

REPORTS FROM A SCHOLAR'S LIFE

*Select Papers
on the Hebrew Bible*



TRYGGVE N. D. METTINGER

edited by

ANDREW KNAPP

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Reports from a Scholar's Life



Photo: Solvi Mettinger.

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by
Tryggve N. D. Mettinger

edited by
Andrew Knapp

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To

Bertil Albrektson

and

Jerker Blomqvist

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Author's Preface

The fact that the present volume with essays of mine is materializing is due to two persons. The first is Dr. Andrew Knapp of Eisenbrauns. He took the initiative for the whole project and approached me in the spring of 2014. Being the victim of a small stroke, but one with embarrassing effects on my linguistic sensitivity, thereby making my proofreading efforts less efficient than I would wish, I was not immediately enthusiastic. But my scholarly vanity made me give in to this temptation. I thus came up with a selection of essays that I have published in English and was granted kind permissions by the copyright holders to republish the material. The Royal Academy of Letters, History and Antiquities, Stockholm, granted a sum to support a final proofreading. I am grateful for these signs of generosity.

That Andrew Knapp appears on the title page of this volume is an expression of my gratitude for his benign and well-informed operations to make the intellectual contents of my essays incarnate in book shape. I am deeply grateful to Andrew for thus granting me years, perhaps decades, of posthumous scholarly life. In planning, Andrew helped the book take shape from this group of essays. In production, Andrew made obstructive computer files submit and yield the text for a number of the essays, while Michael Brown scanned and thus computerized the older material. Andrew's eagle eyes discovered a number of infelicities of mine and thereby saved me from embarrassment. I am indebted to Andrew for his attentiveness to numerous details during his careful editing of the volume.

The second person, no less important in the present context, is the person Andrew persuaded to hazard a project like this, namely Jim Eisenbraun, Publisher at Eisenbrauns. That my collected essays appear from his renowned publishing house is a source of particular pride for me. Few publishers, if any, have done more during the last few decades to serve the community of scholars and students in the fields of Bible and the ancient Near East. For me to have a publisher with his personal dedication to these fields is the result of the benevolent dispensations of Providence in my life.

I dedicate this book to two of my most esteemed friends, men whose uncompromising scholarly stringency has contributed to shaping my ideals for serious scholarly work—Bertil Albrektson and Jerker Blomqvist.

Their research is marked by the qualities of being both penetrating and pitiless. Penetrating in their exemplary philological work, pitiless in their dismantling of conclusions that do not stand up to scrutiny. In their integrity they provide examples that inspire following.

Jerker Blomqvist, Lund, is special to me in being my earliest academic friend. We met in 1960 in our first university course in Greek and I have admired him ever since. Jerker became Professor of Classical Philology in Copenhagen and, later, of Greek Language and Literature in Lund. His recruitment to Lund University had positive effects for the international standing of our alma mater in classical studies. One of his honorary doctorates was bestowed upon him by the University of Athens. His helping hand is visible in the treatment of Greek texts in my works, especially in my monograph *The Riddle of Resurrection*.

Bertil Albrektson, now at Uppsala, is the globally known author of *History and the Gods* (1967) and one of the fathers of the current paradigm in our discipline for the interpretation of Israel's religious development. I met him in 1961 as my first teacher in the field that also became mine. For his role as mentor and friend through the years I am deeply grateful. I, for one, gladly accept that our friendship is also of a certain value to our respective telephone companies.

Borgeby in May 2015

Tryggve N. D. Mettinger

The Enigma of Tryggve

Editor's Preface

While composing this preface I tried to restrict my comments to a brief description of the origin and contents of the volume. Tryggve Mettinger needs no further encomium; for a summary of his attributes as a scholar, teacher, and human being, the reader may consult the introduction to his (second) Festschrift, *Enigmas and Images*. But Mettinger is a man who is easy to praise, so I hope the reader will forgive the occasional personal remark in what follows.

