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Book Review: Social and Economic Life in Second Temple Judea/The Wealth of Nations: A Tradition-Historical Study/The Sacred Economy of Ancient Israel.

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Book Reviews

Samuel L. Adams, *Social and Economic Life in Second Temple Judea* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2014). Pp. xiv + 252. Paper \$35.

Michael J. Chan, *The Wealth of Nations: A Tradition-Historical Study* (FAT; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015). Pp. 300. €85.

Roland Boer, *The Sacred Economy of Ancient Israel* (Library of Ancient Israel; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2015). Pp. xx + 312. \$50.

The study of Israelite economies has seen a surge of interest in recent years. Each of the three volumes under review here covers a distinct aspect of the economic world of the Hebrew Bible.

Adams provides a broad overview of social and economic life in Second Temple Judea through four chapters of descriptive themes and a cumulative ethical assessment of wealth and poverty. The book includes a bibliography and multiple indexes. A. states his hope: “By taking up topics like marriage gifts, borrowing and lending, and taxation, our discussion will provide an overview of economic life, with fresh insights from relevant biblical texts, including passages and entire books that do not receive enough attention in this regard” (p. 2).

In chap. 1, “Family Life and Marriage,” A. examines economic roles at the household level. He describes the paradigmatic “patrimonial household model,” a concept that connected Second Temple repatriates to preexilic families. Throughout the Second Temple period, the dominance of the patrimonial household had a great economic impact on marriage, specifically in the preference for endogamous marriage, as assumed in biblical texts (e.g., Ezra-Nehemiah, Ruth, Malachi), deuterocanonical works (e.g., Tobit), and Pseudepigrapha (e.g., *Jubilees*) as an economically protective strategy. Understanding this view helps to illuminate the marriage prohibitions of Ezra 9-10.

In chap. 2, “The Status of Women and Children,” A. examines what he views as a neglected topic. Despite the bias of the textual and artefactual evidence toward the work of men, particularly elite men, women played an important part in the economy. Widows faced

particularly acute problems because they lacked both property and communal identity. Children functioned as “small-scale adults,” doing chores and contributing to the household in ways that made them suitable for future economic activities of labor and marriage. From as early as age six, boys performed agricultural tasks while learning their father’s trade. There is little information in the biblical literature about the lives of Second Temple daughters, though they likely assisted in multiple domestic chores and in the care of younger siblings. Daughters, even in elite circles, did not have the same educational opportunities as sons.

In chap. 3, “Work and Financial Exchanges,” A. transitions from the household to the broader economic landscape. Most of the population engaged in some aspect of farming. The increased social stratification during the Second Temple period resulted in a higher vocational status for the priesthood and scribalism. Financial transactions were largely limited to the patrilocal economic system of subsistence and transfers of wealth via taxation. Trade and debt also occurred outside local networks, opening new avenues of exploitation.

In chap. 4, “Taxation and the Role of the State,” A. takes an explicitly diachronic approach to the topic through the various political contexts of Second Temple Judea. He briefly introduces theoretical models from S. N. Eisenstadt and Gerhard Lenski and then proceeds to describe taxation systems of the Persian, Ptolemaic, Seleucid, Hasmonean, and Roman periods. Each of these systems operated in a complex matrix of political factors, in which the needs of the state drove the taxation, which impacted all levels of the economy.

Drawing primarily from sapiential and apocalyptic literature in chap. 5, “The Ethics of Wealth and Poverty,” A. steps back from the historical investigation. The texts he considers here provide a variety of perspectives on topics such as wealth, greed, diligence, and honesty. Apocalyptic eschatological texts such as 4QInstruction demonstrate the common motif of material reversal of fortune reaching fulfillment in a future eschaton. The reality of oppressive imperial taxation and the challenges of subsistence farming at least partially fostered these traditions. This is a crucial part of the social context for late Second Temple texts regarding wealth and poverty.

Adams presents an informed, readable treatment of this chronologically vast topic, while nuancing the dynamic changes within the Second Temple period. For example, while discussing dowry, he outlines the epigraphic evidence for a chronological shift from bridal payments to dowry throughout the Second Temple period. This movement opens a wider discussion on socioeconomic conditions, in which Adams draws on the work of Tracy Lemos, suggesting that increased social stratification led to the shift from bridal gift to dowry, a pattern evident in cultural anthropological studies. A. consistently makes judicious use of philology, studies of material culture, and anthropology in order to construct a clearer picture of the socioeconomic world of the Second Temple. In addition, I appreciate the attention to the marginalized, less-documented groups of women and children. They were important figures in the social world, and attention to their economically challenged existence is a welcome and all-too-rare occurrence in Second Temple scholarship.

