This book is reflective of a growing movement extending back at least two decades in which Jewish women, influenced by a modern feminist perspective, are finding their voice as well as what they see as their proper place within historic Judaism. Miriam is the focus of this collection because she has come to be seen as the model and example for modern Jewish women, particularly "modern Jewish feminists" (8).

The book includes Acknowledgments, Preface, an Introduction and seven major sections, followed by Biblical Translations (of the biblical texts that mention Miriam), About the Authors, and Permission Acknowledgments (most contributions were published elsewhere prior to this publication). The major sections constituting the heart of the work are "Prophecy & Leadership," "Miriam the Musician," The Women of Exodus," "Standing at Sinai," "Miriam the Bitter," "Miriam the Rebel," and "Miriam's Well." Each section has a brief editorial introduction (except for "Miriam the Rebel" in which the first essay was written by the editor), and each contains multiple individual pieces ranging in nature from brief poems to songs to scripts for ritual observance to lengthy academic essays, representing the work of over thirty different authors.

The variety in authorship and type of contribution results, on the one hand, in a very interesting mix for reading, but on the other hand, in a good deal of repetition in content. Perhaps the latter problem could have been addressed by a stronger editorial hand, but an inadvertent result might have been the diminishing of some of the healthy variety.

Certainly, the connection between modern interest in the role of women and the book of Exodus is an appropriate one. The early part of the book of Exodus reflects a surprising focus on the role of women in Israel's history, a role which is often overlooked in interpretation. The particular focus on Miriam in this collection, however, is based more on tradition than on the biblical text. In fact, a constant refrain throughout is the description of the sparse nature of the biblical record on or about Miriam.

How the various authors deal with the limited biblical record concerning Miriam deserves some comment. Obviously, the fact that traditional patterns of addressing the subject (rabbinic, talmudic) would be central is to be expected. But some contributors color heavily their use of these materials with suggestions of a patriarchal conspiracy theory. Their view is that the records that eventually became what we know as the biblical text once contained much more information about Miriam, but those who superintended the process of the formation of the text excised that information in order to conceal her...
important and central leadership role. An extreme extension of such thinking is the implication that Miriam actually should be seen as a goddess, or at least should be linked to a kind of female manifestation of deity.

I think that we can find in our study of Miriam a happy medium between "reading over" and "over-reading" our information. The biblical text, though limited, still provides a basis for seeing a significant role for Miriam. She is depicted as in some sense a partner with Moses and Aaron. She is called a prophetess. She is depicted as leading in worship. Certainly, given the male dominant background, there is room for embracing a fuller role for Miriam than is literally described. But suggesting a conspiracy is unnecessary and without clear factual basis.

One of the real values of this collection is that the contributions as a whole provide in one location some reflection of the significant components of wide ranging traditional understanding of Miriam along with, in many cases, rather copious notes citing a great number of extant sources that will allow interested readers to pursue their own reading and study of the subject.

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