

RESEÑAS BIBLIOGRÁFICAS / BOOK REVIEWS

NISSIM AMZALLAG, *Esau in Jerusalem: The Rise of a Seirite Religious Elite in Zion in the Persian Period*. Cahiers de la Revue Biblique 85. Pendé, J. Gabalda et Cie, 2015. ISBN 978-2-85021-242-0. Paperback 62,00 €.

In the introduction to his Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel, Julius Wellhausen explains that prior to his having composed that foundational work in the field of the critical study of Hebrew Scripture, it was widely held

that the great mass of the books of the Old Testament not only relate to the pre-exilic period, but date from it... they are remnants of the literature of ancient Israel which the Jews rescued as a heritage from the past, and on which they continued to subsist in the decay of independent intellectual life. (. . .) in dogmatic theology Judaism is a mere empty chasm over which one spans from the Old Testament to the new...¹

Notwithstanding an overwhelming antipathy to post-exilic Judaism, even Wellhausen remarks as follows concerning the religious and literary creativity of Judaism² in the Achaemenid period:

(...) apart from the Pentateuch the pre-exilic portion of the Old Testament amounts in bulk to little more than half of the entire volume. All the rest belongs to the later period, and it includes not merely the feeble after-growths of a failing vegetation, but also productions of the vigour and originality of Isa. XL-LXVI and Ps.LXXIII.³

During the first half of the 20th century C.E. it was widely held by academic scholars of the Hebrew Scriptures that while the cultic regulations of Ex. 25–31; 35–40 and the law corpora found in the book of Leviticus were created in the period following the destruction of King Solomon's temple by the army

¹ Wellhausen 1883: 1.

² See below.

³ Wellhausen 1883: 2.

of King Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C.E., many of the narratives of the Pentateuch and of Joshua-Judges, Samuel, and Kings represented pre-exilic Israelite literature. However, in the last three decades of the 20th century C.E. this consensus was shattered by Thomas L. Thompson's *The Historicity of the Patriarchal Narratives: The Quest for the Historical Abraham*⁴ and John van Seters' *Abraham in History and Tradition*⁵ followed by many others. Scholars who insisted that most of the narratives in the Pentateuch and Joshua-Kings were written after 586 B.C.E. were called minimalists. Scholars who argued that a relatively greater amount of the Pentateuch and the so-called Former Prophets had been composed prior to the Exile were called maximalists.

A tacit assumption of both maximalists and minimalists was that post-exilic writings must of necessity be less reliable historically and less authoritative spiritually in keeping with Wellhausen's having characterized the Jewish community of Yehud in the Achaemenid period in the following words:

*The Jews had no historical life, and therefore painted the old time according to their ideas, and framed the time to come according to their wishes. They stood in no living relation with either the past or the future; the present was not with them a bridge from the one to the other; they did not think of bestirring themselves with a view to the kingdom of God. They had no natural and historical existence, and made no preparations to procure such a thing for themselves; they only hoped for it as a reward of faithful keeping of the law.*⁶

In the midst of the debate between maximalists and minimalists as to which Scripture texts might be properly defined as post-exilic, Avi Hurvitz produced a whole series of researches into the characteristics of pre-exilic, exilic,⁷ and post-exilic Hebrew, culminating in *A Concise Lexicon of Late Biblical Hebrew*.⁸ Many of the minimalists do not want to countenance the possibility of scientific proof for linguistic differences between pre-exilic and post-exilic texts. Indeed, Thomas L. Thompson went so far as to declare that the oldest

⁴ Thompson 1974.

⁵ van Seters 1975.

⁶ Wellhausen 1883: 502–03.

⁷ Hurvitz 1982.

⁸ Hurvitz 2014.

testimony to the existence of Hebrew Scripture comes from “the Hasmonean state, created by the Maccabees.”⁹

In 1908 Solomon Schechter argued against the attribution of a large part of Hebrew Scripture including not only the Priestly Code of the Pentateuch but also Song of Songs and Ruth to the period 450–150 B.C.E.¹⁰ He stated, “No period in Jewish history...is so entirely obscure.”¹¹ As Schechter would have it,

*All that is left of those ages are a few meagre notices by Josephus, which do not seem to be above doubt, and a few bare names in the Books of Chronicles of persons who hardly left any mark on the history of the times.*¹²

It is against the background of this long debate as to how much of Hebrew Scripture might be assigned to the Achaemenid period (539–330 B.C.E.) that Nissim Amzallag (Ph.D. in biblical research, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Beer Sheva 2015), a Ph.D. in botany (Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1993), the author of 30 scientific articles in biblical studies, three books on the history of ideas and philosophy of science, 13 scientific articles on the history of ideas, and 40 scientific articles on plant biology, emerges into the field of biblical studies, full blown like Athena from the head of Zeus, and offers a totally new way of looking at one aspect of the history of Judaism and its literature in the Achaemenid period.

