

Antonios Finitzis (ed.), *Dress and Clothing in the Hebrew Bible. “For all Her Household are Clothed in Crimson”* (Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 679; London – New York – Oxford – New Delhi – Sydney: Clark 2019). Pp. 191. \$ 89.52. ISBN 978-0-5676-8640-4

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A multi-author monograph, *Dress and Clothing in the Hebrew Bible. “For all Her Household are Clothed in Crimson”* constitutes another proof of the growing interest in biblical apparel. As noted in the preface by Alicia J. Batten, the study of clothing is still a new discipline, and in the scope of biblical research it remains at an early stage (pp. X–XI and 2). Hence, so much more can one rejoice in the fact that the year 2019 brought as many as two more extensive studies on this subject. Apart from the study being discussed here, the volume *Clothing and Nudity in the Hebrew Bible* (review published in *The Biblical Annals* 10/2 (2020) 331–337 [<https://doi.org/10.31743/biban.8680>]) was published. In a similar vein to the above-mentioned book, *Dress and Clothing* is the result of the annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, which was held in 2014 and resulted in the formation of a research group (p. 1). Initially, its efforts revolved around the subject of *clothing*, but later a decision was taken to use a different *terminus technicus*, namely *dress*, which is slightly different semantically. The researchers chose it because of its greater universality, including jewellery, hairstyle, footwear and all accessories, and decided to adopt a specific definition thereof “assemblage of body modifications and/or supplements displayed by a person in communicating with other human beings” (p. 1). They draw attention to the heuristic and symbolic meanings of dress, which are virtually infinite. In the case of the language of the Bible, they rightly note that dress goes beyond physicality, entering the level of metaphysics. In other words, biblical dress is not limited to communicating identity (p. 3). According to the authors and editors, the presented volume has two main goals: to bridge the gap between what is material and ideological and to shape the development of the implications resulting from this fact. The editor also explains what the eponymous scarlet thread means. According to him, it is a symbolic expression of the communicative power of dress. He explains this phenomenon basing on the source of the citation – the poem

about a brave woman from Prov 31, in which the widely mentioned dress (one third of the poem) testifies not only to the abilities but also to the power of *'ēšet ḥajil*, being, among other things, a financial one, since scarlet belonged to luxury goods, which, for unknown reasons, is argued for by Finitsis through reference not so much to scarlet as to purple (p. 4). This gives the impression of erroneous identification of these two dyes of different origins (pp. 5–6). Nevertheless, it is worth appreciating the fact that he also mentions contemporary destructive actions associated with the growing power of the human being, also manifested by dress (its excessive consumption, one may add), a sad example of which is the extinction of *murex* snails in the waters of the Mediterranean Sea – molluscs used for producing Tyrian purple, associated with power – linked to climate change (p. 9). Finitsis himself summarizes, or rather sums up each of the eight chapters of the monograph on pp. 6–9, highlighting the most important themes, which, as he himself states, are only supposed to be a catalyst for further studies in the expanding research field (p. 9).

The first chapter, a text by Shawn W. Flynn (pp. 11–28), concerns the power behind the dress, which is expressed in the apparel of various cultures of the Ancient Near East. The author uses the tools of comparative studies, comparing the concept of dress implying power in Israel and in its neighbouring countries. In his study, he discusses the semantic scope of various Akkadian and Hebrew terms (pp. 13–18), showing their similar functioning in both languages. He focuses mainly on the Hebrew term *šûl*, meaning the edge of the garment in most of the texts, and in Isa 6:1 a garment implying power. He perceives similar connotations in the Akkadian noun *pala*; he confronts the faith of ancient Israel, in the books of which Yahweh is placed in opposition to the decorated pagan idols which *de facto* have no power, with Mesopotamian visions of *mīs pī*, *pīt pī* rituals and myths (the descent of Ishtar into the underworld; pp. 19–24). The author also notices the shortcomings of biblical commentaries in discussing the divine dress, which they consider to overly enigmatic and lacking cultural embedding (p. 24). They are also reluctant to resort to Near Eastern sources. Flynn, on the other hand, emphasizes that both in Marduk and Ishtar the presence of dress – also on a statue – assures power and reigning. The same is true of the garments of Yahweh, mainly in the implicit mentions of the psalmists. They seem to be directly related to the stability of the whole world resulting from an effective reign (p. 27). Despite the similarity of the Israeli tradition, the author rightly points out that it transcends Mesopotamian concepts, which he successfully proves, despite excessive meandering and repetition of certain content.

