Jeremy Hughes, Secrets of the Times: Myth and History in Biblical Chronology

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Review
Review by: Steven W. Holloway
Source: Shofar, Vol. 9, No. 4, Special Issue: Eastern European Jewish Women Immigrants: To America and to Pre-State Israel (Summer 1991), pp. 132-135
Published by: Purdue University Press
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/42942328
Accessed: 05-01-2018 18:55 UTC

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What becomes clear in Danzger's analysis is that there are basic differences between the conversion process in Judaism and that in Christianity, stemming from fundamental differences in the sociologies of the two faith communities. This stands as a useful corrective to the sociological literature on the conversion process, which normally takes Christianity as its paradigm.

Finally, Returning to Tradition indicates that the Ba' al Teshuva phenomenon has had and is likely to continue to have a profound effect on Orthodoxy itself. Whereas previously Orthodox Jews worked hard to retain their own children in their communities, now they are attracting Jews from the "outside" culture who have joined by their own choice. The implication for Orthodoxy is potentially profound. As Danzger states (p. 340):

In the process the traditionalists open themselves to the broader world in their innermost recesses ... Even if they are successful, their own beliefs are transformed from unarticulated ... practices to reasoned choices. The nature of their beliefs is changed. It may be strengthened—but not necessarily.

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Hughes' monograph on biblical chronologies is a successful revision of an Oxford dissertation directed by James Barr. The validity of his approach is rooted in his recognition that biblical chronology is primarily mythic and schematic, a product of the biblical writers' imperative to explicate the theological significance of the lapse of universal and Judaeo-centric time. The theological meaning of time is punctuated by the formative events of Jewish self-identity: the life of Abraham, the Exodus and the Sinai theophany, the founding of the First and Second Temples, the Exile. "In arguing that biblical chronology is essentially mythical, I am saying that it uses historical fiction to express ideological beliefs. The most fundamental of these beliefs, which motivated Ussher just as it motivated the original biblical chronologers, is the belief that there is a divine plan behind human history" (pp. 3f).

Hughes notes that, unlike most students of biblical chronology, he began his investigation with the mythological chronology of the Priestly source,
endeavoring to gain access to its own inner logic, rather than commencing *ab initio* with a quest for the historic kernel folded away within the discrepant numbers of Kings (p. v).

In chapter 2, "The Priestly Chronology of the World," the author compares the 4,000 years of P's mythic history in terms of the textual traditions preserved in the Massoretic Text (MT), the Septuagint (LXX), and the Samaritan Pentateuch (SP), a methodologically sound procedure. He concludes that MT consistently preserved Priestly figures for postdiluvian chronology from the birth of Arpachshad to the fall of the First Temple, whereas SP is the best witness for antediluvian chronology (p. 43). The chronological schematization of P divides history into a pre-Abrahamic period of 1599 years and a post-Abrahamic period of 2400 years, with the latter divided into pre-(Jerusalem) temple and temple eras of 1200 years each. The most striking schematic correspondences exist between the final period of the pre-Abrahamic period (a postdiluvian age of 290 years followed by a patriarchal age of 290 years) and the first period of the post-Abrahamic period (480 years from Exodus to the First Temple and 480 years from the First to the Second Temple) (p. 48). The foci of the schema define the "ideological presuppositions" of P: creation, the patriarch Abraham, and the temple cult. In opposition to the views of F. M. Cross, Hughes maintains that P was an independent narrative source that was intended to supersede JE, rather than to act as a supplemental source (p. 50). The systemic schematization of P, with its 480-year stretch from the First to the Second Temple, is indicative of a post-Exilic date of composition (p. 51).

