matthews and Benjamin give us an anthropological window into the Old Testament. The book is divided into two basic parts: Israel as a village-based culture, which deals with Israel especially prior to the rise of monarchy, and Israel as a state after the rise of monarchy. In each part, separate chapters discuss the topics of politics, economics, diplomacy, law, and education.

The most fascinating and interesting aspect of the book is the new understanding Matthews and Benjamin bring to the Old Testament. By following an anthropological model, they show that many of the stories can be interpreted in a new manner. For example, in the story of Jael and Sisera in Judges 4, does Jael break the established code of treatment for a guest by giving Sisera a sleep-inducing drink and then killing him? Matthews and Benjamin interpret the text to show that Sisera is the one who violated the codes of hospitality and Jael acted to protect her household. Just to mention one other example, Matthews and Benjamin interpret many of the rapes mentioned in the Old Testament as political maneuvers to take over the household of another by showing the inability of the head of the house to protect its members. Thus Amnon's rape of Tamar was not a matter of unrequited love, but rather an attempt to show that Absalom could not defend his household, and was, therefore, incapable of ruling after David. Absalom takes two years before he is able to restore the honor of his household by murdering Amnon.

This book is quite readable and would be of great interest to the pastor and student alike. I plan to use it as a textbook next semester. Many of the insights would also be helpful to the layperson as well. I highly recommend this book to give a new window to interpret many of the Old Testament stories as well as a number of New Testament ones.

Lester L. Grabbe, <u>Society for Old Testament Book Study List</u>. 1994:37

Matthews and Benjamin have written a useful textbook. It is divided into two parts, the **first** on the village, the second on the state. Each part has chapters on politics, economics, diplomacy, law, and education. Separate chapters focus on individuals who really represent social

institutions (father, mother, chief, widow, monarch, priest, prophet). The last part of each chapter focuses on specific texts chosen to illustrate the content of that chapter. The study is up to date, the bibliography very useful, and there is much common sense in discussion and interpretation. Nevertheless. there are some problems of conception about such a textbook. First, it does not tell us how we know what we know. How do you get from source -- especially when that source is the biblical text -- to society? Secondly, it gives little indication of major disputes between scholars. The problem of interpretation in their reconstruction is really by-passed. Students should learn the issues, not just be spoonfed predigested, homogenized 'facts' -- after all, they are supposed to be on a university course.

Clifford Denton, <u>Tishrei Reviews: exploring the Jewish Roots of the Christian Faith</u>. 1994:??

This is very well written, well researched and well referenced book. It is a cultural anthropologists' view of society in Ancient Israel which is written in an attractive style for the general reader. The authors subdivide the society of Ancient Israel into at least four types. They do not tackle the Exile or Post Exilic period, however, but concentrate on early Israel and the Monarchy. This gives us a view of Israel in relation to many of the earliest Old Testament accounts. It is necessary for us to study these accounts with understanding, with a relevant interpretations of the priorities of society in the background to our thinking. Otherwise we are likely to superimpose priorities from the world around us or lean on our imagination. Any historian will create a picture of the times he is considering with certain emphasis which he considers to be the priority. Thus the view of the anthropologist is one of many views. Hence this book must be studied alongside other material in an objective way. It is not necessary for the reader to agree with all of the perspectives that are taken in the book in order to discover a rich overview of the early days of Israel and deepen his understanding of the priorities of this civilisation. The authors of the book have analysed essential elements of this society in a clear, scholarly and useful way. The first part of the book looks at village communities and the second at the State. The authors explore the roles of Father, Mother, Farmer Midwife, Elder, Chief, Herder, Host, Stranger, Guardian, Widow, the Wise and the Fool when considering village economy, politics, diplomacy, law and education. They then consider the Monarch, Virgin, Priest, Slave, Prophet, Lawgiver and Storyteller in relation to the State system. They draw on evidence from Israel's neighbours as well as from Biblical accounts. This strengthens the ability to draw relevant pictures of these times but could also distort the particular view of Israel itself. Since we need to look at all possible evidence we can rightly say that the authors have done an excellent job in building a pictorial background to these important days of Biblical history, which we can and should test and sift for ourselves.