In the second chapter (pp. 29–62), in the perception of the editor of the volume, Carmen Joy Imes deals with the performative function of religion, noticing that it is not important who is who, but what that person does. The starting point of her research is a correct statement whereby dress is usually omitted or

described briefly in the Bible, also in texts where the authors attribute a huge symbolic weight to it. The only dress described in detail is the priestly regalia (Exod 28; 39; Lev 8). The author of the article therefore briefly discusses the following: the ephod, breastplate, robe, tunic, turban, and the high priest's girdle, pointing to the techniques of crafting individual elements. She performs it quite accurately and in detail, finally pointing to their Near Eastern and Egyptian parallels from the 16th to 8th centuries BC, starting with royal attire to finish with the priestly one (from p. 38). She rightly concludes that Aaron, thanks to his attire, becomes a representative of Yahweh and before Yahweh (p. 30), and his unique status is expressed in the priestly dress referring to the inner sanctuary of the temple, placing him between the divine and human worlds. Thus, the dress co-creates the priest instead of only indicating the role played by him.

Chapter three by Joshua Joel Spoelstra (pp. 63–86) was devoted to amulets, and more precisely to the functions and intentions lying behind the ornaments in the cultures of the Levant, including Israel – especially behind the tassels adorning the robes and the high priest's crown. On this occasion he resorts to the parallel texts and iconography of the ancient Egypt and Near East. In his text, he refers to the complex phenomenon of magic, but due to the specificity of Israel, he resigns from magical names (pp. 63–64) making a nod to the adjective “apotropaic.” Apart from precision behind the terminology, the author also shows a great chronological and methodological insight when talking about the sources of the Torah and the ideologies underlying them (p. 65). Regarding the head-dress of the high priest, the author notes that at the time of the formation of the Torah, the Israelites could not have had images of God or a king who would have the right to wear a golden rosette on their head, therefore this element of attire was assigned to the high priest (p. 85). The tassels worn by all Israelites represent, from this perspective, participation in the priesthood. Both elements of the costume – the rosette and the tassels – also served as amulets, as the Near Eastern parallels seem to suggest. The author draws an excellent conclusion based on the iconographic and lexical material, recognizing that the rosette and tassels in the form of flowers performed a mnemonic function, and thus protected against evil so that the person wearing them would grow and flourish (p. 86).

Another text, this time by Sara M. Koenig (pp. 87–108), focuses on the messages conveyed by dressing and points to two moments in which attire accredits a woman. These are the stories of the two Tamars in Gen 38 and 2 Sam 13, in which dress goes beyond symbolizing status. In both cases, dress should elicit specific reactions, yet both women stand in opposition to the message resulting from their clothing, which ultimately represents a significant degree of female liberation. The first of the Tamars sat at the gate dressed as a bride, not a harlot, emphasizing the fact that Judah had broken the levirate law. The second Tamar tore her long-sleeved robe – a status symbol of royal daughter and virgin – in

protest of the harm she had suffered and against the monarchy that had failed to protect her. Changing clothes allows for taking specific actions which were culturally excluded by the previous dress code. The undeniable value of Koenig's text is the parallel reading of the two Tamars' fate with reference to the significance of attire and the emphasis on the liberation of both women through their clothing, which is undoubtedly an interpretative novelty.

In chapter five (pp. 109–124) Sean E. Cook discusses the capability of dress to deprive somebody of power and to show otherness. He illustrates this fact with the story of Saul – a stranger among his people, who already during the election differs in dress and appearance from his fellow countrymen, rather resembling a Philistine, because, like Goliath, he was of superior height compared to Benjaminites. Even his corpse and armour after his death were treated like the corpse and armament of the aforementioned Philistine. Moreover, Saul's military dress contrasts with David's appearance (and choices), emphasising the differences between the two characters already from 1 Samuel 17, where David throws off the heavy armour of the king (pp. 114–115). Also, the ordinary day-to-day vestments, putting them on and their removal in a situation of prophesying, and disguises during a visit to a necromancer define Saul's fate as an anti-elect. The only drawback of the text is a slight oversight in the discussion of *beged* of Saul and Samuel on p. 122. Perhaps the author did not refer directly to the terminology in HB, but he himself decided to use *beged* to describe the dress of Samuel's spirit, which the biblical authors call differently – *me'il*, and not *beged*. The change in terminology slightly influences the researcher's interpretation of the scene but is irrelevant for the whole article.

