Revelation and Authority: Sinai in Jewish Scripture and Tradition. The Anchor Yale Bible Reference Library. Yale University Press, New Haven, CT, 2015. 440 pp. $50.00

Revelation and Authority is a major study of the biblical texts describing the events at Sinai/Horeb and an important theological statement. Sommer claims that the book's primary goal is to demonstrate that Rosenzweig's and Heschel's claims that the Torah is the beginning of the human response to God's revelation are not a radically new but continue a line of thought from the Torah itself. Along the way, Sommer shows that one can accept contemporary biblical scholarship and fully incorporate Torah into a modern theological system. Also, he establishes that a critical reading of the Torah places law at the center of revelation, and the compiling of the Torah itself illustrates that law changes and develops through time. In Sommer's opinion, critical biblical scholarship should not present a problem for a contemporary Jewish theologian; rather, "... the Bible as recovered by biblical critics can serve as scripture for contemporary Judaism" (24).

Sommer states that "moral issues rather than historical-philological ones pose the most disturbing challenges" (28) to his accepting the Bible as Moses' stenographic account of revelation. In place of Moses' merely transcribing God's words, Sommer argues for participatory revelation—the idea "that revelation involved active contributions by both God and Israel" (1). If human activity, that is, Israel's/Moses' response to God's revelation, produced the Bible, then its moral shortcomings can be explained. If, however, the Bible is merely God's revelation, then "to many a modern Jew ...[it is] embarrassing" (28).

Building on biblical criticism, Sommer disentangles the accounts of Sinai/Horeb in E, J, P, and D. He points to E's ambiguities in Exodus 19–20, centering on the Hebrew words qol (voice/sound) and r’h (normally, see). Exod. 20:1 does not state to whom Elohim spoke, Moses or the people, and Exod. 20:18ff indicates that the people were too frightened to hear the revelation directly from God. Sommer concludes: "[T]he effect of E's text as a whole is neither to prove that the people heard all of it [the Decalogue] nor to show they head a part or none; it is to force us to wonder" (49). The ambiguity continues concerning the "written tablets." In Exod. 24:12, 31:18, and 32:15–16, the tablets contain God's writing; however, Moses shattered the tablets upon seeing the Golden Calf. Following normal Hebrew grammar and syntax, Moses wrote the second tablet in 34:28; but the subject of the verb "wrote" is unstated, so again E is ambiguous. No matter who wrote the second set of tablets, "[t]he Israelites do not hear or see the divine words that Moses receives. [And the Israelites] never gained access to the original tablets written by God" (53).
According to P, God’s body, *kbwd*, looked like fire, and when it descended upon the mountain, the mountain was covered by a cloud. Moses ascended the mountain into the cloud, and God gave him detailed instructions for building the tent-shrine (Exod. 24:16–18a). God also gave Moses the ‘*edut* as the token of the covenant between God and Israel (Exod. 31:18). Upon descending the mountain, Moses’ face radiated “an uncanny light” that frightened Aaron and the priests. The *kavod* waited on the mountain until the people finished the shrine, then it entered the shrine and called to Moses from inside the shrine (Lev. 1:1). P “refers to acts of lawgiving when the Tent was located at the foot of the mountain. Furthermore, God gave laws to Moses at the Tent ... even after the Israelites (and the Tent) left Sinai” (55).

*J* like *P* stresses the visual aspect of revelation and downplays the auditory. In *J*, the people find God’s appearance appealing, not frightening. *E* and *D* describe the people as frightened at Sinai, and in *P* the people fall on their faces. In *J*, however, the theophany is appealing, fascinating, and desirable. In *J*, the people remain at a distance, at the foot of the mountain. Although *J* does not have its own code of law, as we find in *E*, *P*, and *D*, *J* still considers law to be an important element of God’s revelation to the people.

Sommer convincingly demonstrates that *D* “reformulates material found in earlier books of the Torah,” clarifying, reviewing, and reacting to the older sources. “Deuteronomy, by commenting on and engaging material we know from Exodus, constructs that material as sacred and authoritative from a Jewish point of view” (64). *D* clarifies the meaning of *qol* in Exodus, by adding *devarim*, words, so that the *qol* “was a voice articulating sounds to communicate meaning.” Furthermore, *D* uses the second person plural in chapters 4 and 5 to explicitly state that the people, not just Moses, hear God’s words. *D* also rejects *J*’s ideas by claiming the people did not see God’s form. When *D* mentions that the people see something, the object of their sight is never God. Deut. 5:4 and 5:5 are contradictory, for in 5:5 Moses states that he mediated God’s world to the people, even though in 5:4 Moses states that God spoke directly to the people. Medieval and modern commentators have struggled with this contradiction, and Sommer concludes that 5:5 is a gloss (69).

This analysis leads to several conclusions: 1) The documents *E*, *J*, *D*, and *P* do not agree on what the Israelites heard directly from God and what they heard from Moses. 2) *D*’s account builds on *E* and with one exception clears up the ambiguities present in *E*’s account. 3) *E*, *J*, *D*, and *P*’s range of opinions concerning exactly what the people heard directly from God corresponds to the discussions of this subject throughout the span of Jewish speculation on the matter. 4) The final editors of the Torah incorporated a variety of older