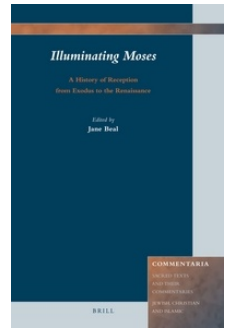
Illuminating Moses: A History of Reception from Exodus to the Renaissance, edited by Jane Beal



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This volume offers a wide spectrum of studies which all focus on the portrayal of Moses in the Hebrew Bible and beyond. In a solid introduction, the editor Jane Beal offers a brief biography of Moses, as told in the Hebrew Bible. She further introduces the volume and summarizes the articles.

Robert D. Miller II locates three different portrayals of Moses within the Pentateuch and argues that they are tied in with the different communities responsible for the different textual strands. The earliest portrayal, stemming from the northern kingdom of Israel, presents Moses as an alternative to the

Jerusalem monarchy. The intermediate portrayal, located in the exilic book of Deuteronomy, prefers a heroic Moses which could serve as a (failed) model. Finally, the Moses of the post-exilic priestly source depicts a man who died for his own and well as other people's sins. In order to reach these results, Miller begins with a brief survey of scholarship on the life of Moses and on the development of the Moses narrative. After discussing the approaches of Gerhard von Rad and John Van Seters, Miller concludes that the quest for the historical Moses is futile; instead it is more fruitful to explore the historical communities behind the extant textual portrayals of him. This quest leads him to the realm of folklore and myth and to the theories of Otto Rank, Joseph Campbell, and Lord Raglan, who each presents Moses as a type of mythic hero on a journey: the Rankean "saved child" who returns to overthrow Pharaoh, the "hero" of Campbell's theory who leaves his homeland in order to reach the promised land, and Lord Raglan's "hero" who falls out of divine favour and dies alone on a mountain top.

Tawny Holm investigates how the Former Prophets, the Latter Prophets, and the Writings understood the figure of Moses differently and used him for different purposes. Beginning with the DtrH, Holm notes that the book of Joshua refers to Moses by far the most. Moses is used to show continuity with the exodus-conquest narrative and to clarify that Joshua did everything that Moses had commanded him to do. In the rest of the DtrH, Moses is mentioned infrequently and primarily in conjunction with references to the law. Likewise, Moses is relatively insignificant in the prophetic literature which features his name only five times. He is an intercessor (Jer 15:1) and part of the leadership team who brought the people out of Egypt (Isa 63:11, 12; Micah 6:4). He is finally the recipient of the law according to Mal 3:22. Moses appears more frequently in the Writings. In the Psalter, Moses is again an intercessor (Ps 99:6). In contrast, Daniel and Ezra-Nehemiah depict him primarily as the recipient of the Law and as the founder of the Israelite cult. Notably, this portrayal of Moses as the founding father of the Israelite religious institutions differs from the depiction of him in the Pentateuch where his brother Aaron dominates the cultic realm as the High Priest. In addition, Moses's prophetic role is enhanced in the material outside of the Pentateuch.

Larry J. Swain explores the portrayals of Moses in the writings of Paul, Matthew's Gospel, John's Gospel, and the Epistle to the Hebrews. Swain begins by noting that Moses is by far the most important Hebrew Bible character in the NT, something which reflects his importance in early Christianity. For Paul, Moses is primarily the mediator of the Law. In fact, although it is

often difficult to distinguish between Paul's understanding of the Law and Paul's depiction of Moses, Swain emphasizes the importance of making such a distinction. Paul depicts Moses as a mystical figure who in many respects functions as a symbol for the people of Israel, in contrast to Jesus who represents the Christians. The covenant of Moses is a faint foreshadowing of the covenant of Christ. Turning to Matthew's Gospel, Swain demonstrates that the birth, life, teaching, and death of Moses function as typologies for Jesus. Jesus is depicted as the inheritor of Moses's authority and as his successor. In a similar way, John's Gospel depicts Jesus as fulfilling and ultimately surpassing Moses: "Moses was good and the Law God-given, but Jesus is better" (75). Finally, Hebrews compares Moses with Jesus and again reaches the same conclusion as Matthew and John: "Moses is faithful; Moses is head of the house as a servant. Jesus, too, is faithful, but faithful as a son" (79). In these different yet also similar ways, the New Testament writers make clear that Jesus is a new Moses who supersedes the earlier one in the Hebrew Bible.

