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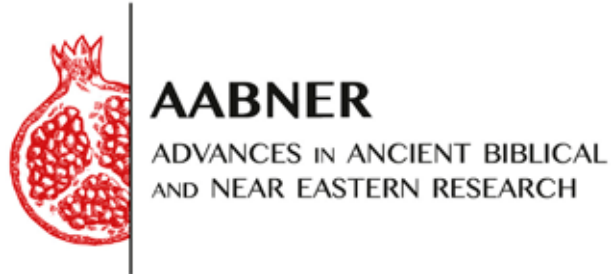
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EBERHARD KARLS
UNIVERSITÄT
TÜBINGEN



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INTRODUCTION

Andrew Tobolowsky and Kelly J. Murphy

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Abstract

This special issue explores the topic of “tradition inheritance” in the ancient biblical and early Jewish worlds, providing a critical analysis of past scholarly assumptions about how stories and texts have been transmitted over time and fresh insights into how conservative approaches miss the reality of the fluidity of transmission over time. The authors approach the topic from a variety of standpoints, including the reconstruction of antecedents in biblical traditions, inherited models of violence in the Hebrew Bible’s description of foreign kings, an examination of the literary and material developments of traditions concerning the matriarch Rachel in early Judaism, and the intertwined histories of the Qurʾān and the Hebrew Bible. Taken together, the articles challenge scholars to reconsider what they think they know about how traditions change over time.



Dieses Themaheft widmet sich der Überlieferung von Traditionen in der biblischen Antike und im Frühjudentum. Es bietet kritische Analysen bisheriger wissenschaftlicher Annahmen über die Überlieferung von Geschichten und Texte im Laufe der Zeit und zeigt auf, wie althergebrachte, statische Ansätze die Realität einer fließenden Überlieferung verkennen. Die Autoren nähern sich dem Thema aus verschiedenen Blickwinkeln, darunter die Rekonstruktion von unterschwelligen Annahmen in der Bibelwissenschaft, vererbte Modelle von Gewalt in der Beschreibung fremder Könige in der hebräischen Bibel, eine Untersuchung der literarischen Entwicklungen der Matriarchin Rachel im frühen Judentum sowie der Materialität der entsprechenden Texte, und die verflochtene Geschichte des Korans und der hebräischen Bibel. Zusammengenommen fordern die Beiträge Wissenschaftler:innen dazu auf, Traditionen nicht einfach als Teil einer Überlieferungsgeschichte zu verstehen, sondern sie auch individuell zu historisieren.



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INTRODUCTION

Andrew Tobolowsky and Kelly J. Murphy



This special issue of *Advances in Ancient, Biblical, and Near Eastern Research* explores the topic of “tradition inheritance” in the ancient biblical and early Jewish world from multiple different perspectives. In using this term, we, the editors of this special issue, are trying to make visible the fact that various assumptions about how stories and texts were *generally* passed down and what their heirs could *generally* do with them—how the inheritance of traditions works—have long played a central role in the study of the ancient world. They must. The most basic reality of the study of ancient texts and traditions is that we are always dealing with fairly meager survivals whose relationship to what else there once was, and what came before, cannot be known with any certainty and therefore need to be theorized. This theorization is the study of tradition inheritance.

It is our view as well that, despite progress in certain respects, typical models of tradition inheritance are still too much under the sway of outdated, Romantic visions about the durability of memory and early tradition over time. In recent years, various kinds of appeals to aspects

of scribal training or concepts such as cultural memory have tended toward attempting to re-establish ideas about the fundamental stability of tradition over time, even in its particulars, that ought to be abandoned. Other ideas about the hard boundaries of cultural groups and watersheds, and about *where* tradition inheritance was going on—that is, mainly in elite, literate circles—continue to inhibit a full appreciation of what tradition survivals actually reflect and reveal. Much more thinking on these topics, with a much greater willingness to move on from what was wrongly premised, remains to be done.

