

# RECENSIONES

## Vetus Testamentum

Carly L. CROUCH, *The Making of Israel. Cultural Diversity in the Southern Levant and the Formation of Ethnic Identity in Deuteronomy* (Supplements to Vetus Testamentum 162). Leiden – Boston, Brill, 2014. xi-279 p. 16 × 24. €115 – \$149.00

The date and historical context of Deuteronomy has been one of the key questions in historical criticism of the Pentateuch. C. does not address this question from the classical starting point, Josiah's reform (cf. 105f.); rather, she departs from a broad view of Israel's pre-exilic social history to read laws in Deuteronomy relating to issues of ethnic identity against this background. C.'s book is structured into three major chapters, moving from archaeology via social anthropology to the textual analysis of Deuteronomy.

The first chapter (8-82) provides an impressive archaeological overview of what C. calls "the long seventh century", i.e. the periods from the strong Assyrian influence in Israel and Judah beginning in the late 8<sup>th</sup> century to the Babylonian conquest of Judah in the early 6<sup>th</sup> century, in the Southern Levant. The presentation starts with the imperial powers of Assyria and Egypt (8-25), before discussing regions in the Southern Levant: Phoenicia, Philistia, Edom, Arabia, and Judah (25-82). The argument shows that the "long seventh century" was a period of intensified intercultural and interethnic exchange, mainly sparked by Assyrian dominance, administration and economic interest in the Southern Levant. Judah was particularly affected by this development through the intensified trade routes between Philistia and Transjordan (leading to Arabia), which routes passed via the Beersheva and Arad valleys. The main point of this archaeological summary in the present context is to argue for the plausibility that questions related to ethnic identity might have become increasingly important during this period in Judah.

The second, relatively short, chapter (83-104) discusses basic concepts of social anthropology, especially the difference between ethnic and nationalist identity. While the notion of the "land" as "national territory" is an important element of nationalist identity, ethnic identity is more strongly defined by cultural phenomena (89). Since C. identifies intensive attention to the "land" in the deuteronomistic framework of the Book of Deuteronomy (90), while she sees the land "largely taken for granted" in its deuteronomic core (91), she prefers to use the term "ethnic identity" in analysing the latter. Ethnic identity becomes an issue of contention when a certain group encounters groups of different cultural habits, and particularly when the "other" is relatively similar and has similar identity claims (94-97). Processes of identity formation are thus intense during periods of social change, especially when groups are integrated into major

political entities (97-99). Based on an exemplary study by A. Cohen (*Custom and Politics in Urban Africa. A Study of Hausa Migrants in Yoruba Towns* [London 1969]), C. identifies important articulations of group boundaries, such as myths of origins or emphasis on endogamy, and the potentially powerful role of religion in the development of an “endo-culture” (99-104).

Having established in the first two chapters that the “long seventh century” was a period of social change in Judah, and that periods of social change trigger dynamics of ethnic identity formation, the third chapter provides an analysis of “Deuteronomy as Identity Formation Project” (105-225). Against “the tendency to classify the book’s identity concerns as indicators of part or all of its origins in the exilic period or later” (105), the scope of C.’s analysis is to read “a number of passages in the book against the long seventh century’s social, economic and political background... If such a reading is successful, it will challenge the dating arguments which insist that the book’s interest in Israelite identity is a reason to locate either the deuteronomic text as a whole or the parts of the book which deal with identity to the exilic period or later” (106). An important assumption regarding the formation of the Book of Deuteronomy is found in a footnote to the latter statement: “It goes nearly without saying that the book was adopted and adapted by a number of subsequent generations; redactional and editorial fault lines are evident on even a superficial reading of the text, with its repetitive introductions and multiple appendices.”