<u>Old Testament Abstracts</u> 19??: 431

This volume is a selective, rather than an exhaustive study of ancient Israel. Specifically, it deals only with early Israel (1250-1000 B.C.E.) and the monarchy (1000-587 B.C.E.), discussing representative social institutions from these two periods, principally those which are most important for understanding the world of the Bible. Its readings of biblical texts are meant only

to highlight the way in which a particular social institution functions, not provide a complete exegesis of the texts cited. The book is divided into two parts: Ancient Israel as Villages and Ancient Israel as a State. Within these two sections, one finds chapters dealing with the broader categories of politics, economics, diplomacy, law, and education. These chapters, in turn, highlight social indicators and labels such as the father, the mother, the midwife, the chief, the elder, the wise and the fool, the priest, the slave, the lawgiver, and the storyteller.-V H.M.

Leslie Hoppe, <u>Bible Today</u> 1994: 260

Readers of *The Bible Today* enjoyed a preview of this work. While it was still in preparation, its authors wrote a series of articles for TBT based on their research that appeared in 1991-1992. This work, written for a popular audience, shows how the social sciences and archaeology can help us understand the people who gave us the Bible. In their discussion of the social institutions of early and monarchic Israel, the authors keep directing readers to the biblical text. This is an engaging work that will inform the scholar and fascinate the general reader.

Philip J. King, <u>Bible Review</u> (October 1994): 15-16

The history of modern biblical research, extending over 250 years, from time to time includes new methods for the interpretation of the Hebrew Bible. Today, though not for the first time, sociology and anthropology play a prominent role in explaining biblical texts. Through the interpretive tools of modern social science, scholars can try to reconstruct the social history of the biblical world. The better one knows the people of the biblical world, the better one understands the Bible. The authors of The Social World of Ancient Israel succeed admirably in describing the impact of the social sciences on biblical studies.

The book is divided into two principal sections, each dealing with a major social institution in the Bible: the village arid the state. Both are analyzed with regard to live areas of daily life-politics, economics, diplomacy, law and education - and with regard to the dominant social roles in each of these categories. The institution of the village, for example, includes father, mother, farmer, herder, midwife, host, stranger, chief, legal guardian, elder,),widow, sage and fool; that of the state includes monarch, virgin, priest, slave, prophet, lawgiver and storyteller. While describing these diverse social roles, the authors impart a good deal of information about daily life in biblical times.

All the chapters are informative, but chapter two, oil the role of the mother, has special relevance as a corrective to the common observation that the Bible is antifeminist. Regarding the status of women in the biblical world, the authors state: "The Bible itself grants women much more access to the administrative, judicial, and economic systems than many of today's generalizations about women and the Bible acknowledge." The biblical world, to be sure, was pariarchal, but patriarchy as a social system and sexism as a form of prejudice are quite different. Women in the biblical household had significant authority and power, especially over

the education of their children. The authors emphasize the responsibilities and not the restrictions placed upon the mother. In biblical teaching, for instance, homemaking and childbearing are not inferior roles. The father and mother had different functions, but the Bible insists that honor is due equally to both parents.

Among the book's numerous virtues arc a glossary of technical and literary terms, and indexes of modern authors and ancient sources. The books format is especially inviting. The generous use of subheadings enhances clarity. Another attractive feature is the blocked paragraphs, set off in shaded color, which serve to highlight biblical and extrabiblical texts and other salient features, such as summaries of the functions of the various social roles described in the book.

Both the English text and the interspersed Hebrew are remarkably free of errors. If the book has a fault, it is its literal and repetitive style. But that hardly detracts from its overall value as a synthesis of the contribution- of social science to biblical interpretation.

DJR Regent's Review 4 (Spring 1994): 6-7

Publishing trends provide one indicator of the importance modern scholars attach to understanding something of the social world of the Bible. Both of these volumes from Hendrickson work from the same premise as Theissen's book reviewed above: constraints of culture played a crucial role in the production of biblical texts; our interpretations will inevitably be impoverished -- if not simply wrong -- if we fail to grasp these social factors. Can we adequately understand the patriarchal narratives if we do not know how families in the ancient Near East functioned'? If we lack an understanding of the place of honour and shame in Mediterranean society, will we fully comprehend the nature of Paul's ethical appeal? The list of such questions could be extended *ad infinitum,* and should win a positive first hearing for these books.

The two volumes vary considerably in design, scope, and tone. Pilch and Malina have set out to provide a reference work on the analogy of a dictionary. Entries are set out in alphabetical order from 'Activeness/ Passiveness' to `Zeal/Jealousy', and cover the entire biblical corpus. The editors of this ground-breaking work counsel that its entries should be 'accepted at face value' and their correctness not questioned (p. xxxviii). Rather, they should be used as a 'set of new lenses with which to read familiar Bible passages' (ibid.). The articles, by 13 contributors, are strongly orientated to a United States readership, the comparison of values from the biblical world with those in the modern United States set out as an editorial goal (p. xiii). Matthews and Benjamin, on the other hand, are interested in the social structures of ancient Israel alone. Broad categories of 'village' and 'state' divide the book in half, with a variety of analogous institutions in both categories (e.g. 'father' in a village setting, 'king' in a state setting) providing breadth of coverage. They are more modest than Pilch and Malina in presenting their work, suggesting that with further study readers might 'refine, correct, arid even challenge our proposals' (p. xi).

