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Fisk, Bruce Norman

Do You Not Remember? Scripture, Story and Exegesis in the Rewritten Bible of Pseudo-Philo

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Bruce Fisk claims that Pseudo-Philo's "time has finally come" (13); the ancient author has now begun to attract sustained attention from scholars. In this work, a revision of his dissertation completed under Richard Hays at Duke University in 1997, Fisk examines one aspect of Pseudo-Philo's *Liber antiquitatum biblicarum* (*L.A.B.*): its use of biblical material to supplement and explicate seemingly unrelated biblical episodes. Fisk, with a clear and clever writing style, demonstrates Pseudo-Philo's interpretive subtlety. Those interested in early Jewish biblical interpretation are sure to profit by careful examination of this book.

Fisk's central concern is what he calls "secondary Scripture." These texts vary from the obvious (quotes delimited by citation formulas) to the subtle (barely discernible allusions); they may function as rhetorical window-dressing or as an essential part of Pseudo-Philo's message. Fisk then demonstrates that the complexity of Pseudo-Philo's work requires "an interpretive model" (32) using both synchronic and diachronic approaches. After addressing dating and provenance issues (which are almost impossible to resolve), Fisk turns to three exemplary works for assistance in deriving his own model: Michael Fishbane's

Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel, Richard Hays's *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*, and Daniel Boyarin's *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash*.

In chapter 3, Fisk presents his model, based on six guiding hypotheses drawn from his exemplars: (1) postbiblical Judaism's hermeneutics is grounded in the intratextual hermeneutics of the Hebrew Bible; (2) exegesis responds to gaps or excesses in the text; (3) exegesis is marked by a combination of repetition and transformation; (4) exegetical appropriations vary from subtle to blatant; (5) the original context of a secondary citation may determine its use in the primary story; and (6) secondary citations may illuminate or transform the primary passage but may be transformed as well. These hypotheses reappear (both as citations and as subtle allusions) in the rest of the work. Next, in dialogue with Fishbane, Fisk pursues the relationship of *treditio* and *treditum*, developing a grid not unlike the Cartesian coordinate system from first-year algebra (119) upon which to plot "static" to "dynamic" reuses (the y-axis) and the relative prominence of *treditum* or *treditio* (the x-axis). This grid enables Fisk to categorize various secondary citations, bringing some order to Pseudo-Philo's varied hermeneutical palette. Fisk (again using Fishbane) then moves to anchor interpretation in early Judaism's "mental matrix" (126). For Fishbane and Fisk, interpretation is linked to social crises: moral lapses of the people, declining relevance of Scripture, and/or historical dislocation (e.g. the exile, post-70 events). Fisk structures his analysis of *L.A.B.* 12–24 on these three categories of social crises.

As Fisk reads Pseudo-Philo reading, he focuses on compositional technique and hermeneutical strategy. "Compositional technique" refers to the identification and analyzing of secondary citations, while "hermeneutical strategy" points to the examination of the function of these citations in Pseudo-Philo's "primary narrative" and "larger argument" (321). In short, Fisk moves from locating the citational "animal" in the guidebook to understanding the way that "animal" functions ecologically. This may sound like a wooden procedure, but it is a tribute to Fisk's writing ability and interpretive insight that his readings come across as anything but a preprogrammed exercise.

Any condensation of Fisk's readings will tend to diminish them. Nevertheless, the reader may find a summary of Fisk's "results" helpful. Fisk sees secondary Scripture at work in Pseudo-Philo's account of the golden calf, grounding a dramatic transformation of the story. God, it turns out, has anticipated Israel's sin, which (in this telling) does not threaten Israel's existence. Echoes of the tower of Babel and the covenant with Abraham are vital in this transformation.

Pseudo-Philo's retelling of the stories of the report of the spies and the threats from Balaam defends God's faithfulness and Israel's own status. This move may be most evident in God's sudden citation (and exposition) of the Akedah in the context of a command to Balaam to refrain from cursing Israel. Finally, Fisk considers Pseudo-Philo's characterizations of Moses and Joshua, especially the way Pseudo-Philo uses other biblical episodes and characters as building blocks of these characterizations. Noah informs that of Moses, while Joshua picks up elements from Solomon and Saul.

In a brief and able conclusion, Fisk reminds the reader of the categories with which he began his reading, demonstrating how the echoes he has discussed interact with those categories. On this basis, Fisk claims that Pseudo-Philo was less "free" in his use of Scripture and more "constrained by intertextual links and traditional associations" (325). And while his work cannot place Pseudo-Philo in a definite social setting, Fisk believes that Pseudo-Philo was motivated not so much by politics as by a love for the ancient text (331).

This book began its life as a dissertation, and in places the marks of its origin are still present. The chapter detailing the views of Fishbane, Hays, and Boyarin could easily have been condensed and Fisk's own method brought to the fore sooner. Fisk's evocative reading of the use of the Akedah throughout *Liber antiquitatum biblicarum* also seems unnecessary to demonstrate his point about its use in the story of Balaam.

