

The Persian Imperial Context of the Pentateuch

Mark G. Brett

What is the Pentateuch about?

An Aramean refugee takes his family to Egypt to escape the ravages of a famine, but his numerous descendants suffer oppression there and, with divine assistance, they flee eastwards into the desert. The leader of the liberation struggle receives from their divinity the law that is to shape their future society, but (contrary to the summary in Deut 26:5–11) the desert generation never reach the homeland of their dreaming. Why not?

From Hexateuch to Pentateuch

Reception of the Pentateuch as the 'Torah of Moses' is linked with the character of Ezra from the time of the Persian Empire (Vaka'uta 2011), and with the king's instructions in Ezra 7. Did Ezra promote a reduction from Hexateuchal tradition (six books) to the five books within the *tôrâ Moshe*? Would the conquest story have offended the Achaemenid administration (Falkenlin and Tal 2013)? Hexateuchal tradition would have supported Samaritan interests, but the Samaritans also preserved a Pentateuch. Did Persian pressure give rise to conformity and compromise within the single administrative district that included Samaria (Frei)? Cf. the letters to Elephantine in 419 and 407 BCE (Bolin 1996).

Postcolonial Perspectives

Postcolonial approaches have begun to highlight the subtle blending of mimicry and resistance. The appearance of loyal assimilation to the empire may at some points contest the claims of imperial sovereignty. E.g., could the Moses story portray not only resistance to Egypt but also to Persia (Yee 2010; Zlotnick-Sivan, 2004)? The Torah is not promulgated by a monarch, and in this respect it presents no challenge to political power (Hagedorn 2007), but why do the laws of conquest in Deuteronomy remain? The Priestly tradition mimics empire (Brett 2014), and Genesis 15 even proposes an imperial vision of territory that stretches from the river of Egypt to the Euphrates. We could characterize this mimicry as a counter-imperial imagination.

If there was a compromise between P and D earlier in the Persian period, that compromise apparently gave way to later expansions in Numbers that moved towards a theocratic, national vision. E.g., unlike earlier Priestly traditions, Numbers allows for warfare guided by priests (Achenbach 2012), and it proposes a new 'eternal covenant' with Phineas in Num 26:6–15 that is clearly aligned with the exclusivist policies of Ezra (Nihan 2009:116–26).

The Torah of Moses can be thought of as resistance literature, responding to the tides of empire, debating the shape and the *tapu* of a divinely given *fanua*.

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Can I say
Pentateuch
is mixture
of Egyptian
and Israelite
traditions
of
Persian + Israel
hybridist

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