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Boccaccini, Gabriele

Roots of Rabbinic Judaism: An Intellectual History, from Ezekiel to Daniel

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Boccaccini has written an engaging and learned typology of the intellectual history of Second Temple Judaism. While some of its conclusions may prove controversial, the author has made an original and positive contribution to the study of Judaism. It will doubtlessly inform scholarly reflection on the Judaism of the Second Temple period.

In his *Beyond the Essene Hypothesis: The Parting of the Ways Between Qumran and Enochic Judaism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), the author describes the Judaism of the Qumran community and that of *1 Enoch* and argues that the former developed out of the latter. *Roots of Rabbinic Judaism* is a broader effort to trace the development of different kinds of Judaism in the Second Temple period. This book covers Jewish thought from the period of the Babylonian Exile to the Maccabean Revolt, as evident in texts from Ezekiel to Daniel. This period is considered the “earliest ‘roots’ of the rabbinic system of thought” (xvii). The author is currently preparing a companion volume that will examine Jewish intellectual history between the Maccabean revolt and the formation of the rabbinic patriarchate. He classifies this era as the “period of rabbinic ‘origins’” (xvii).

Boccaccini begins by tracing the rise of the Zadokites after the Babylonian Exile (43). He surveys their consolidation of control of the Temple at the expense of other priestly groups (61). He describes the Zadokite worldview as preoccupied with hierarchy, control, and purity. He writes that “in the Zadokite worldview the house of YHWH has taken the place of the house of David, the priesthood has replaced the monarchy, and Aaron has superseded Moses” (80). The Zadokites gave prominence to the Torah as the foundation of a covenantal relationship in which God protects those who obey his commandments and punishes its transgressors.

There were types of Jewish thought, the author contends, that developed in opposition to the Zadokites. One of them is the apocalyptic strand of Jewish thought manifest in *1 Enoch*. In contrast to the “Zadokite idea of stability and order” of God’s

creation (91), *I Enoch* presupposes that the cosmos has fallen into disarray because of the wickedness introduced to the world by the fallen angels known as the Watchers. Boccaccini argues that *I Enoch* developed as the “cry of insiders” whose priestly rights were usurped by the ascendancy of the Zadokites (99). This point can be debated. It is certainly true that *I Enoch* contains some criticism of the priesthood. For example, the throne vision of chapters 14-15 is often read as a critique of the official cult. Texts that are critical of the priesthood by themselves, however, do not imply that *I Enoch* has a priestly provenance. *I Enoch* is more interested in providing revelation than criticizing the Jerusalem cult. While the heavenly knowledge it discloses is clearly beyond that contained in the priestly Torah, the relationship of its revelation to priestly concerns is rarely stressed. If *I Enoch* is to be considered anti-Zadokite, it is not clear that this should be taken as a foundational feature of the book.

According to Boccaccini, the sapiential tradition is also in tension with Zadokite theology. He depicts texts such as Proverbs and Job as “lay opposition” to the Zadokites (103). Since these wisdom texts do not pay deference to the covenant or the priesthood, he argues that they undermine key prerogatives of the Zadokite worldview. He argues that Ecclesiastes’ famous phrase “vanity of vanities” is directed against Zadokite covenantal theology as prescribed by the Mosaic Torah (123). Ecclesiastes is often understood as critical of the ephemeral nature of reality in general. While this broad critique can be considered as pertaining to the Torah and the Zadokites, few would grant that disdain for priests is a major theme of the book (cf. Ecc 5:1, 5). Also, as the author himself grants, wisdom texts like Proverbs and Job do “not confront directly the authority and stability of Zadokite power” (108), suggesting that the wisdom tradition should not be considered a form of “lay opposition” to the Zadokites.

