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**Prosic, Tamara**

***The Development and Symbolism of Passover until 70 CE***

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Tamara Prosic offers a fresh appraisal of the controversies surrounding the origin and meaning of Passover against the background of the new developments in the study of the early history of the Israelites. In view of the paradigm shift that has occurred in Old Testament scholarship, this is a valid question and indeed one that is long overdue. Unfortunately, Prosic's approach is burdened by a rigid revisionist agenda, as becomes clear from the theoretical and methodological remarks introducing the first chapter (5–19). The Old Testament is presented as essentially a document from Hellenistic times. This point of departure permeates the entire study, in which more often than not the writings of Josephus and Philo as well as the Mishnah are adduced to explain features of Passover that remain unclear in the Old Testament texts themselves. The Old Testament was, admittedly, edited in the exilic and postexilic times, but it cannot be seen as a Hellenistic book without further ado. In essence, the Hebrew Bible seems to exude an atmosphere of Yahwism and not of Hellenistic Judaism.

In the remainder of chapter 1 Prosic briefly reviews a series of traditional theories about the origin and development of Passover (19–32). The studies discussed, however, are primarily presented from the perspective of whether or not Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread were seen as originally independent festivals. In the majority of the traditional studies, the combined festival of Passover and Unleavened Bread is considered a merger of an agricultural festival and a festival related to the animal husbandry. However, Prosic fails to make a clear distinction between scholars who find the origin of Passover in the sacrifice of the first spring lambs and calves and those who argue for an origin in the seasonal change of pasturelands in the spring. The two approaches need to be refuted—and can be refuted within the new historical paradigm dealing with the origin

of the Israelites—on their own terms. Prosic, on the other hand, from the outset leans toward the opinion that Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread have never been separate festivals.

Chapter 2 pursues the development from the precommemorative Passover to the Passover presented in the Hebrew Bible (35–70). The first section discusses the centralization law of Deuteronomy and the question of the separate origins of Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Prosic argues that “the basic picture of Passover emerging from [the sources E and J] is in complete concordance with Deuteronomy” (37). However, she fails to acknowledge the difference, which has been discussed in several recent studies, between a communal gathering on the first day of the combined festival stipulated in Deut 16:1–8 and one on the seventh day assumed by Exod 13:6–7. The same holds true for her claim that “[t]here is no internal inconsistency in [the] Deuteronomic legislation on Passover” (42). A score of studies published in the last decade have demonstrated convincingly that Deut 16:1–8 lacks a literary and logical integrity (see especially J. C. Gertz, “Die Passa-Massot-Ordnung im deuteronomistischen Festkalender,” in *Das Deuteronomium und seine Querbeziehungen* (ed. Timo Veijola; Schriften der Finnischen Exegetischen Gesellschaft/Publications of the Finnish Exegetical Society 62; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996), 56–80; S. Gesundheit, “Der deuteronomistischen Festkalender,” in *Das Deuteronomium* (ed. Georg Braulik; ÖBS 23; Frankfurt: Lang, 2003), 57–68).

The next three sections, dealing with the distinction between a “home” and a “temple” celebration of Passover (44–45), a “pastoral” versus an “agricultural” background of the festival (54–60), and the “calendric” versus the “seasonal” setting of the festival contain a number of astute observations. First of all, the “home” celebration mentioned in Exod 12 indeed seems to be presented deliberately as a one-time occasion in the days before the institution of the cult on Mount Sinai. The story may, therefore, not be indicative of the way Passover was celebrated in the days of the monarchies or the exile. Moreover, the designation of the month appropriate for the celebration of Passover as Abib may indeed refer to a particular season instead of the name of a particular month. The festival would accordingly have been celebrated in the month when the ears of barley were—almost—ripe. However, Prosic fails to pursue these points to their logical conclusion. The setting of Passover in the days before the installation of the cult in Exod 12 has consequences beyond the question of the “home” celebration (see below). In the case that Passover was indeed celebrated on the night of the full moon following the spring equinox, as she claims, the festival would have been separated from the harvest by about a full month. The full moon following the spring equinox falls between 21 March and 4 April; the barley harvest, on the other hand, does not start before the beginning of May. Passover cannot be linked to both the vernal equinox and the beginning of the cereal harvest. The

case against the dual origins of Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread is, therefore, rather weak. The same holds true for Prosic's conclusion that the precommemorative Passover was celebrated in the context of the fertility cult. This suggestion basically rests on the single occurrence of the Passover sacrifice in connection with the firstfruits in the present text of Exod 34:25–26. However, the occurrence of **חג הפסח** in Exod 34:25b may be questioned. In fact, Exod 34:25b is the only instance in the Hebrew Bible where Passover is called a **חג** and may well be the result of a later interpolation. The lack of philological precision in this case and the pursuit of literary critical issues in general present a serious shortcoming of the book.

The third and final chapter discusses the symbolism of Passover (75–130). The first section reviews biblical narratives in which a celebration of Passover is mentioned in order to determine the fundamental constants behind the phenomenal appearances (74–82). These stories all reveal the same organizational and structural pattern, which point, according to Prosic, to the nature of Passover as a “rite of passage.” The second and third sections deal with “time symbolism” (82–104) and the “symbolism of the first-night ritual” and identify the “rite of passage” in question as the transition from winter to summer, the time of the harvest (104–28). The second section in particular, however, suffers from a lack of methodological clarity. The “time symbolism” of Passover is often derived from remarks by Philo (“from Philo we learn that the month in question was the month of the vernal equinox” [83]), later Jewish traditions (“Events such as blocking of the waters of the deep ... and appearance of the light of creation ... are thought to have happened on the date of Passover” [88]), and the Mishnah (“according to the Mishnah [the ritual cutting of the first sheaf happened] during the second night of the festival” [98]). Although admittedly the Hebrew Bible does not specify the time of the ritual presentation of the first sheaf, the phrase “the day after the Sabbath” in Lev 23:11 most likely refers to daytime and may not, therefore, contribute to the night-time symbolism of Passover.

In the third section Prosic proceeds to expound her view on the meaning of the sacrificial meal in the Passover night. The description of the sacrificial meal (the vigil, the sacrificial animal, the treatment of the bones) is nevertheless mainly derived from Exod 12—and, again, later Jewish tradition. However, as the celebration of Passover in the days before the installation of the cult in Exod 12 is to all intents and purposes presented as the opposite of a sacrifice and indeed explicitly contradicts the Deuteronomic legislation (Exod 12:9//Deut 16:7), this text cannot be of much help in determining the original meaning of Passover. The same holds true for Prosic's suggestion that the consumption of the Passover sacrifice in fact symbolizes the devouring of the personified rains in the spring so as to prevent them from damaging the new crops. The Ugaritic myth of Baal and Moth indeed offers a nice example of a rain god who is incapacitated during the summer months. However, the line from the myth in which Moth boasts “I it

was who confronted mightiest Baal, I who made him a lamb in my mouth, he was carried away like a kid in the breach of my windpipe” can hardly elucidate the symbolism of Passover, as Prosic claims. After all, lambs and kids are not the only animals sacrificed at Passover, as Deut 16:2 explicitly allows for cattle as well.

The quest for the development and symbolism of Passover until 70 C.E. has indeed only just begun, but Prosic’s structuralist approach, which takes its point of departure in Hellenistic times and turns more often than not to Philo, Josephus, and the Mishnah, has in fact little to contribute to this endeavor.