



Protestant Theological University

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Hartog, P.B.

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VROEG JODENDOM

ZAHN, M.M. — *Genres of Rewriting in Second Temple Judaism. Scribal Composition and Transmission*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2020. (23,5 cm, XII, 264). ISBN 978-1-108-47758-1. £ 75.00.

With this book Molly Zahn calls attention to rewriting as a fundamental scribal technique in ancient Judaism. Lamenting the lack of interdisciplinary studies on rewriting, Zahn sets out “to map the extent and significance of rewriting in early Jewish texts, across the boundaries (such as biblical/extrabiblical, sectarian/nonsectarian, Hebrew/Greek) that have obscured the breadth of the phenomenon” (4).

In chapter 1, Zahn introduces the most important terms and concepts of her study. Reflecting on previous debates on Rewritten Scripture in ancient Judaism, Zahn shows eloquently that both the “rewritten” and the “Scripture” element exhibit limitations. A focus on rewriting runs the risk of obscuring the central role of oral performance in ancient textuality, whereas a focus on Scripture overlooks the fact that non-scriptural traditions testify to the same types of reworking and retelling as non-scriptural ones. To bypass these problems, Zahn conceives broadly of rewriting as “the deliberate, unmarked reproduction and modification of one text by another” (38) and distinguishes between two main types of rewriting: revision and reuse. The first refers to rewritings “made to a work in the course of the production of a new copy of that work” (38); the second concerns rewritings “of textual material drawn from an existing source” “in a new work” (38). Both types of rewriting, in turn, encompass “a variety of compositional techniques” (39).

Chapter 2 delves more deeply into the study of genre and its usefulness for exploring rewriting in ancient Jewish

literature. Three aspects of modern genre theory prove particularly fruitful for Zahn: the conviction that genres are flexible and historically and culturally conditioned, and that writings can participate in various genres simultaneously; the emphasis on genres as expressing function rather than, for instance, structure; and the importance of prototypes in thinking about genre. Applied to the material she studies, Zahn proposes to conceive of revision and reuse as genres of rewriting, which fulfil different purposes and may overlap with other genres.

Chapter 3 engages processes of revision and reuse in the Hebrew Bible. Zahn outlines how canonical assumptions have long guided the study of Rewritten Bible and innerbiblical interpretation, thereby causing scholars to overlook overlaps between biblical and non-biblical materials. Zahn’s use of the terms revision and reuse aims at focusing scholarly attention on the generic aspects of these processes instead of the canonical or non-canonical status of the writings in which they appear. After discussing documented cases of revision and reuse in the Hebrew Bible, Zahn addresses cases where revision and reuse may be (and have often been) assumed, but cannot be proved due to a lack of manuscript evidence. Identifying a trend in Hebrew Bible scholarship to formulate empirical models for textual development, based on documented instances of rewriting and the study of textual fluidity in non-canonical ancient Jewish literature, Zahn pointedly concludes that “documented cases of revision and reuse ... [o]n the one hand ... demonstrate that early Jewish literary and religious texts ... had complex histories of development.... But on the other hand, documented cases actually challenge traditional scholarly confidence in our ability to offer detailed reconstructions of each stage” (92–93).

Chapter 4 broadens the investigation to non-canonical ancient Jewish literature. Zahn takes issue with the “close association of rewriting with the transmission and interpretation of the books that ended up in the Bible”, as it “can lead us astray if accompanied by the idea that the texts now in the Hebrew Bible held a unique prestige and authority in the late Second Temple period” (98–99). Offering detailed exegetical discussions of key passages in Jubilees and the Temple Scroll, Zahn shows that revision and reuse were ubiquitous in ancient Jewish literature outside of the Bible. In the second part of this chapter Zahn discusses the Serekh ha-Yahad or Community Rule tradition (S), the War Scroll tradition (M), and the Hodayot, demonstrating that the Qumran sectarian works reflect the same types of revision and reuse as biblical writings and writings traditionally classified as “Rewritten Bible”. Hence, judges Zahn, “rewriting is not a procedure that was exclusively associated in the Second Temple period with the texts later included in our Bibles.... Obviously, our categories need to be rethought” (133). Yet notwithstanding this “pervasiveness of rewriting”, Zahn ends this chapter by noting that we must not “regard the corpus of works that employed or experienced reuse or revision as a shapeless, undifferentiated blob” (136).

