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- Title** Review of *The Literary Imagination in Jewish Antiquity*,
by Eva Mroczek
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- Reference** *Studies in the Bible and Antiquity* 8 (2016): 238–49.
- ISSN** 2151-7800 (print), 2168-3166 (online)
- DOI** <https://doi.org/10.18809/sba.2016.0113>

believe, and Bokovoy takes these readers by the hand, gently showing them one viable path through these issues. The path Bokovoy charts is not the only possible way, and it has its drawbacks, just as every path does. But the reader cannot get more than a few pages through this book without feeling Bokovoy's love and passion for his faith, for the world of academic scholarship, and for the reader. For Bokovoy, these tensions are "challenges to learn, not contradictions to avoid,"⁵ and it is this spirit of honest inquiry that makes his book such a delight to read. This is precisely the type of discourse that is needed among Latter-day Saints, and I look forward to the next two books in the series.

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Eva Mroczek. *The Literary Imagination in Jewish Antiquity*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016.

Reviewed by Carli Anderson

Studies in the Bible and Antiquity, vol. 8, 2016, pp. 238–49

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Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18809/sba.2016.0113> Journal DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18809/misba.21683166>

OVER THE LAST SEVERAL DECADES, scholarly discussion on the textual world of the Second Temple has been shifting. Ideas about texts and the development of the biblical canon began to be reshaped by the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, which altered previously established ideas about the configuration of a prebiblical canon. Investigation of those and other texts made it apparent that the structure of the biblical canon was still fluid at a much later date than was originally thought. These new scholarly analyses are redefining the timelines and ideas about

5. "Mormon and Modern," Church Newsroom Release, July 6, 2012, <http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/article/mormon-and-modern>.

the early shape of the biblical text and its elasticity. Such developments have been particularly intriguing for Latter-day Saints because they have generated new ways of thinking about the historic limits of text and canon. In her new book, Eva Mroczek takes the discussion a step further and in a direction that will resonate well within the Mormon scholarly community. Her aim is to identify the “literary imagination” of Jewish antiquity or, in other words, the ways in which ancient writers and scribes conceived of their own textual world. Although she is not the first to point out the anachronistic difficulties that can plague modern scholars in their approach to texts from antiquity, she is one of the first to try to re-create a vision of an original literary mindset from the ancient texts themselves. Her study culls texts from antiquity for clues about the ways in which ancient communities thought about literature, text, authorship, and canon.

Mroczek’s exploration of the ideas about scripture and textual traditions in the ancient world creates an important space for discussion about the fluidity of canon and authoritative literature. She creates a compelling picture of a literary world in which bounded collections don’t necessarily imply a definitive end, texts exist outside of a canonical hierarchy, and literary heroes often have more of their story to be told. Her study is not exhaustive, but she has picked her sources strategically as representative of the specific kinds of literary expressions she is examining.

For Mroczek, one main problem is the way in which modern bibliographic notions of *Bible* and *book* have influenced how scholars consider texts from the past. These terms carry with them a specific set of characteristics in a modern context and have therefore fashioned a deceptive sense of textual hierarchies and authority for modern scholars that may not have existed in the same way in the ancient world. Jewish literary ideas certainly could not have been shaped by the iconic concepts of *Bible* and *canon* as we now implicitly understand them. Mroczek’s purpose is to dismantle these modern notions that influence particularly how texts are viewed in the scholarly world. Accordingly, she sets out to deconstruct the ideas and then to reconstruct an

impression from the ancient texts themselves about what sacred Jewish literature may have looked like to the ancient mind. This is not another exploration about how canon emerged, but rather an exploration of how ancient people conceived of literature within their world and how writing and literature were understood in the time and space of antiquity.

Mroczek structures her argument thematically. She first sets up a critique of the biblical and canonical assumptions used in modern scholarly interrogation. She then addresses four constitutive bibliographic elements of the ancient Jewish literary world: authorship, textual composition, library, and bounded collections.