Biblical Social Values and Their Meaning will certainly provide a new set of lenses through which to view the biblical text. It offers a great deal of valuable material in short compass. Still, in its present form, the book's limits soon become apparent. It is heavily weighted to the New

Testament, and while the United States analogies may appeal to one readership, they may prove unhelpful for those beyond the pale. In a work that looks like a
reference book, lack of bibliography or pointers to further scholarship is a serious drawback. Once one has encountered the notion that 'deception', for instance, was not the wholly negative value we hold it to be. Or that `hypocrisy' in the Gospels does not equate with our notion of it. One might want to explore these matters further. One hopes that the future editions of this useful work (see p. xxxix) will achieve greater depth and even broader appeal.

Matthews and Benjamin adopt a different strategy for their work on ancient Israel. Each of the 18 chapters sets out first some synthetic discussion of the particular social institution at hand, and then uses that discussion to lead the reader into specific passages in the Old Testament where this sociological data makes a difference to our reading of the text. It thus both informs and invites the reader into the biblical world in an effective way. Judging the book a success, however, need not imply agreement with all the authors' claims. The bare suggestion that 'rock' may have been a nickname for midwives seems later to be assumed in the presentation of Deuteronomy 32 (p. 71), an association that to me seems far-fetched. Their perceptive comments on the nature of 'false' prophets (p. 215) is counter-balanced by the tacit sense that the writing or 'classical' prophets were somehow state functionaries. Such disagreements, however, are signs of the vitality that this book brings and the stimulus it provides in opening out new vistas on the world of ancient Israel. One cannot help but benefit from such an engagement.

Insights from the social sciences loom ever larger for the interpreter of the Bible. Both these works in diverse ways provide an introduction to the difference this orientation can make to Bible study. Bible studiers will profit from consulting them.

Neither covenant nor blood kinship ever completely replaced one another (Fox 1967:13). Even when villages distributed power from parents to children and between brothers and sisters, this kinship was ratified by covenant. No blood relationship was taken for granted. ~~And~~ although members of households, clans, villages, and tribes in early Israel may have been physically related, the critical requirement for membership was not kinship, but covenant (Meyers 1988:127)

> *The film <u>Monsieur Ibrahim</u> directed by Francois Dupeyron and starring Omar Sharif is a poignant portrayal of the power of relationships built on choice, rather than kinship. In this film a young Jewish boy, abandoned by his mother and failed by his father, "adopts" an elderly Muslim shopkeeper to be his "father".* http://www.sonyclassics.com/ibrahim/

►SWAI 1993: 17

Isaac Adopts Jacob and Esau
(Gen 27:1-40)

27 When Isaac was old, he could not see well. He called his oldest son Esau. "My son".

Esau answered, "Here I am."

[2] Isaac said: "You can see that I am old. I do not know when I am going to die. [3] Now then, take your weapons, your quiver and your bow, and go out to the field, and hunt game for me. [4] Then prepare my favorite meal, and bring it to me to eat, so that I may bless you before I die."

[5] Now Rebekah was listening when Isaac spoke to his son Esau. So when Esau went to the field to hunt for game and bring it, [6] Rebekah said to her son Jacob, "I heard your father say to your brother Esau, [7] 'Hunt game, and then prepare my favorite meal, and bring it to me to eat, so that I may bless you before Yahweh before I die.' [8] Now therefore, my son, pay attention to me. [9] Go to the flock, and get me two choice kids, so that I may prepare your father's favorite meal; [10] and you shall take it to your father to eat, so that he may bless you before he dies."

[11] But Jacob said to his mother Rebekah: "My brother Esau is a Mt Seir man covered with hair. I am a Mt Halak man without hair. (Josh 11:17; 12:7) [12] If my father touches me, and he will know that I am lying to him, and bring a curse on myself and not a blessing."

[13] His mother said to him, "Let your curse be on me, my son, just do what I tell you."

