

THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF THE BIBLE AND ITS RECEPTION

Barry Dov Walfish

What role does the *Aqedah* play in modern Israeli art and literature? How are Abraham and the *Aqedah* portrayed in the Koran and hadith literature? How was the image of Abigail transformed in medieval and early modern halakhic texts? What have been the Jewish interpretations of the rite of circumcision throughout the ages? What are the Jewish views on the afterlife and how do these compare with Christian and Muslim views? What role do angels play in Jewish religious thought and how does it compare with their role in Christianity and Islam?

These are only a few of the questions to which you will soon be able to find answers in the *Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception (EBR)*, a groundbreaking new reference work in biblical studies to be published by Walter de Gruyter. *EBR* aims not only to provide up-to-date information on the state of research in biblical and cognate studies but also to document the impact that the Bible has had on the post-biblical religious civilizations that drew upon it as well as on other civilizations and cultures. It will trace the history and development of biblical interpretation in Judaism and Christianity as well as the reception of biblical characters, themes, concepts, and motifs in

liturgy, philosophy, legal texts, Islam, and other religions and modern religious movements (e.g., Jews for Jesus), as well as the arts. At present there is no

encyclopedia that summarizes and synthesizes the current state of knowledge in biblical studies and allied disciplines while creating links, identifying problematic areas and lacunae in scholarship, and stimulating new research. Nor has any encyclopedic effort been made to take stock of the major shift that has occurred in most disciplines of the humanities over the last thirty years to an orientation informed by what has come to be called cultural studies.

WHAT ARE THE JEWISH VIEWS ON THE AFTERLIFE AND HOW DO THESE COMPARE WITH CHRISTIAN AND MUSLIM VIEWS? WHAT ROLE DO ANGELS PLAY IN JEWISH RELIGIOUS THOUGHT AND HOW DOES IT COMPARE WITH THEIR ROLE IN CHRISTIANITY AND ISLAM?

Biblical studies have participated in this interdisciplinary exchange and have been further enhanced by a burgeoning interest in reception history, a scholarly enterprise whose literary-historical roots extend back to late nineteenth-century *Stoffgeschichte* (the study of themes) and its expansion into twentieth-century *Wirkungsgeschichte* (the study of effects), and whose development was abetted by the popularity of reader-response theory in literary studies during the closing decades of the twentieth century. Today, aside from the classic historical questions about the conditions and circumstances of the Bible's origins, inquiries into the

reception and culture-forming influence of the Bible attract considerable attention. As a now well-established branch of biblical studies, the history of exegesis continues to contribute to the debate about the meanings of the biblical texts as they have been expounded throughout the histories of Judaism and Christianity. In addition, there is increasing attention among scholars to the reception and adaptation of biblical themes, motifs, and characters in music, art, literature, and film, as well as in Islam and various non-monotheistic religious traditions and new religious movements. Such studies have shown how biblical traditions have transcended the realms of church and synagogue and entered the cultural

consciousness not only of Western societies but of other cultures as well.

EBR's two major foci—the Bible and its reception—are reflected in the five main domains under *EBR's* purview, each of which is overseen by its own main

editor and comprises five or six specific areas managed in turn by their own area editors. One domain is dedicated to the formation of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament and the New Testament, including the contextual history of surrounding events, society, religion, culture, and economy. Two more domains cover the influence of the Bible in the Judaic and Christian traditions respectively. The Judaism domain is divided into four periods: Second Temple and Hellenistic, Rabbinic, Medieval, and Modern. The fifth domain encompasses biblical reception and influence in literature, art, music, and film, as well as in Islam and in other religions that do

not ascribe exclusive authority to the Bible but in some way draw upon its traditions. While not knowingly omitting anything that may shed light upon biblical traditions, *EBR* aspires to completeness only in its coverage of the scriptures themselves and their formation. Bearing in mind that comprehensive coverage of the global history of the reception and influence of the Bible over two millennia is impossible, *EBR* seeks to document that history in ways that outline the major themes and issues and provide the necessary guidance for further research.

