

be open to them. For those who read and admire Luther, this book should be an important addition to their library.

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Hepner, Gershon. *Legal Friction: Law, Narrative, and Identity Politics in Biblical Israel*, Studies in Biblical Literature 78. New York: Peter Lang, 2010. xx + 1110 pp. Hardcover, \$155.95.

Gershon Hepner is a poet and independent scholar who has written a number of articles on law and narrative. *Legal Friction* has been described by the editor as a cross-disciplinary, progressive work, designed to broaden the horizon of biblical scholarship in line with the series *Studies in Biblical Literature* published by Peter Lang. The work is divided into three parts: the Genesis narratives, the narratives in Exodus-Samuel, and primeval history (Gen 1:1–11:25). The author covers a wide range of secondary sources, including Rabbinic literature (Mishnah, Tosephta, and the Palestinian and Babylonian Talmuds), the Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, post-midrashic literature, classical authors, and ancient Near Eastern texts and inscriptions. An extensive index and a fifty-page bibliography indicate the breadth of this volume.

Legal Friction is an intertextual study (a method reintroduced by, e.g., A. Roberts and further developed by S. Sandmel, I. Seeligmann, N. Sarna, and M. Fishbane) that follows the innertextual approach of David Daube, who first identified legal elements in narrative. Daube's student Calum Carmichael is credited for encouraging Hepner to enter the study of law and narrative (xvi). As the title suggests, the book is about alleged social friction among different identity groups within ancient Israel as reflected in law and narrative. Interest in literary analysis and historical criticism is also shared by Carmichael, but both interpreters reach conclusions diametrically opposed to each other. For Carmichael, the laws were written after the narratives of Genesis, whereas for Hepner "the Genesis narratives were written in the light of biblical laws, which are their *Vorlage*" (539). Be that as it may, it goes to show the subjective nature of generic theories and the tentative character of proposals for reconstructing social settings behind the laws and narratives of the Hebrew Bible.

Hepner deals specifically with the Genesis narratives and the Sinai codes (Covenant Code, Priestly Torah, Holiness Code, Holiness School, and Deuteronomy). The book is built upon the following assumptions: the Genesis narrative (1) was codified primarily in the exilic and partially in the postexilic periods, long after the Sinai laws were given; (2) was cast in light of the Sinai laws by making the patriarchs either conform to or transgress them; (3) upheld the unconditional covenant of the patriarchs, over against the futility of applying the Sinai covenant literally; (4) signaled God's preference

for the unconditional covenants, making it possible for the exiles to recover their faith and eventually heed God's call to return to Jerusalem.

To support the points above, the author uses a particular method derived from midrashic exegesis. However, rather than using a variety of tools—as one would expect in a book this size—the author makes heavy use of one particular technique: anagrammatic verbal resonance (472), which involves the association of two different verbs sharing two identical but alternating root consonants that produce similar sounds.

Because the author juxtaposes texts together on the basis of verbs anchored by their resonating consonants, much is at stake in his “midrashic approach” (xvi). It would be useful to know in detail what is meant by “midrash” and how anagrammatic verbal resonance relates to traditional forms of midrash. For example, the use of anagrammatic verbal resonance does not seem to take stock of two distinct Rabbinic methods governing law and narrative: variant, flexible methods for narrative (*Aggadah*), and more limited, stringent rules for laws (*Halakha*). Saul Lieberman notes that hermeneutical rules have long been applied to laws on the basis of choice and discrimination rather than creative imagination as in narrative (*Hellenism in Jewish Palestine* [New York: JTS, 1994], 78).

Hepner summarizes his methodology in eight steps (44), but holds that a mere minimum of three justify use of his method. Further elaboration of a set of criteria for the presence of anagrammatic verbal resonance could, chart a clearer path amid the collision of suggested interpretations in *Legal Friction*.

Claiming that the rabbis believed the patriarchs followed the Sinai laws, but without providing any supporting textual links (3-4), the author sets out to provide just that by way of anagrammatic verbal resonance. Due to the copious repetition of root letters in the Hebrew verbal system, he finds a plethora of verbal associations that he uses to link texts together. This imaginative method is well suited for him, as he concerns himself with possibilities, secondary meanings, and hidden politics in the text. Statements are framed by words such as “imply, infer, resonate, allude, mirror, echo.”

Hepner's interest in the text is driven by “implications over and above its plain meaning” (690), leading him to posit multiple meanings. Recently, however, scholars have recognized a certain nuance within midrash, what one might describe as a tension between the variety of interpretation, on one hand, and a singleness of purpose, on the other. William Scott Green explains that even the disjunctive Rabbinic interpretations (so-called *davar 'aber*) “operate within a limited conceptual sphere and a narrow thematic range . . . that do not conflict but are mutually reinforcing . . . Thus, rather than ‘endless multiple meanings’ . . . they in fact ascribe multiple variations of a single meaning” (“The Hebrew Scriptures in Rabbinic Judaism,” in *Rabbinic Judaism: Structure and System*, Jacob Neusner and William Scott Green [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995], 39-41).

At times the author's examples of anagrammatic verbal resonance seem to move too quickly from semantics to hermeneutics to historical reconstruction of the text's setting. For example, it is difficult to follow the transition from word analysis to the conclusion that the Genesis narratives postdate Sinai laws. It would be equally plausible to speak of the patriarchs as embodying implicit principles of what later came to be revealed as the Sinaitic laws.

As for the question of covenants, Hepner holds that the Genesis stories were created to prioritize the unconditional covenant of the patriarchs over against the conditional terms of Sinai, in that the Genesis stories "supported the view that the conditional Sinai covenant, whose violation Leviticus 26 explains was the cause of the Babylonian exile, was transformed into the unconditional patriarchal covenant" (9). This sharp dichotomy tends to miss the broad contours of both covenants; both contain conditional and unconditional elements, albeit in different measure. In Lev 26:43-44, the sins of the people, which conditioned them to exile, contrast with YHWH's promise of forgiveness for those who confess and repent. Also in vv. 41-42, there remains an element for potential transformation within the Sinaitic covenant itself.

By the same token, Jacob's deceiving of his father and brother sent him into exile in Aram (404), even under the unconditional covenants of Genesis (404). Conditional as well as unconditional elements in both covenants tend to minimize the idea that only the unconditional covenant of the patriarchs generated the necessary hope and encouragement for exiles to arise from the ashes of their past, regain their confidence in God, and return to Jerusalem.

No short review could address the many facets of this encyclopedic tome. *Legal Friction* is certainly the most comprehensive study on law and narrative thus far written from an intertextual standpoint. This book will stimulate further the debate over the relation of law and narrative.

The following errata should be noted:

Errata	Corrections
"Viejola" (123)	"Veijola"
"Sarah" (207)	"Hagar"
"linksbetween" (226)	"links between"
"Abraham" (247)	"Abimelech"
"Moses" (282)	"Abraham"
"Elazar" (336)	"Eleazar"
"Jacob" (389)	"Joseph"
"Abimelech" (427)	"Isaac"
"girl" (501)	"man"
"how" (605)	the repetition of the word
"Joseph"	"Moses" (620)
truncated printing (610)	