Christopher A. Hall continues in the same vein as he investigates the ways in which the Church Fathers portrayed Moses. He opens with a discussion of the Church Fathers' conundrum vis-à-vis the Hebrew Bible: in response to the claims by various other Christian groups such as the Marcionites who rejected its authority, they had to make sense of the Hebrew Bible and to show that it was an integral part of Christian Scripture. The way forward was to transpose and adapt the story of Moses to the story of Jesus. The Church Fathers walked a tight-rope between on the one hand praising Moses and thus emphasizing continuity, and on the other hand pointing out his failings in order to stress Jesus's newness and superiority. They also resorted to typology in that key actions of Moses became prefigurations of Jesus. For instance, Moses's position with his arms outstretched during the battle against Amalek which ensured Israelite victory came to foreshadow Jesus's outstretched arms on the cross. Even more so, the whole exodus event was understood as a type for Jesus's death and resurrection. In the same way, the bronze serpent in the wilderness and the transformation of Moses's rod into a serpent were connected with Jesus's death on the cross. Finally, Moses's near death and miraculous survival as an infant was interpreted allegorically: Pharaoh's daughter symbolizes the Gentile church which rescues Moses (a symbol of the Law) in the water of baptism. In this way, the Church Fathers made clear that the Moses narrative, in fact the entire narrative of the Hebrew Bible, culminated in Jesus. When they read about Moses in the Hebrew Bible, Christian readers are meant to discover Jesus.

Luciana Cuppo-Csaki explores the presence of Moses in select Christian texts, ranging from 300 to 600 CE, which connect Passover with Easter. The chosen texts represent a range of Christian traditions, with focus on the Irish and the Roman. In these texts, two questions dominate the discourse. First, should the celebration of Easter follow the Jewish celebration of Passover? Expressed differently, how should the church convert the Jewish lunar calendar into the Greek or Roman solar calendar? Secondly, should Easter predominantly be a celebration of Jesus's resurrection on Easter Sunday or rather a remembrance of Jesus's suffering and death on Good Friday? Cuppo-Csaki begins by looking at the writings of Anatolius of Laodicea who was held in high esteem in Irish culture. His writings follow the Eastern tradition which emphasizes Jesus's resurrection and he refers implicitly to Moses and Aaron as he seeks to uphold the calendrical link between Passover and Easter. In contrast, Columbanus of Bobbio, also belonging to the Irish tradition, mentions Moses in his writings yet reaches the opposite conclusion: the church cannot follow the Jewish calendar because the Jews, now without a temple, cannot celebrate Passover as God intended it to be celebrated. Turning to the Roman tradition, Cuppo-Csaki notes that MS Lucca 490 states that the Church should not "celebrate with the Jews." In contrast, Dionysius Exiguus, adhering to the Greek school of Alexandria, advocated fidelity to the Mosaic tradition and thus insisted that the church should seek to establish the first of Nisan and to celebrate Easter on that date.

Howard Kreisel surveys the role of Moses in mediaeval Jewish philosophy. He covers a wide range of philosophers who all sought, each in his own way, to understand the nature of prophecy and divine revelation. They were all influenced by the religious-intellectual ideas and philosophical traditions prevalent in their times. At the same time, as Jews they needed to explain how the Torah was perfect and constituted God's true speech. Many of them, among them Saadia Gaon, accepted the prevalent notion that God is incorporeal. How, then, could Moses see him "face-to-face"? Further, what does it mean that God "spoke," given that he has no body and thus no ability to form sounds? Going one step further, Judah Halevi rejected the idea of a personal God who played a role in history. Prophecy was thus an emanation from the Active Intellect to the rational human intellect. Even so, in order to remain faithful to Judaism, he conceded that God's revelation to Moses on Sinai was an exception. Going yet one step further, Maimonides argued that prophecy could only be perceived by a person of perfect intellect and imagination. The sounds of prophecy were products of his own imagination

as a result of the emanation from the Active Intellect. Likewise, Nissim of Marseilles understood the voice at Sinai as Moses's own voice: Moses, the perfect human being, wrote the Torah as the result of prophetic illumination (rather than as the result of hearing God's voice). Along similar lines, Levi Gersonides understood the Torah to be the product of the impersonal activity of the Active Intellect (rather than of personal divine communication). In contrast, the later Hasdai Crescas treated prophecy as a combination of the natural and the supernatural, as he insisted that Moses received prophecies directly from God. Spinoza ultimately removed the interpretation of the Hebrew Bible from philosophy, claiming that the biblical texts are not concerned with philosophical truths. On the contrary, they form a political treaty which advocates theocracy. Moreover, the people of ancient Israel understood God to have feelings and prophecy to be God's actual words.