Publishers rarely go in search of a *kleine Schriften* volume; more frequently, authors hoping for an everlasting name propose such projects. But occasionally such an anthology suggests itself, as was the case here.

The idea for this book occurred to me in 2013, when I first had the pleasure of interacting with Tryggve Mettinger. Eisenbrauns had recently taken over publication and distribution of *Coniectanea Biblica*, and two of Mettinger's well-known monographs in this series had recently gone out of print. To solve the riddle of resurrecting these books, we needed his permission as the copyright holder. I wrote him with the request and took the opportunity to include a personal note mentioning the influence his work had had on me. He replied with the utmost graciousness, not only granting the hoped-for permission but also inquiring into my work. At one point in the ensuing correspondence he shared with me his farewell lecture from Lund University, "Report from a Scholar's Life." I read it with interest and thought that it might serve as an excellent opening piece in a collected studies volume—it provided both a summary of Mettinger's contributions to biblical studies and a glimpse into his personal background and motivations as a scholar.

The more I reflected on the idea of a collected studies volume, the more eager I was to pursue it. My motivation was not entirely altruistic: I knew that developing such a volume would provide me with the opportunity, indeed require me, to work carefully through many of Mettinger's writings. I also knew that it would allow me to work closely with a scholar

whose collegiality, kindness, and humility make editing a pleasant task. Nevertheless, the idea lay dormant for a while as other projects consumed my attention. But in early 2014 I encountered some scholars who hoped to find a copy of Mettinger's acclaimed *Farewell to the Servant Songs*, an important piece that had been out of print for some time. At a lean 52 pages, the monograph did not make much sense to reissue as a stand-alone volume. Conveniently, in my role at Eisenbrauns I had recently worked on a collected studies volume for Delbert Hillers, which included a full reprint of his dissertation, which itself was published as a slim individual book. So the idea to revivify the entire *Farewell* within a larger volume required little ingenuity.

With the dual impetus of the "Report" and *Farewell*, I approached Trygve with the idea. Initial reluctance on his part soon yielded to enthusiasm, and together we discussed the *Buchsbild*, the notions of this book. (I should note here that Mettinger was not always loathe to reprint his collected essays. He provided me with the final, pre-press manuscripts of some articles as I prepared the volume. At the end of one I stumbled across a note to the editor of the journal requesting that Mettinger retain the copyright of the work. He explained the request with his trademark self-deprecating humor: "Before I die I shall publish a volume of my collected follies.") After we established the skeleton, Mettinger fleshed it out with the articles that now appear in this volume—including his works that made the most significant contributions, those that best encapsulate his views on certain subjects, and those in which he takes particular pride.

We shared a vision of a volume that was not necessarily exhaustive, but represented the peregrinations of a scholar through a variety of topics in the Hebrew Bible. It is fair to say that Mettinger is better known for his books than for his articles; I attribute this to his proclivity for tackling large issues. For this reason, then, in this volume we both wanted to provide articles that summarized his positions on the subjects on which he has worked. As will become clear in the following, the contents of this book align closely with his monographs—seven of his eight English-language books (the one omission being his published dissertation, *Solomonic State Officials*—a fine book in its own right, but the most narrowly focused of Mettinger's monographs) have a corresponding article or two in this collection. We could perhaps have titled this book *A Mettinger Primer*—the reader who is unfamiliar with the author's oeuvre will find here his ideas *in nuce*; the reader who has long followed the author's work will find a quick refresher on his methodology and thinking.

“Report from a Scholar’s Life: My Work on the Enigmas and Notions of God” opens this collection. This piece originated as Mettinger’s farewell lecture upon his retirement from Lund University in 2003. In it, he provides a brief autobiography that helps contextualize his interest in and work on the Hebrew Bible. He also reflects on his work on several topics.