The starting point of the sixth chapter by Ian D. Wilson (pp. 125–141), is in two descriptions of the Ark's entry to Jerusalem, along with a scene of David dancing in front of it (2 Sam 6 and 1 Chr 15) with Michal watching him. The differences between them concern mainly David's dress. In the first version, he is dressed in a linen ephod, identified with a loincloth. In the other, with a linen ephod and a coat of exquisite linen (pp. 125–126). In the first version, the reason for being rejected by Michal was David's nudity, and in the other version, his dancing. However, the author points out that David's actions had consequences, not only private but also social and political ones, making his dress the so-called "social skin," which brings about criticism and comments. It is not without Near Eastern contexts, ranging from Hittite processions, through Persian, to other Mesopotamian ones, in which rulers are always clothed because nudity meant weakness and poverty. In this context, the author presents the difficulties in identifying the biblical procession, which can be interpreted in various ways – even as a celebration of fertility by some. Analysing the scene of David's dance and the conflict with Michal, the researcher concludes that the inspired author, on the one hand, emphasizes the final collapse of Saul's dynasty, and, on the other one, announces

the theme of David's amorous nature in the future (p. 135). The fact that the author resorts to the tools of cognitive psychology (p. 139) in order to deal with Michal's reaction to her husband in both texts is an interesting treatment – on this basis, in the First Book of Chronicles, he notices the process of forgetting about Michal (and Bathsheba!) in Judah.

Scott R.A. Starbuck in chapter seven (pp. 143–159) discusses dress as a tool of gaining power. The main object of his interest is the “mantle of righteousness” and the fact of unclenching/clothing present in the literature of the post-exilic times. Starbuck believes that the *me'il* was a royal vestment adopted by the priesthood after the Babylonian exile at the time of monarchy disappearance. It depicted the power held by the priesthood and politicians. His argumentation is based on chronologically similar texts – the verse of Isa 61:10, being of interest to him is well contextualized, both historically and literature-wise, devoting the attention to the entire section, i.e., chapters 60–62. He concludes that the subject in v. 10 is the whole community, which enjoys the metaphorical “mantle of righteousness” and “garments of salvation,” clothing which testifies to its new socio-political status (pp. 152–153) – the freedom and joy of rebuilding Jerusalem. In the Book of Isaiah, the change of clothing marks a radical turnaround, a change and reconceptualization of priesthood and kingship (p. 159) indicating the evolution that took place in the post-exilic community, devoid of David's rule and experiencing religious reform. By reading the “mantle of righteousness” and other Trito-Isaiah terms related to clothing in this way, the author points to the great exegetical potential of textile terminology, which may also assist in reconstructing the social mood lurking behind the text.

Ehud Ben Zvi devoted the eighth and final chapter to the garments of Yahweh in texts from the Persian and Hellenistic periods. His starting point is in the statement that despite the tendency of the writers in Judah/Yehud to anthropomorphise Yahweh, it is impossible that an image of naked Yahweh could exist. Consequently, one would expect to see many references to God's vestments and footwear, which should be unique, rich, fragrant and colourful, to duly emphasise the majesty of God (pp. 161–165). Meanwhile, God's attire is mentioned two or three times (twice about the sandals, p. 169), as if in a perfunctory way, without the aforementioned sensationalism and splendour (e.g., in Isa 6:1-4 there is only information about the considerable size of God's mantle). The researcher points out that the biblical text creates many occasions for addressing Yahweh's dress – the Book of Ezekiel or Micah, for example – so much more peculiar his consistent silence appears (p. 170). Searching for the reasons behind this situation, the author concludes that it is undoubtedly related to the tendency to omit the description of the king's vestments, due to the king's absence in Yehud (p. 174). He notes, however, that the writers were more interested not in what the leaders wore, but in how they and God Himself clothed their loved ones and subordinates

(God clothing Adam and Eve and his bride; Pharaoh clothing Joseph; Moses clothing Aaron etc.; p. 177). It happens so because clothing, in a way, creates and shapes, and the one who clothes stands higher in the hierarchy. And since God is above all creation, there can be no discussion about any attire limiting Him, let alone the one applied by the writers, as this would place them, in a way, above God (p. 178). However, as Ben Zvi points out, all of the proposals he cites to resolve the question of the (absence of) Yahweh's vestments are not definitive, but are an invitation for further, detailed research (p. 181). It is worth noting that this text is accompanied by extensive footnotes, testifying to the author's great erudition and knowledge of the latest literature on the subject.

Summing up, the reviewed monograph is undoubtedly a novelty and methodologically differs from, for example, the considerable size of the book *Clothing and Nudity in the Hebrew Bible*, which is a collection of texts being diverse in every respect, despite the *clue* contained in its title. The starting point for each of the articles in the monograph under review is not merely linguistic reconstructions or analyses, but concrete ideas, concepts – from the socio-historical to the theological/symbolic ones – which, on the basis of textile terminology, are successfully picked up by the authors, thus attaining the two objectives mentioned at the beginning. The undoubted merit of the book is the fact of the qualitative equality of the texts, which are original and well-developed. The only deficiencies include a lack of a complete bibliography, which was replaced with selected items (pp. 183–186). A complete bibliography on such a niche topic would certainly facilitate further research.

Translated by Grzegorz Knyś