EBR is edited by an international team of scholars representing a wide variety of religious, denominational, and disciplinary perspectives, none privileged above the others. The work is produced in English to facilitate global accessibility and reception, and scholars from around the world are being invited to contribute.

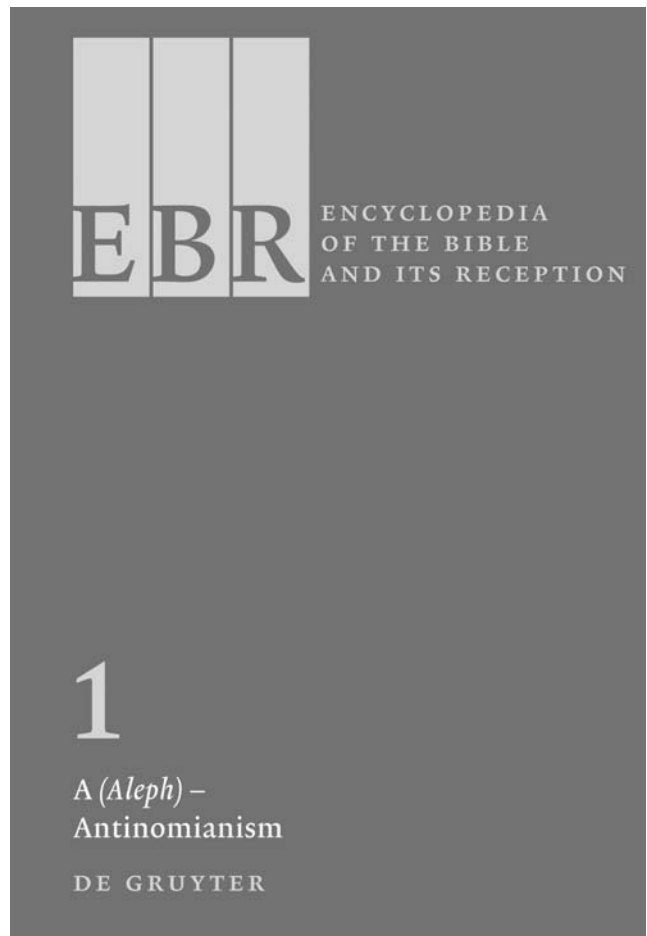
The size and scope of the project is very ambitious. It is projected to encompass thirty volumes, each six hundred pages, to be published over the next ten years or so, with a parallel online version.

There are two main types of articles in *EBR*: the stand-alone articles on specific biblical characters or places for whom there is no post-biblical reception, or on biblical exegetes, philosophers, literary figures, or artists who were heavily influenced by the Bible. Of interest to people engaged in Jewish studies will be the articles on individual exegetes, as well as philosophers, mystics, authors, and poets, with the emphasis on the biblical influences on their work. In addition there will be articles on topics with biblical connections, e.g., Abayudaya and the Canaanite Movement. Of special interest and importance will be the synthetic articles that trace the history of the reception of a theme

or character through the history of Judaism and Christianity as well as Islam and the arts. Some examples from the A's are abortion, Abraham, Adam (Person), Adam and Eve (Story of), adultery, angels and angel-like beings, anthropomorphism, the *Aqedah*, and atonement. This juxtaposition of material from various religious traditions facilitates comparative study and promises to stimulate further research. Another type of synthetic article will trace the reception of the Bible in various countries or regions.

Of interest in the A's for Jewish studies are the articles on al-Andalus and Ashkenaz.

This project should prove to be a great boon for Jewish studies. Not only will biblical and Near Eastern studies—including archaeology—be given their due, but so will the history of Judaism from the Second Temple period to the modern, insofar as biblical origins, connections, or influence can be identified. The *EBR* will provide the opportunity to document the role that various biblical books played in the lives of Jewish communities throughout the ages. Furthermore, there is the potential to explore and document the use and development of biblical themes in Hebrew and Yiddish literature, Jewish and Israeli art, and Jewish and Israeli music, film, and popular culture.