The chapter discusses a broad range of relevant texts and concepts in the Deuteronomic Code. The analysis includes classic texts concerned with ethnic identity formation such as the mythology of origins expressed in the exodus formula (138-140), the prohibition of the religious practice of the nations of the land in Deut 18,9-14 (141-146), and the exclusion of Ammonites and Moabites from the “assembly of Israel” in Deut 23,4 (186-189). The interdiction of intermarriage with the Canaanite nations in Deut 7,1-4a is also considered deuteronomic (166-171). An interesting exception is the seemingly unproblematic integration of foreign women taken captive in war as wives of Israelite men in Deut 21,10-14 (199-203). Another “inconsistency of a deuteronomic agenda focused on defining and protecting Israelite identity” consists in the attention given to the resident alien (גר), whose status is “a curiously liminal one” (218). “The deuteronomic identity project is a complex undertaking, reflecting existing diversity in its attempts to homogenise Israelite practice as well as the intensity of debates over the appropriate parameters of Israelite identity in its virulent rhetoric towards those with competing claims” (225).

An analysis that might be less compelling in chapter three concerns the law of the king in Deut 17,14-20 (177-184). The final depiction of the king as a pious student of the Torah (17,18-20) is likely to be a later addition (177, n. 190). Regarding the initial regulations, C. readily admits with other authors that “the description of the royal role as it now stands is a far cry from any historical institution in Judah” (177). Yet, C. would not follow the line of a number of commentators who see in the law “an exilic demotion of the nation’s leader as a result of deuteronomistic apportioning of blame for the exile onto Judah’s and Israel’s kings” (177). A first reason to assume a pre-exilic origin of the text, C. suggests, is that the text presumes the king’s existence (177f.). Does it really? Might it not rather envision the potential re-establishment of the monarchy in a postexilic future? The divine chosenness of a king

exclusively from among Israelite “brothers” clearly contrasts with the imperial practice of appointing puppet rulers and imperial governors that could be outsiders (179-181). Yet, is this not true from an exilic retrospect? The subsequent injunction that minimizes the king’s military power (Deut 17,16) could be explained as trying to prevent dangerous alliances with Egypt that could provoke Assyrian response (182). Yet, how are we to imagine an author with a strongly centralistic attitude towards the temple of Jerusalem in greatest proximity to the royal palace, who would preach poverty to a king (Deut 17,17)? Should a priesthood interested in a powerful centralized sanctuary not rather strengthen the monarch legitimized by the temple’s deity? Moreover, the formulation of the law does not seem to be unrelated to the actual account of the establishment of the monarchy in the deuteronomistic history. Does the law have any historiographical purpose? And if so, what would this mean for evaluating its historical background?

C.’s book is evidence of profound learning and presents a major argument in sophisticated style. The wealth of information processed in the archaeological chapter demonstrates C.’s serious confrontation with the information gained from the remains of the material culture, while the chapter on social anthropology enters into dialogue with contributions of the social sciences in order to clarify concepts and to provide a theory much needed for a more profound analysis of texts concerned with identity formation. This multi-disciplinary approach is thought through in an exemplary manner, and it is rewarding.

The possibility of a pre-exilic origin of several laws in the Deuteronomistic Code does not contradict, of course, the fact that the framing chapters of the Book of Deuteronomy by no means hide their composition against the experience of exile and their perspective of restoration (esp. Deut 30,1-10), which characterizes the overall pragmatics of Deuteronomy in its canonical form (see, e.g., D. Markl, *Gottes Volk im Deuteronomium* [BZAR 18; Wiesbaden 2012], esp. 291-295). There remains, then, the question of how much the experience of exile led to redactions or might even have been the original historical background of laws in the Deuteronomistic Code. While C. has made a strong case that the “long seventh century” was a period of rising social change and a likely setting of discourses on ethnic identity, presumably nobody would contend that these issues continued to be of great importance during and after exile. Does the imaginability of a pre-exilic origin of a law in Deuteronomy prove its pre-exilic origin?

C.’s study is a welcome contribution to reflections on dating laws in the Deuteronomistic Code. At the same time, it leaves a fundamental methodological question open: Can we arrive at a sound historical theory if we think through but one of several historical possibilities? Most probably, we run the risk of remaining biased and one-sided. A hermeneutical process in which we honestly consider all possible historical scenarios, weigh their probability and then draw conclusions, might hopefully lead to more profoundly grounded results. This said, exegetes will be grateful to C. for having described the possibility of dating laws in Deuteronomy in a pre-exilic context with great seriousness.

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