

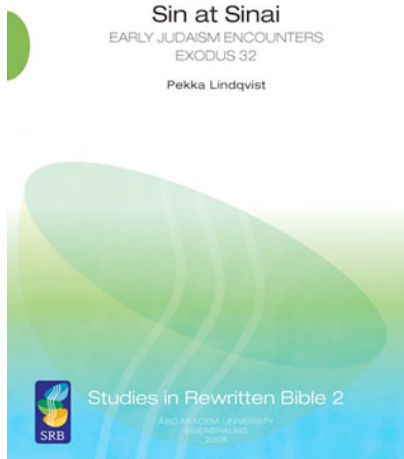
RBL 10/2009

**Lindqvist, Pekka**

***Sin at Sinai: Early Judaism Encounters Exodus 32***

Studies in Rewritten Bible 2

Turku, Finland: Åbo Akademi University, 2008. Pp. 391. Paper. \$49.95. ISBN 9521220201.



James N. Rhodes  
Saint Michael's College  
Colchester, Vermont

*Sin at Sinai* is the published version of a doctoral thesis directed by Antti Laato and presented in 2006 to the faculty of Åbo Akademi University (Finland), where the author currently serves as a postdoctoral research fellow. Lindqvist aims to trace the “interpretive life” of the golden calf incident in early Judaism in order to map out the extent and range of apologetic motifs drawn into the retelling of Exod 32. While the study includes three nonrabbinic sources of the first century C.E. (Philo, Josephus, and Pseudo-Philo’s *Liber antiquitatum biblicorum*), the focus falls especially on rabbinic documents of the Tannaitic and Amoraic periods.

As expected, Lindqvist’s study begins with an introduction that seeks to clarify the methodological parameters of the study and situate it within the history of earlier research. The author gives a brief survey of the contested definitions of the term *midrash*, before settling on Kugel’s “interpretive life” as a more appropriate description of the survey to follow. He rejects any dichotomy between an exegetical approach (Kugel) and a documentary approach (Neusner) to the traditions, seeking instead to hold both considerations together. There follows a brief survey of six prior studies by A. Marmorstein (1935), L. Smolar and M. Aberbach (1968), D. J. Halperin (1980), I. J. Mandelbaum (1990), P. C. Bori (1990), and D. E. Fass (1990). (It may be noted that Halperin’s study draws the golden calf incident into a discussion focusing primarily on

*merkabah* speculation, while Fass's contribution explores a psychoanalytic approach to Exod 32.) Among the reasons for a fresh study, Lindqvist cites both a lack of methodological sophistication in handling the rabbinic sources (e.g., Marmorstein) as well as a tendency to focus too quickly on Christian anti-Jewish polemic as the sole generative matrix for apologetic motifs in the Jewish sources (e.g., Smolar and Aberbach, Bori).

In chapter 2, titled "Challenging Encounters," Lindqvist identifies four "confrontations" from which various apologetic motifs may be thought to arise: (1) confrontation with the Gentile world; (2) confrontation within Judaism; (3) confrontation with Christianity; and (4) confrontation with a new historical situation. Of the last of these confrontations, Lindqvist—in acknowledged dependence upon the work of Jacob Neusner—has the Constantinian revolution of the fourth century particularly in mind (78–79). In probing the literature for evidence of these confrontations, the author eschews the attempt to mine individual texts for evidence of specific opponents (usually based on speculative "mirror" readings) in favor of a broader, thematic approach. Citing Alan Segal's work on the "two powers" controversy as a model for emulation, Lindqvist defines his approach as an effort "to trace the changes in larger theological themes as indirect signs of external challenge" (74).

Chapter 3 is entitled, somewhat generically, "Sin at Sinai in Various Contexts and Corpora." Here the author surveys interpretations of apostasy at Sinai in the Old Testament (Exod 32; Deut 9:8–21; Ps 106:19–23; Neh 9), the New Testament (Acts 7; 1 Cor 10:6–7), and various patristic sources (Barnabas, Justin, Tertullian, Augustine, etc.). Lindqvist aims first to identify exegetical questions that might be generated by the Old Testament accounts themselves, then to probe the motifs that come to the fore in early Christian interpretations. A final subsection briefly treats the Gentile charge of Jewish zoolatry as an ancillary theme that, in theory at least, could have influenced Jewish sensitivities about the golden calf story.

