

RBL 12/2008



Achenbach, Reinhard, Martin Arneth, and Eckart Otto

Tora in der Hebräischen Bibel: Studien zur Redaktionsgeschichte und synchronen Logik diachroner Transformationen

Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für Altorientalische und Biblische Rechtsgeschichte 7

Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2007. Pp. viii + 387.

Hardcover. €78.00. ISBN 9783447056342.

Kent Aaron Reynolds
Union Theological Seminary
New York, New York

Since essays in the field of biblical studies often focus on something very specific, such as a particular pericope or even a single verse, there is a danger of being myopic. The essays in this collection are anything but myopic. In fact, several of the articles are broad, sweeping studies that attempt to synthesize a staggering amount of information, including not only the relationship between the various corpora within the Hebrew Bible but also extrabiblical cognate texts and archeological evidence.

According to the foreword, these essays (all in German) developed out of preparation for a co-authored introduction to the literary history of the Old Testament that is scheduled to appear in the near future. The contributors are Reinhard Achenbach, Martin Arneth, and Eckart Otto, who are all of the opinion that the literary history of the Hebrew Bible is predominately a condensation of theological discourses in the postexilic period (1). These discourses were not friendly discussions but rather debates about the nature and extent of divine revelation, especially between those in prophetic circles, who claimed that they had received revelation from God himself, and those in priestly circles, who claimed that there was no other prophet like Moses and that the interpretation of Torah was the only ongoing source of revelation.

After an introduction by Otto (“Tora als Schlüssel literarischer Vernetzungen im Kanon der Hebräischen Bibel: Überlegungen zur Einführung,” 1–6), the first essay, by Arneth

("Die noachitischen Gebote [Genesis 9,1-7]: Die Priesterschrift und das Gesetz in der Urgeschichte," 7-25), examines the prohibition of eating blood in Gen 9:1-7. The flood story has long been a testing ground for models of pentateuchal composition, and Arneith argues that these verses within the story are an essential component of the Priestly source in Gen 1-9. Part of Arneith's support is the intricate connections (lexical links, chiasms, allusions, and the like) between these seven verses and the rest of the Priestly source in the primeval history. Another bit of evidence is the "image of God" concept that can be correlated with the P account of creation but contrasted with non-Priestly texts.

In the next essay ("Die Tora und die Propheten im 5. und 4. Jh. v. Chr.," 26-71), Achenbach provides a wide-ranging sketch of the relationship between the composition of the Torah and the prophets, specifically by exploring the evolution of the Torah concept in the Hexateuch, Pentateuch, the Former Prophets, Jeremiah, Isaiah, Ezekiel, and the Book of the Twelve. This is an example of the type of extremely broad study mentioned above, and it is important reading for those who wish to understand the other essays in the volume. Although the authors may not agree on every detail, they all assume the same general outline for the historical development of these texts.

Otto then discusses the legal hermeneutics in the Pentateuch and the Temple Scroll ("Die Rechtshermeneutik im Pentateuch und in der Tempelrolle," 72-121). He first examines how the authority of Moses became so important in antiquity, even though it is clear that he could not have written the Pentateuch in its entirety. For Otto, the question of why Moses never arrived in the promised land—despite the fact that there is no sufficient reason given in the narratives—is a crux of interpretation, which Otto explains in the following manner. Although divine revelation ended with Moses, he had already begun the process of interpreting Torah in Moab. Priests and scribes—not prophets—are those with the authority to continue the process of interpreting Torah, following the example set by Moses. Thus, this element of the plot bestows authority on the priests rather than the prophets. Next, Otto contrasts competing claims for legitimacy of the different strata within the Pentateuch, including the relationship between the explication of the law in Deuteronomy with the earlier Sinai traditions. He then discusses the Holiness Code and its relationship to the composition of the Pentateuch. Finally, he argues that the authors of the Temple Scroll claim legitimacy for their own interpretation with a variety of exegetical techniques.

The next essay ("Die Urmenschen im Paradies: Vom Ursprung des Bösen und der Freiheit des Menschen," 122-33) originated as a short lecture presented by Otto in Munich on the problem of evil and its relationship to free will. At first it seems out of place in this collection; however, it does provide an example of how Otto utilizes his compositional model in a theological discussion.

