

Magne Saebø 1998 – On the way to canon: Creative tradition history in the Old Testament. (Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 191.)

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Reviewer: Prof P M Venter

This publication presents a collection of 21 essays on the tradition of Israel, written by the author between 1960 and 1998. Most of these have been published elsewhere, but twelve of them had to be translated in to English for this book. In this way the work of the author is introduced to a much larger circle of readers and contributes to the much needed international debate between Scandinavian, German, English and American scholars.

Although the heyday of tradition history is long since past, Saebø is of opinion that there are left open some questions that still have to be answered. These questions are about the theological multiplicity and unity in the Biblical text, the theological continuity in its process of production and the productive circles of this literature in ancient Israel. Problems arising on the synchronic level of reading still need the study of matters like these on the diachronic level to be answered. Although opinions differ on the tradition history of the text, especially between Scandinavian and German scholars, the creative movement in the forming process leading to the final canon has to be investigated. And what Saebø presents here is the results of his research in this area.

The essay is arranged in five main parts, dealing with different aspects of tradition history. In the first part it is shown in the text history, inter alia in Leviticus, that the tradition history was a living creative tradition related to different groups or bodies where they had their functional *Sitz im Leben*. This thesis is proven in the second part where traditio historical aspects are studied in texts like Genesis 49:24b-25a, Exodus 3:13-15, Isaiah 7:3-9, Isaiah 8:9-10, Psalms 72:8 and 89:26, Zechariah 9:10b and Lamentations 3:1.

When dealing with theological themes exposed by traditio historical study, Saebø very often reflects on older research and gives a new opinion marked by an obvious effort at balance between different viewpoints. Matters like the relationship between cult theology and wisdom theology, wisdom and law, revelation and history, messiah and eschatology, wisdom and apocalyptic, are discussed in the essays of this section.

In part four the author collected his essays on the final stages of the tradition process where *traditio* at last becomes *traditum*. Investigating the tradition history as well as the redaction history of books like Proverbs, Song of Songs, and the sections of the servant songs in Isaiah and “son of man” in Daniel 7, he comes to the issue of canon. In chapter 18, which can be seen as the concluding point of the argument for a creative traditio historical process, Saebø takes up the argument with Childs. According to him “The final form of the biblical writings can be understood not as something which had already been given, but generally as something which had become both historically and theologically, and which had come into being after prior conditions by means of a creative and productive process” (p 302). A process of *Zusammen Denken* theologically developed the material into a final form. Hence the title of the book *On the way to...* Only in the final form there existed a canon consciousness and a new kind of *traditum* appeared which was conceptualized in terms of final holy writings.

In part five the author collected three articles he wrote on Gabler, William Robertson Smith and Mowinckel, which are interesting, but do not really fit into the pattern of the rest of the book. The book is concluded by a very useful bibliography, index of references and index of authors, making a book dealing

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with so many aspects of Old Testament science and so many publications, a user-friendly publication. In the ongoing debate between final form and tradition, canonical criticism and tradition history, synchronic and diachronic study, this book is a must for every scholar who wants to study the Old Testament and to think on a universal level.