Chapters 5 and 6 build on this last observation. In chapter 5, Zahn discusses translation as a type—or genre—of rewriting, based on translations of the Jewish Scriptures into Greek and Aramaic. According to Zahn, “[t]he lens of genre allows us to see the overlap between the activities of translators and same-language scribes while still appreciating the distinctive functions of translation” (168). Chapter 6 outlines various genres of reuse, which “serve different purposes

within the broader context of the compositions of which they are a part” (171), in ancient Jewish literature. Zahn recognises limited reuse (reuse of earlier material with no obvious interpretative bent), historical résumés, pastiche (combinations of snippets of earlier material into a new whole), as well as types of reuse that take up the structure of or motifs from earlier material or produce new materials associated with particular personae. Taken together, these types of reuse exemplify the “porous or flexible limits of reuse as a category” (192).

Chapter 7 situates ancient Jewish practices of rewriting within their broader contexts. The first part of this chapter explores the implications of Zahn’s analysis for how scholars think about authority and exegesis. In both instances, Zahn shows how canonical distinctions present a hindrance for exploring these issues. The second part of this chapter places ancient Jewish rewriting in a wider cultural context by drawing attention to the textual turn in late preexilic, exilic, and postexilic Judaism, as well as to parallel practices in Mesopotamian textual culture. The book rounds off with a conclusion, in which Zahn summarizes her main points and repeats her aim “to speed the emergence of new modes of thinking” (227) in the study of the Hebrew Bible and ancient Jewish literature alike.

Zahn has written a rich and thought-provoking monograph. A red thread throughout the book is the need to rethink the categories that have shaped our understanding of ancient Jewish textual culture and the role rewriting played therein.

Canon and exegesis are but two of the concepts which Zahn’s expert eye provokes us to consider afresh. Building on the work of others who have questioned the centrality of canonical assumptions in the study of ancient Jewish literature, Zahn shows comprehensively how writings that ended up in the Hebrew Bible and writings that did not attest to the same types of rewriting. On that basis she makes a persuasive argument that canonical assumptions hamper rather than aid the study of the scribal development and intended purpose of these writings. Moreover, by invoking recent genre theory Zahn makes a compelling case for viewing various types of rewriting as fulfilling different functions, exegesis being only one of them. Although Zahn allows for all rewriting to be exegetical in a qualified sense (211), she profitably calls for caution by observing that “there has not been much reflection on what exactly we mean by exegesis” (208) and suggesting that no “firm line” be drawn “between categories of rewriting that we deem exegetical in function and those that seem to serve other, non-exegetical purposes” (209). In this and other ways, Zahn’s work shifts the parameters that have often governed the study of the Hebrew Bible and ancient Jewish textual culture and invites thorough reflection on the categories that have shaped these fields.

The strength of Zahn’s work is that she develops useful categories for analysis, though without pressing her case. On the War Scroll tradition, for instance, Zahn comments: “This case in particular is one where the distinction between ‘revision’ and ‘reuse’ probably needs to be kept at a purely heuristic level.” (127). This heuristic understanding of the terms she proposes results from Zahn’s engagement with genre theory, which holds genres to be flexible and fluid, and as such is a welcome improvement over attempts at all too clear-cut classifications of textual strategies and scribal practices in ancient Jewish literature.

One question I have upon reading Zahn’s work, is how her choice to apply terminology derived from modern-day genre

theory relates to the terminology that ancient writings, Jewish or other, themselves use. In Jer 36, for instance, the verb כָּתַב may imply aspects of rewriting: the contents of the second bookroll Baruch “wrote” equalled that of the first, yet with “many similar words” appended. Similarly, in the central passage 1QS 6:6–8, the terms כָּתַב, קָרָא, and דָּרָשׁ may cover several aspects of Qumran scribal and textual culture, as George Brooke has suggested. Moreover, school exercises and rhetorical handbooks from the Hellenistic and Roman periods attest to and reflect on the practice of *paraphrasis*, which often resembles practices that Zahn classifies as reuse. I would be interested to see how these more and less modern terms relate to each other and how and to what extent each may contribute to contemporary scholarly engagements with ancient Jewish textual culture.

In short, Zahn’s monograph is an important contribution to both Biblical and Jewish Studies. It shows what an in-depth integration of these two fields can achieve and how both fields enrich one another. As it critically and constructively rethinks scholarly categories and offers attractive alternatives, this book will be an indispensable resource for anyone studying the literary and textual development of the Hebrew Bible, as well as ancient Jewish literature and scribal culture.

Protestant Theological University,
Groningen
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Pieter B. HARTOG