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## Invention, Rewriting, Usurpation: Discursive Fights over Religious Traditions in Antiquity

Berlin: Peter Lang. 2012. XVI + 322 pages,  
1 table, ISBN 978-3-631-63538-4 (hardcover)

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Coming out of a 2010 Aarhus conference on the enticing topic of “The Discursive Fight over Religious Texts in Antiquity,” the volume under review, *Invention, Rewriting, Usurpation*, gathers nineteen contributions that explore various agonistic aspects of ancient literature, mostly of Jewish and Christian expression, under the headings of four main ‘themes’: “Reuse, Rewriting, and Usurpation of Biblical and Classical Texts,” “Invention and Maintenance of Religious Traditions,” “Orthodoxy and Heresy,” and “the Formation of the Biblical Canon.” The first two themes advance a series of new terms, such as ‘reuse,’ ‘rewriting,’ ‘invention,’ ‘contestation,’ and ‘usurpation,’ which enrich considerably the discussions on religious transformations carried in the last two themes of the volume. The topics of orthodoxy/heresy and the biblical canon already constitute well-established topics in previous studies on controversy in early Judaism and early Christianity.

The studies collected in the first section, “Reuse, Rewriting, and Usurpation of Biblical and Classical Texts,” examine the literary methods of appropriation, transmission, and adaptation of classical texts in later Christian antiquity. Usurpation and recodification characterize case studies as different as Attridge’s analysis of the reception of the Gospel of John

in the second century (pp. 1-17); Müller's reevaluation of the Augustinian composition of the Athanasian Creed (pp. 19-40); Sághy's insights into how fourth-century bishop Damasus of Rome appropriated Vergil's poetry in a Christian key (pp. 41-55); Kendeffy's examination of how Lactantius used Pauline conception of revelation (pp. 57-70); Haaland's exploration of Josephus' intertextual geography and its Graeco-Roman sources (pp. 71-88); Von Möllendorff's study of mimetical appropriation of Greek canonical texts for educational purposes (pp. 89-101); and Pollmann's understanding of how early Christian authors modified preexisting literary genres as historically constructed practices and as means of communication (pp. 103-120). In Pollmann's view, classical major texts acquire not only new hermeneutic dimensions when read in new ideological contexts, in this case, in early Christianity, they also make room for new dynamics of contestation and, at the same time, preservation of its genres.

The studies collected in the second section, "Invention and Maintenance of Religious Traditions," revisit the delicate issue of religious traditions versus religious innovation in the relation between ancient Judaism and formative Christianity. Petersen's contribution shows the relevance of terms such as 'invention' and 'maintenance' for understanding the ways in which religions innovate and remain traditional at the same time (pp. 129-60). Next, Ulrich explores the development of early Christian historiography, comparing it to attempts at rewriting old texts in new ideological contexts in Greco-Roman and Jewish historiographies (pp. 161-76). Closing the second theme of the volume, Wischmeyer's contribution applies Hobsbawm's celebrated concept of 'invented tradition' to the earliest forms of Christianity, as they were documented in Paul's letters and in the Gospel of Mark (pp. 177-89).

If the previous three studies redeemed the role of the concept of 'tradition' in conceptualizing religious transformation and articulating its

vocabulary, the studies collected in the third section, “Orthodoxy and Heresy,” delve into the question of what makes ancient heresiological discourses into religious tradition and orthodoxy into religious practice. Thomassen’s contribution, “What is Heresy and Why Did it Matter?” sets up a generous methodological tone. It revisits some of the topics of the 1985 two-volume study by Alain Le Boulluec,<sup>1</sup> it extends this discussion beyond the limits of Christianity and even of religion, by relating it to politics of identity and exclusion in Marxism-Leninism and in American rock-climbing communities, and defines heresy as a perceived threat within movements characterized by radical social transformation and by its inescapable corollary, ideological uniformity (pp. 191-201). The next three contributions in this section display more historical features. Heil’s piece represents an alternative map to the establishing of Christian orthodoxy in the second century, one which lessens the normative role of the bishop, the Bible and *regula fidei* (pp. 203-18), while Graumann’s consideration of the “reconstruction of the past” after the Church councils of 431 and 553 (pp. 219-37) and Lundhaug’s scrutiny of Shenoute’s heresiological treatise “I am amazed” (ca. 430) and of its focus on the production and circulation of the apocryphal texts (pp. 239-61) illustrate some of the ways in which the discursive fights for orthodoxy extended well into the sixth century.

The studies collected in the fourth section return with fresh perspectives on the classical question of the “the Formation of the Biblical Canon.” Brakke urges historians engaged in delineating this matter to forgo the primacy of teleology in their narratives and focus instead on a “history of scriptural practices” whose later outcome and intersections included the canon of the New Testament (pp. 263-80). Echoing Brakke’s communities

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1 Alain Le Boulluec. 1985. *La notion d'hérésie dans la littérature grecque, II<sup>e</sup>-III<sup>e</sup> siècles*. 2 vols. Paris: Études augustiniennes.

of textual practices, Chapman's contribution advocates shifting the focus from understanding the Second-Temple Jewish canon as "a list of books, or a set order, or even a uniform text" towards grasping the value of the notion of 'canon,' as a representation, for different religious settings, such as the Qumran group (pp. 281-96).

The main virtue of this volume resides in its valiant attempt at creating a non-theological vocabulary for understanding ancient religious agonistic situations, often filled with tensions, ambiguities, anxieties, and unresolved conflicts. For instance, Attridge's notions of "dynamics of usurpation and contestation" or "imaginative invention and rewriting" (p. 12) represent clear enrichments of the technical vocabulary used to describe antagonistic situations in ancient Mediterranean religions. Pollmann's and Brakke's contributions advance highly useful methodological contexts for reevaluating religious transformations and transitions in antiquity. Pollmann delineates five ways in which of Christian writers appropriated pagan genres: "seamless continuation" of professional texts, such as handbooks of medicine, grammar, and rhetoric; erasure, iconoclasm, *damnatio memoriae*; abrupt juxtaposition of pagan and Christian literary traditions; the right use (*chresis, usus iustus*); and, innovations (pp. 115-19). Similarly, instead of a unilinear development of the New Testament canon, Brakke suggests envisioning the configuration of multiple canon-making situations expressed mainly through three types of characteristic scriptural practices: "(1) study and contemplation; (2) revelation and continued inspiration; and (3) communal worship and edification." (p. 271)

The collection of these articles amounts to a substantial book useful for classicists, and for students of ancient Judaism and Christianity. The scholars at work in this volume successfully mined the neighboring fields of literary criticism, history of ancient literature, and even social sciences, for notions and concepts which would allow them to investigate and describe

patterns of literary metamorphosis from the classical antiquity to its later  
Christian counterpart.

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