Cover, *The Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, forthcoming.

It is in the area of reception that the greatest challenges and potential for innovation reside. The editors of *EBR* and the publisher have been unequivocal in expressing their willingness to be as inclusive as possible in terms of coverage of all religions and cultures. But on the Jewish side the challenge is to identify and locate authors who are able to write on these topics, some of which have never been written about before.

I would thus like to appeal to the AJS community to contribute to this project. If anyone has expertise in a topic of biblical interest and would like to write for *EBR*, please be in touch with me (barry.dov.walfish@gmail.com) or one of the other area editors. For their contact information and to get an idea of the scope of the encyclopedia's coverage, please consult the *EBR* website at:

THE EBR WILL PROVIDE THE OPPORTUNITY TO DOCUMENT THE ROLE THAT VARIOUS BIBLICAL BOOKS PLAYED IN THE LIVES OF JEWISH COMMUNITIES THROUGHOUT THE AGES. FURTHERMORE, THERE IS THE POTENTIAL TO EXPLORE AND DOCUMENT THE USE AND DEVELOPMENT OF BIBLICAL THEMES IN HEBREW AND YIDDISH LITERATURE, JEWISH AND ISRAELI ART, AND JEWISH AND ISRAELI MUSIC, FILM, AND POPULAR CULTURE.

www.degruyter.com/cont/fb/th/thEbrEn.cfm. We are only at the early stages of what will doubtless

be a long, challenging but intriguing and stimulating journey. For *EBR* to realize its full potential

and be of the greatest benefit to Jewish studies, the cooperation and contributions of the Jewish studies community of scholars are essential. We look forward to hearing from you.

Barry Dov Walfish is the Judaica Specialist at the University of Toronto Libraries. He is the author of Bibliographia Karaitica: An Annotated Bibliography of Karaites and Karaism (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute, forthcoming).

Request for Grant Proposals for courses in the Study of Secular Jewish History and Cultures

\$50,000 Awards annually for up to three years

The Center for Cultural Judaism invites applications for Posen Project grants for the study of secular Jewish history and cultures. Recipients will receive \$50,000 per year, for up to three years, towards new courses of study.

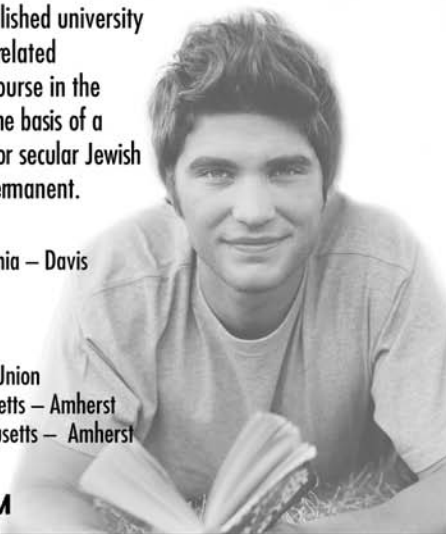
These grants are intended to encourage the study of secular Jewish history within already well-established university programs and departments of Jewish Studies, Philosophy, Literature, Sociology, Anthropology or other related disciplines. Grants will support the teaching of at least three new courses per year, including a core course in the history or process of Jewish secularization over the past three centuries. Selections will be made on the basis of a strong proposed core course; an understanding of what it means to teach courses in Jewish secularism or secular Jewish culture; scholarship in this area; and the ability to integrate these courses over time and make them permanent.

Grants of up to \$50,000 each per year will be awarded for the 2009-2010 academic year. Upon review, these grants are renewable for up to two additional years.

Deadline: November 24, 2008

Background, Guidelines, Application, and Sample Syllabi are available at www.culturaljudaism.org or by contacting Myrna Baron, Executive Director The Center for Cultural Judaism 212-564-6711 x301 or myrna@culturaljudaism.org

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