Rachel S. Mikva explores the portrayal of Moses in what is often called the "Minor Midrashim," namely *The Chronicles of Moses*, *Midrash vaYosha*, and *Midrash Petirat Mosheh*, which expand on the biblical material and turn the exodus narrative into an epic and a romance. Mikva investigates, among other matters, what factors and processes triggered and also enabled these transformations of the biblical narrative. In short, she argues that there are "gaps" within the biblical text which demand to be filled. Mikva looks at four key areas: Moses's birth, Moses and Pharaoh's crown, Moses's escape from Egypt, and Moses's return to Egypt. In the case of Moses's birth, for example, *Midrash vaYosha* transforms the biblical narrative in order to highlight God's omnipotence and care for Israel: what a casual reader may understand to be a mere coincidence is, in fact, a divine miracle. As for Moses's return to Egypt, *Midrash vaYosha* writes that Jethro had stipulated that Moses and Zipporah's second son would not be circumcised but instead be brought up to worship idols. This stipulation helps to explain not only why Moses decided to return to Egypt but also the incident on the road where Zipporah saved their lives by circumcising her son. Mikva also highlights how these Minor Midrashim turn Moses into a romantic hero. *The Chronicles of Moses*, for instance, depicts Moses as a military hero and has him marrying the widow queen of Ethiopia. Mikva concludes by arguing that the origin of these "romantic" transformations of Moses is situated in the synagogue, rooted in and triggered by exegetical concerns. Furthermore, although these expansions contain folk-motifs and, as such, testify to Jewish participation within the surrounding wider culture, they are given a distinct Jewish flavour in order to fit their Jewish audience.

Devorah Schoenfeld explores the two main ways in which the Hebrew Bible, Rabbinic midrash, and the later mediaeval Jewish exegetes understood Moses's culpability in his own death. Beginning with the biblical records, Num 20:13 explains Moses's premature death (i.e., before he was able to enter into the Promised Land) as the result of his sin when striking the rock. In contrast, Deut 1–4 depicts Moses as arguing that his death is the result not of his own sin but of the sins of the people of Israel. These two contrasting explanations co-exist also in the midrashic literature. While the earlier *Sifre* does not question God's justice but instead attributes the reason for Moses's death to his own sin, the later *Midrash Tanhuma* and *Deuteronomy Rabbah* portray Moses as pleading his case before God, claiming that though he had sinned, it would be reasonable for God to forgive him, just as he forgave Israel who had sinned so much more. Finally, Schoenfeld shows that these two exegetical traditions are to be found also in mediaeval Jewish exegesis. While Rashi and his fellow interpreters in Provence emphasized Moses's culpability, the exegetes belonging to the Spanish tradition, in particular Nahmanides but also Rabbenu Asher and Abravanel, and to a certain degree also Abraham ibn Ezra, stressed the notion that Israel's sin caused Moses's untimely death and, as such, upheld the tradition of theodicy.

Gernot Wieland explores the attitudes towards Moses in Anglo-Saxon literature. He begins by looking at a trio of Anglo-Latin writers: Alcuin, Aldhelm, and Bede. In each case, Wieland cites the Latin text and his own English translation of the relevant passages. He notes that in all three cases, Moses is neglected and to a certain extent also criticized. Alcuin conveys the impression that Moses is a less-than-successful leader who towards the end of his life felt that he had failed to lead the people properly. Aldhelm is not openly critical yet the very sparse references to Moses reveal a certain reluctance to speak about him. Bede is most openly hostile to Moses, stating that Moses's writing falls short of the ideal as his account of the creation failed to take the participation of the Son into account! Turning to Old English poetry such as the *Exodus*, *Andreas*, and *Elene*, Wieland notes a similar tendency. Moses is associated with the Law and blamed for his failure to foreshadow Christianity. Wieland concludes that Moses was so strongly identified with Judaism and the Torah that he could not easily be transformed into a type for Jesus: "he is not allowed entry into the New Testament through the doorway of typology and he was not allowed entry into the Promised Land" (209).

