



Reviews of the Enoch Seminar 2015.03.03

Sarah J. K. Pearce, *The Words of Moses: Studies in the Reception of Deuteronomy in the Second Temple Period. Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism 152.* Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013. Pp. xviii + 404. ISBN: 9783161507335. Cloth. \$. € 139.00

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The book of Deuteronomy resonated deeply with Jewish scribes and interpreters in the Second Temple period. From the different versions of the book (MT, SP, LXX) to the creative engagement with Deuteronomistic stipulations (Chronicles, Philo, etc.), the laws of Deuteronomy were of central importance to Jewish life in Palestine and the Diaspora. This study by Sarah Pearce began as her DPhil thesis at Oxford and is dedicated to the memory of her supervisor Geza Vermes. In this monograph, Pearce explores what the laws of Deuteronomy meant for Jews living in the Second Temple period. She argues that the book of Deuteronomy had a profound influence upon the development of Scripture in early Judaism. This study offers a detailed textual approach to three laws in MT Deuteronomy and their interpretation in the Second Temple era, revealing the extent to which Deuteronomy shaped Judaism in this formative period.

The book opens with a robust introduction that outlines the significance of the project, the main research questions, and a detailed contextualization of the central sources. While Pearce engages with questions of legal practices and the formation of scripture, the book is organized as a commentary on the reception of the book of Deuteronomy in the Second Temple period. Each chapter begins with the close reading and textual analysis of the Deuteronomistic law as attested in MT followed by its appearance in later Second Temple sources, organized chronologically. The focus is on providing a contextualized reading of each text in its own right and not on synthesizing the various interpretations.

In the first chapter Pearce addresses the appointment of judges and the administration of justice in Deut 16:18–20. The law instructs Moses to appoint judges and officials in the towns where the people will live and how they are to administer justice. This command is the first of Deuteronomy's laws of public officials and looks towards a future time when all Israel lives in the land. Pearce focuses on Second Temple interpretations of this text found in 2 Chronicles (57–68), LXX Deuteronomy (68–76), the *Temple Scroll* (76–92), Philo of Alexandria's *Special Laws* (92–120), and Josephus' *Jewish Antiquities* and *Against Apion* (120–142). Pearce observes that all of the Second Temple sources, with the exception of LXX Deuteronomy, relocate Deut

16:18–20 to a new context. These sources each demonstrate a desire to harmonize (in different ways) various elements from the book of Deuteronomy, in terms of content, expressions, style, and the development of new rules (143).

The second chapter focuses on the prohibition of a single testimony in Deut 17:6, but also takes into account parallel formulations found in Deut 19:15 and Num 35:30. This passage explains what constitutes sufficient testimony. In contrast to earlier laws focusing on prohibitions against false testimony, Deut 17:6 forbids reliance upon a single witness, instead requiring two or three in order to execute judgment. Pearce claims that the prohibition in Deuteronomy began as a reform to existing law, which sought to “defend and promote the interests of justice in the judiciary” (233). This passage in Deuteronomy inspired many responses from Jewish interpreters, including texts from the Hebrew Bible, Dead Sea Scrolls, Greek speaking Judaism, and the New Testament. While differing renderings of this law abound throughout this chapter, the interpretation by Josephus to include the reputation of the witnesses and the prohibition of women and slaves is particularly striking (237).

The third chapter addresses the issue of the central sanctuary in the administration of justice (Deut 17:8–13). The chapter opens with a discussion of the importance of place to the Deuteronomist and subsequently demonstrates how interpreters were similarly concerned with the function of the court and the ultimate judicial authority. The sources detailed include SP Deuteronomy (250–52), Chronicles (252–63), LXX Deuteronomy (263–74), the *Temple Scroll* (275–89), Philo (289–306), and Josephus (306–24). While Pearce addresses each text individually in terms of how it engages with the book of Deuteronomy, we see that these texts also were aware of one another and contributed to larger conversations on Deuteronomistic law. For example, both Deuteronomy and Chronicles shaped descriptions of the central court in *11QTemple(a)* 57:11–14 and the specific interpretation in LXX Deuteronomy informed Philo’s views in *Special Laws* (324–325). This is reminiscent of the perspective presented by James L. Kugel in *Traditions of the Bible* that there was a world of ancient biblical interpreters in which Jews participated in developing interpretive traditions.

In the epilogue Pearce returns to address two issues brought up in her introduction. First, she examines the sequence of laws presented in Deuteronomy. As she points out, only MT, SP, and LXX Deuteronomy preserve the traditional order of the laws (327). By contrast, other texts use Deuteronomy but extract the laws from their original setting. The second issue is the degree to which ancient sources view such laws as an ideal form of justice and model for government (327). Pearce addresses this by examining each text separately. What emerges from her analysis is that the Jewish interpreters from the Second Temple period all shared similar perspectives on the sanctity of Deuteronomistic law, and in particular Mosaic law, but the degree to which each text idealized such laws remains distinct.

The interplay between the idealized administration of justice and the reality of Jewish legal practices is a consistent theme throughout the book. In her introduction, Pearce asks a series of questions that frame her study, including: “Did Jewish interpreters think that these laws should be put into practical effect, and if so how and by whom?” and “How do the laws relate to existing judicial institutions?” (6). These questions resurface repeatedly in discussions on the texts as Jewish interpreters read Deuteronomy in new ways. Pearce’s study offers preliminary

answers to such questions as she examines texts individually; as such she opens the door for future studies to synthesize the material and draw larger conclusions for Second Temple Judaism. An investigation into the papyrological evidence from Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt and how this connects with Deuteronomic law would be one future avenue of research. The administration of justice in the case of a stolen coat by a local Jew in Alexandrou-Nesos in Egypt (CPJ I 129 [218 BCE]) provides one example of how the judicial system worked under foreign rule. The papyrus suggests that justice was decided locally, within Jewish communities. While the inclusion of such evidence was not the aim of Pearce's study, her investigation nevertheless helps frame such material and lays the groundwork for future projects on the nature and function of law in the Hellenistic and Roman periods.

The greatest strength of this book is its attention to both detail and breadth. Each text that Pearce examines is supported by an analysis of the language and its textual particularities. Moreover, the vast array of Second Temple literature selected for this study shows her command over a variety of periods and genres. This is best exemplified in chapter two which includes many more Second Temple sources than the other chapters. Ranging from the books of 1–2 Chronicles to 1 Timothy, she demonstrates the legacy of Deut 17:6 in terms of time, geography, and genre. As such, her study offers the reader a comprehensive analysis of its reception and paves the way for new scholarship on the significance of such interpretative traditions for early Jewish communities.

This book provides a detailed analysis of the multiple ways in which the book of Deuteronomy has been read, absorbed, and recast in the Second Temple period. While the focus of this study is on specific laws found in the book of Deuteronomy, this book offers new ways of thinking about early Judaism. The centrality of the words of Moses and the degree to which his words, as codified in Deuteronomy, were taken as Scripture reveals that the interpretation of Deuteronomic laws were not just about daily life or religious belief, but rather, were vital for understanding the role of the divine and the proper behaviours associated with religious practice. This book should be read by anyone interested in the reception of the book of Deuteronomy and in particular the role of law in the Second Temple period.

Bibliography:

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