Before there was a Bible

Mroczek lays the foundation of her thesis by addressing the way that modern minds think about the relationship of Bible and bibliography, a catchall term she uses to incorporate anything associated with the present-day concept of books. Modern bibliographic ideas derive from a time and place in which the term *Bible* has an iconic status, *canon* has a sacralized fixedness, *book* implies something self-contained and static, and each of these implies something finished and absolute. These ideas, however, don't suffice as the heuristic categories for the study of antiquity quite simply because they are inherently anachronistic. These concepts generated in modernity have nevertheless shaped the ways in which scholars consider ancient texts. They have been the major paradigm behind a too-limited scope in which ancient texts themselves, as well as ideas about text and writing in antiquity, have been approached. Mroczek calls attention to the fact that our modern conceptions of Bible, book, and canon are the driving force behind the questions we ask about texts from antiquity and therefore how we categorize, qualify, and study them. Within this framework, these texts answer some of our questions about the ancient world, but they also leave many unexplored historical lacunae because our assumptions have limited the scope of exploration. She therefore suggests a revision of scholarly inquiry by reframing the questions we ask about these texts.

Mroczek uses the phrase the “mirage of the Bible” to identify this modern focus on the finality of text and the static concept of books and how the preoccupation with these definitions, in fact, distorts how we read evidence when dealing with ancient writings. Mroczek strives to bring the reader into a more authentically ancient literary worldview by first looking at how the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls altered previously assumed timelines for the development of the Hebrew Psalter. Before that time, extant copies of the book of Psalms varied little, and scholars assumed that its shape had been basically static since the Hellenistic period. The Dead Sea Scrolls, however, contain psalms preserved in a myriad of arrangements, collections, and genres. Scholarly consensus now considers 11Q Psalms a collection preexistent to the received book of Psalms, which thus necessitates adjusting the dates for the formation of the biblical collection. However, Mroczek thinks the evidence can be taken further. The Qumran psalms manuscripts reveal a much more fragmented use of psalms compositions than are found in later editions. The compositions within these collections do not appear to represent a stable or contained book, yet this fact has been obscured by scholarly focus on a comparison of the scrolls with the biblical texts.

Mroczek acknowledges a need for some kind of focal point for situating these texts but suggests it ought to be something other than the Bible. For example, she points to theorists Roger Chartier’s and N. Katherine Hayles’s ways of thinking about digital text.¹ The terms *archive* and *database*, with their more fluid and segmented connotations, may be more helpful when considering the textual inheritance of antiquity. She also suggests the concept of “text as project” which, she notes, “brings human agency and a sense of ongoing development and use back into the production of text” (p. 41). In this way, textual variants become a

1. Roger Chartier, “Representations of the Written Word,” in *Forms and Meanings: Texts, Performances and Audiences from Codex to Computer* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), 6-24; Chartier, “Languages, Books, and Reading from the Printed Word to the Digital Text,” trans. T. L. Fagan, *Critical Inquiry* 31 (2004): 133-51; and N. Katherine Hayles, “Translating Media: Why We Should Rethink Textuality,” *Yale Journal of Criticism* 16 (2003): 263-90.

more fundamental part of the shape of the ancient textual world. No longer bound by a strictly static concept, the texts themselves can tell us more about the modes and models of their creation.

Authors and ancient attribution

Authorship in modernity has specific implicit characteristics that influence the way we interact with texts. Accordingly, in the next chapter Mroczek takes on the element of authorial attribution in an attempt to shift this paradigm to reflect a more ancient view. Early Jewish texts likely had a different sense of authorship and attribution. It was not necessarily a linear point of origin. For moderns, the title of author connotes the person(s) primarily responsible for the composition or production of a work. Our literary paradigm doesn't immediately allow for incongruity or fluctuating attribution without suspicion. Mroczek, however, asserts that current scholarship's concern with historical authorship as a classification of textual validity is a distinctly modern preoccupation. Her examination of this element of ancient literature therefore is centered on ancient pseudonymous attribution.

