



Lohfink, Norbert

Studien zum Deuteronomium und zur deuteronomistischen Literatur V

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Collected essays always evoke mixed feelings. On the one hand, one is extremely grateful for having the published works of an author in one convenient volume; on the other hand, there is a certain feeling of disappointment for simply getting old wine in new flasks.

This is the fifth volume of N. Lohfink's studies containing nine articles published between 1998 and 2004 that address several problems of Deuteronomy and Deuteronomistic literature. All but one essay have been previously published, and all articles are written in German (one being the German version of an English contribution to the Festschrift in honor of Patrick D. Miller). Just like the previous four volumes (and the same holds true for the two volumes by G. Braulik in the same series), they have to be seen as prolegomena to the extensive commentary Lohfink and Braulik are working on for the Hermeneia series.

The articles are as follows: "Der neue Bund im Deuteronomium"; "Der Zorn Gottes und das Exil"; "Narrative Analyse von Dtn 1,6–3,29"; "Deuteronomium 5 als Erzählung"; "Deuteronomium 9,1–10,11 und Exodus 32–34: Zu Endtextstruktur, Intertextualität, Schichtung und Abhängigkeiten"; "Prolegomena zu einer Rechtshermeneutik des Pentateuchs"; 'Deuteronomium 1,5 באר את-התורה הזאת: 'er verlieh dieser Tora Rechtskraft'"; "Dtn 1,9–18: Gerichtsverfassung und Militär"; "Die Landübereignung in Numeri und das Ende der Prieterschrift: Zu einem rätselhaften Befund im Buch Numeri."

The red methodological thread that runs through all the essays is that Lohfink gives up a diachronic analysis in favor of a synchronic reading of the biblical texts under scrutiny. Especially within the German academic context, where a synchronic reading is often regarded as too simplistic and not doing justice to the complex literary history of the text, this approach opens new avenues of research because Lohfink is able to show that a narrative analysis can be as detailed, subtle, and informed as the more traditional readings.

Especially one of the two core essays in the collection (“Deuteronomium 9,1–10,11 und Exodus 32–34: Zu Endtextstruktur, Intertextualität, Schichtung und Abhängigkeiten”) demonstrates in an impressive way how such a synchronic analysis can yield insights for a diachronic analysis of the genesis of Deut 9–10 and how this text relates to Exod 32–34 and 1 Kgs 12. Here Lohfink traces two literary strata: an early Deuteronomistic Horeb narrative (shaped under the influence and knowledge of Exod 32–34) that paves the ground for the Deuteronomistic picture of the northern kingdom and a late Deuteronomistic interpretive strata from the late exilic period that interprets the return from exile in the light of a “doctrine of justification” using the whole narrative of the Pentateuch.

The second main essay is again a narrative analysis, this time of Deut 1:6–3:29. In contrast to his analysis of Deut 9–10, Lohfink refrains from tracing intertextual traits outside Deut 1–3 but is nevertheless able to show that careful attention to the narrative structure might lead to a reconsideration of diachronic results, since some criteria often used for a separation of sources or strata can be explained otherwise. Admittedly, the current reviewer had some problems with Lohfink’s synchronic analysis. Despite its lucidity one misses a theoretical framework. Literary terms are seldom defined or explained, and it is left to the reader to figure out where Lohfink borrows his terminology from. Also, he seems a bit too keen to find palindromes everywhere, and one sometimes gets the impression that that is what he is really after. Despite the stress on synchronic analysis, the analysis helps the reader to learn a great deal about Lohfink’s diachronic views regarding the formation of the book of Deuteronomy. I have the feeling that seeing the essays as a (admittedly very compelling) fusion of a synchronic reading on the basis of previous diachronic analysis would be a more accurate description.

In the opinion of this reviewer, the most exciting essay is easily the one addressing problems of a legal hermeneutic of the Pentateuch as a whole (“Prolegomena zu einer Rechtshermeneutik des Pentateuchs”). Starting with the colophon in Num 36:13, Lohfink explores ways the reader can reconcile this apparent closure of biblical legislation with its continuation in Deuteronomy. Here he stresses that on the narrative level the different (and sometimes contradicting) legal corpora do not seem to pose a problem for the reader

(the narrative simply reports that laws were given to Israel). This of course changes when one attempts to use the different laws with a concrete judicial process. Rather than looking outside the Pentateuch, Lohfink embarks to trace hermeneutical keys inside the Pentateuch itself that help to guide the reader/user of legal texts. In an impressive way he is able to show how the narrative of the Pentateuch and its legal stipulations were used to shape the cultural memory of ancient Israel (Lohfink stresses that the Pentateuch narrates rather than promulgates divine law). Here it is important that the laws were not necessarily meant to be used in concrete law cases; rather, they aim at creating a counterworld that can be used as a corrective to everyday legislation (needless to say, already the books of Ezra and Nehemiah no longer seem to understand this conceptions).

Of course, such a plethora of ideas and views put forward cannot be discussed adequately in a review. As usual, when reading Lohfink's contributions to Deuteronomy and its context one learns a good deal, gains fresh insights, and is provoked into rethinking one's own ideas and views. After this fifth volume of essays on single exegetical issues, one awaits the full synthesis in form of the commentary even more. In the meantime, let these articles be the starting point for a fresh discussion about Deuteronomy and its neighboring texts.

Indices to biblical passages, topics, and modern authors conclude the book and help one to navigate through the individual essays.