[14] So he went and got them and brought them to his mother; and his mother prepared his father's favorite meal. [15] Then Rebekah took the best garments of her oldest son Esau, which were with her in the house, and dressed her younger son Jacob. [16] She put the lamb's wool on the hairless part of his neck. [17]

Then she handed Jacob's favorite meal, and the bread that she had prepared, to her son Jacob.

¹⁸ So he went in to his father, and said, "My father".

Isaac said, "Here I am; who are you, my son?"

¹⁹ Jacob said to his father, "I am Esau your firstborn. I have done as you told me; now sit up and eat my game, so that you may bless me."

²⁰ But Isaac said to his son, "How is it that you have found it so quickly, my son?"

He answered, "Because Yahweh your divine patron granted me success."

²¹ Then Isaac said to Jacob, "Come near, that I may feel you, my son, to know whether you are really my son Esau or not."

²² So Jacob went up to his father Isaac, who felt him and said, "The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau." ²³ He did not recognize him, because his hands were hairy like Esau's hands; so he blessed him. ²⁴ He said, "Are you really my son Esau?" He answered, "I am." ²⁵ Then he said, "Bring it to me, that I may eat of my son's game and bless you." So he brought it to him, and he ate; and he brought him wine, and he drank. ²⁶ Then his father Isaac said to him, "Come near and kiss me, my son." ²⁷ So he came near and kissed him; and he smelled the smell of his garments, and blessed him, and said:

"Ah, the smell of my son
    The smell of a field that Yahweh has blessed.
²⁸ May our divine patron give you dew from heaven,
    The earth's first harvest,
    and plenty of grain and wine.
²⁹ Let peoples serve you,
    and nations bow down to you.
  Be the father of the household over your brothers,
    May your mother's sons bow down to you.
  Cursed be everyone who curses you,
    Blessed be everyone who blesses you!"

³⁰ As soon as Isaac had finished blessing Jacob, when Jacob had scarcely gone out from the presence of his father Isaac, his brother Esau came in from his hunting. ³¹ He also prepared his father's favorite meal, and brought it to his father. And he said to his father, "Let my father sit up and eat of his son's game, so that you may bless me."

³² His father Isaac said to him, "Who are you?" He answered, "I am your oldest son, Esau."

³³ Then Isaac trembled violently, and said, "Who was it then that hunted game and brought it to me, and I ate it all before you came, and I have blessed him?—yes, and blessed he shall be!"

³⁴ When Esau heard his father's words, he cried out loudly and bitterly, and said to his father, "Bless me, me also, father!"

³⁵ But he said, "Your brother lied to me and took away your blessing."

³⁶ Esau said, "Is he not rightly named "Jacob the trickster"? He has tricked me twice. He took away my birthright; and look, now he has taken away my blessing." Then he said, "Have you not reserved a blessing for me?"

³⁷ Isaac answered Esau, "I have already made him the father of the household, and I have given him all his brothers as slaves, and with grain and wine I have sustained him. What then can I do for you, my son?"

³⁸ Esau said to his father, "Have you only one blessing, father? Bless me, me also, father!" And Esau lifted up his voice and wept. ³⁹ Then his father Isaac answered him:

"Your household with enjoy the first harvest of the earth,
    Dew from heaven above.
⁴⁰But you will live by your sword,
    You shall be your brother's slave.
  But when you break revolt,
    You shall break his yoke from your neck."

► **SWAI 1993: 19**

Jephthah Delivers Israel from Ammon
(Judg 11:1-40)

crisis (Judg. 11:1-3)

There was a chief from the household of Gilead named "Jephthah", who was the son of Gilead and a secondary wife. Besides Jephthah, Gilead had sons with his primary wife. When the sons of Gilead with his primary wife became elders, they excommunicated Jephthah. "Because you are the son of stranger, you shall inherit nothing."

Jephthah went into exile in the land of Tob , about twelve miles north of Ramoth-gilead near the border of Jordan and Syria today. Other exiles joined him and they supported their households by raiding.

climax (Judg. 11:4-33)

Some time later, when Ammon began to attack Israel, the elders of Gilead sent messengers to Jephthah in the land of Tob. "Come," they said to Jephthah, "be our chief that we may defend ourselves against Ammon."

"Are you not the elders who excommunicated me from the household of my father?" Jephthah replied. "Why do you come to me now, when you are in distress?"

The elders of Gilead replied to Jephthah, "In spite of our actions then, we are now asking you to return as the chief of Gilead and defend us against Ammon."

Jephthah told the messengers to reply to the elders of Gilead: "If you allow me to return and Yahweh delivers Ammon up to me, then you must recognize me as the father of the household of Gilead."

