Spronk, Klaas.

**Nahum**

Historical Commentary on the Old Testament


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This volume follows the approach of the recently inaugurated Historical Commentary on the Old Testament series by seeking to place the book of Nahum both within its own historical context and within the history of its interpretation. Spronk attributes the prophetic book to an author writing ca. 650 BCE, who used the pseudonym Nahum to indicate his intention to "comfort" the Israelites in the face of Assyrian oppression. He appears to have drawn upon Assyrian royal texts, Israelite cultic literature, especially the Psalms, and the words of Isaiah of Jerusalem. The book of Nahum, in turn, influenced Habbakuk, Second Isaiah, Jeremiah, later proto-apocalyptic literature, Qumran material, and the New Testament. It was incorporated into its current location in the middle section of the book of the Twelve in imitation of the larger prophetic books, with their sections dealing with woe to Israel, woe to the nations, and comfort for Israel. But contrary to traditional views which saw the book as simply one of vengeance, Spronk interprets it in terms of Yahweh's anger at injustice and oppression of the weak.

The greatest strength of this volume is the detailed attention to literary and structural details. Spronk divides the prophetic book into three "cantos" 1:1-11, 1:12-2:9-14; and 3:1-19, with the latter two further divided into three "subcantos" each. The (sub)cantos are divided into "canticles" which are then broken into "strophes." The second and third cantos both have shorter middle canticles while all three are linked by repeated keywords. In addition, Spronk sees a chiasm (mirror pattern) in 2:1-3:18 as well as an overlapping linear sequence of parallels in 2:4-8 and 3:1-5. Not everyone will be convinced by every proposal (for example, the mirror pattern alternates between semantic and exact lexical correspondences and does not incorporate 3:1-4) but nonetheless, Spronk is correct in his assessment that there is "an intricate web of cross-references throughout the book" (p. 5).

The commentary proper presents the author's own translation of each canto, followed by "Essentials and Perspectives," which comprises an overview of the content and the
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history of interpretation aimed at a general audience. This material is developed at length in the "Scholarly Exposition," which is divided into introductory matters of bibliography and structure and a detailed exegesis. Here again the emphasis is on literary features, including alliteration, wordplay, neologism, and acrostics; examples of the later include יָהָוָה at the beginning of verse lines in 1:2-3a and יהוה as the final letter of vv. 1:1, 2a, 2b, 3a (together forming "I am YHWH"); from aleph to הת in vv. 1:3-7a; יהוה (Ashur/Assyria) in 1:12a; and ( ...) לֹא (Ninevah) in 3:18. As for the exegesis itself, Spronk works through the various subdivisions one bicolon (or tricolon) at a time, while also considering how each fits into the larger sections as well as the book as whole. While the focus is on the final form of the text, Spronk also attends to occasional additions as part of the interpretational history of the book.

The exegetical sections contain a wealth of literary and historical insights that rely upon often technical analyses and reference to the original Hebrew and the versions, often without translation. As such, while not incomprehensible, they are not easily accessible for the non-specialist, and since the "Essentials and Perspectives" sections amount to less than 6 of the 144 pages of the commentary proper, it is questionable whether this volume achieves its stated aim of serving both specialists and "pastors and the educated laity" (p. vii). Such a goal envisions a much better educated laity than this reviewer usually encounters. At the same time, the overall commentary is marred by the many awkward English phrasings and/or editorial lapses, including "The now following introduction" (p. 1), "stay more close" (p. 2), "the prophet used in the order of the letters" (p. 23; delete "in"), "may haven been" "announces e will" (p. 32; "he"), "replacing" for "relocating" (p. 44), "sho" for "who" (p. 46), "renounce from attempts" (p. 54), the last sentence of the continued paragraph at the top of p. 107, "the reason of [rather than "for"] this" (p. 108) and "Niledelta" (p. 127).

Such infelicities detract from the value of this commentary and could cause some to discard it entirely, which would be a shame. One can only hope that this shortcoming will be corrected in a future printing, and that perhaps indices of references and authors will be added as well.