
The JSOT Supplement Series has published several of the most significant and influential doctoral dissertations on Ezekiel’s prophecy over the last fifteen years: Paul Joyce, Ellen F Davis, Mark F Rooker. We are glad to see the pattern continue with the appearance of Risa Levitt Kohn’s work, a revised version of her 1997 PhD thesis for the University of California, San Diego. The author’s scholarship is evident, and her arguments are well reasoned, clearly presented, and provocative.
Though the title of this book might well lead the reader to expect more of a theological orientation, Levitt Kohn offers essentially a linguistic study. There is some valuable theological analysis, especially at the end of the work, but it is more limited in scope. She focuses upon affinities and differences between the Torah and Ezekiel. The aim of her work is to offer primarily ‘a systematic examination of the lexical and thematic similarities’ of the Priestly Source (P) and Ezekiel; such an examination, she argues, has never been attempted. Levitt Kohn’s secondary concern is to make a contribution to scholarship by exploring links between Ezekiel and the book of Deuteronomy (D) with the Deuteronomistic History (Dtr). She contends that ‘the influence of D/Dtr on Ezekiel has never been fully investigated’ (pp 3-4). The goal of the dissertation project is to answer the question: ‘Where does the book of Ezekiel stand in the evolution of Israelite history, theology and literature – specifically, what can Ezekiel teach us about the composition of the Torah?’ (p 4). The author’s interest is diachronic throughout.

Most dissertations these days in the field of biblical studies are careful to spell out their hermeneutical approach. *A new heart and a new soul* spends less time doing this. Only by proceeding through the work does the reader recognise that Levitt Kohn’s approach owes much to Richard E Friedman and William H C Propp, two of her San Diego professors, and to the seminal work of Michael Fishbane on inner-biblical interpretation.

After explaining the need for her research, she considers ‘the state of the question’ in a lengthy discussion of Wellhausen’s and Yehezkel Kaufmann’s works on the relation between the prophets and the legal materials of the Torah. These are ‘two pillars’ between which ‘modern critical scholarship finds itself wedged’ (p 6). In Wellhausen’s reconstruction of Israelite history and religious development, the Law came late; it was not the starting point for ancient Israel but rather for later Judaism. Also ‘the book of Ezekiel ... is a liminal work between pre-exilic Israelite religion and postexilic Judaism’ (p 7) which produced the Priestly law. P is later than, and could not have influenced, Ezekiel’s prophecy. Kaufmann took exception to a number of Wellhausen’s conclusions, especially the denigration and late dating of P. ‘For Kaufmann, the sources of the Pentateuch reflect alternate expressions of a basic and unified belief system and are the products of the earliest stage of Israelite religion’ (p 14). P is earlier than D and, of course, earlier than Ezekiel. As one finds resonances between P and Ezekiel, the vector of influence is from P to the Prophet.

All agree that chronological priority in literary relationships is very difficult to discern and prove. No one working in the field of biblical studies is surprised that there continues to be wide disagreement among scholars regarding the relationship between P and Ezekiel. Despite the difficulties, Levitt Kohn enters the debate and, to her credit, advances it a good ways by providing ‘a basic
classification of what ... P and Ezekiel have in common’ (p 29). Those doing research on Ezekiel’s theological and literary relationship to the Torah cannot afford to ignore her work. See especially her three indexes which detail the shared terminology between Ezekiel and P and among Ezekiel, Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic History (pp 139-146).

Levitt Kohn’s conclusion is that Kaufmann was more or less correct. She joins a growing chorus of scholars – Hurvitz, Rooker, Milgrom, Greenberg, Block – who find evidence of an earlier P and of direct literary allusions to P throughout Ezekiel. She asserts that Ezekiel’s message, in the words of Brevard Childs, ‘shows many signs of being influenced by a study of Israel’s sacred writings’. The reader of this dissertation cannot help being impressed with Levitt Kohn’s accumulation of texts where the Prophet reuses, reinterprets and reformulates Torah materials. She also gives examples of how P and D/Dtr were fused in Ezekiel’s prophecy (chap 5). This fusing of Pentateuchal traditions – ‘rival streams of thought in pre-exilic Israel’ (p 117) – established Ezekiel as a forerunner of an anonymous Pentateuchal Redactor.

Levitt Kohn’s dissertation could have been strengthened at a few points. A more careful and thorough examination of the recognition formulae in P and Ezekiel would have revealed a much stronger link than she found (chap 3, section 1.9). Ezekiel’s transport to a high mountain in 40:2 where he received a detailed plan of Yahweh’s sanctuary might be better linked to Mount Sinai and Exodus 24:12–31:18 than to Mount Nebo and Deuteronomy 32:49-52. The work has a few editing mistakes: ‘than’ for ‘that’ on page 15; a page number discrepancy in chapter 6, footnote 9. These are but minor criticisms of a fine dissertation which deserved publication in the JSOT Supplement Series.

For an encapsulation of her arguments, see ‘A Prophet like Moses? Rethinking Ezekiel’s Relationship to the Torah’, Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 114 (2002), 236-254.

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