One minor suggestion would be more explicit attention to the diasporic element of the Second Temple. In particular, A. begins his book with Neh 5:4 and its social context of a marginalized repatriate community living in tension with local Judeans all under a hegemonic Persian empire. Both historical and anthropological evidence points to diaspora as a

pervasive force in the Judean Second Temple socioeconomic world whether through repatriates in Judea or voluntary migrations to Ptolemaic Egypt. A. deals with this in the analysis of Ezra 9-10, though one would like to see this discussion more explicitly in every chapter. But this is a very minor suggestion, and A. deftly fulfills his stated aim in producing an overview of the socioeconomic landscape. The text strikes a great balance between readability and thorough documentation of secondary sources, making the volume an excellent addition for students and scholars.

In *The Sacred Economy of Ancient Israel*, Roland Boer utilizes social-scientific theories to articulate a framework for Israel's economy. He highlights various expressions of Marxism, namely, World Systems Theory, the work of Karl Polanyi, Soviet-era Marxism, and the work of Mario Liverani, but he draws primarily from the Annales offshoot of regulation theory. B. argues that ancient Near Eastern socioeconomic life revolved around continued series of crises and that regulation theory highlights the multiple regulation strategies in response to these crises.

Regulation theory has fallen out of favor with anthropologists due to the growing recognition of nongovernmental factors that influence an economy. But B. accommodates these weaknesses in recognizing the myriad unofficial channels that influence economic life, including factors such as regulatory culture. This adjustment is crucial, as B. argues that the promotion of a sacred ideology serves to enforce extractive economic measures, a novel strategy that emerged in the Iron Age IIA.

Boer outlines the different strategies of economic regulation through a broad chronological frame. In chap. 2, he describes the mechanics of basic subsistence agriculture, largely neglected with so much archaeological and epigraphic evidence arising from royal and elite contexts. In contrast to grand palatial economies, B. argues that subsistence strategies dominated the common economic landscape, particularly the marginal economic zones. Subsistence strategies prioritized diversification and risk aversion, and the choice of surplus over luxuries guarded against future years of crisis. Such regulations concentrated on longevity and survival across generations with land as the central aspect of the economy, but subsistence does not necessitate a closed economy devoid of trade. Rather, B. points out that subsistence can involve other economic movements such as taxes and tribute for the nonproducers.

Subsistence strategies require an allocative economic unit, which chap. 3 presents as "Clans, Households, and Patrons." Although kinship is originally based on blood, B. argues that Active forms can alter and revise the boundaries of kinship. This malleability of kinship often emerges in genealogical materials such as the patriarchal narratives. B. also identifies the institutional form of patronage, well known in Roman society (see particularly Carl H. Lande, *Leaders, Factions, and Parties: The Structure of Philippine Politics* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964] and Richard Sailer, *Personal Patronage under the Early Empire* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982]), but with less attention to ancient Israel (though see Gary Stansell, "How Abraham Became Rich," in *Ancient Israel: The Old Testament in Its Social Context* [ed. Philip F. Esler; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006] for preliminary studies). Genesis 14 displays a form of patronage with the clan leader Abraham, who draws 318 men to battle to recover Lot and his household. Such patronage may eventually operate as a form of regulation leading to extraction.

In chap. 4, “Feeding the Nonproducers, or (E)states,” B. emphasizes the mechanics of one-way exchange both locally (estates) and imperially (states). Here, as might be expected, one finds the most explicit Marxist language. B. states that during subsistence times, simple surplus did not sufficiently meet the needs of the nonlaboring classes; therefore, agricultural estates were developed in places like Sumer and Ur. By drawing on Marxian definitions of class, delineated by access to means of production, B. argues that religious institutions aid this movement toward greater extraction in three forms: the need to provide for priests, which in turn keeps the gods satisfied, the political myth of the founding of the state, and new forms of religious extraction. These factors converge to mark a major change over the long term: the state-estate was a primary form through the second millennium, though at the beginning of Iron Age II, the rise of empires placed tribute exchange as a dominant mode.