The elders of Gilead replied: "We will do as you say. Yahweh is our witness."

So Jephthah returned to Gilead with the messengers, and the warriors of Gilead inaugurated him as their chief before Yahweh at the sanctuary of Mizpah.

Then Jephthah sent messengers to the ruler of Ammon with the message: "What have you against me that you attack me in my land ?" (Judg. 11:12).

...the spirit of Yahweh came upon Jephthah (Judg. 11:29). He reconquered Gilead and Manasseh, and Mizpah-Gilead as well, and from there he went on to attack Rabbath-Ammon.

Before the battle, Jephthah made a vow to Yahweh: "If you deliver Ammon up to me, I will sacrifice to you the first to come out of the doors of my house to meet me when I return in triumph."

Then Jephthah attacked Rabbath-Ammon and Yahweh delivered Ammon up to him. His victory was complete. He destroyed twenty villages between Aroer and Minnith and Abel-keramim, and sold the Ammonites as slaves in Israel.

denouement (Judg. 11:34-40)

When Jephthah returned to Mizpah, his daughter was the first person to come out of his house, praising Yahweh with her tambourines and dancing. She was his heir. Jephthah had no other sons or daughters. When Jephthah saw her, he tore his clothes in mourning, and cried out: "Oh my daughter, the words of your song are a death sentence for our household. For I have made a vow to Yahweh and I must fulfill it."

"Father," she replied, "you have made a vow to Yahweh. Do with me as you have vowed, because Yahweh has delivered your enemies up to you. But grant me this favor. For two months, let me and the other marriageable women in the household go off to the mountains to mourn our infertility."

"Go," he replied, and sent her away for two months.

She departed with the other marriageable women and they mourned their infertility on the mountains. After two months she returned to her father without ever having had sexual intercourse, and her father sacrificed her to Yahweh as he had vowed. It then became an annual custom for the women of Israel to mourn the daughter of Jephthah from Gilead for four days.

► **SWAI 1993: 121-131**

Assemblies of Elders

The ideal of a non-hierarchal society governed by assemblies of elders was an essential social institution in the social world of early Israel (Victor H. Matthews and Don C. Benjamin, "The Elder" in *Social World of Ancient Israel 1250-587 BCE*: 121-131. (Baker Publishing Group: Ada MI, 1993).

Abdullah Ocalan launched a Kurdish liberation movement or Kurdish Workers' Party (P.K.K.) in Turkey using spectacular acts of violence against rival organization and the

government to destabilize Turkey's authority in the Kurdish regions of southeastern Turkey. Once imprisoned on the island of Imrali by the Turkish government in 1998, Ocalan evolved a new world view after reading works by Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended,* Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* and Murray Bookchin, *The Ecology of Freedom* and *Urbanization without Cities.* Bookchin proposed a world view he labeled *social ecology* which argued that all environmental problems stemmed from social issues like racism, sexism and economic inequality. For Bookchin hierarchical relationships are the original sin of western cultures. The destruction of the natural world by human beings, he argues, is a product of the domination of one group of people by another, and only by doing away with all hierarchies – men over women, old over young, white over black, rich over poor – can humans solve the global ecological crisis.

Bookchin called his alternative to capitalism *libertarian municipalism* using an *Hellenic model* which was based on his understanding of the face-to-face government of the ancient Greek city states. By 2005 Ocalan had adopted Bookchin's concept of *municipal assemblies* as the new paradigm for achieving Kurdish independence – described in his *Declaration of Democratic Confederalism in Kurdistan.* Ocalan encouraged Kurds in Turkey to create municipal assemblies, which he called *democracy without a state*. The assemblies would form a grand confederation that would be united by a common set of values based on defending the environment, respecting religious, political and cultural pluralism and self-defense.

By 2015 Kurdish fighters from Turkey had occupied the region of Rojava in northern Syria, and established a society there based on Bookchin's philosophy as Ocalan understands it. They divided Rojava into communes each using their own assemblies to make decisions for the common good (Wes Enzinnanov, *A Dream of Secular Utopia in ISIS' Backyard At a college in Kurdish Syria, Rojava tries to train its future leaders.* Nov 24, 2015 http://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/29/magazine/a-dream-of-utopia-in-hell.html?_r=0).

Thus the concept of an assembly of elders which appears as a fundamental institution in the world of the Bible, continues to reappear, not only in the works of philosophers like Murray Bookchin, but in the everyday life of the Kurdish freedom fighters of Abdullah Ocalan in Rojava.