After this introductory essay comes **Part I**, The God of Israel in the Ancient Near Eastern Milieu: Continuities and Contrasts. The first two essays of this section cover the larger argument from his *In Search of God: The Meaning and Message of the Everlasting Names*. First, “The Study of the *Gottesbild*: Problems and Suggestions” (1989) describes the issues involved in trying to reconstruct an Old Testament view of God in light of the diverse groups in ancient Israel who contributed to the composition of Scripture, all of whom experienced different social contexts which informed their respective theologies. Mettinger offers a way of working through this pluriformity via the “root metaphors” of the Old Testament. Here he focuses on YHWH’s appropriation of certain characteristics of both El, the enthroned deity, leading to YHWH’s representation as king, and Baal, the warrior god, leading to YHWH’s representation as the battler of chaos. He takes this latter point further in “The Elusive Essence: YHWH, El and Baal and the Distinctiveness of Israelite Faith” (1990), an article which provides an admirable example of Mettinger’s ability to work through a large amount of data both concisely and carefully. Here, he explores YHWH’s origins, asserting that a southern Yahwistic group merged with a northern Israelite group, resulting in the manifold aspects of the deity’s character that appear throughout the Hebrew Bible. He argues that recognition of the blending of numerous traditions in YHWH suggests that the groups that merged to form Israel differed in many aspects of their belief systems, but also shared much. This history-of-religion article demonstrates much in common with the work of Frank Moore Cross and other well-known North American scholars, and remains a fascinating and persuasive example of this line of research.

The following two articles are related to Mettinger’s third book, *The Dethronement of Sabaoth: Studies in the Shem and Kabod Theologies*. In “YHWH Sabaoth: The Heavenly King on the Cherubim Throne” (1982), the author investigates the titular divine epithet. He locates the designation *yhw̄h šĕbā’ōt* in the Jerusalem cult and notes a strong connection between this title for the deity and the mention of the cherubim throne in the temple. He then employs a joint contextual-philological method to argue that, in light of the temple’s role as the nexus of heaven and earth

and the associations of the root *šb'*, this sobriquet was used with special reference to the god enthroned on the cherubim, surrounded by the heavenly council. He concludes the study by searching for the origin of this idea, and finds its source in the Shiloh cult, which probably centered on an *'ēl šēbā'ōt*—a theory bolstered by textual and iconographic evidence from Ugarit. After searching for the origins of *yhwš šēbā'ōt* in the aforementioned article, in “The Name and the Glory: The Zion–Sabaoth Theology and Its Exilic Successors” (1998) we are treated to Mettinger’s exploration of the development of this conception of the deity after the destruction of the temple. He begins this work by reemphasizing the connection of *yhwš šēbā'ōt* to the Jerusalem cult; he then identifies a serious theological problem of the exilic period in that this cult focused on the presence of the deity in a temple that no longer existed. The Deuteronomistic (D) and priestly (P) groups solved this dilemma in different ways: in the D-work, God’s “Name” (*šēm*) was present in the temple while God himself resided in heaven; in the P materials, the idea of God’s presence solely in the temple was abandoned in favor of the notion of God’s “Glory” (*kābôd*) dwelling with the people. Mettinger employs the idea of cognitive dissonance to describe what confronted the people when the fulcrum of their theology, the temple, was removed. One successive tradition (D) resolved the problem spatially by relocating the deity to heaven, while an alternative tradition (P) resolved the problem temporally by considering God’s abandonment of the people to be only a hiatus of the divine presence.

