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## [Review of] Molly M. Zahn, *Genres of Rewriting in Second Temple Judaism*

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Zahn, Molly M. *Genres of Rewriting in Second Temple Judaism: Scribal Composition and Transmission*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020. ISBN: 9781108477581.

Once in a while, the discipline sees the publication of a study that promises to have a profound impact on the field – Molly Zahn’s second monograph on *Genres of Rewriting in Second Temple Judaism* is a prime example. The Associate Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Kansas has published widely on transmission and interpretation in early Jewish texts. Drawing on this long-standing expertise, Zahn’s second book represents a programmatic study about how and why early Jewish scribes reworked existing texts in new contexts. Mapping both extent and significance of rewriting by proposing new language and concepts, she develops a framework that significantly advances our understanding of the phenomenon. It is especially the differentiation of “revision” and “reuse” as main forms of scribal activity that can replace previous categories such as “biblical” versus “post/non-biblical interpretation,” which operate within canonically inflected categories. The compact study divides into seven main chapters, framed with introduction and conclusion. In the introduction, Zahn starts from the definition of rewriting as “the deliberate, formally unmarked reproduction and modification of existing texts” (p. 3), and illustrates these scribal activities using the idea of “prototypes”. Her first group of examples comprises revised and expanded biblical manuscripts such as the different textual traditions of Jeremiah, the Samaritan Pentateuch, and the 4Q (Reworked) Pentateuch. The second group focuses on new compositions that “rewrite the Bible” such as Jubilees, the Temple Scroll, and the Genesis Apocryphon.

The first chapter *Rewriting, Revision, and Reuse* lays the methodological groundwork by introducing the two primary forms of rewriting: revision and reuse. The main difference is in the relation between the different types of rewriting to the *Vorlage*: While revision results in the production of a new copy of an existing work, reuse leads to a new composition that draws on a source text. Zahn admits that this is not always a clear-cut distinction, but the more important methodological question is how to identify rewriting in the first place. Current scholarship relies on evidence such as overlap, thematic correspondence, and *Tendenzkritik* to identify clear cases, which in turn can help to detect less clear instances. Even though the evidence needs to be assessed carefully (and should not fall prey to what Zahn calls “canonical language”), the preservation of multiple manuscripts of a work and its related compositions facilitates the argument. Zahn points out rightly that methodologically more worrying is the idea that rewriting might not always leave discernible traces, which becomes a challenge in the absence of material evidence. Chapter 2 (*Genre and Rewriting*) focuses on the theoretical framework, demonstrating how the idea of genre represents a helpful tool for organising different types of rewriting. Drawing on modern genre theory and the assumption that genres are about function and communication, Zahn uses this language as a framework to discuss how scribes used rewriting for specific purposes. Against this background, genre describes a communication between author and audience with a typified response in a given situation.

The two following chapters consider a series of data sets in light of the framework outlined in the first two chapters. Chapter 3 deals with *Revision and Reuse in the Bible*, thus playing with the category that Zahn has deemed to be anachronistic in the beginning. What sets this specific set of data apart, it not so much its later canonical status, but rather the fact that while the Second Temple materials support the assumption that rewriting was similarly ubiquitous in later canonical books, there is few material evidence for scribal activity. Zahn gets to the heart of the problem, when she addresses the limits of reconstructing redactional processes with the help of documented cases of rewriting stating that “*we may never be able to accurately reconstruct the textual histories of books in the Bible*” (p. 92). The fourth chapter (*Beyond “Rewritten*

*Bible*”) focuses on what has for a long time been considered “non-biblical” materials, demonstrating that rewriting is a generic phenomenon in Second Temple literature and not limited to works concerned with later biblical materials. Furnishing proof, Zahn first analyses two prototypical examples of Rewritten Bible, the Temple Scroll and Jubilees, before she turns to rewriting in texts produced by the Qumran community, such as the Community Rule, the War Scroll, and the Hodayot. Her results do not only demonstrate the diversity and ubiquity of rewriting, but also challenge previous assumptions – namely that rewriting is linked to questions of authority and that it is always exegetical in nature. She makes a convincing case that rewriting should be considered an element of composition rather than of reception and transmission.