In the Ptolemaic period Jerusalem became an economic center in the rapidly growing economy of Hellenistic Palestine. The Zadokites came under the influence of the Tobiads, a family that accumulated vast quantities of wealth through tax collection. One family member, Tobiah, married into the family of the high priest Onias II. The Zadokites also acquired political power under the Seleucids (133). The union of the Zadokites and the Tobiads, Boccaccini claims, helped launch a “process of rapprochement between Zadokite and Sapiential Judaism” (125). Zadokite and sapiential strains of thought are fully combined in Ben Sira. He associates wisdom with the Mosaic Torah (24:23) (146). He also praises the high priest Simon (50:1-24) and urges deference to the priests (7:29-31). The claim that the respect for priestly concerns found in Ben Sira reflects an acknowledgement of the elite status of the Zadokites is an interesting idea that merits further pursuit. But this may have more to do with Ben Sira’s own aristocratic status than a systemic shift of the wisdom tradition. For example, 4QInstruction, a sapiential text roughly contemporary with Ben Sira that Boccaccini does not discuss, assumes participation in the Temple cult (4Q423 3) but in general shows little interest in the Temple or cultic concerns.

Boccaccini’s intellectual history culminates in the book of Daniel. He contends that Daniel combines priestly and apocalyptic attitudes from the Zadokite and Enochic traditions in a manner so new that Boccaccini boldly terms the book the “Danielic

Revolution” (169). He acknowledges that in both *I Enoch* and Daniel visions and the revelation of heavenly knowledge are important. Yet Enoch is given revelation “as a gracious act of enlightenment on God’s part” whereas Daniel is depicted as a pious and loyal to the Mosaic covenant (174). It is certainly true that Daniel observes dietary laws (1:8-16), whereas this is not the case with Enoch. But one should not conclude that Daniel is given revelation because he is righteous while it is given to Enoch because of the mystery of election. Enoch, for example, is referred to as the “scribe of righteousness” (e.g., *I Enoch* 12:4; 15:1). Also Daniel has no supernatural origin of evil, whereas *I Enoch* does. While there are significant differences between the two books, it is not clear that Daniel has an “anti-Enochic stance” (207).

Boccaccini makes a distinction between the figures of Enoch and Daniel because he argues that the latter is consistent with Zadokite covenant theology, whereas, in his view, *I Enoch* is anti-Zadokite. He claims that Daniel as a whole reflects the view that enlightenment is given only to those “who merit it through faithfulness to the Mosaic covenant” (175). This is an intriguing and controversial claim. While it is certainly true that Daniel is depicted as a pious Jew (e.g., 6:10), the fact that he is given revelation in chapters 7-12 that is beyond that of Sinai suggests Torah faithfulness should not be considered a framing theme of the book. Also important for Boccaccini’s understanding of Daniel is the prayer of 9:4-19, which is widely recognized as Deuteronomic. It is fully consistent with Zadokite covenantal theology, as laid out by Boccaccini. The author argues that the prayer is important for understanding chapter 9 and Daniel as a whole (188). But Daniel’s prayer is often understood as somewhat inconsistent with the overall theology of the book. While the prayer emphasizes the sinfulness of Israel (e.g., 9:5-6), the visions of chapters 7-12 generally describe Gentile kings oppressing the Jews without depicting this as retribution for sin.

Boccaccini argues that Daniel modifies Zadokite theology with ideas from the apocalyptic tradition such as the “degeneration” of history (the “four kingdoms” vision) and retribution after death (207). These changes to the Zadokite system are important, he argues, because they would give rise to a strand of Jewish thought that would eventually produce rabbinic Judaism. Daniel is construed as the fountainhead of Pharsaism and rabbinic Judaism. This is the boldest claim of the book. And it is one that he does not adequately support. Perhaps his argument can be better assessed when he has finished his forthcoming book that covers the period from Daniel to the Mishnah. But in *Roots of Rabbinic Judaism* itself, very few direct connections are made between rabbinic Judaism and its “roots.” One exception is that Boccaccini claims that Daniel and the early rabbinic text *Megillat Ta’anit* used the same “Zadokite sabbatical calendar” (191). But in general not a lot of evidence is marshaled to claim that Daniel has an exalted position in terms of rabbinic origins. Furthermore, the relationship between Daniel and the Pharisees is not treated at all. The rabbis drew from and reinterpreted multiple strands of Second Temple Judaism. It is not clear why Daniel should be understood as a kind of filter through which Zadokite perspectives were modified and handed down.

Even though one might disagree with Boccaccini's claims, he has written a stimulating and thought provoking book that will certainly further scholarly discussion on the critical issue of the relationship between Second Temple and rabbinic Judaism.