
BOOK REVIEWS / BOEKRESENSIES

Nathan MacDonald. *Priestly Rule: Polemic and Biblical Interpretation in Ezekiel 44*. Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 476. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015. VIII + 172 pages, hardcover, €89.95, ISBN 978-3-11-041003-7.

Since Julius Wellhausen has argued that Ezek 44 is a connecting link between D, where all Levites are priests (in his interpretation), and P, where the Levites are the minor clergy, this chapter received a lot of attention in biblical scholarship. Nathan MacDonald adds another monograph to this difficult text. As the subtitle suggests, a main focus is on biblical interpretation in Ezek 44. After the introduction, the study is divided in three parts: The first part deals with the “rule of priests” (Ezek 44:6-16), the second part deals with the “rules for priests” (Ezek 44:17-31), and the third part deals with “Zadok and the Sons of Zadok in Second Temple Judaism.”

In the introduction, MacDonald first gives a brief outline of Ezek 44 in modern scholarship since Wellhausen (pp. 4-10). In recent research, he sees a distinction between American scholarship and European scholarship. While American scholarship since Michael Fishbane has often focused on inner-biblical interpretation (e.g. Levenson, Cook), European scholarship in the tradition of Gese and Zimmerli has still a main interest in redaction-criticism (e.g. Rudnig, Konkel). After this brief outline, MacDonald discusses a few methodological issues related to both inner-biblical interpretation (pp. 11-14) and redaction-criticism (pp. 14-17). Regarding inner-biblical interpretation, he mainly discusses the two questions: “How might we ascertain where inner-biblical interpretation has occurred, and how can we determine the general direction of dependence?” (p. 13). Hereby, he follows largely David Carr with some “rough guides requiring judicious use” which should not be understood as a series of rules (p. 14). Regarding redaction-criticism, MacDonald insists on the distinction between redaction as a “scribal activity that rewrites and reworks an entire text for a new ideological purpose” and *Fortschreibung* as “the interpretive development of a text” (p. 15). Furthermore, he points to the fact “that inner-biblical interpretation can sometimes be used to explain the same data” (p. 15). Unfortunately, he gives no hints how to deal methodically with these different possibilities. In my view, the demonstration of a use of sources (be they inner- or outer-biblical) should always have priority over redaction-critical explanations which make these redundant. Finally, MacDonald states that, “as proponents of final-form and canonical readings insist, [...] the task of the biblical interpreter is to understand and interpret the texts that we have” (p. 17). In the following, I give a brief evaluation of the study along these methodological considerations, starting with the final-form reading which should stand at the beginning of any diachronic investigation.

On pp. 19-23, MacDonald gives an outline of the place of Ezek 44 in the book of Ezekiel and especially in the context of the temple vision in Ezek 40-48. He emphasizes that Ezek 44:4-5 refers back to 43:1-11 where the ordinances and laws of the temple are announced. However, if we try to understand Ezek 44 within the whole book of Ezekiel, it would be equally important to consider that Ezek 43:1-11 refers back to the first temple vision in Ezek 8-11, where the glory of YHWH, which now returns to the temple, has left it. According to Ezek 43:10, the ordinances and laws that are given to the house of Israel (which is addressed in Ezek 44:6) shall make them ashamed of their former iniquities. Thus, Ezek 43 prepares the reader to remember Ezek 8-11 when reading Ezek 44. This should be addressed in each attempt to understand Ezek 44. Yet MacDonald moves immediately to three difficulties (pp. 21-22) that he locates in Ezek 44: first, Israel is addressed in the second person plural, while the word of judgment is not against Israel but against the Levites and it is spoken in the third person. Secondly, Israel's failure is described in different terms in vv. 6-8 as compared to vv. 10-16. Thirdly, the word of judgment moves between past and future in a surprising way. Rather than trying to understand these difficulties on a synchronic level, MacDonald sees in these problems the legitimation to look for a diachronic solution in inner-biblical interpretation. In what follows, the place of Ezek 44 within the book of Ezekiel plays almost no further role for his interpretation of the text (apart of his proposal to see Ezek 14 as one of the texts interpreted in Ezek 44). Therefore, MacDonald's approach is not totally satisfying.

The suggestions on inner-biblical interpretation are the most important contribution of this study. They would be even stronger if MacDonald would have explained in the context of the book of Ezekiel why which reference to an older biblical text is made and what the function of these references is. First, he interprets Ezek 44:6-8 as an inner-biblical interpretation of Isa 56:1-8 against some scholars (Fishbane, Schaper, Tuell) who suggested the reverse direction of dependence. While the suggestion that there is a direct literary relationship between the two texts is not completely conclusive in my view, the arguments for the priority of Isa 56:1-8 are strong if one accepts the dependency at all. According to MacDonald, Ezek 44 contradicts the promise of Isa 56 that non-Israelites shall serve as priests on the basis of Gen 17 (where the foreigners are characterized as uncircumcised) and of Lev 22, where the offering is polluted by the presence of foreigners. With regard to Ezek 44:9-15, MacDonald argues convincingly as several scholars since Gunneweg have done before, but even more precisely, that it draws on Num 18 and that thus the distinction between priests and Levites is not first established in Ezekiel (as Wellhausen suggested and few scholars still suggest today) but rather in the Pentateuch. Furthermore, he suggests that Ezek 44 also draws on Ezek 14 when it points to the sins of the past. This would have been a good place to discuss the meaning of the text in light of the whole book of Ezekiel and the relationship of Ezek 14 and 44 to Ezek 8-11 as well. However, the synchronic reflection remains limited.

