
This volume consists of papers from a conference at Oxford in 2003, which celebrated the 250th anniversary of the publication of Robert Lowth's *De Sacra Poesi Hebraeorum* and Jean Astruc's *Conjectures*. While Lowth initiated the literary study of the Bible, Astruc is credited with the first formulation of the Documentary Hypothesis. The first, and longer, part of the volume is on Lowth, the second on Astruc. Each moves from an essay on the author and his times to his influence on subsequent scholarship and contemporary issues. Not only is the section on Lowth longer, but the essays are also in general more substantial. This suggests a contrast between the two: whereas Astruc had essentially one idea and was relatively isolated, Lowth was fully integrated in the intellectual currents of his time, had an immense influence on subsequent thought, and was very wide-ranging in his interests (which far exceeded the discovery of parallelism for which he is famous).

The book begins with a fascinating article by Scott Mandelbrote on the historical background of the publication of Lowth's lectures. These lectures were fully enmeshed in the theological and interpersonal complexities of Oxford life, which in turn were linked to networks of patronage, both in the church and in politics. Lowth belonged to a new school of scholars, exemplified by his friends Kennicott and Hunt, who were initiating the critical study of the Masoretic text and advocating the value of Oriental languages (such as Arabic) for its proper understanding. Lowth's contribution was his recognition that Hebrew poetry had to be understood in the context of other ancient literature and culture. In particular, through treating the biblical texts as prime examples of ancient poetry on a par with classical authors, Lowth ultimately facilitated the study of the Bible as a secular discipline as well as the subversion of the authority of the church, which was especially pertinent in the late 18th century with the rise of Unitarian Dissent.

The next two essays, by Anna Culhed and Stephen Prickett, situate Lowth in the intellectual context of the eighteenth century. Culhed sees him as a transitional figure between classicism and romanticism. She traces his immense influence on the first generation of German Romanticists and his virtual eclipse— together with that of Hebrew Bible— in later ones. Prickett, in a typically insightful essay, discusses the virtual absence of the word "tradition" in Lowth's writings and attributes it to ambivalence about the concept of tradition and a growing awareness of the plurality of traditions. Christoph Bultmann, in his contribution, asks why Lowth chose the Bible rather than Horace as the subject of his lectures (since the 18th century regarded Horace as the exemplar of classical poetry), and adduces Lowth's emphasis on the passions and the sublime. John Rogerson, in a brief but vigorous paper, examines the work of another author published in 1753, Charles-Francois Houbigant, and wonders why he has been consigned to oblivion.

By far the longest paper in the volume, in German, is by Markus Witte on the genre of Job; it is also the best. Witte shows how Lowth set the terms and limits of
the debate over genre; for instance, whether Job is dramatic, epic, elegiac, or sapien-
tial, and whether it is possible to classify biblical poetry according to external generic
categories. Witte’s is a detailed and elegant survey of the discussion up to postmod-
ern readings, such as those of Whedbee and Dell. Witte’s paper is followed by a cata-
logue raisonné on the status of research of biblical poetics by Wilfred Watson; I found
it disappointing not to hear more from Watson himself about the issues.

Rudolf Smend writes the introductory essay on the life and work of Astruc. Astruc
was a brilliant physician; his Conjectures, published when he was 68, were his only
contribution to biblical studies. His thesis was that Moses must have used written
sources to compose Genesis; he postulated ten or twelve of these, using criteria such
as the alternation of names of God, duplication, and contradiction. These became
foundational to later documentary theory. The essay by Pierre Gibert, who edited a
new edition of Conjectures in 1999, compares Astruc to an obscure precursor, Hen-
ning Witter, who differentiated between sources on the basis of style. Gibert accounts
for the similarity by “l’esprit du temps” (195). The following essays, by Jan Christian
Gertz and Aulikki Nahkola respectively, both consider Astruc’s thesis in relation to its
critics. Gertz juxtaposes him with Benno Jacob, whose polemics against the Docu-
mentary Hypothesis anticipate the current literary turn in biblical studies. Nahkola
argues that Astruc’s principal contribution to biblical studies consists in the method
with which he synthesized the work of his predecessors. Finally, Otto Kaiser’s essay
delineates the life and, in particular, the coexistence of piety and critical acuity in Her-
mann Hupfeld, who founded the New Documentary Hypothesis in 1853. Interes-
ting as it is, this essay did not seem to me to make the connection it promises with
Astruc, or to show that Hupfeld was truly Astruc’s successor.

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