THE PROPHESYING WOMEN IN EZEKIEL 13 RECONSIDERED

Abstract

In this paper I approach the age-old question: what is the social role of the 'daughters of your people who מִתְנַבְּאוֹת from their own hearts'. The traditional reading that these women are 'evil' sorceress who need to be criticised by the 'good' prophet Ezekiel for their despicable acts has justly been criticised as relying too much on the Hebrew Bible's value judgement that 'prophecy' is good and 'magic' and 'divination' are bad. As recent studies of magic and religion on the one hand and divination and prophecy on the other have shown, it is impossible to distinguish between magic and religion; (technical) divination and prophecy, in turn, are part of a larger whole.

Based on this notion a number of recent scholars have suggested recognising the women of *Eze* 13 as prophetesses. However, in my view, this relies on a misunderstanding: because prophecy and (technical) divination are both part of a larger whole does not mean that they are identical. In order to clarify the issue I introduce a new (and old) terminology which distinguishes between technical divination and intuitive divination which are both kinds of the 'supercategory' divination. Prophecy is a kind of intuitive divination as is, for example, dreaming, while augury, haruspicy, dream-interpretation are all forms of technical divination.

An interesting parallel to *Eze* 13 which has escaped virtually all scholars are the occurrences of **munabbiātu* at Emar. Flemming introduced the term to the etymological discussion on Hebrew נבא, but he always assumed it to mean 'prophetesses'. A thorough analysis of the contexts in which the root *n.b.*ʾ appears at Emar suggests, however, that the *munabbiātu* are to be connected to necromancy.

In a noteworthy article, Marjo Korpel had suggested to interpret the women in *Eze* 13 because of links between the bird language and the bird-imagery used to describe the spirits of the dead throughout the ANE. While I think that her reading is essentially correct, she is still caught in the unwarranted negative evaluation of these necromancers. Instead I suggest taking the view of the societies of the ANE seriously who valued technical divination higher than intuitive divination.

Further, as both the biblical and the Emar texts seem to refer to necromancy, I suggest that the two terms should be considered as linked. Either the female participle retained a different meaning from other occurrences of the root נבא, or the entire root should be considered as initially not referring just to prophecy but to necromancy or divination in general.