Chapter 4, "Early Judaism Reacts to the Problem of the Calf Episode," clearly constitutes the bulk of the thesis and, at 200 pages, is almost twice as long as the three preceding chapters combined. Subsections are devoted to (1) "Three Authors of the First Century" (i.e., Philo, Josephus, and Pseudo-Philo, 119–55); (2) "Silence as a Reaction" (i.e., textual manipulations and forbidden Targumim, 155–205); (3) "Apologetical Midrash in the Targumim to Exodus 32" (205–26); (4) "Apologetical Exegesis in Rabbinic Sources of the Talmudic Era" (226–95); and (5) "Merkavah Mysticism and the Calf of Sinai" (295–316). As the page ranges suggest, the targumic and rabbinic materials receive the fullest treatment; in the course of discussion relevant excerpts are given from the Mishnah, the Tosefta, both Talmuds, and a wide range of midrashic collections (the dating for which

Lindqvist relies primarily on Stemberger's *Invitation to Talmud and Midrash*). A final chapter (317–25) synthesizes the author's findings.

The results of this wide-ranging study can only be partially summarized here. In contrast to Philo, for whom "the golden calf episode is merely an instrument for selecting the auxiliary priesthood [i.e., the Levites]" (121), Josephus's modifications are more strongly motivated by the need to deny any place to the anti-Semitic and anti-Mosaic counter-narratives of Apion and his predecessors. In contrast to both Philo and Josephus, Pseudo-Philo makes "no attempt, whatsoever, to mitigate the gravity of the people's sin" (151). Lindqvist sees Philo, Josephus, and Pseudo-Philo as something of a control group in that (1) they represent diverse forms of first-century Judaism(s); (2) they are clearly in contact and/or controversy with foreign cultural currents; and (3) they "bear witness to an era when there was no established church (or practically none) to hurl its polemics" (118).

In the Tannaitic and Amoraic literature, Lindqvist identifies a variety of apologetic motifs intended to exonerate Aaron (e.g., that Aaron capitulated only upon threat of death; that he sought to direct the people's idolatrous intentions back to the worship of Yahweh; and that he purposefully delayed in hopes that Moses would arrive in time to intervene). He judges these interpretive maneuvers to be sufficiently early and widespread to suggest that they were motivated primarily by "inner-Judaic catechetical needs" (323). Explanations mitigating the blame of the people are also quite diverse (e.g., Satan deluded the people; Moses was presumed dead; foreign elements in the assembly were responsible), with later sources even concluding that God himself takes responsibility for the abundance of gold that made the molten calf possible. Lindqvist concludes: "Merely looking for the Christian polemic behind the indications of an apologetical attitude would not give justice to the multiplicity of the material, or to the shifts of times, places, and circumstances which are held within the frame focused on in this study" (322).

The primary value of this study is undoubtedly the breadth of its coverage. It will prove especially useful to scholars of early Jewish-Christian relations whose predominant expertise does not extend to the rabbinic corpus (here I include myself). A consistent motif is Lindqvist's claim that early Jewish interpretation of the calf incident deserves to be seen in a broader perspective than the one provided by the lens of patristic anti-Jewish polemic; a corollary is his argument that differences between Tannaitic and Amoraic sources are best explained against the backdrop of the Constantinian revolution. The first of these claims is amply demonstrated; the second, while plausible—even persuasive—seems to some extent presupposed from the outset. Especially welcome is the author's attention to the forbidden Targumim and an overall approach that is sensitive both to strategies of suppression as well as strategies of reinterpretation.

Lindqvist's book contains a bibliography, an index of ancient sources, and an index of modern authors. Considering the breadth of material covered, the presentation could be made more user-friendly with the addition of a few tables or other graphic supports to summarize some of the results and/or identify overlaps in the midrashic compilations. The volume would also have benefited from closer editing, as there are more typographical errors and missing (or oddly placed) commas than expected. Moreover, the eclectic documentation system makes the consultation of internal references more difficult than it needs to be. The footnotes, for example, use an author-date format for the first reference, followed by old style designations (*art. cit.*, *op. cit.*) in subsequent references—so that one must backtrack first to the initial reference, then to the bibliography to obtain the title of the work in question. Complicating matters further is the fact that the enumeration of footnotes begins anew on each page, also resulting in occasional broken or lost references. Thus on page 22, footnote 4, one finds the reference "See 1.1, n. 4." No such reference exists, though it appears to point to "Kugel 1994" (= *In Potiphar's House*) in the fourth footnote of the first chapter—a footnote that nevertheless now appears as note 2 on page 10. These issues distract the reader slightly from what is otherwise a valuable and stimulating study.