Chapter 3, "The Deuteronomistic Chronology of Israel," examines the various chronological notices in Deuteronomy–Kings in terms of schema, redactional activity, and textual tradition (MT, the major and sometimes minor manuscript families of the LXX). He concludes, not surprisingly, that the chronology in Judges and Samuel is highly schematic; the original Deuteronomistic History probably contained no chronology for the period preceding David (p. 70). By contrast, an originally non-schematic (and historical) chronology was incorporated into the pre-Exilic Deuteronomistic History of Kings, only to be "schematized" during the Exile, then modified to conform *grasso modo* to the Priestly dating (e.g., 1 Kings 6:1), and finally revised using non-inclusive antedating for the regnal dates (p. 94). Even though the chronology in Kings has been fictionalized by editorial schematization, and is not a reliable source of historical information as it stands, "it may nevertheless contain reliable information alongside fictionalized and unreliable data" (p. 96), hence chapter 4, "The Original Chronology of the Book of Kings" and chapter 5, "the Historical Chronology of Israel and Judah."
The first half of chapter 4 consists of a topical survey of the scholarship on the chronology of Kings. Hughes, building on the observations of Wellhausen and Mowinckel, finds evidence of chronological schematization in Kings; most other modern efforts to account for the chronological discrepancies presuppose some combination of textual corruption, scribal or editorial arithmetic incompetence, or various “harmonistic devices” used by the original authors or editors, e.g., coregencies (p. 114). For the rest of chapter 4 Hughes attempts to factor out the chronological schematization in Kings, critically weighing the relationships between the various textual traditions plus the salient chronological notices in Josephus. Chapter 5 represents Hughes’ attempt to establish an absolute chronology for the events in the pre-Exilic kingdoms of Israel and Judah; integral to his analysis is the proper identification of what kind of calendar(s) were in use in these kingdoms. Israel followed a lunisolar autumnal (Tishri) calendar throughout its existence (pp. 178, 181); Judah likewise observed a lunisolar autumnal New Year system until the reign of Josiah, when the Babylonian spring (Nisan) calendar was adopted. The proof for this? Deuteronomic festal legislation, in order to break with the associations of Canaanite festivals, changed the indigenous calendar to that of the Babylonians; Deuteronomic reforms were initiated in the reign of Josiah; ergo, the calendar probably changed from an autumnal to a spring New Year under Josiah (p. 176f). Reader, beware!: the dating of the Deuteronomic reforms to Josiah is by no means an established fact; if the administrative Judahite calendar was actually changed prior to the Exile, it is unlikely that any scholarly legerdemain with the ambiguous numbers in Kings will settle the issue in the absence of extra-biblical evidence. The balance of the chapter displays Hughes’ grappling with the historicity of the numbers in Kings in light of extra-biblical sources; his sensitivity for literary and theological shaping of these materials is acute, and the attentive reader will be rewarded by his grasp of philological and historical niceties, and by his astute ability to raise more questions than he can answer. While Hughes has by no means severed all the Gordian knots in the historical time-lines of Judah and Israel, his insistence on beginning with the Priestly and Deuteronomic schematization of Kings is an important breakthrough that has signal implications for any theological assessment of these sources.

Chapter 6, “From P to Ussher,” provides informative summaries of the chronological systems in the Hebrew Scriptural traditions (MT, LXX, SP); various ancient Jewish sources (Demetrius, Eupolemus, Jubilees, Josephus, Pseudo-Philo, Seder Olam Rabba); and selected Christian chronologies (NT, Eastern Christianity, Eusebius, Bede, Luther, and Ussher). Following a brief conclusion, five appendices appear with charts on biblical chronologies (Priestly and Deuteronomic), chronology in Josephus, Mesopotamian chronologies of the first millennium (Assyrian, Babylonian, Persian), his-
torical chronology of Israel and Judah, and Babylonian/Jewish month names. With bibliographies of ancient and modern sources and three indices, this book is a highly serviceable reference work for biblical and related historical chronologies.

Minor flaws. There is one glaring typo in the book: in the first table of chronological data (Gen. 5–11) on p. 7, the columns of figures culled from the LXX and SP are reversed (they are correctly presented in the tables on pp. 12, 19f., 45, and Appendix A). The omission of both captions for the many tables of figures scattered throughout the text and of a list of these tables limits somewhat the reader's ease of access to this information.

Jeremy Hughes' book, in my opinion, represents an outstanding addition to the rather esoteric branch of biblical studies devoted to chronology. While I hesitate to call any secondary work on the Bible indispensible, I know of no other recent study on biblical chronology in any language that I would prefer to have in my personal library.

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The Savage in Judaism: Anthropology of Israelite Religion and Ancient Judaism, by Howard Eilberg-Schwartz. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990. 289 pp. $35.00 (c); $17.95 (p).

The author, now a professor of religious studies at Temple University, acknowledges that this revolutionary book had its genesis in his disillusionment, while a rabbinical student, with previous models for understanding ancient Israelite history and religion. In particular, he eschewed then, and now in this book, the tendency of nineteenth- and twentieth-century scholarship, mostly Christian, to exclude ancient Israelite religion and later Judaism from the study of "primitive religions" ("the savage"). Thus this tradition was eliminated from consideration by modern comparative religion, ethnography, and anthropology—to its detriment.

Eilberg-Schwartz begins in Part I with a review of scholarship since the Enlightenment, arguing that leading students of comparative religion such as Durkheim, Malinowski, Radcliffe-Brown, Evans-Pritchard, Boas, Mead, Krober, Benedict, and others rarely influenced the study of Israelite religion. He contends that only since the mid-sixties, with such studies as those of Mary Douglas on food taboos and Edmund Leach on structuralist approaches to religious narrative, has the picture changed. Most previous studies up to this time, theologically based and apologetic in nature, had tried to