This discussion on one-way transfer sets up chap. 5, where simple one-directional transfer is now characterized as “The Many Faces of Plunder, or, Tribute-Exchange.” B. suggests that the Late Bronze Age empires faced internal limits of a fixed size and the danger of undermining the labor source with too much extraction. Thus, the transformation to greater institutional plunder was seen as a potential solution. Unlike estate economies, institutional plunder could cover wider geographic distances, thus bringing in necessary provision for the imperial power of the Neo-Assyrians, Neo-Babylonians, and then Persians. B. identifies the temple as a central vehicle for such plunder. In such an economy, trade primarily serves to build monarchical legitimization. Royal prestige value was more important than people’s daily subsistence.

In chap. 6, B. looks at recurring crises as well as the regimes that regulated them. Ancient Israel was often the object of conquest, and hints of resistance appear throughout biblical texts. B. concludes with eleven helpful excursuses, as well as a lengthy bibliography and three indexes.

One of the volume’s primary contributions is B.’s use of social-scientific theories as both an interpretive frame and a methodological control. In relying on diverse expressions of Marxism and presenting the emergence of these theories in their own intellectual context, B. provides a strong corrective of the implicit assumption of capitalism that has plagued biblical scholarship. One particular insight is B.’s criticism of the theoretical dominance of *Homo economicus* making rational decisions, whereas history shows a pattern of disastrous decisions, particularly by rulers, who overtax to the point of depletion.

Another major contribution of the book is the explicit reintegration of economic and religious life. Although these two worlds are theoretically separable in our scholarship, and even necessarily so in advancing knowledge, the idea of a “sacred economy” emphasizes that the people of ancient Israel lived in an integrated world. B. demonstrates such awareness in connecting the religious institutions to the economic crises and regulations. He realizes that plunder in the name of the sacred has a long history before the first millennium, but that it fully flourishes in the Neo-Assyrian empire with the development of imperial armies. Aside from expected vehicles of temple and debt, B. identifies international trade of empires as a more disguised form of “elite plunder.”

In light of B.’s own stated concerns about theoretical control, I have less criticism, but rather questions, specifically how non-Marxist approaches would interact with some of his

views on a sacred economy. Can Adam Smith, modified of course, help to clarify the role that supply and demand might play in the overarching economic mechanisms in Late Bronze Age trade or Phoenician ship routes? B. is right to criticize the overcapitalist analysis of markets, but perhaps some aspects of capitalism may still explain some of the evidence for socially disembedded exchange. Certain texts, while not indicating a complete market economy, may suggest meaningful elements of such an economy. Two examples may suffice. First, the example of the foreign widow in 2 Kgs 4:1-7 assumes that the most disenfranchised person in all of ancient Israel had the ability to exchange the commodity of oil to pay off debts to save her sons from forfeiture. This text suggests some economic freedom, at least in Iron Age Samaria. Second, studies by Peter Temin ("Price Behavior in Ancient Babylon," *Explorations in Economic History* 39 [2002] 46-60) and Alice Slotsky (*The Bourse of Babylon: Market Quotations in the Astronomical Diaries of Babylonia* [Bethesda, MD: CDL, 1997]) show that fluctuations in prices during the late first millennium point toward a limited degree of market influence. Perhaps a nuanced capitalism with an emphasis on wants and limited supply may hint at these capitalist forces, even if they are greatly limited in comparison to other socially embedded factors.

Boer has written a hugely important and well-researched book. This is one of the sharpest critiques of the natural capitalist assumption as well as the disembodied temple, and discussions of the economics of ancient Israel will need to interact with B.'s arguments and his convincing contention that ancient Israel was indeed a sacred economy.

The City on a Hill: A Tradition-Historical Study of the Wealth of Nations Tradition, by Michael J. Chan, is a revised dissertation (Emory University, under the direction of Brent Strawn, 2013). C. employs a *traditionsgeschichtlich* approach to the theme of the "wealth of nations," which C. defines as follows: "The nations of the earth bring their wealth to a royal figure as an act of homage, honor, and submission" (p. 21). C.'s intent is twofold. First, he seeks to address this largely neglected theme, which covers multiple biblical periods and genres. Second, he expands *Traditionsgeschichte* to include iconographic traditions, following other scholars like Roelof van Straten (*An Introduction to Iconography* [trans. Patricia de Man; Documenting the Image 1; Yverdon: Gordon & Breach, 1994]) and Erwin Panofsky (*Studies in Iconology: Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance* [Boulder, CO: Westview, 1967]). For C., "[t]radition refers to ... concepts, notions, and constellations that are inherited from the broader intellectual environment" (p. 8). Thus, the inclusion of rich visual representations is necessary for understanding the larger intellectual world.

