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Review of Jon L. Berquist, ed. *Approaching Yehud: New Approaches to the Study of the Persian Period*. Semeia Studies 50. Atlanta: SBL, 2007.

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The collection comprises an introduction by the editor, eleven essays, and two critical responses. Berquist emphasises the ongoing re-evaluation of the Persian period, both in itself and in its relation to the writing and compilation of the biblical texts. This contrasts with the older, although still much in evidence, view of the period as a secondary, derivative time marked by a legalistic Judaism and a dark age in terms of the history of the Persian Empire. Both views stand over against the assumption of certain knowledge of the history of the monarchies of Judah and Israel, an era of a vibrant religion. The notion of a historical dark age is being effectively challenged by the burgeoning number of studies of the Persian Empire, those connected with and others separate from any interest in the Bible. The narrow view of Persian age Judaism is also being challenged, although it is proving to be harder to dislodge. This collection of essays is intended to extend that challenge and to demonstrate how an assumed context in the time of the Persian Empire can redirect and enrich our readings of biblical texts.

The new interest is indicated at the start and throughout the essays by the name Yehud, rather than the traditional Judea or such, for the Persian province. A major thread for most of the essays is the imperialism of the Persian empire and its wide ranging effects in politics, religion, economics, identity (both communal and individual), and the collection and writing of texts within and against this imperial milieu.

Melody Knowles treats the issue of pilgrimage to Jerusalem in the Persian period, discussing texts such as Ezra-Nehemiah, Chronicles, Haggai, and Psalms 120-134 that variously see pilgrimage as a past, present, or eschatological event. She concludes that pilgrimage, based on the belief that YHWH is again resident in Jerusalem, is both a religious and a social phenomenon and perhaps more a desire than a reality. Richard Bautch reviews a number of works, for example, Polaski's study of Isaiah 24-27 and Mitchell's of Chronicles, to examine the use of intertextuality in Persian era literature. The essay itself and the studies it reviews are perched somewhere between a literary and an historical understanding of the relation between texts. An unexamined assumption of most such studies of intertextuality is that we can confidently date the analysed texts to the Persian period and not earlier or later.

Donald Polaski deals with the phenomenon of textuality itself, beginning with the Behistun inscription, a visible proclamation of royal authority but a proclamation that cannot be read from the ground since Darius destroyed access to the inscription. It is the inscription itself, the text and not the content, that manifests the royal power. Polaski extends this notion to Joshua 8, 22 and 24, "which may plausibly be dated to the early Achaemenid period" (p. 40), maintaining that these chapters also witness to the authority of a text itself, separate from its actual content. David Janzen focuses on Ezra 9-10, the divorce and expulsion of all foreign wives. Employing insights from the anthropological theories of Douglas and Fenn, he argues that the threat was from the wives' impure status; they were witches of a sort. They were expelled as "the impure other" to assert and maintain the purity of the community. He presents this as a theological and literary interpretation, not a historical reconstruction, although it does accord with what we know of Persian period Yehud.

Christine Mitchell addresses the question of the "the development of the literary genre of historiography in postexilic Yehud" (p. 71). She examines both midrash and Greek historiography, particularly Herodotus, in her search for an answer. Jerusalem's isolation in Lam 1:1 is a key text and

she maintains that biblical historiography, particularly that in Genesis-Kings, was a response to the destruction of Jerusalem, both city and communal symbol, and a way of dealing with Persian imperialism. It was an assertion and maintenance of the identity of the community.

Brent Strawn interrogates possible relations between the Apadana reliefs in Persepolis and Isaiah 60. After a review of the wide-range of opinion on the possible divisions and dates of Trito-Isaiah, he turns to an in-depth presentation of the Apadana reliefs. The reliefs symbolise the power and extent of the Persian empire and portray many subjects willingly bringing tribute to the king, who is closely associated with Ahuramazda, depicted as a winged sun disk. Strawn opts for a general relationship between the reliefs and the biblical text and not a direct borrowing and argues that both manifest the Persian imperial ideology. Isaiah 60, however, has displaced the Persian empire from the center and replaced it with Jerusalem.

Jean-Pierre Ruiz lays out the development of postcolonial hermeneutics and its present status and application in biblical studies. It arose in the 80s in a variety of settings as Third World scholars had a growing impact on cultural studies in First World institutions. The approach is catholic and eclectic in method with a concern to bring to the fore issues of empire and the status of the inhabitants of its colonies, including exile and migration. For Ruiz to read Ezekiel in its setting one has to take the experience of deportation into account and fully realise the brutality of both Babylonian and Persian imperialism.

John Kessler regards Zechariah 1-8 as a textual unity separate from its biblical context and a unity relevant to the Yehud-Diaspora period. After a detailed study he proposes that the chapters are Yehud-centred and regard the existence of communities outside Yehud as a provisional situation that will be remedied in the future. There is no hint that the community resident in Yehud has some priority in membership in the restored people of the future. Herbert Marbury argues that “the strange woman” of Proverbs 7 is not the adulteress of most translations but an unmarried, foreign woman. She was a liminal figure who threatened the clear “us” versus “them” distinctions maintained by the temple elites of Yehud. He buttresses his claims with a close reading of Proverbs 7.

Jennifer Koosed, a resisting feminist reader, is troubled by Qoh 7:26, “I found more bitter than death the woman”, that is a blanket condemnation of all women, not a particular group or type. The text seems irredeemable but its exclusivist ideology is not stable when one looks closely at the actual Hebrew text. There are two text-critical issues in 7:22 and 27 that introduce a feminine presence in this male text – note also the feminine formation of the name/title Qoheleth – and destabilise and shake this most male of texts. Jon Berquist, in the final essay, examines identity, “the construction of the self”, in the Psalter, read as a Persian era document with insights from postcolonial theory. The Psalter, and Chronicles in a similar vein, develops identity, both communal and individual, through music, God and history. These provide a variety of ways to define identity, ways that both accord with Persian imperial authority and, at the same time, resist it.

The collection closes with two responses that summarise, praise, and critique. Alice Hunt affirms the change in knowledge and evaluation of the Persian period and the use of a variety of approaches beyond the traditional. The essays evince the need to pay attention to all the voices excluded or “other-ed”, for example, those who experience exile, immigration, and exploitation because they are not “natives”. She warns against rejecting all the accomplishments of past biblical work in the rush for the new and the diverse. Julia O’Brien stresses the value of the collection since most introductions to the Persian period still demean this period and its religious status. But she is also critical of the over-emphasis on empire, noting that the collection could be named a “Reader in Empire” (p. 210). “Once invoked, the label ‘empire’ can become a buzzword, a posture” (p. 210). She calls for more attention to the differences between Babylonian and Persian imperialism. Her final evaluative comment moves beyond her critiques of individual essays to affirm that the collection

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decisively moves from treating the post-exilic period – the avoidance of the adjective Persian is deliberate – as a poor stepchild of the Judean-Israelite monarchy to a significant time in its own right, a time of life under and within the Persian empire.

I share and affirm this evaluation but I also want to emphasise Bautch's use of intertextuality, Janzen's employing anthropological models to analyse a text without proposing a historical reconstruction, Strawn's speaking of general connection rather than direct borrowing, and Koosed's feminist reading of Qoheleth regardless of the period, early or late, in which it originated. These reveal an interpretive model that is not dependent on firmly dating texts to the Persian period in order to employ insights drawn from knowledge of the Persian empire and its imperial policies. Given the unending debates over dating biblical texts, I find this a salutary model.