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This book grew out of the author’s Habilitationsschrift (Zurich, 2015), and follows the traditional structure of a monograph in this well-respected series. The introduction and first chapter lay out the goals of and analytical framework for the study; chs. 2–4 present evidence from the ancient world; chs. 5–8 focus on the biblical texts; and ch. 9 offers a brief conclusion.

Altmann examines both the Persian period and the biblical texts through a careful analysis of what is known about economic activity and how it was perceived. He argues for significant “theological and identity implications of economics as structuring metaphors for conceptions of divine action and human community” (p. 2). In the first chapter, he surveys a spectrum of economic analytical perspectives that have been applied to the ancient world, including (1) a formalist/modernist approach that assumes an independent “economic realm” apart from other institutions like “extended-family” or “religion”; (2) a substantivist approach (represented by Polanyi) that “locates economics *embedded within* the larger matrix of social relations” rather than in “widespread depersonalized trade” (p. 21); and (3) a Marxist approach (represented by Boer) that focuses on extractive activity and views “the economic level [as] the most important for an adequate understanding of ancient history” (p. 24). Altmann offers instead the “New Institutional Economics” (NIE) perspective, identified most notably with the work of economist Douglass North. NIE, Altmann suggests, incorporates the strengths of the neoclassical modernist and substantivist approaches by extending the modernist focus on the incentives of actors in an economic system to analyze culture and social structures: “Economic change, therefore, is for the most part a deliberate process shaped *by the perceptions of the actors about the consequences of their actions*” (p. 31; a quotation from Douglass C. North, *Understanding the Process of Economic Change* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005], viii).

Altmann deploys this sensitive perspective on economic change in examining both the economic realities of the ANE and the perceptions of those realities in ancient sources. Chapter 2 presents evidence from ancient Mesopotamian law treatises, inscriptions, and royal proclamations concerning prices for goods, wages, and debt/interest arrangements. In these texts, a competent ruler was responsible for setting forth “ideal” or “just” terms for economic activity, including setting prices for goods, labor and capital. Conversely, extremely high prices for basic commodities were construed as evidence of bad governance (p. 38). Chapter 3 is an economic study of the Neo-Assyrian Empire as the backdrop for preexilic Israelite texts. While acknowledging that Assyria
“relied far more on tribute and booty than on trade and taxes to appropriate the goods of its empire” (p. 49), Altmann finds that local and international systems of trade did exist. In this economic milieu, the preexilic Hebrew texts surveyed (including Exod 20–23 and various prophetic texts) portray God as delegating to human rulers his “royal” responsibility to “uphold fair standards of trade for everyone” (p. 77). Nevertheless, God serves as “divine accountant” who will repay those who oppress debts slaves and those who exact interest for subsistence loans (p. 77).

Chapter 4 is by far the longest chapter in the book (109 pages). Altmann has provided incredibly detailed compendium and synthesis of economic data from the Neo-Babylonian and Persian periods. At the same time, one wonders whether this unwieldy chapter (with 477 footnotes) could have been slightly expanded into a book of its own, or broken into smaller chapters. The most significant points for Altmann’s later examination of biblical texts are: (1) Changing economic circumstances in Babylonia and Persia during this period resulted in a shift toward a more favorable view of commerce, merchants, and craftsmen. Judeans exposed to these concepts in the East migrated to Yehud with an awareness of these changes, though they did not always embrace them. (2) Contrary to some claims, the Persian Empire was not as concerned with projecting images of its power through the minting of coins. Altmann suggests “caution when linking the issue of coinage necessarily with a particular type of ‘state ideology’. The issuance of coinage by provinces need not have signified rebellion” (p. 104). (3) The Greek myth of Persian economic weakness and decadence in the fourth century leading to Alexander’s conquest must be rejected.