In chap. 2, C. gives a traditional analysis of a number of biblical texts, concentrating on the broad theme of the wealth of nations rather than on a specific lemma: 1 Kgs 10:1-10, 13, 15//2 Chr 9:1-9, 12, 14; 1 Kgs 10:23-25//2 Chr 9:22-24; Isa 18:7; 45:14; 66:12; Zeph 3:10; Pss 68:19, 29-32; 72:10-11; 76:12; 96:7-8//1 Chr 16:28-29; 2 Chr 32:23. C. carefully outlines ways in which the tradition of the wealth of nations is distinct from other related traditions, such as those focusing on temple building (see Victor Hurowitz, *I Have Built You an Exalted House: Temple Building in the Bible in the Light of Mesopotamian and North-West Semitic Writings* [JSOTSup 115; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992]) or pilgrimage (see Gerhard von Rad, "Die Stadt auf dem Berge," in idem, *Gesammelte Studien zum Alten Testament* [TBu 8; Munich: Kaiser, 1961] 214-24). C. extensively reviews the literature, analyzes the form, exegetes, and discusses the compositional history of each of these

passages. He is appropriately cautious in assigning dates to each text, though he still holds to a general flourishing of the wealth of nations tradition after the fall of Jerusalem. The end of the chapter includes a list of terms in the tradition of the wealth of nations.

In chap. 3, C. introduces material from written and visual ancient Near Eastern sources that pertain to the theme of the wealth of nations. Under the methodological influence of Othmar Keel and Joel LeMon, C. reviews a variety of monographic expressions of the theme in a variety of media, from monumental wall reliefs to smaller transportable items such as cylinder seals and ivories. An appendix of photographs and hand drawings supplements this series, though simple in-text figures within the chapter would have been more helpful to readers. The textual sources stem from a variety of genres and historical contexts, though C. indicates the dominance of the wealth of nations tradition during the Neo-Assyrian period, a clear contrast to the exilic and postexilic biblical examples.

In chap. 4, C. synthesizes the preceding chapters and makes broad observations on the development of the theme of the wealth of nations. C. describes the theme as a varied trope covering diverse social settings and indicates that its expressions in the Hebrew Bible are similarly multivalent. He asserts that the sheer volume of biblical examples from the Neo-Babylonian and Persian periods suggests that the defeat of the Davidic dynasty catalyzed the textualization of the wealth of nations tradition. This results in a few amendments to the tradition in the biblical text. First, Deuteronomic redactions cloud the theme of the wealth of nations, particularly in placing some blame on Solomon (1 Kings 10). Second, the tradition shifts the beneficiary from Israel to God and, in other cases, Zion. Both of these shifts occur in line with the general shift from kingly language in the wealth of nations tradition to an adaptation of a group experiencing political marginalization in light of exile and return. In this way, the theme, particularly in Isaiah 60-61 served to subvert Persian hegemony.

Chan's work follows the genre of doctoral dissertation in expected ways, and for the most part he executes it very well. The exegetical study of the wealth of nations passages in chap. 2 is an enormous undertaking, and C. is thorough in his review, covering North American and Continental scholarship. C.'s work highlights the significance of the wealth of nations tradition and the importance of this project. Congruent with the aims of the book, the incorporation of iconographic images adds a significant component to the presentation of the wealth of nations tradition throughout Israel's cultural heritage.

I would have wished for more balance between the biblical texts and the ancient Near Eastern materials. In pure page count, chap. 2 offers 129 pages on the biblical materials, which is more than twice the size of chap. 3, on the ancient Near Eastern materials, despite the fact that the latter surveys both iconography and texts. For example, C. provides a detailed analysis of the iconography of the Black Obelisk, yet, except for a footnote, he makes no mention of the actual inscription, despite the rare historical reference to an Israelite king and the incorporation of multiple elements of the wealth of nations tradition within the Neo-Assyrian royal inscription.

A more comprehensive review of the ancient Near Eastern epigraphic tradition with reference to the wealth of nations may also nuance C.'s conclusion that the bulk of the materials pertaining to this theme appeared in the exilic and postexilic periods. C. is right to see the wealth of nations tradition as a subversive device against Persian hegemony, though perhaps such subversion also arose against the Neo-Assyrian empire and was redeployed against the Persian empire during postexilic era. Nevertheless, C.'s work is an

impressive contribution to biblical economies in both its investigation of this neglected theme and the effort to combine textual and monographic analysis.

The arrival of the three volumes reviewed here signals a burgeoning interest in the economics of the biblical world and the need for continued dialogue over a variety of related issues. One can hope that this stream of scholarship will continue to benefit the field of biblical studies.

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