

Published in Association of Jewish Libraries Reviews, May/June, 2018, p. 22.

Berman, Joshua A. *Inconsistency in the Torah: Ancient Literary Convention and the Limits of Source Criticism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017. 307 pp. \$98.98. (9780190658809). Also available as an eBook.

Since the nineteenth century, source criticism has been the predominant method of academic biblical criticism. It involves close literary analysis of the Bible, noting contradictions in the text. In this way, attempts are made to identify the sources of the received biblical text, reconstitute them, date them, and determine the ideological motivations of their authors. Recently source criticism has come under challenge. This book by Joshua Berman of Bar Ilan University argues for a different, empirical approach: using other ancient Middle Eastern literature as a way to understand and evaluate the Hebrew Bible. For example, he analyzes Pharaoh Ramesses II's inscriptions regarding the battle of Kadesh against the Hittites. The inscriptions are carved together and present three different versions of the battle. One version attributes the Egyptian victory to the god Amun, a second says that Ramesses defeated the Hittites single-handedly, and a third deals with the Egyptian army itself. From this, Berman concludes that the assumption made by source critics that variant versions of an event (like the two versions of creation in Genesis) necessarily indicates separate sources is mistaken and that it imposes a modern sense of consistency which is alien to ancient Middle Eastern literature. Instead, Berman argues, ancient writings sometimes offer variant versions of events because the concern is not to present an exact picture of what actually occurred but to use narrations of the past for hortatory purposes. This is a rich, technical book and a valuable one for academic collections.

Shmuel Ben-Gad, Gelman Library, George Washington University