

This is an electronic reprint of the original article. This reprint may differ from the original in pagination and typographic detail.

Foreword

Laato, Antti

Published in:
The Challenge of the Mosaic Torah in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam

Published: 08/10/2020

Document Version
Accepted author manuscript

Document License
Publisher rights policy

[Link to publication](#)

Please cite the original version:
Laato, A. (2020). Foreword. In A. Laato (Ed.), *The Challenge of the Mosaic Torah in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Studies on the Children of Abraham; Vol. 7). Brill. <https://brill.com/view/book/9789004441996/front-6.xml>

General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

FOREWORD

The international conference, “The Challenge of the Mosaic Torah in Judaisms, Christianity and Islam”, held in Karkku, Finland, August 17-18, 2017, was organized by Åbo Akademi University (ÅAU). Our common aim was to deal with theological issues arising when different ancient religious groups inside three Abrahamic religions attempt to understand or define their opinion on the Mosaic Torah. We wanted to detect different kinds of theological issues including, for example, accepting, modifying, ignoring, criticizing, and vilifying the Mosaic Torah. The presentations published in this volume illustrate these different ancient opinions. They show from a variety of different angles ways in which the Mosaic Torah has formed a challenge in the Jewish, Christian and Islamic writings.

Already in the Second Temple Judaisms the Mosaic Torah was discussed in different contexts as can be seen in the recent important scholarly work of John Collins.¹ Scholars who today want to clarify the role of the Mosaic Torah in early Judaism must discuss several important issues related to its outcome in historical and social milieu of the Persian government. Assuming that Ezra played a role in the codifying of the Mosaic Torah then his mission in Jerusalem could have been related to the political aims of the Persian government which could be compared with the mission of Udjahorresnet.² If this is indeed the case, then the first stage of the Mosaic Torah was deeply rooted in religious ideas which were legitimated politically by the Persian government. In his article “Deuteronomy and the Beginning of the Mosaic Torah” **Kåre Berge** discusses some of these important issues.

The presumably political outcome of the collections of the Mosaic stipulations in the present form of the Mosaic Torah can hardly be characterized as a political pamphlet of a Jewish religious priestly group. It seems quite clear that the scribes responsible for the present form of the Mosaic Torah wanted to relate its message to the theological dialogue with the prophetic voice. This explains well how the Mosaic Torah and the prophetic literature are often interconnected. In scholarly discussion the Book of Jeremiah is related to Deuteronomy³ and the Book of Ezekiel to the Priestly document.⁴ More difficult problem has been the Book of Isaiah and the meaning of the Torah in it.⁵ In this volume **Jacques van Ruiten** continues this important innerbiblical discussion in his article “The Torah in the Book of the Twelve Prophets” where he deals with the question of how the Torah has been used in the Book of Twelve.

¹ John J. Collins, *The Invention of Judaism: Torah and Jewish Identity from Deuteronomy to Paul* (The Taubman Lectures in Jewish Studies 7; Oakland, Ca: The University of California Press, 2017).

² For this, see A.B. Lloyd, “The Inscription of Udjahorresnet: A Collaborator’s Testament,” *JAE* 68 (1982) 166-180; J. Blenkinsopp, “The Mission of Udjahorresnet and Those of Ezra and Nehemia,” *JBL* 196 (1987) 409-421.

³ All commentaries and studies take it as self-evident that the Book of Jeremiah is linguistically and thematically related to Deuteronomistic and Deuteronomistic School. See the important early study of J. Philip Hyatt, “Jeremiah and Deuteronomy,” *JNES* 1 (1942): 156-173, and Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1992). See further the articles in Jack R. Lundbom, Craig A. Evans, Bradford A. Anderson, eds., *The Book of Jeremiah: Composition, Reception, and Interpretation* (SupVT 178; Leiden: Brill, 2018).

⁴ That Ezekiel and Priestly source are interrelated is a common view in commentaries even though scholars discuss in which direction the influence has been made. See further A. Hurvitz, *A Linguistic Study of the Relationship between the Priestly Source and the Book of Ezekiel* (CahRB 20; Paris: Gabalda, 1982); Menahem Haran, “Ezekiel, P, and the Priestly School,” *VT* 58 (2008): 211-218.

⁵ Irmaud Fischer, *Tora für Israel – Tora für die Völker: Das Konzept des Jesajabuches* (SBS 164; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1995); Marvin A. Sweeney, “The Book of Isaiah as Prophetic Torah,” in Roy F. Melugin and Marvin A. Sweeney, eds., *New Visions of Isaiah* (JSOTSS 214; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 50-67.

The rendering of the Mosaic Torah became a problem in early Judaism as can be seen from the Jerusalemite and Samaritan versions of the work. The different textual transmission processes of the Pentateuch will be clarified in detail when Stefan Schorch completes *The Samaritan Pentateuch: A Critical Editio Maior* (Berlin: De Gruyter).⁶ The main difference between the two versions concerns the place where Yahweh should be worshipped. It seems to be rather a complex problem as to why Deuteronomy, which clearly has taken its form in Jerusalem (in the postexilic period), nevertheless refers to the mounts of Ebal and Gerizim as *sacer locus* in Deuteronomy 27. The problem should also be related to Deut 11:29-30 where a later editor has apparently attempted to relocalize the mounts of Ebal and Gerizim in the valley of Jordan. This indicates that the textual rendering of Deut 27:4 or Josh 8:30-35 cannot be separated from tradition-historical questions,⁷ and means that Ebal and Gerizim in the vicinity of Shechem presumably played an important role in the early Israelite traditions and the Samaritans' claim of their *sacer locus* has a good basis in the Mosaic traditions. It is for this reason that the role of Samaritans must be carefully considered in modern exegetical research on the outcome of the Mosaic Torah. In this volume **Magnar Kartveit**, who has earlier discussed the origin of the Samaritans⁸, deals with the form and content of the Samaritan Pentateuch in his article "The Mosaic Torah among the Samaritans: The Tablets from Divine Essence."