The final article in Part I, “The Dying and Rising God: The Peregrinations of a Mytheme” (2005), beautifully distills one of Mettinger’s most well-known monographs, *The Riddle of Resurrection: “Dying and Rising Gods” in the Ancient Near East*. Mettinger’s work in this area epitomizes the type of work for which he is renowned, namely reexamining dubious ideas taken for granted by biblical scholars—as he states in the introduction to this article, “my ambition is to grant the evidence a second hearing.” He systematically investigates the pertinent evidence for several deities, determining that Dumuzi, Baal of Ugarit, Melqart–Heracles, and perhaps Adonis indeed were, contrary to the consensus of the late 20th century, dying-and-rising gods. He sees the appearance of this mytheme in Bronze Age Mesopotamia and Syria, and Phoenicia and Greece in the later first millennium BCE, not as independent instantiations of a natural *fabula*, but as varied manifestations of an idea that “peregrinated” to several cultures over the span of over two millennia. He concludes with brief remarks about YHWH and Jesus. Nothing about the former suggests that Israel’s

god was conceived of as a dying-and-rising deity. Jesus, meanwhile, despite his superficial similarity to this mytheme, including the idea of descent and return, shows major differences in that he was a historically located human being whose death served to atone for sins and had nothing to do with the seasonal cycle—these differences suggest that the tradition of Jesus' resurrection emerged independently of the dying-and-rising mytheme.

The two essays in **Part II**, Aniconism, comprise something of a prologue and epilogue to another of Mettinger's influential books, *No Graven Image? Israelite Aniconism in Its Ancient Near Eastern Context*. The first essay, "The Veto on Images and the Aniconic God in Ancient Israel" (1979), predated the monograph by more than a decade and a half. In it we do not yet see the author's famous distinction between de facto and programmatic aniconism expressed in those terms, but the idea appears clearly. Mettinger proposes that in the Hebrew Bible we find two parallel aniconic traditions, one in the north located at Bethel and one in the south located at Jerusalem. Both featured pedestals, or thrones—a bull and cherubim, respectively—above which the deity was present. But such imageless representation of the deity was not actively prohibited until the eighth century, fueled by Hosea and others. Mettinger suggests that by this time the bull of Bethel especially had become misunderstood as an iconic representation of the deity; thus the aniconic agenda apparent in the prophetic corpus is a by-product of a larger platform against syncretism. The following piece, "A Conversation with My Critics: Cultic Image or Aniconism in the First Temple?" (2006) opens with a summary of the author's book on the subject, focusing on the de facto (tolerant, indifferent) aniconism of the pre-monarchic and early monarchic periods in contrast to the programmatic (intolerant, prohibitive) aniconism of the later monarchic and exilic periods. He then, as the title adumbrates, responds to various critiques of the ideas presented in his book. First, he summons a variety of evidence to support his position that the First Temple lacked a cult statue, contra Christoph Uehlinger and certain other scholars. He then marshals further evidence for his contention that the cherubim in the temple served as a throne for YHWH. (Note especially in this regard fig. 8.4 on p. 163, which inspired the cover for this volume. My thanks to Andy Kerr for the wonderful cover design.) Mettinger concludes by discussing the "material aniconism" seen with standing stones, which he considers endemic to Palestine and a cultic practice that long predated the Yahwism described in the Hebrew Bible.

Part III, Davidic Trajectories, narrows the scope from the previous essays on various aspects of ancient Levantine religion. The two articles here focus on individual pericopes in the David narrative, drawing on the groundwork laid in *King and Messiah: The Civil and Sacral Legitimation of the Israelite Kings*. First, “‘The Last Words of David’: A Study of Structure and Meaning in II Samuel 23:1–7” (1977) contains a verse-by-verse analysis of this text, offering solutions to a number of cruxes, followed by an arrangement and translation of the poem. Then, “*Cui Bono?* The Prophecy of Nathan (2 Sam 7) as a Piece of Political Rhetoric” (2008) attempts to locate the original setting of this prophecy on the basis of its rhetorical situation. Mettinger first works through the passage, stripping the passage of Deuteronomistic accretions to reveal an original core text, which involved the promise of a temple and a dynasty. Whatever the status of the dynastic promise in the original text, the “thesis” of the passage is that the successor who will build the temple is David’s legitimate heir—that is, the text serves as pro-Solomon rhetoric, reinforcing Solomon’s legitimacy. Mettinger then works backward, questioning at what historical point the promotion of such a thesis would be necessary. He concludes by establishing the *Sitz im Leben* of the text in the first half of Solomon’s reign.