In the next two chapters, Zahn discusses different forms of rewriting. First, Chapter 5 (*Translation and/as Rewriting*) focuses on translations that have frequently been neglected in the discussion. The phenomenon of translation has a natural closeness to same-language revision, however, the use of genre theory demonstrates that larger changes in translations can be used to achieve specific goals, so that the boundaries between a new copy and a new composition blur. The sixth chapter (*Diverse Genres of Reuse*) returns back to reuse and thematises the diverse range of forms and function of this type of rewriting. Here, Zahn shows that the conceptualisation of reuse as “extensive, serial and centripetal rewriting of a single main base text” (p. 170) has been heavenly influenced by the study of prototypical examples. Advancing on this narrow definition, Zahn introduces the cases of limited reuse, historical résumés, structural reuse, and new narratives associated with a known character (see table 6.4). She thus shows that reuse is a flexible category that can best be understood as a group constituted by “family resemblance” (p. 193). The members of this group share similarities rather than meet specific criteria.

Chapter 7 (*Second Temple Rewriting*) synthesises the results of the study with regard to the questions of authority, exegesis, and scribal culture. Concerning authority, Zahn’s results question the view that rewriting should be seen as an authorising strategy. Rather, she proposes a more nuanced perspective that envisions a wide range of traditions in the Second Temple period that were considered to be relevant for scribes and their audiences. These traditions were enhanced and supplemented in rewritings that contributed to the ongoing discourse by associating new writings to existing texts and traditions. When it comes to exegesis, Zahn argues that from a broader understanding, rewriting could indeed be considered exegetical, as it stems from acts of reading. She suggests, however, to sever the ties between rewriting as interpretation and biblical texts, acknowledging that the interpretive character of rewriting is generic and does not depend on a presumed status of its *Vorlage*. Finally, the study sheds new light on the cultural context of rewriting. Zahn’s results demonstrate a “textualization of revelation” (p. 212) that flourished especially in exilic and postexilic Judaism. Differently to developments in neighbouring cultures, this did not result in a turn away from rewriting and a move towards textual standardization, but the scribes seem to have understood themselves as active participants in the process of instantiating traditions. This leads Zahn to the idea of a (heavenly) revelation that can never be fully captured in a text, so that rewriting becomes a legitimate process of attesting to revelation. That in the end standardization of the “canonical books” set in at the end of the first century CE seems to be connected to the esteem of the original word of the author in the Greek world. Rewriting of the now canonised texts was channelled in Rabbinic literature, while revision and reuse in other texts continued well into the Middle Ages.

In her conclusion, Zahn summarises the new modes of thinking that she has proposed in her study: She highlights the significance of genre as a conceptual framework for revision and reuse, and outlines the new picture of scribal activity in Second Temple Judaism – the scribes emerge as agents, who made deliberate choices in rewriting tradition. Finally, she emphasises

the “‘open and participatory’ nature of scripture” (p. 232) that significantly advances on previous conventions about scripture as fixed and immutable. Attesting that scholarship finds itself “in the process of a revolution in our understanding of the production and transmission of scripture” (p. 230), Zahn has submitted nothing less than the ultimate manifesto of this revolution. Hers is an extremely lucid study that competently consolidates the current state of research, overcomes methodological dead ends and sketches out a new framework for the analysis of rewriting that will prove indispensable for any further research on the subject. The application of genre theory is an innovative move that fits well with the fluid character of rewriting forms and processes – it is, however, exactly the fluid character of the idea of genre and the question if it applies to the text form, an oral-written family or the scribal activity, where some readers might wish for more clarity. However, this only shows how the study is bound to influence further discussions in the field. If there is one heavy burden that results from it, this burden weighs on the shoulders of Hebrew Bible scholars. While Zahn demonstrates once and for all that rewriting is the norm that has to be assumed for all texts in the Hebrew Bible (even if we have only limited or no material evidence), her results question our ability to reconstruct these processes with our traditional methods. This calls for a similar programmatic study in the field of Hebrew Bible together with a new tool box, if we want to continue responsible historical-critical research on the biblical writings. While for a long time, biblical studies constituted the framework for research on Second Temple Judaism, Molly Zahn’s study marks a turning point in this relationship and will hopefully find its way into many offices and classrooms.

Anja Klein  
University of Edinburgh  
anja.klein@ed.ac.uk