Unquestionably, Wellhausen’s assigning Leviticus to the decadent Achaemenid era was no sign of admiration for the book that first taught “Love thy neighbor as thyself.” Likewise, Schechter did not find in the assigning of Ruth and Song of Songs to that era a compliment. Now emerges a highly gifted and original scholar, Nissim Amzallag, to declare that the province of Yehud in the Achaemenid period “was the hub of such intense intellectual and literary activity as to be regarded as the host of the golden age of Hebrew literature” (*Esau in Jerusalem*, p. 1). Moreover, Amzallag explains, “This extraordinary literary outpouring was accompanied by deep theological transformations of the official religion of the pre-exilic Judean kingdom” (p. 1).

⁹ Thompson 1999: 294.

¹⁰ Schechter 1908: 42

¹¹ Schechter 1908: 43

¹² Schechter 1908: 43.

Elaborating upon the hypothesis formulated by Juan Manuel Tebes in 2011, according to which in the Achaemenid period, people with an Edomite background formed one of the choirs that sang at the services at the temple of YHWH in Jerusalem,¹³ Amzallag argues extensively and convincingly that the Judahite clan of Zerah is a local extension of a group originating in Edom, which was assigned a Levitical lineage in 1 Chr. 6. Their non-Israelite origin is attested in 1 Chr. 2:6, and it is corroborated by 1 Kgs. 5:11. Levitization of persons of non-Israelite origin is demonstrated by the Chronicler's assigning the family of Obed Edom to the Korahites and/or Merarites in 1 Chr. 15 (pp. 15–31). In addition, Amzallag argues that the 200 unnamed male and female singers referred to in Ezra 2:65 must be the descendants of Heman and Jeduthun because in post-exilic writings the descendants of Asaph are mentioned with precisely these other two groups of performers in 1 Chr. 15; 16; 25; 2 Chr. 5; 35.

Having made this point in the opening chapter of *Esau in Jerusalem*, Amzallag devotes the second chapter of the book to exploring the background of the Ezrahites (pp. 33–51). He shows how reference to metallurgy, the Edomites's specialized activity, reveals that the anonymous singers of Ezra 2:65 were heirs both to the prestigious tradition of song-poetry in Canaan and to Yahwist traditions that were older than Israelite religion. Consequently, Amzallag explains, they were recruited by the post-exilic Israelite community for the musical worship of YHWH (p. 51). In Chapter 3 of *Esau in Jerusalem*, "The Paradox of the Edomite Presence" (pp. 53–74), the author argues that during the Iron Age, two Yahwisms coexisted, one in Israel and one in Edom. Moreover, Amzallag argues, the story of the rivalry between Jacob and Esau, in which Esau is the firstborn son of Isaac and Rebekah, alludes to the rivalry between the two Yahwisms (pp. 53–58). Later, Amzallag elaborates, Edom's having sided with Babylonia in 586 B.C.E. resulted in the Judeans's demonization of Edom (pp. 58–74). Nevertheless, Amzallag explains, the post-exilic Judean community in Yehud chose to recruit Edomite singers for one of their temple choirs "to reacquaint the Asaphite singers with the musical traditions that their ancestors had lost in exile."

In the second of the three larger divisions of *Esau in Jerusalem*, Integration of the Ezrahite Singers, the author traces the evidence for the process, by means of which the Ezrahite singers were integrated into the clergy of the post-exilic Judean community of Yehud. In Chapter Four Amzallag

¹³ Tebes 2011: 253.

argues that the central purpose of the Nehemiah Charter contained in Neh. 10 is to integrate the Ezrahite singers into the community and to pay them for their religious services. The Ezrahites, in turn, agreed to abandon their Edomite identity and traditions (p. 91). In Chapter Five, “The Levitization of the Ezrahites,” the author argues that 2 Chr. 31:1–21 provides the details as to how the provisions of Neh. 10 with respect to the integration of the Ezrahites into the community were implemented. No less interesting is our author’s explaining how Neh. 11 sought to integrate other Edomites into Judah (pp. 103–106). In the 3d section of Chapter Five, Changes in Musical Worship, Amzallag explains that in the 17-verse account of the ceremony of dedication of the wall of Jerusalem in Neh. 12, most of the text describes the antiphonal singing involving the Asaphites led by Zechariah and the Ezrahites by Jezrahiah (see especially, p. 113). According to our author,

the musical ceremony recounted in Neh. 12:27–43 celebrates not only the completion of the city wall but also the integration of the Ezrahites in the community, their promotion to the rank of a religious elite, and their financial support by the community. (p. 112).