We encounter a different methodology in **Part IV**, Job. Although Mettinger never published a monograph on Job, the two articles here provide examples of the type of literary criticism employed in his final (English-language) book, *The Eden Narrative: A Literary and Religio-Historical Study of Genesis 2–3*. In “Intertextuality: Allusion and Vertical Context Systems in Some Job Passages” (1993), Mettinger introduces the reader to the idea of intertextuality, the allusive use of a text (the intertext) known to the audience of the more recent text in order to evoke certain images and ideas. He illustrates this with a pair of examples from Job: the subversion of Psalm 8 in Job 7:17–18, and the emphasis on the absurdity of Job’s situation by “metamorphic” use of the literary genre of lamentation in Job 16:7–17 and 19:6–12. Then, in “The Enigma of Job: The Deconstruction of God in Intertextual Perspective” (1997), Mettinger surveys the various conceptions of God as seen in the words spoken by the friends, by Job, and out of the whirlwind. He closes with a proposal that the “literary master” who composed Job did militate against the idea of a strictly retributive God, as the friends suggest, but the biblical author did not offer a simplistic solution to the problem of theodicy.

Part V, Second Isaiah, includes in its entirety Mettinger's shortest monograph, *A Farewell to the Servant Songs: A Critical Examination of an Exegetical Axiom* (1983), along with one other, brief, related work. The former piece weighs on the scales and finds wanting Bernhard Duhm's axiomatic hypothesis that the four Servant Songs of Second Isaiah comprise a secondary, independent layer of text that was inserted into the existing Isaianic material. Mettinger dismantles this idea by appealing to an array of arguments: the Servant Songs do not appear to be originally unified; they appear to be carefully positioned in the greater structure of Second Isaiah (contra Duhm's contention that the Songs were inserted into margins arbitrarily, wherever there was room); they interact with the surrounding material in a way that suggests an original integration, including reference to the same Servant as the surrounding text in Second Isaiah; alleged differences between the content of the Servant Songs and adjacent material are overstated, if not invented; and more. The *Farewell* is a *tour de force* of biblical scholarship—Mettinger carefully and cogently addresses each of Duhm's arguments, persuasively demonstrating the main flaws in each. The shorter piece in this section, "In Search of the Hidden Structure: YHWH as King in Isaiah 40–55" (1997), takes as its starting point the question whether the motif of YHWH's kingship appears in Second Isaiah and answers in the affirmative. Mettinger analyzes Isa 52:7–10 especially, noting its affinities to the "YHWH is king" Psalms (93, 95–99) and various passages about the Divine Warrior.

The volume concludes with **Part VI**, Reviews, in which we have chosen to include a trio of book reviews. The first two of these show the attention to philology that informs all of Mettinger's work. He evaluates James Barr's notable *Comparative Philology*, interacting easily with this masterful work, assessing its particularly meritorious contributions and illustrating a few areas where the ideas are less compelling—the review seems particularly precocious when one considers that it was published in 1970, while Mettinger was still a student. One sees more of the same in his appraisal of Ernst Jenni's work on the Hebrew *pi'el*, published early in Mettinger's career (1972). The final review, of Sandra L. Richter's monograph on the Name theology, comes from the other end of his career—it was published in 2003, the year of his retirement—and illustrates a mature scholar assaying the work of a younger colleague who had built on Mettinger's own conclusions. Mettinger's collegiality shines through here, as he lavishes praise on the stronger portions of Richter's work while also pointing to certain areas where she misunderstood or mischaracterized his own ideas.

