

1-1-2006

Review of Hindy Najman's *Seconding Sinai: The Development of Mosaic Discourse in Second Temple Judaism*

Andrei Orlov

Marquette University, andrei.orlov@marquette.edu

Hindy NAJMAN, *Secoding Sinai: The Development of Mosaic Discourse in Second Temple Judaism*. Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism 77. Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2003. xiv + 178 pages. ISBN 90-04-11542-0. Price €60, \$82.

Najman's study can be seen as a valuable contribution in both a methodological and a practical dimension since it represents not only a pioneering attempt at the formulation of a new approach to Second Temple pseudepigrapha, but more importantly a successful application of this new methodological vision to a cluster of important text associated with a significant theological development—Mosaic discourse.

In the methodological dimension, Najman's research is an attempt to challenge the still prevailing methodological consensus that Second Temple Jewish pseudepigraphy is a combination of practices "plagiarizing and tampering" with earlier texts and traditions. The first chapter of the monograph explores the methodological roots of this perspective, which is dominated by the modern conception of fraudulence and piety toward tradition. Scholars operating on these conceptual premises envision the writers of the pseudepigraphical materials as committing what we would call forgery, an activity that is not only unhistorical but also morally tainted. Najman warns

about the danger of anachronism when reading ancient texts with contemporary assumptions about authorship. In her attempt to construct a methodological alternative, she rightly points to the historical limits of the modern notion of authorship which often pays little attention to practices of construction and legitimization in the ancient world, when the written materials were often accepted, valorized, and put into circulation without any questions about the identity of their author. Scholars are becoming increasingly aware that the various concepts of authority and authorship have long and complex histories in the Second Temple period which demonstrate various models of anonymity and pseudonymity in the Bible as well as in extra-biblical texts.

Najman is aware that it is not sufficient merely to point to the anachronism of previous studies of Second Temple pseudepigraphic traditions that have often approached ancient Jewish texts with a post-Enlightenment concept of authorship. The task is more complex and challenging; that is, to demonstrate through the scarcity of the available textual witness that a different concept of authorship was indeed operative at the time of the texts' production and/or reception. Najman's research represents an attempt at such reconstruction which focuses on late Second Temple participants in Mosaic discourse, which, she argues, originated with the gradual production of Deuteronomy.

The large bulk of the study deals with this reconstruction, which includes several important steps. In the second part of the first chapter of the book, Najman offers a schematic discussion about the origination of Mosaic discourse in the Book of Deuteronomy. She sees Deuteronomy as a paradigmatic text for later instances of Mosaic discourse since the Deuteronomists have established a model for the authoritative interpretation of tradition and for its authoritative application to new circumstances. Najman shows that the scribes behind the production of Deuteronomy operated with a conception of textual authority strikingly different from our own.

The second chapter of the monograph deals with second century B.C.E. post-Deuteronomist participants in Mosaic discourse: the Book of Jubilees and 11QTemple, texts typically classified as pseudepigrapha. The study shows that both Jubilees and 11QTemple seek to provide an interpretive context within which scriptural traditions already acknowledged as authoritative can be properly understood. The analysis demonstrates that this is neither a fraudulent attempt at replacement nor an act of impiety, but rather a pious effort to convey what is taken to be the essence of earlier traditions, an essence that the rewriters think is in danger of being missed. In other words, post-Deuteronomist participants in Mosaic discourse, such

as Jubilees and 11QTemple, are trying to provide an interpretive context for received revealed literature, a context whose absence might engender dangerous misinterpretations.

The third chapter of the study analyses the writings of Philo of Alexandria and his participation in Mosaic discourse. In this section of her study, Najman tries to answer an important question: under what conditions was Mosaic discourse possible? Or in other words: of what transformations was Mosaic discourse capable under varying conditions? She envisions the works of Philo as a test-case for the exploration of these questions. Najman demonstrates that, despite Philo's participation in the discourse of Moses, there are two significant contrasts between him and his Palestinian counterparts. First, while Jubilees and 11QTemple subordinate the figure of Moses to the law of Moses, Philo subordinates the law of Moses to the figure of Moses. Second, whereas Jubilees and 11QTemple, following the lead of Deuteronomy, seek to weave existing traditions and their own interpretations into a single seamless whole attributed to Moses, Philo distinguishes explicitly between Mosaic scripture and his own interpretation. The study demonstrates that Philo conceives the independence of an author in a way that was new to Judaism.

Najman's reconstruction of Second Temple participants in Mosaic discourse is convincing since it allows her to demonstrate how within a family of approaches to the question of authorization, there could be both continuity and variation. Thus, the study illustrates that Mosaic discourse was sufficiently compelling and robust to survive in Hellenistic Alexandria, under conditions, and in the presence of a conception of textuality and authorship, quite different from those in Palestine.

One of the important avenues of the study is that the monograph pays special attention to a less explored connection between the Deuteronomist elaboration of the Torah and the figure of Moses, investigating further elaboration of those dimensions of Mosaic authority in the late Second Temple period. The study thus sees Mosaic discourse as a discourse tied to a founder. Another important feature of the book is that it underlines the importance of the progressive idealization of the figure of Moses, who becomes envisioned not only as the ultimate prophet and lawgiver, but also as the exemplary human being—serving in many ways as the representative of true humanity.

On the whole, Najman's study represents an important methodological breakthrough in Second Temple studies, a field, as she has remarkably demonstrated, still in many ways dominated by antiquated notions of authorship and authority. Najman's research challenges the very vocabulary of the field of Second Temple studies, which still operates with such

ambiguous terms as "Rewritten Bible," showing the problematic nature of such classifications which perpetuate an anachronistic conception of the text as a fixed set of claims embodied in specific language, such that tampering with that language is tantamount to interfering with an author's property. Najman suggests that, if one is to speak of "rewriting the Bible," one must be clear about the status of the Bible in the period in question, and also about the motivation and significance of the act of rewriting in its historical context.

Najman's study has lasting methodological value not only for the study of the Mosaic tradition, but also for investigations of other pseudepigraphical traditions of exalted patriarchs and prophets that were flourishing in the late Second Temple period, since the pseudepigraphic reworking found in the Book of Deuteronomy and other participants in Mosaic discourse have paradigmatic value in providing models for practices of pseudonymous attribution and rewriting developed by late Second Temple authors and editors.

Andrei A. Orlov
Marquette University