Histos 15 (2021) xxxviii–xliii

REVIEW

HELLENISTIC INFLUENCE IN THE HEBREW BIBLE

Robert Karl Gnuse, *Hellenism and the Primary History: The Imprint of Greek Sources in Genesis–2 Kings*. Copenhagen International Seminar. London: Routledge, 2021. Pp. xii + 192. Hardback, £120.00/$160.00. ISBN 978-0-367-46246-8.

The essays collected in this volume represent observations on the Hellenistic origins of many biblical texts; they were originally published between 1998 and 2019. By careful and detailed analysis of particular texts, Gnuse seeks to demonstrate later classical and Hellenistic influence over the Bible. 'Deconstructing the biblical and Greek works in parallel' (i), he points out similarities in theme, meaning, and detail. Using this evidence, he suggests that 'although much of the text may originate from the Persian period, large parts of its final form likely date from the Hellenistic era' (i). He sets out to prove 'that the suggestions of [Niels Peter] Lemche and [Thomas] Thompson, especially, deserve attention among biblical scholars, and this collection of writings will serve that purpose' (4). Because these essays are scattered over a wide range of publications, their inclusion in one collection provides easier access for scholars. Apart from Chapters 1 and 7, the essays are arranged in the sequence in which they were published, thus corresponding to the author's development over the years. Let it be said from the start that this book is great: it is dedicated to fighting for its cause and yet it is full of prudence and restraint. In this review, I will go through the essays and reflect on methodological and historical questions that should enhance dialogue and future research.

In his short 'Introduction: An Intellectual Odyssey' (1–6), Gnuse introduces himself from his first course in Old Testament in 1963 at Saint Paul's College in Concordia, Missouri, to the present. He explains how he turned from the 'unconscious fundamentalism of my earlier education' to the present position among minimalists ('a modified minimalist') with others from the Copenhagen school. He recalls the importance of his reading Thomas Thompson (*The Historicity of the Patriarchal Narratives*) and John Van Seters (*Abraham in History and Tradition*) in the 1970s. In a way, this book is also dedicated to these authors and their endeavours.

ISSN: 2046-5963 Copyright © 2021 Stéphanie Anthonioz 22 March 2021

In the first essay, 'A Hellenistic First Testament: The Views of Minimalist Scholars' (7–33), Gnuse presents his general view concerning biblical historical criticism and the suggestion in much scholarship that the Elohist originated in the seventh or sixth century BCE, the Deuteronomistic History in the sixth century BCE, the Yahwist in the early fifth century BCE, and the priestly tradition in the late fifth century to the fourth century BCE. On this view, significant accounts continued to be added in the fourth and third centuries BCE, especially in those portions of the text that appear as appendages to biblical books (Genesis 39–50, Judges 11–16, 2 Samuel 22–24) or expansions of older narratives (Abraham, Lot, Balaam, and Jephthah). This essay goes on to summarise the views of significant 'minimalist' scholars (Giovanni Garbini, Thomas Thompson, Niels Peter Lemche, Russell Gmirkin, Lukasz Niesiolowski-Spano, Philippe Wajdenbaum), who theorise that the Primary History in the Old Testament was generated in the Hellenistic Era after 300 BCE. It presents their views along with some of the criticisms of their theories.

In 'Spilt Water: Tales of David in II Sam 23:13–17 and of Alexander the Great in Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander* 6.26.1–3' (34–46), a critical comparison between 2 Sam 23 and narratives concerning Alexander the Great, especially that of Arrian in the *Anabasis of Alexander*, indicates that the Greek tradition has influenced the emergence of the biblical narrative in its present form. However, Gnuse notes a serious difficulty with this conclusion: 'the Greek story comes from an author in the 2nd century CE, Arrian, and it speaks of a great general from the fourth century BCE, Alexander the Great, both tremendously removed from the days of David or even the theoretic time when the Deuteronomistic History was generated in the 6th century BCE' (37). But parallel narratives may also be identified in the earlier accounts by Quintus Curtius Rufus and Plutarch. This implies that material in 2 Samuel 21–4, an apparent appendix in the Deuteronomistic History, may have taken shape in the Hellenistic period. In this essay Gnuse makes two claims that give important clues to his intellectual development: first, that the literary form of an appendix is a sign that the narrative is inserted at a late stage. Second, that the late dates of classical authors should not prevent critical comparative study, because classical authors are well known to have worked with sources that are now lost. So Gnuse creates a device that I would tentatively call the 'implied transmission channel': classical texts are often known in a very late stage of redaction, but we must presume that older versions and traditions circulated, and these must have been available as far afield as Jerusalem in the Levant.

