



Digital Commons@

Loyola Marymount University
LMU Loyola Law School

Theological Studies Faculty Works

Theological Studies

1993

Review of Robert B. Coote, *In Defense of Revolution: The Elohist History*

Daniel L. Smith-Christopher

Loyola Marymount University, dchristopher@lmu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/theo_fac



Part of the [Religion Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Smith-Christopher, Daniel. Review of *In Defense of Revolution: The Elohist History* by Robert B. Coote. *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 55 no. 4 (October 1993), 751-753.

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Theological Studies at Digital Commons @ Loyola Marymount University and Loyola Law School. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theological Studies Faculty Works by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons@Loyola Marymount University and Loyola Law School. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@lmu.edu.

On the other hand, some of C.'s examples appear forced, and special pleading is used for their defense, including: (1) that Joseph was the animal in the pit (Exod 21:33-34) and was the lost ass when he came to his brothers (Exod 23:4-5); (2) that the brothers' lie to Jacob formed the basis for an ox goring an ox (Exod 21:35-36), for damage to a field (Exod 22:5-6), and for avoiding torn flesh (Exod 22:31); (3) that Dinah's visit to foreign women inspired the witchcraft law (Exod 22:18); (4) that bestiality was condemned (Exod 22:19) by allusions in the names of Hamor and Jacob; (5) that delay in sacrifice (Exod 22:29-30) was Jacob's sin for burying Deborah before arriving at Bethel; (6) that Judah's advice on Joseph's fate showed unfair partiality to the poor (Exod 23:3); (7) that Joseph's concealment of money in the sacks was a bribe (Exod 23:8) and that his farm program inspired the Fallow Year (Exod 23:10-11); (8) that Cain's marriage was the basis for condemning adultery in the Decalogue.

Despite these reservations, one must praise C. for this brilliant and pioneering work. Even if his thesis does not convince the scholarly mind, he has provided many cogent insights worth consideration and further debate. He has proven that there is interplay between laws and narratives, at some stage of development, and future scholarship must take this evidence into account.

Robert Gnuse, Loyola University, New Orleans, LA 70118

ROBERT B. COOTE, *In Defense of Revolution: The Elohist History* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991). Pp. x + 150. Paper \$10.95.

Readers who were impressed by Coote's earlier work (written with Mary Coote) *Power, Politics, and the Making of the Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990) will find *In Defense of Revolution* a helpful development of ideas only briefly suggested in the previous work. In this new work, C. shows how the Elohist's material reflects the political goals of Jeroboam I, who must theologially justify the revolution in the North that resulted in the secession of Israel from Jerusalem and the house of David. C. admits that the tone of his work makes his theories sound more certain than the evidence allows, but this style also makes for a narrative that is frankly engrossing and for a presentation clearer than it would be if he had written the work in typical scholarly style, with tentative conclusions and careful, copious footnotes. Along the way, C.'s work provides a helpful reminder that source and redaction criticism still has its gifts to offer and is not overpowered by the recent chorus of literary critical voices asking us to read the Bible only in its "final form."

Coote states his positions clearly with regard to the Elohist's work (hereafter E). E is identified by additions to the preexisting J document. It never existed as a history parallel to J; it was *only* an adaptation to J, and, thus, it cannot be *separated* from J. It came from the northern royal court of Jeroboam I, although it was supplemented later. As C. states it: "E was written by a scribe who studied the scroll of J, planned the insertions carefully, and then rewrote the scroll."

After a number of chapters where the E material is helpfully laid out in readable prose, chaps. 5 and 6 provide a highly politicized reading of developments in the Solomonic state and of the northern rebellion. Such chapters, with their emphasis on economic and power issues including the various foreign alliances involved with the northern and southern kingdoms, are some of the most interesting and thought-provoking of Coote's contribution to the historiography of preexilic Israel. Although it is sometimes frustrating not to be able to follow up a particularly provocative suggestion in footnotes, that is the price we pay for the equal value of being able to read C.'s work in one sitting and then think about the suggestions of the entire thesis.