The essays in this special issue chart a wide course, at least within the already limited ambit of the study of the biblical and early Jewish worlds. Contributions by Andrew Tobolowsky and Seth L. Sanders address problems in the reconstruction of the antecedents of biblical traditions, with special attention being paid to the legacy of Romantic ways of thinking about traditions and authorship. In “Rethinking Tradition Inheritance: Restoring the Individual,” Tobolowsky explores—and rejects—the intellectual foundations of what he calls “conservative” tradition inheritance, meaning the idea that there are certain rules that those who inherit traditions in certain contexts are truly unable to break. Sanders champions another kind of paradigm shift in “We Can Remember It for You Wholesale: The Social Theory of Biblical Literature.” He makes the case that biblical studies has been especially dependent, throughout its history, on one way of reading texts, in which they are supposed to reflect some of the characteristics and concerns of ancient Israelite, or Judahite, society as a whole. This, Sanders suggests, constitutes an underlying social theory within biblical studies itself. In tracing its intellectual history, Sanders shows why it is outdated and poorly formed, calling on scholars to move toward investigation rather than assumption, and offers suggestions on how we might engage in such practice.

In “Foreign Kings as Theological Playthings within Biblical Explanations of Violence,” Debra Scoggins Ballentine investigates a specific biblical example of tradition inheritance: the use of what she calls “inherited models of divine violence and sanctified violence” in biblical depictions of foreign kings. In showing how the Judahite shapers of biblical visions of the past redeployed existing literary models to represent



foreign kings not only as “agents of violence” but often as instruments of Yahweh’s wrath, she illuminates the dynamic potentialities of tradition inheritance, where inherited models can be simultaneously redeployed and transformed into something useful toward a later author’s goals. She also outlines how the figure of Cyrus continues to be invoked in the contemporary world, including in American politics, and in so doing reminds us that the tradition inheritance of biblical texts continues into the present—often with significant political ramifications. In drawing our attention to the continued vitality of the Hebrew Bible’s traditions and the sometimes surprising ways in which they are reshaped, Ballentine’s essay is also a call for scholars to engage with and contextualize ancient texts as they appear in our world.

As editors, we also sought essays that expanded our understanding of the dynamism of the inheritance of the Hebrew Bible’s traditions in postbiblical contexts, especially in the manifold ways those have been used and reshaped, including in their coexistence and interaction with other traditions. The final two essays by Sari Fein and Jillian Stinchcomb do just this, providing new ways of thinking about the material and textual realities of the late antique Jewish world. Fein’s “Amulets and Ancestors: Jewish Women’s Reproductive Agency in Late Antiquity” explores how the use of traditions about the biblical figure of Rachel in both rabbinic literature and material artifacts such as Jewish Aramaic magic bowls reflect a developing sense of Rachel as a maternal figure. Between studying these literary and material traces and imagining the world of the ritual expert who fashioned the bowls and that of their clients, Fein traces how these usages of the figure of Rachel offer insight into under-scrutinized instances of tradition inheritance by ancient women. In “The Masoretes, the Qur’ān, and Biblical Tradition” Stinchcomb reopens the question of the nature and direction of influence between the formation of the Qur’ān and the Hebrew Bible in terms of issues of textualization and canonization. She argues for specific attention to the contribution of Islamic uses of the codex and of the formalization of traditions of pronunciation to the intellectual watershed that produced the Masoretic Text of the Hebrew Bible as well. Overall, Stinchcomb asserts the importance of realizing that many Jewish traditions of biblical reading and interpretation emerged in the context of an Islamicate late



antique world in a way that requires us to cut across typical disciplinary divisions. Her essay calls on readers to revisit what we think we know about both the Hebrew Bible and the Qur'ān, and in revealing their intertwined histories, Stinchcomb challenges many readerly assumptions about the primacy of the biblical texts as we know them now.

Each of these essays demonstrates the value of thinking about tradition inheritance in and of itself as a phenomenon worth studying and of revisiting old models of tracing the development and intermingling of ideas over time. Each one shows what new insights can be possible when we are attuned to the fluidity of tradition inheritance over time, not only in one context but across contexts—including in our own contemporary world. The legacy of outdated approaches continues to make itself felt in various ways across the disciplines concerned with the study of the ancient world, but thinking about what we really *know* and what the evidence actually *says* is the path to new and fascinating insights.