According to MacDonald, the conflation of Num 18 and Ezek 14 in Ezek 44 can explain why the expression “bear their sin” is not used in the cultic sense as Num 18 used it, but rather in the sense of Ezek 14, so that the expression in Ezek 44 “was understood as a punishment for Levitical transgression” (p. 50). MacDonald then goes on to Ezek 44:17-31 where he goes step by step through the rules for the priests and shows how different texts of the Pentateuch are borrowed. Particularly convincing is his demonstration how Ezek 44:20-27 is composed out of Laws in Lev 10 and 21 (p. 87). It is about time that European scholarship learns likewise to look consequently for inner-biblical exegesis instead of just jumping into redaction-critical analyses before thinking about possible sources of the text.

MacDonald develops his redaction-critical model for Ezek 44 throughout the book. He presents it – an original oracle with two expansions – on pp. 112-113. However, the methodological remarks in the introduction of his book are not appropriate to support his suggestions. While the original oracle in 44.6-7*,9*,15* “was composed as a response to the oracle in Isaiah 56,” the first expansion “drew upon Num 18 and Ezek 14.” Then, the oracle “was expanded once more, this time under the influence of Leviticus 10 and 21-22” (p. 113). MacDonald did not answer the methodological question how to deal with the case that literary observations can be explained sometimes with either the use of sources or with redaction critical hypothesis. Thus, MacDonald accepts both explanations at the same time and suggests that the use of different sources belongs to different stages of the composition of the oracle. But how can he know this? Everything that can be explained by different editorial layers can likewise be explained by the conflation of different sources. To assume that the conflation of different sources belongs to different stages in the redaction of the text is pure speculation.

Finally, the weakest part of the book are in my view the dating issues. According to MacDonald, “Ezekiel 44 is a very late text” (p. 18), that does not belong to the neo-Babylonian period (thus the conventional dating), but rather, the “earliest form of Ezekiel 44 [...] comes from well into the Persian period, perhaps even the Hellenistic period” (p. 147). This dating he bases mainly on two arguments: first, the suggested dependence of Ezek 44 on the other biblical texts, especially Isa 56, and, secondly, the fact that the expression “sons of Zadok” is elsewhere not attested in the OT, but “in the later developments of the *Serekh* tradition at Qumran, and in one part of the Ben Sira textual tradition” (p. 147). Both arguments are not very strong, however. The first argument is pure circular reasoning, namely the dating of a text with an unsure date by its relationship to another text with an unsure date. Since the date of Isa 56 is not surer than the date of Ezek 44, one could just as well conclude that Isa 56 must be older than often suggested. In fact, we have more indications for the date of Ezek 44 than Isa 56 by the internal witness of Ezekiel’s dating system, which is still taken seriously by several commentators of Ezekiel (e.g. Greenberg,

Block, Milgrom, Joyce). Thus, the relationship between Ezek 44 and Isa 56 might be telling more about the date of Isa 56 than about the date of Ezek 44. The second argument is weak as well. The labelling of the priests as Zadokites fits well with the program of the whole book of Ezekiel. To give an example: although full of Zion-theology, Ezekiel never calls Zion by name. The reason for that seems to be that Ezekiel applies Sinai-traditions to Zion and, by avoiding the label “Zion” and speaking instead of “the mountain,” he effects an oscillation between Sinai and Zion. Likewise, by applying Sinaitic instructions to the priests, while naming the priests after the first priest of Zion, not Sinai, Sinai and Zion are brought together. This is not part of a larger discourse on Zadokite priesthood in exilic or postexilic times, but rather part of the theological agenda of Ezekiel. Accordingly, we do not have such a discourse in later times either, as MacDonald is conceding himself: “Every other Second Temple source is completely silent on the matter.” The reason for the mention of Zadokite priesthood in the Community Rule (1QS) and in one part of the Ben Sira tradition is not a broad contemporary discourse but Biblical interpretation. This simply shows us that the respective texts in Ezek 40-48 were in a quite high (if not canonical) prestige and not that they must just have been written a short time before.

In sum, I recommend this study especially as a lesson for the attention to biblical exegesis (what is, in fact, the lion’s share of the study). Here, MacDonald brings the discussion a whole step forward and thereby hopefully stimulates biblical exegesis far beyond Ezekiel studies. However, in interpreting the final form of the text, in relating redaction-criticism to biblical exegesis, and in dating the certain texts, I see several shortcomings and think that further consideration is needed.

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/2312-3621/2016/v29n3a15>

Benjamin Kilchör, Staatsunabhängige Theologische Hochschule Basel (Switzerland) and Dept. of Ancient Languages at the University of Pretoria (South Africa), Grüenaustrasse 21, CH-8624 Grüt (Switzerland). Email: benjamin.kilchoer@sthbasel.ch.