The problem of pseudonymous attribution has been discussed since late antiquity. How should one understand a text attributed to someone who clearly did not actually write it? More recent scholarship tends to assess authorial attribution of pseudepigraphic writings according to the authority and importance a given pseudonymous author would have afforded the text. Attribution to a revered historical or heroic figure certainly gives it an implied importance, yet Mroczek examines the phenomenon more closely in order to create a more nuanced view. Although an impressive authorial attribution may have been intended to give greater weight to the text and its message, authorial attribution may also have been an accepted and authentic way to expand and enhance the biographies of important figures in ancient Judaism. She notes, "A fruitful way to explain these practices is to think of them also as effusions of historical, ethical, and aesthetic interest in a compelling character—as biography, not bibliography" (p. 53). The

Davidic psalm headings and the character of David in Second Temple literature demonstrate this phenomenon. For Mroczek, calling something “Davidic” was a way to situate a composition within a specific cultural context and also provided a space in which David’s biography could be explored, expanded, or revised poetically. David—as he appears in the ancient Jewish imagination, from the psalm headings to extant versions of Psalm 151 and the Qumran literature—seems to have been personally responsible for a vast number of psalms (over 4,000) and other writings. In this view he ultimately develops from a flawed king into a celestial figure who writes both prose and poetry and represents all that is beautiful. In each of these examples, his biography is expanded or explained, and his character is transformed. In the Jewish literary imagination, he becomes more than the original story had revealed.

For Mroczek, authorial attribution should be rethought into something like a poetic, honorific act. She observes that the attributed figures in pseudepigraphic texts from the Second Temple period regularly appear in their texts to be more like characters than authors, suggesting that authorial attribution as a means for developing biography was a common practice. Although such a paradigm is not necessarily in line with the ways in which modern readers think about textual authorship, it does create new possibilities for the consideration of both canonical and noncanonical texts of antiquity. It is perhaps a bit simplistic to use the term *fan fiction* here to describe what Mroczek is suggesting, although it does seem to parallel the idea. The difference, however, for Mroczek is that these texts don’t lose the authority in their individual creations. They take their place alongside the other texts in history and, as she argues in a later chapter, have an equal place, not in a vertical textual hierarchy but within a horizontally conceived textual tradition. Her argument presents a way to rethink textual attribution in antiquity. This distinction between attribution and composition outside a modern context highlights a way in which the ancient literary world functioned differently from our contemporary one.

Production as project

Mroczek next takes a look at the process of textual production in antiquity; specifically she looks at ways to consider texts that appear to have been produced over time by several different contributors. In this chapter, she fills out her idea of “scribal projects” by portraying ancient ideas of textual production more in terms of creations that have multiple layers and generations preserved within single manuscripts. She looks closely at Ben Sira (Ecclesiasticus), generally considered to be one of the first “authored books” in the ancient Jewish milieu. However, in her quest for a native literary theory of antiquity, Mroczek takes nothing for granted. She suggests that the identification of the author in the prologue may not be telling the whole story. The text’s famous self-attribution to the figure of Ben Sira is unique to its period, and the attribution has strong representation in the Greek manuscripts. The Hebrew manuscripts, however, contain phrasing that is more ambivalent, not unlike the Davidic attribution of the psalms, which could easily suggest the text is a compilation rather than a singular composition. Indeed, she notes that it is easy to read the text as something like an “open” book, one that is neither original nor complete. Later rabbinic literature treats the figure of Ben Sira as a legendary character associated with Wisdom teaching in much the same way that David is associated with the psalms and psalm-like compositions. Examining the textual collections of psalms and Ben Sira together shows remarkable similarities in their development and attribution. For Mroczek, it suggests that Ben Sira ought not to be treated as a historical author but rather as something more like a pseudepigraphic hero whose legacy was expandable and whose textual production was dynamic.

Noting the absence of the term for a book (*sefer*) in the Hebrew version of Ben Sira, she points out that the concept of production that the text reinforces is one of compositional instability: “Ben Sira’s traditions—the ones he inherits and the ones he creates—do not stand still, but are imagined in dynamic metaphors of flow, growth, and elusiveness, as water, light, a harvest, and a woman” (p. 89). This theme resonates with many sapiential texts from antiquity—wisdom is something

to be gathered and cultivated. But here again, the nonstatic nature of the textual process is the point. Mroczek wants to drive home the idea that in the ancient world the intent of the text is most definitely *not* finality.