Deborah L. Goodwin explores how mediaeval Christian commentators understood and evaluated Moses, with focus on the reasons behind God's

decision not to allow Moses to enter into the Promised Land. She demonstrates that an exegete's evaluation of Moses was often tied to his own understanding of the Torah and its role in God's salvific plan for humanity. Beginning with Augustine as a representative of the Latin tradition, Goodwin highlights how Augustine, in the *City of God*, treated Moses's failure to reach the Promised Land as a symbol of the inadequacies of the Old Law. In other contexts, Augustine explores Moses's failures as leader and uses him as a model for the individual Christian's struggles. The rest of the article focuses on the portrayal of Moses in Peter Comestor's *Historia Scholastica*. Goodwin argues that Comestor drew not only from Josephus's account of Moses but also from Mediaeval Jewish commentators with whom Comestor may have met and discussed. In particular, there are parallels between Rashbam's and Comestor's suggestions that Moses struck the rock as an expression of his doubt. Further, both commentators postulate that Moses was punished for the sins of the people rather than for any sin of his own. These influences from Jewish sources may, in turn, have caused Comestor to preserve a more positive portrayal of Moses than what is found in other contemporaneous Christian sources. Comestor understood Moses, the giver of the Old Law, as a heroic figure and as a worthy forerunner of Jesus, the new lawgiver.

Franklin T. Harkins discusses the ways in which Thomas Aquinas employs the figure of Moses in his *Summa theologiae*. First and foremost, Thomas saw himself as a teacher, and he presents Moses as a source and model for his own theological work. According to Thomas, Moses was *primus doctor Iudaeorum*, i.e., the first teacher of the Jews whose main task was to share with Israel his knowledge about God and Law in an erudite yet also pedagogical manner. Thomas portrays Moses as an "effective Master of sacred doctrine" (240) whose understanding of the divine surpassed that of the prophets because God spoke to him "face to face" (Exod 33:11). In particular, assuming Mosaic authorship of Genesis, Thomas presents Moses as a teacher of the doctrine of creation and as a competent instructor who adapts his teaching to the level of his pupils. Moses omits more complex insights from his teaching because his audience—Israel—would not have been able to understand it. Instead he uses language and symbols that were fitting to his audience's capabilities. Thomas further presents Moses as wise teacher in the doctrine of Christ, in the sense that the Old Law was given by God (1) as a witness of the future saviour and (2) as a guide to a life pleasing to God which, in turn, would prepare the followers of the Law for the later worship of Christ. Finally, Thomas presents Moses as a skilled teacher who is able to teach his less

learned students to draw conclusions from principles, a task which Thomas himself considered to be a teacher's prime function.

Gail Ivy Berlin discusses the mostly negative portrayals of Moses that are presented in Middle English biblical literature, in the mystery play cycles, and in Willian Langland's vision report *Piers Plowman B*. She begins by noting that Moses is a "split figure" (263) in the sense that, on the one hand, he is the bringer of God's law and thus to be honoured, while on the other hand, as the purveyor of the Mosaic Law, Moses is associated with ritual sacrifices and with harsh punishments such as stoning and thus a problematic and disturbing figure. Moses, having lived in the pre-Christ era, is further associated with sin and with a time under a deficient law which had not yet been fulfilled by Jesus. The people are sinful because although they have the Law, they do not obey it. Berlin begins by exploring the portrayal of Moses (his life, his laws, and his figurative value) in verse and prose retellings of the Bible. She concludes that Moses is revered because God chose him to be the recipient of the Old Law. However, as the representative of that same deficient Law, he cannot be trusted. Berlin reveals that the Mystery Plays display a similar set of attitudes. In some plays the audience are encouraged to side with Moses against Pharaoh, yet the same audience is subsequently led to side with Jesus as the giver of the New Law against Moses as the giver of the Old Law. In other plays, the Decalogue is Christianised in the sense that Jesus is presented as having written it prior to Moses. The triune God inspired Moses to write it, a claim which effectively disassociates Moses from the Law. In yet other cases, Moses himself is Christianised, resulting in plays that are intensely anti-Jewish: Moses is turned into an anti-Jewish Christian preacher who blames the Jews for failing to understand that the Old Law spoke about Jesus. The situation is similar in *Piers Plowman* where Moses is Christianised by being portrayed as Hope alongside Abraham who goes under the name Faith. Both Old Testament characters are positive characters, yet they cannot function without Love (i.e., Jesus). The interaction between the three figures is played out in a retelling of the Good Samarian. Faith and Hope both fail to help the wounded man whereas only Charity/Love is capable of true compassion.