The third essay, 'Abducted Wives: A Hellenistic Narrative in the Book of Judges?' (47–60) compares the biblical account of the kidnapped maidens in Judges 21:15–24 and the Roman traditions about the 'Rape of the Sabine Women' as recounted by Livy and Plutarch. As Gnuse notes, 'an argument for a literary connection … is difficult to make in an absolute sense, since the actual language is quite different. The similarity lies in the coincidence of the

stories, and the significant number of continuities between the plot of the biblical narrative and the classical sources' (58). Although the classical authors are very late, relatively speaking, it is assumed that they recall earlier traditions and that these traditions were available to the biblical author, who in turn crafted a particular account. In this essay, Gnuse clearly formulates his literary argument, that appendices to biblical books (or *Anhangen*) are likely as late as the Hellenistic era: 'Their abrupt insertion into the greater narrative should make us suspicious of dating them too early' (47).

In 'From Prison to Prestige: The Hero who Helps a King in Jewish and Greek Literature' (61–82), Gnuse compares the story of Joseph as the interpreter of Pharaoh's dreams in Genesis 41 and the account of Democedes at the court of the Persian king Darius, as recorded by Herodotus (3.125–32). The narrative in Genesis 41 in turn inspired accounts of Daniel as a dream- and sign-interpreter (Daniel 2:4–5). Beyond literary familiarity, the author is eager to demonstrate a common interest among both Jews and Greeks in crafting narratives that might be termed 'literature of resistance': 'there is political rhetoric in these stories designed to praise the skills of the people who tell the account and to denigrate those foreign folk who are in an antagonistic relationship. Hence, we are led to conclude that there was a genre of such narratives, found in both Greek and Jewish communities, with perhaps some sharing of ideas and stories' (79–80). Here the argument is a bit different, as it does not seek to demonstrate literary dependence (built upon the 'implied transmission channel'), but rather to suggest cultural familiarity between Greeks and Jews.

The fifth essay, 'Divine Messengers in Genesis 18–19 and Ovid' (83–96), compares, on the one hand, stories where three divine messengers promise a child to Abraham and Sarah and three Greek gods promise a son to Hyrieus in Ovid's *Fasti* and, on the other hand, stories where two divine messengers save Lot from the destruction of Sodom and two Greek gods save Philemon and Baucis from flooding in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Detailed comparison is given, and further motifs are pointed out that occur in the Abraham and Lot story but nowhere else in the Bible, notably the warning against looking at something (the destruction of Sodom) and a person's transformation into a natural feature (Lot's wife). These motifs recall items from classical myth such as the petrifying gaze of Medusa or Orpheus' being forbidden to look back at Eurydice. Gnuse again is aware that comparing biblical texts with Ovid, who was born in 43 BCE, is problematic, but he reminds us that it is well known that the Latin poet drew upon older traditions. Thus, familiarity with these old classical traditions is proposed, and transmission becomes possible after the post exilic era, perhaps even as late as the Hellenistic era after 300 BCE.

'Greek Connections: Genesis 1–11 and the Poetry of Hesiod' (97–115) points to 'strong evidence that the biblical authors, the Yahwist and the Priestly editors, had Hesiod's texts at their disposal' (112): Hesiod and the Bible both

refer to a 'void' at creation and to a divine creation of light and darkness. Gnuse concludes that 'their accounts are similar and there are no real parallels in the Mesopotamian stories' (112). Furthermore, both texts present an earlier narrative as a prelude to the emergence of their respective cultures (97). Hesiod's poetry describes the origin of the cosmos, the gods, and the heroic age down to the Trojan War and the beginning of his own era. Similarly, Genesis 1–11 recounts the Primeval History before narrating the lives of the patriarchs and, in Exodus, the origin-story of Israel. Eve and Hesiod's Pandora are the only women to play prominent roles in 'fall' narratives. Both Hesiod and Genesis differ from Mesopotamian accounts of the post-flood restoration of humanity, in that the former texts have modern people as descendants of a heroic flood survivor. Finally, in Gnuse's view, the fact that 'only the Bible and Hesiod focus upon segmented genealogies or multilinearity in their genealogical listings may also indicate their divergence from Mesopotamian parallels', athough in contrast to Hesiod, 'the biblical texts appear to testify to a more personal and gracious deity, a greater anthropocentric perspective of the texts, and the equality of all men and women' (112). Gnuse thus believes that 'the Primeval History was created in critical response to Mesopotamian accounts with their concomitant religious and political ideologies', by authors familiar with Greek literature (99).

The seventh essay, 'Genesis 1–11 and the Greek Historiographers Hecataeus of Miletus and Herodotus of Halicarnassus' (116–23), does not assert any direct relationship between the named authors and particular biblical texts. Rather, connections appear to be more general (122):

> It seems as though the biblical authors are familiar with the agenda of the Greek historians and the accounts they presented. The biblical authors do some things in very similar fashion: the discussion of human accomplishments, the planting of the post-flood vineyard, the three sons who are great progenitors, segmented genealogies, and the ethnographic concerns appear to be narratives or concerns that the biblical authors shared with their western intellectual counterparts, and they did not share them with Mesopotamian sources.