Amzallag’s painstaking arguments in the course of the first five chapters of *Esau in Jerusalem* prepare us for chapter 6, which analyzes in great detail the various sources of opposition to Nehemiah’s charter beginning with Noadiah the last named prophetess in Hebrew Scripture, and culminating with the authors of Ps. 14, who were threatened by the fact that the Ezrahites were not satisfied with being integrated into Israel. They sought, instead, to become Israel’s new intellectual and religious elite. Indeed, it was the very great success of the Ezrahites in achieving precisely this goal and this status that is explored in Part 3, The Ezrahites as a new religious elite (pp. 143–219).

Part 3 of *Esau in Jerusalem* includes an introduction and three chapters, 7 (the theological shift in Nehemiah’s charter); 8 (the Levites’s position in regard to the reform); and 9 (the Ezrahite credo). In Chapter 7 the author argues that Neh. 9 is not a prayer but rather a preamble to the charter (Neh. 10). Its purpose was to integrate the Ezrahites into Judah by emphasizing the covenant with Abraham rather than the covenant with Jacob. In Chapter 8

Amzallag analyzes various possible meanings of Ps. 106. He concludes that the purpose of this psalm was for the non-Ezrahite Levites to acknowledge the superiority of the Ezrahites' musical traditions and to promote the Ezrahites to the rank of a new religious elite. In the final chapter of the body of the book, Chapter 9, The Ezrahite Credo, Amzallag shows how Ps. 89 exalts the Ezrahite elite and how Psalms 111–112 are two parts of a song that the Ezrahites performed antiphonally.

In the book's conclusion (pp. 221–235) it is suggested that there may be a pro-Edomite bias in Genesis (p. 233) and in Chronicles (pp. 232–233). The author briefly discusses the possibility of an Edomite origin of the book of Job as part of the abiding legacy of Nehemiah's having integrated the Ezrahites into the Levites and into the Jewish community of Yehud.

Esau in Jerusalem is a fascinating piece of highly original and meticulously argued and documented research. It is interesting to read, and it demonstrates how original thinking can shed new light on questions not previously pondered. The writing is lucid, and it is thoroughly grounded in the history of research. The author avoids scholarly jargon. The book is provided with excellent indices, and it includes a rich bibliography that sheds much light on the until now not sufficiently appreciated legacy of Nehemiah son of Hacaliah. The book is highly recommended for biblical scholars, university students and seminarians, as well as clergy and educated laypersons. One looks forward to reading many more highly original books and articles by Nissim Amzallag.

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PETER JAMES & PETER G. VAN DER VEEN (eds.), *Solomon and Shishak. Current Perspectives from Archaeology, Epigraphy, History and Chronology. Proceedings of the Third BICANE Colloquium held at Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge 26–27 March, 2011*. BAR International Series 2732. Oxford, Archaeopress, 2015. xii + 281. ISBN 978–1–4073–1389–4. £47.00

En 1991 la publicación del libro *Centuries of Darkness: A Challenge to the Conventional Chronology of Old World Archaeology*, escrito por un grupo de historiadores británicos liderados por Peter James,¹⁴ estimuló un extenso debate respecto de la cronología del antiguo Cercano Oriente y el mundo mediterráneo. Es que la hipótesis principal del modelo Centuries of Darkness (CoD), como se lo ha dado en llamar, iba en contra de la mayoría de los postulados cronológicos aceptados hasta ese momento. A partir de una serie de “anomalías” detectadas en las evidencias epigráficas y arqueológicas de principios de del Hierro, James *et al.* argüían que la cronología convencional de este período estaba artificialmente alargada en unos 250 años, principalmente debido a los serios problemas presentados por la periodización egipcia. No es este el lugar para extendernos en los detalles del modelo CoD, pero podemos enfocarnos en su argumento principal: la egiptología ha creado una extensión temporal demasiado larga del Tercer Período Intermedio (tradicionalmente, 1069–664 a.C.), lo que ha tenido una consecuencia no querida en la periodización de las áreas que dependen de la cronología egipcia para la datación de sus restos arqueológicos, básicamente todo el mundo antiguo desde Irán hasta Gibraltar antes del siglo VIII a.C. Períodos arqueológicos anómalamente largos de principios de

¹⁴ Véase la traducción castellana: James *et al.* 1993 [1991].