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Review of J. Kabamba Kiboko, *Divining the Woman of Endor. African Culture, Postcolonial Hermeneutics, and the Politics of Biblical Translation*. Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies, 644. London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017. xxxii, 288 pp. £81.00. ISBN 9780567673671

One of the most significant biblical texts dealing with female divination is 1 Samuel 28:3–25, the story about king Saul’s visit to a female necromancer in Endor. However, misconceptions about ‘the woman of Endor’ have dominated the text’s long reception history: she has often been (mis)labelled as a witch. In this monograph Biblical scholar Jeanne Kabamba Kiboko, who is also a clergy woman and Bible translator, discusses these persistent misconceptions and how they were passed on to African culture through the colonial period, with far-reaching consequences for the mission-church’s attitude towards indigenous divinatory practices.

In the prologue the reader learns more about the author’s background: she was born into the Sanga (also known as Basanga) people in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Her relatives were devout Roman Catholics but also honoured their native way of life and their ancient religious traditions, including divinatory practices, which were condemned by the church. Yet, despite the deep-rooted, negative attitude of the Roman Catholic Church towards divination, Kiboko already observed early on the striking similarities between the culture of the Hebrew Bible and the Sanga culture in which she was immersed, especially with regard to the positive use of divination.

In this study the author demonstrates her thorough understanding of divination, witchcraft and attitudes towards them from ancient times to the present day. She acquaints the reader with divinatory practices in the ancient Near East during the second and first millennia BCE, thus providing a helpful background for our understanding of 1 Samuel 28. She also examines the anti-divinatory sentiments in Medieval to modern Christian Europe which the colonial-missionizing agents brought with them to Africa. Within the African context, Kiboko mainly focuses on the divinatory practices of her own Basanga people. She explains how the mission-church failed to distinguish witchcraft from the positive use of divination in the Basanga way of life, thus condemning all types of divination as demonic practices.

With her postcolonial literary investigation of 1 Samuel 28 Kiboko compellingly demonstrates not only the multicultural spiritual challenges which she had to face, but also the

linguistic challenges: the vocabulary of divination used in the translations that were popular in the region, such as the French *La Sainte Bible* (LSG) and the Kisanga Bible, served well in the colonial context, but it no longer serves the complex situation which the church currently faces in Central Africa (where women, men and children are still being persecuted for being ‘witches’).

For example, according to the worldview of the Basanga people, there are bad spirits, such as the *mufu*, an angry, haunting ghost. In the Kisanga Bible the Hebrew word *Elohim*, which refers to Samuel’s spirit summoned by the woman of Endor, is rendered as *mufu*. However, due to the choice of the term *mufu*, with its negative connotations, this entire episode in 1 Samuel 28 is seen as demonic in the Kisanga Bible. In fact, it is Kiboko’s thesis that the vocabulary of divination in this passage (and throughout the Bible) has widely been mistranslated, not only in the LSG and in the Kisanga Bible, but also in the authorized English translations and many other translations and scholarly writings.

Kiboko subsequently exposes several cases of mistranslation through her word study of a number of key terms within the rich vocabulary of divination in the Hebrew Bible. Although not all of these terms are used in 1 Samuel 28, she argues that their examination is essential for understanding the inner-biblical conflict surrounding acts of divination. She subsequently examines the history and social context of these terms in ancient times and demonstrates that each one of them has connotative, emotive, and associative meanings that are not consistently negative. Her word study relies on the work of Mikhail Bakhtin, in particular his conceptions of the social history of utterances, and the heteroglossia and dialogism of literary texts. In her examination of each Hebrew term, Kiboko takes popular English translations into account, primarily the King James Version (KJV), the Revised Standard Version (RSV), and the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV). Occasionally she also interacts with other Bible versions and scholarly translations in English, French, and Kisanga. Her word study clearly reveals how attitudes towards divinatory practices vary from one context to another within the Hebrew Bible itself. For instance, we learn that thaumaturgy (the author prefers to use this rare term because of the pejorative meaning that the term ‘necromancy’ has acquired over time) is not witchcraft per se in the worldview of the ancient Israelites. Although some considered the practice to be a capital offence (e.g. Deuteronomy 18:10-11), others believed in the positive power of thaumaturgy (e.g. 1 Samuel 28). Yet, whereas the Hebrew Bible maintains a polyphony of voices on divination, the English translations lack consistency in their rendering of the vocabulary of divination, which Kiboko attributes to the laying-on of external (anti-divinatory) ideology by the translators. The author

makes a valid observation here, yet she fails to address a very important aspect when it comes to these English translations, starting with the KJV: the long translation history of each of these key terms. To what extent was the KJV dependent on its predecessor, the Bishops' Bible from 1568, and the earlier English versions, not to mention the Latin Vulgate? Although such an examination seems to have been beyond the scope of Kibiko's study, it could have revealed interesting insights and added more nuance to some of her observations regarding the translation strategy in these English versions.

Following her in-depth word study, Kiboko introduces the reader to her own interpretation of 1 Samuel 28 from an African, feminist and postcolonial perspective. She dismisses the demonization of the woman of Endor in the story's long reception and translation history – which already started in the Bible itself, in 1 Chronicles 10:13–14, where Saul's desperate resort to necromancy is condemned as a major transgression – and she restores the woman's integrity and her rightful role as a necromancer. She poignantly observes that 'any use of the word "witch" in regard to the woman of Endor is slanderous. She has been horribly violated through mistranslation. This also violates the Hebrew text and whatever anti-imperial sentiments the Bible does express. All of this has had disastrous consequences in Africa' (p. 216). The author's own translation of 1 Samuel 28 – in English, French and Kisanga – offers a fitting and beautiful tribute to the woman of Endor in this eye-opening, timely monograph.

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