Coote divides E into three main subjects, or main emphases: (1) the dangers to sons, (2) the story of Joseph, and (3) Horeb and its laws. The section on threats to sons includes the threat to Abram's sons Ishmael and Isaac, Jacob threatened by Laban, the threat to Joseph, and Moses as a child. This theme of threat and God's intervention does seem to be a favorite motif of E. However, the arguments that attempt to link the motif of "sons in danger" with the supposed concerns of Jeroboam himself seem strained. Jeroboam may have worried about his hostage son(s) in Egypt, and, thus, about the question of succession in his kingdom, but how does writing the E narrative help? Coote suggests that E was a "mirror" for Jeroboam to look at. But if it was also some form of political propaganda, to whom was it directed? I recognize the theme, but I fail to see the point. If the people of the northern kingdom somehow took comfort in God's care for endangered people, then one could presumably understand the purpose of the motif, but this is not the direction that C. takes in developing this theme, as far as I can tell.

In chap. 9 C. compares Joseph, who was promoted in Egypt as a result of good relations with Pharaoh, to Jeroboam, who was also promoted by the Egyptians or at least assisted by them. Once again, therefore, E is supposed to mirror the life and concerns of Jeroboam I. But once again, although the suggestion is intriguing, I fail to be convinced. In view of Redford's work, a postexilic date for much of the Joseph material seems more likely to me.

Chapters 10 and 11 are particularly interesting for their outline of the religious practices of the North gleaned from E material. Chap. 11 discusses E1 as the name for God, Horeb as the preferred term for the Mosaic holy place, the importance of stone symbols that are anointed with oil, altar sacrifice (with the polemic against human sacrifice), the importance of pilgrimage and incubation, and the "fear" of God as a central aspect of E's spiritual perspective. Chap 12 deals with jurisdiction and law in E. It is followed by a chapter on a suggested amendment to E material by Hezekiah which Coote calls "proto-Deuteronomistic."

Coote summarizes his work thus: "Jeroboam rode to power in a rattletrap movement clapped together out of the tenuous social bonds, shaky alliances, and dubious loyalties. E is an anxious text infected with uncertainty and the spirit of deterrence, at odds with the confidence of J. In E, peril threatens at every turn." So fear itself, argues C., becomes the "social norm" in the theology and ideology of E.

As in C.'s earlier works, here too there are important contributions to biblical analysis, especially when that analysis is informed by a sophisticated social or political awareness. He is also taking risks by generalizing. Yet, I argue that it is very

important that scholars be willing to wade outside highly specialized studies in order to help us all to benefit from a broader perspective. C.'s innovative suggestions deserve serious consideration and additional studies. When viewed against a background of other, perhaps more generally accepted, theories, C.'s work can be read with great profit by undergraduates and graduates alike.

Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles, CA 90045

G. I. DAVIES, *Ancient Hebrew Inscriptions: Corpus and Concordance* (Cambridge/New York/Port Chester: Cambridge University, 1991). Pp. xxxiv + 535 + synopsis. N.P.

As the corpus of ancient Hebrew inscriptions grows, and publications appear in *Festschriften*, minor journals, archaeological reports difficult to obtain, and the like, it is increasingly difficult for scholars to keep abreast of everything in order to discern for themselves what is important. Furthermore, unless one has a prodigious memory, it is quite impossible to keep in mind where various vocables are attested in the corpus. Finally, even if one knows where something has appeared, available libraries may not have the publication available.

Ancient Hebrew Inscriptions by G. I. Davies, assisted by M. N. A. Bochmuehl, D. R. de Lacey, and A. J. Poulter, comes to remedy these particular problems. Working with a database stored and edited on a mainframe computer since 1986, D. recorded all inscriptions deemed Hebrew that are dated before 200 B.C.E. In determining what readings would be presented in the corpus, and concomitantly in the concordance, D. consulted major publications, photographs, and drawings, as well as critical rereadings. In cases of debated readings, D. followed in his *text* the majority view and included as variants those readings which have strong support. Thus, it appears that in establishing his corpus D. has been conservative and has worked within the scholarly consensus.

The concordance is based on the main readings of each text. No entries are included for the definite article, but there are entries for inseparable prepositions, conjunctive *waw*, and *he interrogativum*. Hollow verbs are parsed as biconsonantal, and geminate verbs as triconsonantal. Homographs are listed separately and should, therefore, be checked, since such a listing represents a parsed interpretation. Since the concordance is alphabetized by dictionary forms and not by roots (a wise choice), it may be used to suggest possible interpretations to scholars studying inscriptions with incomplete words. Each entry word is printed in the middle of the page, surrounded by other words or signs that determine its context. D. plans to produce a "grammatical" concordance of the texts which will list all instances of particular grammatical forms.

By using the judicious cross-referencing system built into the volume, it is possible to find inscriptions by site or by word and to discover major publications. The book is clearly printed on good paper, so that anybody can get the hang of it after