In "Jeremia und die Tora: Ein nachexilischer Diskurs" (134–82) Otto explores the complex relationship between Jeremiah and the Pentateuch. In the portrayal of Jeremiah as a prophet like Moses, Otto sees an attempt by the prophetic circle to claim authority for themselves. In the story of Aaron's staff that sprouted, Otto sees a reclamation of authority by the priestly circle. (The story of Aaron's staff is part of a postpentateuchal addendum that postdates the book of Jeremiah in Otto's reconstruction.) He criticizes some scholars for their simplistic view of the Deuteronomistic redaction of Jeremiah, since they do not have a sufficiently sophisticated model for the many layers of Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic History.

The following two essays focus on the book of Isaiah. Otto examines the priestly and prophetic streams in the throne vision of Isa 6, especially the issues of purity and holiness ("Liminalität in der Thronratsvision Jesajas: Priesterliches und prophetisches Denken in Jesaja 6," 183–95). He claims that the vision legitimizes prophetic claims to revelation and robs the priestly circles of their exclusive right to speak for God. Again, Otto finds evidence of a postexilic debate between priests and prophets. Achenbach then studies Isa 61 and argues that it is from a scribe trained in a priestly way of thinking, who uses royal and messianic imagery to portray an alternative to a king in the late Persian period ("König, Priester und Prophet: Zur Transformation der Konzepte der Herrschaftslegitimation in Jesaja 61," 196–244).

Since de Wette, the reform of Josiah is important for any theory on the formation of the Pentateuch, and Josiah's reform is the focus of the next two essays. In "Die antiassyrische Reform Josias von Juda: Überlegungen zur Komposition und Intention von 2 Reg 23,4–15" (246–74) Arneht compares the report of the cult reform (2 Kgs 23:4–15) with the cult reform described in the annals of Esarhaddon. He first examines the verses in 2 Kings and argues that they are a unity. He then presents the contents of Esarhaddon's report, specifying its four distinct parts, and claims that the report on Josiah contains three of the four elements that occur in Esarhaddon's report. Thus, Arneht believes that Josiah's report mimics Esarhaddon's for a polemical purpose, namely, an anti-Assyrian reform. But even if the polemical element or the direct borrowing cannot be proven, the two reports are at least analogous. Next, Arneht compares the depictions of Josiah and Hezekiah ("Hiskia und Josia," 275–93). He defends the literary unity of 2 Kgs 18:3–8, which is about Hezekiah, on the basis of an intricate chiasm. This highly artistic composition also assumes several other passages that Arneht lists, and therefore the portrayal of Hezekiah is likely part of a relatively late strata in the Deuteronomistic History.

In the final two essays, Arneht turns to the Psalter, specifically Ps 1 ("Psalm 1: Seine Stellung im Psalter und seine Bedeutung für die Komposition der Bergpredigt," 294–309)

and Ps 19 (“Psalm 19: Tora oder Messias?” 310–39). Arneth argues that Ps 1 assumes and draws from Josh 1, Jer 17, and the portrayals of Hezekiah and Josiah. He then claims that the Sermon on the Mount in Matt 5 is based in large part on Ps 1. Although a discussion of Matthew may seem out of place given the title of this collection, Arneth views this as evidence that the book of Matthew arose in a circle of scribes and thus provides a window into the state of the text of the Hebrew Bible in the early Christian period. Finally, Arneth examines Ps 19 in light of both Ashurbanipal’s song for the sun-god and intertextual relations with 2 Sam 23. He concludes that Ps 19 is an example of an antimessianic stream in the late layers of the Hebrew Bible.

The broad scope of these essays is either their strength or their weakness. The authors are attempting to provide an explanation of the various corpora of the Hebrew Bible that accounts for all of the available evidence and coordinates the evidence with integrative theories about the sociological or ideological forces that helped to shape the texts. If all of the pieces of this puzzle fit together the way these authors claim, then the resulting system is bold and impressive. But if all of the pieces do not fit, this raises questions about the system as a whole. For example, Otto claims that the composer of Lev 26 borrowed material from the book of Ezekiel. But what if Ezekiel is using the Holiness Code? (Studies by Jacob Milgrom, Jan Joosten, and Risa Levitt Kohn point in this direction.) This is not to say that Otto has not thought about the question; he has published various works on the Holiness Code. The point is that evaluating these essays adequately can only take place by evaluating their system in its entirety.