It is often difficult to grasp adequately how certain ideas would have been received in other periods, so as a younger scholar I am not ideally situated to evaluate Mettinger's work within the larger trends of Hebrew Bible scholarship in the final decades of the 20th century and the first decade of the 21st. But I will offer a few remarks here, beginning with his work on David, which coincides with my own primary area of study and was the first area in which I encountered his work. In this arena Mettinger's work in the 1970's anticipated the trends that took hold in the ensuing years. Since the turn of the millennium, many have grown more skeptical of the type of historical work seen in the two pertinent essays in this volume, as well as in *King and Messiah* and even *Solomonic State Officials*; today Mettinger's work here might be labeled positivist. But I and many others remain convinced that one can employ the Hebrew Bible, particularly the books of Samuel, as a historical source, and if one accepts this, Mettinger's methodology and results remain exemplary.

Second, it is a testament to Mettinger's work on Second Isaiah that when I studied the Servant Songs in graduate school, Duhm's idea—which had been the consensus view prior to the *Farewell to the Servant Songs*—was presented more as a curiosity than as a viable position. Although in recent years scholars have become generally less confident about the textual development of the second part of Isaiah, the position espoused in *Farewell* remains viable. (I confess, though, that I have always found *A Farewell to the Servant Songs* to be an odd title—the essay does not attack the existence of the Servant Songs as such, but rather the understanding of the Songs as a discrete corpus superimposed upon the rest of Isaiah.)

Third, Mettinger's work on aniconism continues to wield much influence among those working on this subject, and with good reason. One of the first to propose a feasible paradigm for understanding the origin and development of the aniconic tradition in ancient Israel, Mettinger attracted many adherents to his ideas—though, of course, not everyone agrees with all of his conclusions, as the title “A Conversation with My Critics” implies. But here, Mettinger's eagerness to dialogue with his “critics” and his well-articulated, firmly grounded arguments demonstrate scholarship at its finest.

Finally, Mettinger's study of the dying and rising god motif, though perhaps the most controversial of his main ideas, deserves praise both for his willingness to challenge a sacred cow of biblical scholarship and for his ability to synthesize data from various media, genres, geographical areas, and chronological periods. It is unfortunate that his monograph and the

article included here have not generated the same amount of response as his work on aniconism and other areas, because he has undoubtedly reopened the subject for debate. Because the pertinent evidence shows up in all corners of the ancient Near East and beyond, though, it is a formidable avenue of study.

These remarks aside, what I find most staggering—and what makes an anthology such as this so remarkable—is the breadth of Mettinger's research. Over his scholarly career, he managed to make major contributions to Hebrew philology, the Deuteronomistic History, Israelite religion, Isaiah, Job, Genesis, and more. He masterfully wielded historical criticism, rhetorical criticism, narrative criticism, and source criticism, to say nothing of his regular use of iconography to help illuminate texts. As a young scholar still struggling to leave the friendly confines of my dissertation topic, I find Mettinger's academic boldness simultaneously inspiring and daunting.

As I read through Mettinger's various works over the years, and particularly while preparing this volume, I repeatedly asked myself: how did one scholar accomplish all this? That, to me, is the enigma of Tryggve.

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Finally, a note on style. Although the original articles have been reformatted according to the design of the present volume, neither Tryggve nor I deemed it necessary to submit the material to “the Procrustean bed of a unified style sheet” (to borrow his phrase). Thus, with a few exceptions, the text of the articles is reproduced exactly, including citation style.

Abbreviations conform to the *SBL Handbook of Style* (2nd edition); some abbreviations were modified from the original essays for this purpose.

Winona Lake, IN in May 2015

Andrew Knapp

Select Publications of Tryggve N. D. Mettinger

The following bibliography provides only the English-language books and major academic articles of the author. For an exhaustive list, including publications in all languages and of all types (including popular articles, obituaries, and book reviews), see tryggvemettinger.com or Göran Eidevall and Blaženka Scheuer, eds., *Enigmas and Images: Studies in Honor of Tryggve N. D. Mettinger* (ConBOT 58; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011), xvii–xxx. An asterisk (*) indicates a publication included in this volume.

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