

Israel and the Assyrians. Deuteronomy, the Succession Treaty of Esarhaddon, and the nature of subversion, by Carly L. Crouch. Ancient Near East Monographs 8. Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2014, 238 pages, US\$ 32.95 (paperback), ISBN (13) 978-1-62837-025-6.

In this book (which is also available as a free download at http://www.sbl-site.org/publications/Books_ANEMonographs.aspx) Carly L. Crouch, lecturer in Hebrew Bible at the University of Nottingham, challenges the widespread view that Deuteronomy is written to subvert Assyrian imperial power and ideology, and, especially, that the Succession Treaty of Esarhaddon (VTE) is subverted by Deut 28 and 13. The line of argument is very clear and straightforward.

After a short introduction on the relevance of the issue and the state of research, Crouch deals in the first chapter with the nature of subversion. The main point is that it belongs to the nature of subversion that it must be recognisable as such, which means that the audience must be able to recognise the allusions to the subverted item. The more specific the source is the more specific allusions are required. An important part of this chapter is the question regarding how allusions can be signalled through translation. The effort of giving clear signals must be even higher than if the subverted text and the subverting text are written in the same language. In short: Deuteronomy must signal a relationship with its source and the audience must know the source. Otherwise, subversion would fail.

In Chapter Two, Crouch examines Deuteronomy's relationship with VTE, whereby the focus is on Deut 28 and 13. In a close comparison of the usual texts, she shows that the connections between the texts are neither specific nor distinctive enough to signal a relationship between Deuteronomy and VTE: "even if Deuteronomy were inspired by VTE, it is clearly not concerned to signal this relationship to its audience" (p. 59). Crouch also deals with the argument of sequential similarities of Deuteronomy and VTE (see esp. Deut 28:23–24, 26–33 and VTE §§ 39–42). However, even there the sequence is not identical, the accordances appear as randomly selected VTE passages, and the divergences produce no meaning. At least,

there are two formulations in Deut 13 that might be directly linked to VTE, namely אהיך בן אמך and *ahhēšu mar'ē ummišu*, as well as דבר סרה and *dabābu surrātu*. However, it is difficult to see these accordances as part of a subversive message: “For purposes of subversion [...] the question is not merely whether this Hebrew phrase may be traced to an Akkadian one, but whether the phrase would have signaled an intention for the audience to interpret Deuteronomy’s meaning in relation to Assyrian ideas about loyalty to the Assyrian sovereign” (p. 90). Thus, it is very unlikely that Deuteronomy intended to be read and understood as a subversion of the Assyrian ideology of VTE.

Chapter Three widens the investigation from VTE to Assyrian treaties and oaths in general: are there “recognizable affinities between Deuteronomy and the specifically Assyrian form” (p. 96) of such texts? After a short introduction to treaties, loyalty oaths, and curses in the whole ancient Near Eastern tradition, Crouch again turns to Deut 28 and 13. The focus in Deut 28 is on the curse tradition, where she shows that Deuteronomy’s curses do not have any specific affinities to Assyrian curses; rather the curse material “locates Deuteronomy in a conceptual world that is broadly ancient Near Eastern” (p. 117). The same applies to Deut 13, where similar material can also be found in Hittite and Aramean texts. The issue that an entire city might be disloyal (Deut 13:13–19) is not even apparent in the Assyrian material, while it is in Sefire III and in two Hittite treaties. Crouch’s conclusion is convincing: “While clearly related to wider ancient Near Eastern treaty, loyalty oath, and curse traditions, neither Deut 13 nor 28 use Assyrian ideas or concepts in a way which renders this material recognizable as the referent of deliberate signaling on the part of Deuteronomy” (p. 124).