For Mroczek, the idea of a name and even a biography attributed to the text does not necessarily imply some kind of ancient copyright or even a complete literary unit. Indeed, she pushes against this idea in order to indicate the difference in thinking about writing in the ancient world. “The fact that he mentions his own name does not necessarily mean that he considers his text to be his own coherent, fixed intellectual creation,” she notes. “Rather Ben Sira presents himself by name as the recipient and heir of some revealed wisdom and received instruction” (p. 103). She also compares the writings of Ben Sira to another text in that same genre, *Qohelet* (Ecclesiastes), where, in a similar fashion, the attributed author’s identity is vague, legendary, and pseudepigraphic. This view of the literary world of antiquity is one where authorship, originality, and authenticity had a different correlation than they do in modernity.

Sacred libraries and scripture

Mroczek’s fourth chapter on scripture and text collections will be especially interesting to Latter-day Saint readers. In it, she takes a broader look at the Jewish literary worldview and, using the texts themselves for their depicted imagery, explores how the Jews would have perceived ancient libraries or text collections. She calls her study a search for the “morphology of an imagined sacred library” (p. 117), and the imagery she singles out reflects a worldview brimming with sacred texts, some accessible, others inaccessible but no less real and important. These texts exist in collections found both on earth and in celestial realms and incorporate vast accumulations of human and heavenly knowledge.

Most scholarly constructions of ancient Jewish text collections come out of theoretical discussions regarding the state of canon and protobiblical collections in the Second Temple era. Mroczek again laments the fact that the predominant scholarly categories of “rewritten Bible” and “biblical interpretation” have created an intellectual scaffolding that

keep these ancient text collections and the world they inhabited at a biblical distance. Mroczek also notes that this gap becomes more defined by the ways in which these nonbiblical texts have been published and collected in modernity and therefore has influenced the ways they have been treated heuristically.

In a particularly interesting synopsis of the historical approach to publishing nonbiblical texts, Mroczek shows that academic work with extrabiblical texts has been influenced by the ways they have been published and collected. Starting with the first major collection of non-canonical texts published under the title *Pseudepigraphia* in 1713 by Johann Fabricius, a book compiled under the theological constraints of Martin Luther's disapproval of the apocryphal texts, she shows how Fabricius's title for this collection—probably a strategic choice to categorize the texts in a nontheologically threatening way—instituted a term for noncanonical writings that was fixed for almost three centuries. The name he chose both reflected and reinforced the concept of legitimate authorship as the identifying features of canonical books.

In the current scholarly era, the vision of the ancient textual landscape of the late Second Temple has expanded, and its diversity and inventiveness are beginning to be observed. Yet Mroczek protests that, even within this context, canonical priority is preserved, making it hard to envision nonbiblical texts in their own creative time period. The most recently published collections² present these texts as important interpretive products that function as a bridge between the biblical and the rabbinic canon. Although these published collections have dropped the classification “pseudonymous,” the organizing structural classification of the Bible is still intact, and for Mroczek, this is still too far from seeing the texts and groups of texts on their own terms.

2. See James L. Kugel, *How to Read the Bible: A Guide to Scripture, Now and Then* (New York: Free Press, 2007); Kugel, *The God of Old: Inside the Lost World of the Bible* (New York: Free Press, 2004); and *The Bible as It Was* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1999); Louis H. Feldman, James L. Kugel, and Lawrence H. Schiffman, eds., *Outside the Bible: Ancient Jewish Writings Related to Scripture*, 3 vols. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2013).

She presents an example of just how to do this with an analysis of the book of *Jubilees*. She intentionally selects this case since *Jubilees* has a heavy internal emphasis on textual tradition. She asserts, “To take *Jubilees*’ own self-presentation seriously . . . [is] to recognize that it claims revelation, rather than derivative status, for itself” (p. 144). It presents a view from the second-century BCE of how sacred writings originated, how they were shaped, and how they were transmitted. The patriarchs Enoch, Noah, and Abraham write on innumerable subjects, both sacred and secular, including astronomy, medicine, and cosmic visions. Angelic messengers transmit their knowledge, and the records are kept and handed down from patriarch to patriarch. The library is not presented as complete or closed. Indeed, the opposite appears to be true. *Jubilees* portrays a worldview where divine communication with Israel is a phenomenon that is perpetually repeated and renewed. There is even the imagery of a celestial archive of texts that remains existent yet unavailable and an earthly archive that is constantly being created and restored. The book of *Jubilees* imagines a literary world that is rich, full, and ever expanding. It has an ungraspable nature that seems to sit untroubled in the ancient Jewish literary imagination, a point of view quite distinct from modern literary concepts.