The author again is not arguing for clear dependence but rather for knowledge or awareness of Greek culture leading to conscious dialogue. He is arguing for cultural familiarity. In this essay, another element is brought out that is absent from the preceding essay, namely a call to reconsider the biblical flood in light of Greek traditions, since in both cases the event comes about by human sinfulness, and not rebellion or 'noise' as in the Mesopotamian accounts. In Ovid's case, Jupiter sends the flood out of disgust at the prevalent evil of Iron Age humanity. Of course, Ovid is late and not truly a Greek historian, but certainly he is familiar with earlier and now lost sources (118). Gnuse is again

considering Greek traditions in their putative fragmentary states and inferring that older traditions were known in the Levant and came to the Jerusalem Temple by the Persian period. This is the device of the 'implied transmission channel'.

'Heed Your Steeds: Achilles' Horses and Balaam's Donkey' (124–30) compares how Achilles' horse speaks a warning to him before he enters battle (*Il.* 19.395–424), and how Balaam's donkey complains of the unfair beating he receives from Balaam when trying to avoid the threatening angel of the Lord (Numbers 22:21–34). Though the stories are clearly different, the biblical author may have crafted his narrative in reaction against some of the underlying themes in the Homeric narrative. In this essay Gnuse again provides important considerations, this time concerning biblical redaction criticism, as both the Pentateuch and the Deuteronomistic History must have undergone 'a long process of supplementation extending down into the Hellenistic era' (129). In 'Samson and Heracles Revisited' (131–49) Gnuse argues that the similarities between those two figures indicate not simply shared familiarity with general folkloristic motifs, but rather that the author of the Samson narratives (Judges 13–16) was familiar with the Heracles legends.

The tenth essay, 'The Sacrificed Maiden: Iphigenia and Jephthah's Daughter' (150–64), analyses the narratives of Jephthah's vow and the sacrifice of his daughter in Judges 11:30–1, 34–40 and the two plays by Euripides, *Iphigenia among the Taurians* and *Iphigenia in Aulis*. As in the preceding essays, the analysis closely follows the sequential progress of the drama and allows us to consider for the biblical text some date after 400 BCE.

The last essay reviews 'The Maximalist/Minimalist Debate over Historical Memory in the Primary History of the Old Testament' (165–75). It echoes the first essay and allows the author to take a clear stand among the minimalist party though he makes clear that both parties could often be on better terms. The book closes with an *index locorum* (177–84) and a general index (185–92).

I fully agree with the author that the future of biblical studies lies along the path opened by the Copenhagen school, in a closer dialogue between Classical and Semitic studies. I found Gnuse's book very engaging in that his tone is always prudent and circumspect, his arguments well founded or, if not, not forced upon the reader. I also found the thematic and narrative comparisons always detailed and the device of the 'implied transmission channel' interesting so as to open our minds to cultural familiarity. All this should invite biblical scholars to accept dialogue and reflect further upon history and methodology. I would tend to follow Michael Riffaterre's view that comparative analysis on literary and historical grounds is not sufficient if it is only thematic: rather than themes, 'motifs' and the function they hold in two comparable texts should

help us to differentiate a shared *topos* from a literary dependence.[1] In the case of Gnuse's examples, it appears more difficult to apply this method since the Greek text being compared is often a late witness and not the 'presumed original'. However, as Gnuse has begun to do, more attention could be paid to the *function* of these 'new' (biblical) texts in their existing context. If they are dependent on older Greek traditions, on what terms do they carry on dialogue with those traditions and what stand does the Bible takes towards those same predecessors: how do these 'new' texts *function* and what for?

In my view, another starting point for further dialogue is Gnuse's frequent reference to the Biblical author in the singular. This is a small point, but it has consequences for one's whole approach to the Bible. As has often been argued, authorship is more of a Greek notion, whereas in Semitic studies one is more likely to refer to scribes or copyists, because the authority of a literary text lies often in its antiquity or 'recreated mythical antiquity'. Somehow, transmission and authority go hand in hand. Of course, in Gnuse's examples, because these are late additions, the notion of a biblical author might be defended. However, the particular authors are unknown and what they have done is transmit a piece of literature that was found worthy of being transmitted even if rewritten. One should keep in mind that the texts we are speaking about were pieces of literature, founding their authority not in their authorship (as Homer, Hesiod, Herodotus, Plutarch, Virgil, etc.) but in their transmission, manifested in many ways divine or revealed. This awareness should help us bear in mind that the Biblical texts, though Hellenistic in much of their late additions, remain deeply imbedded in their Semitic milieu: we may be unable to claim the texts themselves as 'early', but many traditions found in them are much older than Greek literature. If we accept the device of the 'implied transmission channel', then we should never sever the threads that make the Bible primarily a Semitic corpus, the transmission of older traditions (now lost) that were once Israelite or Northern before becoming Samarian and Judean, and later Samaritan, Jerusalemite, or Alexandrian.

STÉPHANIE ANTHONIOZ

CNRS UMR 8167 Orient et Méditerranée 'Mondes sémitiques'

stephanie.anthonioz@orange.fr

[1] M. Riffaterre, *La production du texte* (Paris, 1979) 91–7.