Jane Beal's substantial contribution explores the manifold uses of Moses as a model in Christian contemplative literature, whom those in the contemplative life should seek to emulate. On the basis of the account of the burning bush (Exod 3) and the reception of the Law (Exod 19, 20, 24), Moses is understood as having sought and experienced the presence of God and as hav-

ing had an intimate relationship with him. Beal discusses systematically and chronologically a wide range of authors. Beginning with Late Antiquity, Beal surveys the use and significance of Moses in the writings of especially Origen, Pseudo-Dionysius, and Egeria. Her discussion of Egeria's *Itinerarium*, for example, highlights how Egeria identified with Moses throughout her pilgrimage to Sinai and the Holy Land. Turning to the High Middle Ages, Beal shows how Bernard of Clairvaux portrays Moses as a model that he and his Cistercian brothers would do well to imitate: humble and compassionate yet at the same time also powerful and influential. In a very different way, Beal reveals how Hildegard of Bingen employs the words of Moses as the means to lend authority and authenticity to her own visionary experiences. Beal also explores the ways in which Bonventure used Moses as a type for both Jesus and St Francis. Moving to the contemplative authors of the Late Middle Ages, among them Birgitta of Sweden and Meister Eckhart, Beal highlights that Birgitta employed Moses alongside Mary as male and female models of humility. Further, Beal explains the curious lack of references to Moses in contemporaneous contemplative English writings as the result of the expulsion of the Jews from England in 1290: the importance of Moses in Jewish thinking had simply no impact in England. Beal further discusses the ways in which the Dutch *Biblia pauperum* depict various events in Moses's life as prefiguring key event in Jesus's life. Finally, Beal investigates the contemplative writings of the Counter-Reformation (Teresa of Avila and St John of the Cross) and how it referred to Moses as a model for the Bride of Christ and for the ascent of the soul whereby the soul is joined with Christ in spiritual matrimony.

Brett Foster concludes the volume with another substantial article which reviews and discusses the diverse and often conflicting portrayals of Moses found in the literature of the Renaissance and beyond. The opening and closing sections of the article are devoted to the depiction of Moses in Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Foster argues that the many allusions to Moses throughout the poem must be understood against the background of the overall treatment of Moses in Renaissance literature. For Milton, Moses was a visionary model, a fellow writer and poet, and a pioneering figure worthy of imitation. The rest of the article surveys chronologically the references to Moses in key works of literature. Among other things, Foster discusses the relatively negative view of Moses found in the Elizabethan double agent Richard Baines's so-called "Baines Note" which attributes heretical statements to the English playwright Christopher Marlowe. Marlowe is said to have called Moses a

charlatan who did not have the kind of (magical) powers that the Bible assigns to him. Foster then analyses the ways that the Gospels and the writings of Paul portray Moses, as well as how Moses was understood and evaluated by the reformers Calvin and Luther and also by the English Bible translator William Tyndale. Foster notes how they all depend upon the evaluation of Moses in the New Testament, yet they also differ from one another in their overall estimation of him. In fact, their views of Moses do, to a certain extent, reflect their own concerns. While Luther tends to regard Moses as a figure of the Law and, as such, a figure of bondage and death, Calvin commends Moses for recording the Law and for being an impartial leader, and Tyndale praises Moses for having communicated God's truth in the language of the people (Hebrew). Foster further explores the literary uses of Moses in English Renaissance literature (e.g., in the writings of John Bale, Edmund Spenser, and George Herbert) and notes that English monarchs such as Henry VIII and Elizabeth I have been likened to Moses. Foster concludes by surveying the various depictions of Moses in the writings of the Counter-Reformation and Renaissance Rome (e.g., Machiavelli) and in the art of Rome (e.g., the Sistine Chapel and the statue of Moses at Pope Sixtus V's Acqua Felice).

The volume concludes with a bibliography and a Subject Index. This is a very fine volume and all the articles are of a consistently high standard. It can be highly recommended.

Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer
University of Aberdeen