The limitations of canon

With the imagery of an overflowing textual inheritance in Jewish antiquity, what should be done with the ancient texts in which a sense of boundary is included? How should these be considered? Mroczek addresses this in her final chapter. Certainly some ancient textual traditions do contain a sense of boundedness. The focus of biblical scholars on the late Second Temple period for the beginnings of the canonical process is not arbitrary. Fourth Ezra mentions a fixed collection of books, as does Josephus’s *Against Apion*. The existence of these specific numbers of books in collections has been a benchmark for scholars for historicizing the canonization process. However, Mroczek emphasizes that these ancient references to numbers don’t necessarily represent a sense of closure. From

an ancient perspective, counting texts may be more a qualitative rather than a quantitative endeavor. Scholars have long acknowledged that Josephus's and 4 Ezra's numbers are typological, as many other writers in antiquity also noted. Semiotics plays as much a role in the context as the boundaries do. Once again, the fluidity of ancient literature comes in to play.

For Mroczek, boundaries given to text collections also don't necessarily require a complete canon. Using the examples of Psalm 151 and the Syriac Psalms 151–55, all of which extend past specific boundaries and are still considered Davidic, Mroczek notes a tension between the ideas of delimitations and authenticity. "Even as canons emerge," she notes, "revealed writing remains a far wider concept, not imagined as coextensive with available scriptural text" (p. 18). In this tension, she identifies an important distinction between revealed writings and canonized writings. In the ancient mindset, ideas about canon were not necessarily identical with ideas about divinely inspired writing. Standardized boundaries were not perceived as containing all of what had been revealed or was sacred. Even into late antiquity, there was room for more sacred writings to be written or discovered. Texts outside set boundaries were not automatically considered spurious or inauthentic.

Mroczek identifies a less rigid approach to canon and collections in the ancient literary world. While bound collections certainly existed before the Common Era, the idea of closed, authoritative, and static canon is a much later development. In the ancient Jewish literary world-view, sacred collections and the numbers assigned to them could be in flux. In her search for the relationship between revelation and scripture, she finds that revealed text and existing scriptural collections were not necessarily viewed exclusively as the same thing. These categories coexisted and did not constrain each other.

Conclusion

Mroczek argues persuasively that texts and text production in the ancient world had more fluid connotations than our modern notions of book and bibliography might allow. Her analysis creates an intriguing picture of a comfortably changeable textual world, where sacred biography,

information, and ideas are ever expanding. The limitations of canon and authorial control were not the principal standards by which textual creations were measured. Indeed, they seem, in some ways, not to have been measured at all. The very expansiveness of both texts and characters recommended their special importance and sacred status in the ancient literary imagination.

While written primarily for specialists, Mroczek's book is nevertheless an accessible and interesting read. Her book is a much-needed contribution to biblical scholarship because it calls attention to shortcomings in scholarly inquiry about the textual past. It also suggests fine possibilities for the kinds of questions that ought to be asked in the future. Mroczek's lens for rethinking ideas about authorship and textual production could also yield a more nuanced approach to textual criticism, both higher and lower. Also, while Mormon scholarship has been keenly aware of what ancient texts have to say about sacred libraries and expansive text collections for some time, Mroczek's book enriches those studies and highlights elements from literary antiquity that might produce more abundant areas of study. The book is a meticulous, creative, and refreshing contribution to the conversation in biblical studies about the literary world of Jewish antiquity.

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Mark S. Smith. *Where the Gods Are: Spatial Dimensions of Anthropomorphism in the Biblical World*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016.

Reviewed by Daniel O. McClellan

Studies in the Bible and Antiquity, vol. 8, 2016, pp. 249–57

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Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18809/sba.2016.0114> Journal DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18809/misba.21683166>

MARK S. SMITH IS PERHAPS BEST KNOWN as one of the world's leading scholars of ancient Judahite and Israelite conceptualizations of YHWH, the God of Israel. From his 1990 book *The Early History of*