Review of Books


Literature on rewritten Scripture has become a growing industry. In the Second Degree is among the more intriguing contributions to the implied vibrant and ongoing debate. However, it is crucial if we want to move the discussion forward that we disentangle it from the slightly parochial nature of Second Temple Jewish literature in general and the context of Qumran texts in particular that have loomed large in the last decade’s debate (since the publication of the Cave 4 manuscripts). By this observation, I do not want to underplay the significance of numerous important studies. But it has been detrimental to the overall discussion that taxonomical debates about whether to categorize particular Qumran texts as rewritten Scripture or not has impeded the theoretical and modular advance of the field. To the extent that the category is exclusively used with respect to ancient Jewish texts and more recently to Qumran texts in particular, the use of the term risks becoming a self-affirmative endeavor from which there is no gain in terms of new knowledge. Therefore, one should whole-heartedly welcome In the Second Degree which strives to break new ground.

The collection of essays dates from a conference at the University of Vienna held in 2007, and paves the way for a new research project. Apart from an extensive introduction by Armin Lange, the book comprises four main sections of which the first includes two essays devoted to the study of the topic in the context of Ancient Judaism. In the second part containing two essays, focus is directed towards the Graeco-Roman world, whereas the third section with two articles centers on ancient Egypt and the ancient Near East. The fourth part concentrates on late ancient and medieval paratextual literature. Unfortunately, the book neither contains indices nor a final bibliography. The individual essays are also poorly equipped in this respect, since bibliographical information is given in footnotes only. This is disadvantageous for a book that aspires to set a new agenda. Additionally, the volume is not free from errors (see, for instance, p. 12 with two faults).
Although the volume stays within the frameset by literature of former epochs, it contributes importantly to the discussion of rewritten Scripture by including textual bodies outside a Jewish context, and in the essay by Renate Pillinger, “Paratextual Literature in Early Christian Art,” it also takes account of iconography, which makes perfect sense if one is prepared to operate with an extended notion of text that includes iconic signs as well. In addition to posing the general question of a more appropriate terminology, the book wrestles with the topic of conceptualizing the authoritative relationship existing between rewritten text and its antecedent(s). The majority of essays focuses on individual aspects of particular texts or examines features of why particular representatives of the genus came into existence. In this context, a number of contributors have recourse to the work of Aleida and Jan Assmann on cultural memory, but seem to be ignorant of the fact that this long-standing Durkheimian discussion was initiated almost a century ago by Halbwachs from whose work they could have benefitted considerably.

Given its programmatic nature, I shall focus my review on Lange’s essay. He discusses the diversity in nomenclature that has been applied to the phenomenon under scrutiny: rewritten Bible, rewritten Scripture, parabiblical and parascriptural literature, and concludes that none of these terms suffices, since they are all distorted by canonical and/or biblical biases (16). In my view, this way of phrasing the question reflects a misunderstanding (see below). To avoid the pitfalls of bibli-cal and canonical anachronism, Lange favours the application of Genette’s notion of paratextual literature, which he in *The Architext: An Introduction* (1992; French 1979) used to denote textual relationships of imitation and transformation. However, Genette was also keen to emphasise the difference between the two (1992; 82), wherefore it is not unproblematic to apply them to rewritten Scripture *per se*. Things do not become smoother by virtue of the fact that in *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree* (1997; French 1982), from which the book reviewed has received its title, Genette changed the nomenclature. Here he used hypertextuality in a fashion resembling but not identical (sic!) with his previous use of paratextual. He applied it to denote relationships between a text B (hypertext) and a previous text A (hypotext), “upon which it is grafted in a manner that is not a commentary” (1997; 5). As if this confusion were not enough, the contributors are divided in their terminological predilection for Genette of 1979 or of 1982. And even those who prefer the terminology of paratextuality do not problematise that the concept cannot without reservation be identified with rewritten Scripture (pastiche and parody are not the same as Genette acknowledged in the context of paratextuality; 1992; 82).

Be that as it may, I find it slightly self-contradictory, when Lange in his definition stipulates that: ‘On the basis of authoritative texts or themes, the authors of paratextual literature employ exegetical techniques to provide answers to questions of their own time, phrased for example, as answers by God through Moses or the prophets. The result of their exegetical efforts is communicated in the form of