For Christianity the Mosaic Torah formed a great challenge from the very beginning in terms of the practical questions of circumcision and purity laws. In the New Testament many different viewpoints on the Mosaic Torah can be found. Two contributions in this volume are related to the question of how the Mosaic Torah was understood in the New Testament. In his article "What should a Christ-believer eat and what not? Food laws in the Gospels and Paul" **Lukas Bormann** discusses how the Mosaic food laws have been treated in the Gospels and in Paul's letters. Another important topic is discussed in **Guido Baltes**'s article "'Circumcision of the heart' in Paul: From a metaphor of Torah obedience to a metaphor of Torah polemics?", which deals with the important Pauline expression 'Circumcision of the heart' which had its own reception history in later Christian writings. The focus in Baltes' article, however, is how the expression should be understood in Paul's original letters.

In later patristic literature there are many stereotypical affirmations which began to criticize and even vilify the Mosaic Torah. In some anti-Jewish explanations, the ceremonial stipulations of the Torah were seen as a penalty for the Jewish people. Justin Martyr represents an early development of Christian anti-Jewish attitude against Jews, and this is the focus in **Antti Laato**'s article "Jewish Believers in Jesus and the Mosaic Law: The Opinion of Justin Martyr" where he shows that Justin Martyr continued to maintain an apostolic attitude towards Jewish believers in Jesus having the right to follow Mosaic stipulations, but simultaneously argued that Christians were free from Mosaic stipulations, which led to some tensions in his opinions. In his article "Forgetting an Epic Battle: Did the Early Church Understand the Debate between Paul and his Judaistic Opponents? Preliminary notes on the role of the Torah in the Early Church" **Erkki Koskenniemi** gives an overview of the way the Mosaic Torah was treated in patristic literature. The attitude of the Mosaic Torah became more problematic in the Christian Church when some movements wanted to reject the Pentateuch. In those cases, Christian theologians always defended the place of the Mosaic Torah among the canonical scriptures. One example of such discussion was the debate between Augustine and

⁶ The edition of Leviticus has been published insofar. Stefan Schorch, *The Samaritan Pentateuch: A Critical Editio Maior. Volume 3: Leviticus* (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 2018).

⁷ See my discussion on the relationship between textual and tradition-historical problems in Antti Laato, "The Cult Site on the Mount Ebal – Josh 8:30-35 Rewritten and Reinterpreted," in: E. Koskenniemi & C. de Vos, eds., *Holy Places and Cult* (Studies in the Reception History of the Bible 5, Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2014), 51-84.

⁸ Magnar Kartveit, *The Origin of the Samaritans* (VTSup 128; Leiden: Brill, 2009).

Faustus. In her article “Faustus and Augustine: a Manichaean-Catholic debate on the Mosaic Torah” **Anni Maria Laato** deals with this important discussion in the early church, and demonstrates which theological arguments Augustine used when placing the Mosaic Torah among the canonical scriptures.

In early Judaism there were different attempts to summarize the content of the Mosaic Law, but those attempts were later downplayed in rabbinical movements when the Christian Church began to argue that the practice of the Mosaic ceremonial law was no longer valid. Nevertheless, the topic itself is an important exegetical question which helps scholars to compare Jewish and Christian ways of understanding the essence of the Mosaic Torah. In his article “Summarising the Jewish Law in Antiquity” **Cor de Vos** discusses this important topic.

Some of Second Temple issues concerning the Mosaic Torah are discussed in rabbinical writings. Problems identified include the different opinions between Pharisees and Sadducees, but rabbinical writings also contain discourses where Samaritan interpretations are discussed. In his article “Rabbinic exegetical debates with Samaritans” **Günter Stemberger** illustrates how rabbis treated the Samaritans and their interpretations.

With the onset of Islam a new page was opened in discussions concerning the Mosaic Torah. Muslims inherited the negative picture of the Mosaic Torah transmitted in Christian circles but nonetheless developed it in its own direction. The final two articles in this volume are related to the debates concerning the Mosaic Torah in a Muslim context. In his article “‘Show me in the Law’: The Use of the Argument of the Law (Torah) in the Dispute between the Muslim Emir and the Patriarch Yuhannon” **Martin Tamcke** sheds light on an important, probably early, debate of the Mosaic Torah which was discussed in Dialogue between Muslims, Christian and Jews. **Serafim Seppälä**, in turn, compares two different contemporary opinions on the Mosaic Torah which originate from Christian and Muslim contexts in his article “Torah in the Christian-Islamic polemics of Theodore Abū Qurrah and ‘Abd al-Jabbār”.

This short survey indicates that the papers published in this volume demonstrate how the Mosaic Torah has been understood as problematic or challenging in many different ways in Jewish, Christian and Islamic writings.

Turku 16.5. 2020, Antti Laato