There is bound to be controversy in any work that discusses echoes and allusions. Different people hear the text differently. Fisk usually succeeds, using criteria largely drawn from Hays, in constructing a cogent argument for his reading. But questions still remain. For example, in *L.A.B.* 15.4 the people quote God as having said, "I will bring you into a land flowing with milk and honey." Fisk isolates several possible source texts for this quotation (Exod 3:8; Num 14:8; 16:14), none of which is completely satisfactory (197–98). In this instance, the number of possible source texts may suggest that Pseudo-Philo was simply using conventional language to describe the land rather than citing a particular source. Such a claim would not apparently harm Fisk's reading (198), but Fisk does not consider Pseudo-Philo's cultural context as itself intertextual, preferring to focus on Pseudo-Philo's own use of definite source texts. This bias in favor of "influence"-based notions of intertextual relations is largely a reflection of Fisk's sources. While Boyarin is alive to (and involved in) theoretical debates over intertextuality, Hays is less explicitly interested. Fishbane (who seems in many ways most vitally related to Fisk's project) ignores literary theory. This is not

necessarily negative; Fishbane and Fisk are persuasive readers given their assumptions about textuality. But the result tempers the portrait we gain of Pseudo-Philo.

Fisk, following Fishbane, sets out to trace the dynamics of inner-biblical interpretation, believing that inner-biblical dynamics have a role to play in Pseudo-Philo's own interpretive choices. Isolating particular instances of inner-biblical interpretation, however, may be speculative and arbitrary. For example, Fisk claims that Pseudo-Philo's linkage of the Akedah with Balaam was not simply the result of the similarity between Gen 22:17 and Num 24:8, 17–19. Relying on the study of the Balaam cycle by Hedwige Rouillard, Fisk asserts that the final redactor of the Balaam materials had the Akedah in mind, thus providing "later tradents like Pseudo-Philo with reasons—inner-biblical reasons—to read Numbers 22–24 alongside Genesis 22" (247). One wonders what precisely is gained by this speculation, since Pseudo-Philo may have "perceived Biblical links" (247) without the redactor having put them there. It remains questionable how much Pseudo-Philo owed to inner-biblical dynamics rooted in the biblical texts. Fisk wishes Pseudo-Philo to stand in their debt; his arguments here (usually offered with caution) are not always secure (e.g., his treatment of supposed inner-biblical links between the Sotah ritual [Num 5] and the forced drinking of the remains of the golden calf [Exod 32]; 176–87).

Fisk, then, while open to Pseudo-Philo's creativity, focuses more on the constraining effect of tradition (and interpretive elements in the text itself) on Pseudo-Philo's biblical interpretation. This is seen most clearly in the choice of the term "secondary Scripture" (in ch. 5, Fisk tends to use the term "subsidiary Scripture"). Pseudo-Philo doubtless felt certain received texts to be authoritative, yet he also felt free to revise them and on select occasion to reverse them. To speak of Pseudo-Philo's textual basis as "Scripture" is to elide the difficulty of determining what was Scripture for Pseudo-Philo and may lead to the assumption that "Scripture" was authoritative for Pseudo-Philo in the same ways it is for present-day reading communities. Fisk's occasional use of the term "Scripture" to refer to the present Hebrew Bible (e.g., 147) while also using it to refer to Pseudo-Philo's textual basis blurs matters further.

So what kind of reader was Pseudo-Philo? Fisk wishes him to be a faithful reader, a reader convinced that "the key for unlocking Scripture's meaning is to be found *in Scripture*" (327, italics original). In large part, I believe Fisk demonstrates this. But Fisk also understands Pseudo-Philo to be a narrative reader: "Clearly, Pseudo-Philo reads Scripture as a coherent and self-interpreting narrative rather

than as a collection of discrete episodes" (327). One can see the influence of Hays here, given his focus on the narrative structure of Paul's theology. It is true that Pseudo-Philo is no mere prooftexter, dragging in bits of text willy nilly, but rather seems to appreciate the hermeneutical function of the narrative contexts of his "secondary" insertions. And Pseudo-Philo, like Paul, may have had a narrative theology—an overarching understanding of Israel's story with God, including his present day (327)—that informed his hermeneutics. But this does not necessarily mean Pseudo-Philo read a certain set of texts as a narrative or even in "canonical" fashion. For if the Hebrew Bible were "coherent" and "self-interpreting," why would Pseudo-Philo write a retelling of the story with so many radical divergences from the original?

Fisk's work raises serious questions about early Jewish hermeneutics. While I suspect Pseudo-Philo's approach may have been more hermeneutically "radical," I appreciate Fisk's close attention to the texts in question and careful presentation of Pseudo-Philo as theological interpreter. Future work on Pseudo-Philo and on early Jewish hermeneutics will have to grapple with Fisk's *traditum*, whether the reuse be "static" or "dynamic" (119).