This raises the question whether it might be that the audience of Deuteronomy was not familiar with the entire tradition of ancient Near Eastern treaties and therefore might have understood any affinities to such treaties in Assyrian terms. In Chapter Four, Crouch investigates Deuteronomy in the context of the entire biblical tradition: “If [...] there are regular references to treaty, loyalty oath, and curse material in non-Assyrian terms, then it is reasonable to suppose that Deuteronomy’s audience had a

more general familiarity with this type of material” (p. 127). Thus, Crouch turns to Deut 28 and 13 for a third time and examines whether there are certain terms or concepts that would have been unfamiliar to its audience. To give an example: the common vocabulary of VTE and Deut 28:23–24 is extremely general: “Iron and bronze are paired in dozens of passages and heaven and earth appear together on hundreds of occasions. Even all four terms together are not unique to Deut 28:23; the quartet appears also in Lev 26:19 (cf. Dan 4:12 [...]; Mic 4:13; Job 28:2)” (p. 132). Regarding Deut 13:7 Crouch shows that the concept of the brother who is specified as the son of the mother is not only attested in VTE but also in Ugarit and in a number of biblical passages. More striking is the formulation דבר סרה (Deut 13:6) which might be related to VTE §57 *dabābu surrātu*. Taken by itself, both words are quite common, yet in combination they are not. Nevertheless, Crouch is completely right when she adds for consideration: “To see in the Hebrew דבר סרה an adaptation of an Akkadian *dabābu surrātu*, intended to carry the weight of Deuteronomy’s allusion to an Assyrian treaty and loyalty oath tradition or text, is to ask a great deal of two isolated words” (p. 145). In sum, the contents of Deut 28 and 13 are completely understandable in Israel’s own context and there is no reason to assume that the audience of Deuteronomy would have interpreted them against an Assyrian background.

In the fifth chapter, Crouch discusses several questions regarding the availability, language and function of assumed Assyrian treaties to a Judahite audience. Despite the recent discovery of a copy of VTE outside the Assyrian capitals at Tell Tayinat, no treaty is still found outside the Assyrian provincial territory and J. Lauinger, who published the Tell Tayinat text, suggested “that any Assyrian-Judahite treaty would have been kept in Assyria” (p. 148). If the availability of Assyrian treaties in Judah is questionable, all the more is the possibility of its general knowledge among the audience of Deuteronomy. Regarding the language, it is very unlikely that a text in Akkadian would have been understood by enough people in Judah to recognise subversive allusions in Deuteronomy. Only a Hebrew or Aramaic translation would have enabled the requested comprehension. However, as Crouch argues, a translation

“would have employed the curse and loyalty traditions more familiar to its Hebrew-speaking audience in Judah” and thus would have “limited Assyrian affinities” (p. 165).

In the sixth and last chapter, Crouch investigates whether there are hints to an Assyrian background in the wider book of Deuteronomy. Because there is a clear lack of explicit signals that Deuteronomy is written as a subversion of Assyrian imperial ideology, she looks for hidden intentions, namely in the law of the king, the laws of centralisation, the laws of warfare, and the laws involving foreigners, where she outlines and then rejects possible allusions to Assyrian ideology. Furthermore, Crouch shows that “the attention of the deuteronomic text is focused locally on the southern Levant and on the internal workings of the Israelite community, rather than on a global stage involving Mesopotamia and its inhabitants” (p. 176). Finally, she calls to mind that the Judean sources from the Assyrian time show a picture where the “Assyrian power was tolerated without notable objection” (p. 178). If the intention of Deuteronomy was to subvert Assyrian imperial ideology, it would be quite an exception.

In sum, Crouch’s argumentation is conclusive and I am convinced by every chapter. The assumption that Deuteronomy (or its core) is written as a subversion of Assyrian imperial power is on shaky ground. The reading of this book raises two questions for me. First, Crouch argues mainly that Deuteronomy cannot be intended as a subversion of VTE or Assyrian imperial ideology in general, because this subversion would not have been recognizable to the audience. However, might it be that the respective parts of Deuteronomy are influenced by VTE without the intention of Deuteronomy’s writer(s) to subvert the ideas he adapted? Then, the allusions would not have had to be recognizable to the audience. Second, in 2014 Crouch has presented two books concerning dating issues of Deuteronomy. Here, the result is that the Assyrian treaty material does not provide a reliable basis for dating Deuteronomy. In the other book, *The making of Israel*, she argues that the formation of Israel’s ethnic identity too does not help much in dating Deuteronomy, since it would fit the long seventh century as well (or even better) as the exilic period. Thus, if both issues do not

provide a firm ground for dating Deuteronomy, how should we then date it?

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