In ch. 5, Altmann surveys economic thinking in early Persian-era biblical texts, including Chronicles, the Priestly Document, the Holiness Code, Isa 40–55, Haggai, and Zech 1–8. He argues that these texts still reflect the preexilic paradigm of royal concern for fair economic standards but do not embrace the moral and social logic of these commercialized economies. Deutero-Isaiah, for example, “[takes] on the analogy of debt as a new way to formulate Israel’s failing toward Yahweh,” but Isa 55:1–3 “does not completely embrace the economic paradigm as a foundational metaphor for God’s interaction with Israel” (p. 205).

Following a short survey of the status questionae on the composition, redaction, and dating of MT Ezra–Nehemiah (ch. 6), Altmann addresses key sections of these books that are illumined by his economic analysis. In Ezra 1–8 and Neh 5 and 13, economic arrangements distinguish Judeans from neighbors. Outsiders and commercial activity are not portrayed negatively, but community identity as evidenced by Torah obedience (reimagined in an economy that includes trade as well as agriculture) supersedes mere economic interests. Nehemiah himself models this view by using his immense personal wealth to provide for the community and to “bring together diverse and even antagonistic factions” at his table (p. 287). Taxes paid to and assistance received from the Persian authorities are understood as the work of God through the Persian kings.

The brevity of the concluding ninth chapter (5 pages of summary) shortchanges the immense research represented in this book. One would have hoped for further exposition of the significance of the results and further applications of the economics-oriented approach.

Though typographical and editorial shortcomings inevitably creep into a highly technical book such as this, a few strange constructions do obscure the
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Ellis R. Brotzman, former senior professor of OT at Tyndale Theological Seminary in the Netherlands, wrote his *Old Testament Textual Criticism* book more than 20 years ago and it has become a standard resource in this area. This new revision done with Eric J. Tully, assistant professor of OT and Semitic Languages at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, certainly offers the hope that it will again become a standard for the next 20 years. There have been many advances in the area of OT textual criticism and this book was overdue for a new edition.

The book starts out with fairly minor modifications and edits, but the farther one goes into the book the more changes one sees. Probably the biggest changes appear in ch. 4, “Ancient Translations of the Old Testament” and ch. 5, “Critical Editions of the Old Testament Text.” Also there is much greater detail to the discussions of the “Textual Commentary on the Book of Ruth” in ch 8. However, one of the most important changes was found in ch. 6 where the first edition referred to “Scribal Errors” (p. 107) and the new edition now calls them “Scribal Changes” (p. 117), the former title included a judgment decision that the latter correctly omits. It is interesting that with only adding about 50 pages and making the pages just a little bigger there is a significant updating of the discussions and the addition of significant textual critical details.

The biggest dilemma in the area of OT textual criticism is trying to determine its goal. What exactly are we trying to find? There have been many suggestions: (1) restoring the original composition (Harrison and others); (2) restoring the final form of the text (Deist, earlier Brotzman, Würthwein); (3) restoring the earliest attested form (Hebrew University Bible Project and others); restoring accepted texts (plural; James Sanders, Brevard Childs); (4) restoring final authoritative texts (Tov, Bruce Waltke, Brotzman, and Tully); or (5) restoring all various literary editions of the OT (Eugene Ulrich).

Because this is crucial to the study of OT textual criticism, Appendix B is an essential addition to the revised edition. However, I wonder if the authors have bought in too quickly to the modern assumption that there may be multiple authoritative OT texts, an idea that appears to have been popularized by Emanuel Tov. One of Tov’s crucial pieces of evidence was that 4QJerb, which

author’s meaning at critical junctions (e.g., p. 45, line 13; p. 77, line 5; p. 304, line 8). In several instances, the Greek υ is unfortunately replaced by θ, resulting in χρθσίου (p. 100 n. 90), γαζοφθλακιος, αθλη, and θησαθρος (p. 288 n. 173); and a dagesh is omitted from נאשש (p. 252 n. 36).

These errors do not substantially detract from an impressive study of the economics of the Persian period and its significance for biblical texts. Biblical scholars of Ezra–Nehemiah, ancient historians, and scholars interested in applying social-science methods in biblical studies will profit from this volume.

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