

of purity and purification were important parts of Jewish life, the book is an important contribution to the scholarship on early Judaism in general. I warmly recommend this book to everyone who works in the field of early Judaism and cognate areas.

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JOHN R. L. MOXON

*Peter's Halakhic Nightmare: The "Animal" Vision of Acts 10:9–16  
in Jewish and Graeco-Roman Perspective*

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Peter's roof-top experience in Joppa—in which he falls into a trance, sees all kinds of clean and unclean animals, and is commanded to kill and eat—is one of the more enigmatic passages in the book of Acts. Although the vision on the surface level undoubtedly concerns dietary restrictions, the narrative context strongly suggests the admittedly different issue of whether a pious Christian Jew, such as Peter, can visit and enjoy table fellowship with a Gentile, such as the centurion Cornelius. Many interpreters have read the vision as curtly abolishing all Jewish dietary restrictions, and by extension the validity of much of the Torah, even though such a negative stance toward Jewish practices would be foreign not only to the narrative character of Peter, but also to the implied author of Acts. Furthermore, the narrative enigmatically presents Peter, the unchallenged leader of the narrated Christian community, as completely bewildered after receiving a divine message that otherwise would have provided him with an additional source of authority. These incongruences are central to John R. L. Moxon's 2017 monograph *Peter's Halakhic Nightmare*, a heavily revised version of his Durham dissertation from 2011.

While many previous interpreters have assumed Peter's vision to be a pre-existing narrative aiming for complete abolition of dietary restrictions, inexpertly incorporated into Luke's narrative, Moxon assumes the vision to be purposefully included by a competent redactor. Whether the vision was imported or written for the purpose, Moxon presumes it

to be bearing upon the problem of including Gentiles in a Jewish movement. Why it was “unlawful” for Peter to visit Cornelius—whether the inhibition can be traced back to forbidden foods, inherent impurity, or separation from presumptive idolaters—is not entirely clear from the narrative, Moxon claims. Existing Jewish practices were varied enough to accommodate not only Peter’s initial inhibition, but also his eventual permissive stance, which is not radical enough to explain his initial disgusted reaction to the vision. In its narrative context, the vision seems to invite its reader not to abolish Jewish halakhah altogether, but to deeply consider their own concepts of impurity, Moxon concludes.

Using A. Leo Oppenheim’s form-critical framework, previous scholars have generally considered three categories of dreams in ancient literature: (1) “message dreams,” in which an easily understood verbal message is delivered to a sleeping recipient, (2) “symbolic dreams,” whose imagery cannot be understood without the help of an expert such as Joseph or Daniel, and (3) ordinary “psychological dreams,” with no deeper significance. Moxon criticizes this scheme and remarks that since “message” is a functional category, “symbol” an interpretative, and “psychological” speaks to the cause of the dream, none of Oppenheim’s key terms is form-critical in nature.

Furthermore, Peter’s vision does not fit Oppenheim’s categories, and the circumstances of his dream—that he is hearing voices speaking about food while dozing off in the midday heat in anticipation of a meal—create uncertainty as to whether a divine message is at hand. After a broad survey of dreams and visions beyond Oppenheim’s material, Moxon is able to point to several other examples with similar difficulties: message dreams that include enigmatic speech in need of interpretation (including commands to do something unpleasant or impossible), symbolic dreams that include realistic as well as bizarre elements (making the symbolic significance of the whole dream rather doubtful), and natural dreams that by one actor are dismissed as the fancies of a slumbering brain, but by others approached as coded divine messages. The anxieties and doubts resulting from such ambiguities were of special

interest to Hellenistic authors who used their narratives to explore human motivation and personal character, Moxon remarks.

Considering how common enigmatic speech, riddles, and ambiguity are in Greco-Roman oracles and prophecies—often to the detriment of their recipients—Moxon finds it intriguing that Hebrew literature asserts that God always speaks clearly through his Jewish prophets; Joseph and Daniel function as dream interpreters only in the service of foreign kings, to whom God has spoken in impenetrable riddles. Obviously, this clear-cut distinction ends with the adoption of apocalyptic literature, and the Fourth Gospel can easily remark that Jesus was capable as speaking figuratively as well as plainly. Moxon points out that Paul's vision, in Acts 16:9–10, of a Macedonian asking him for help is ambiguously worded and needs to be interpreted before Paul and his companions can conclude that God is calling them to proclaim the good news to the Macedonians. Likewise, the identity of the voice asking "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" in Acts 9:4 is withheld, necessitating interpretation before action. But the level of enigma in Acts 10:9–16 is unchallenged, Moxon argues, since both the command to eat and the aphorism about what God has cleanses operate in relation to the imaginary scene, making any meaning in real life speculative. It is therefore impossible, Moxon claims, to view this passage as a commissioning narrative, Moxon claims.

In addition, Peter's dream is the second part of a pair, and functions in the narrative together with Cornelius's straightforward message vision in Acts 10:3–6. Such double dreams have been studied by Alfred Wikenhauser and John S. Hanson, the latter of which has argued that Peter's dream was added to an originally much simpler pair of two similar visions. Moxon sharply criticizes the criteria and terminology of these earlier studies and is able to expand the comparative material significantly. Among five dozen double dreams, he finds nine examples where a message dream is paired with an enigmatic dream, as in the case of Cornelius and Peter. In several of these closer parallels, the protagonist is left bewildered when the more explicit instructions are given only to the secondary character, as is the case in the preceding double vision

of Saul and Ananias in Acts 9:1–16. In several of Moxon's examples two foreigners from mutually distrusting communities, such as Joseph and the Egyptian Aseneth, are brought together. The contrast between the visions of Peter and Cornelius thus fall within patterns seen elsewhere, and the exaggeratedly positive features of Cornelius's case point not toward a similarly positive counterpart, Moxon maintains, but towards the opposite. The position of Peter's dream as paired with Cornelius's vision indicates that it was not inexpertly added, but originally meant to be perceived as enigmatic and difficult to comprehend—a dream not intended to spur the reader into action but to make him think hard about his own conceptions of ritual impurity, Moxon argues. That the outsider Cornelius receives a "biblical" revelation and the protagonist Peter experiences a disturbingly enigmatic dream serves not only to include Gentiles in the biblical community, but also to admit that even Christians have to puzzle over the divine will, Moxon concludes.

By connecting Acts 10:9–16 to recurrent themes in a large repository of Jewish and Greco-Roman literature, Moxon is able to shed new light on an otherwise impenetrable passage. His contribution is valuable not only for scholars of the book of Acts, but for everyone with an interest in dreams and visions in ancient literature. By cataloguing most of his comparative examples in four copious appendices, he has also had the courtesy of providing raw material for future studies in this area.

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REINHARD NEUDECKER

*Moses Interpreted by the Pharisees and Jesus: Matthew's  
Antitheses in the Light of Early Rabbinic Literature*

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SEK 274, ISBN: 978-88-7653-661-8

Reinhard Neudecker – professor emeritus i rabbinsk litteratur vid Pontificio Istituto Biblico i Rom – har i *Moses Interpreted by the Pharisees and Jesus* författat en, till såväl omfång som innehåll, behändig behandling av Matteusevangeliets antiteser (5:21–28) i relation till tidig rabbinsk tradition. Eftersom Neudecker menar att den matteanske Jesus