

Editorial: *Histoire croisée* and 25 years of Publishing Old Testament Scholarship

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Old Testament Essays aims to publish research on the Old Testament and related fields. Although its authors are primarily South African researchers, the journal received the last few years more and more contributions from scholars residing not only in the United States of America and Europe, but also in several African countries. In 2008/9 25% of the articles came from non-South African Old Testament scholars. In 2010/11 that figure rose to 33%. The 25th volume (2012) of Old Testament Essays, which is celebrated in this issue, continues with this trend.

Just as varied the contributing scholars are, are the various perspectives and methodologies. In this issue it is guaranteed that each contribution represents a unique view on some or other aspect of the Old Testament, reflecting views from Germany, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and South Africa. Moreover, in line with the journal's language policy, this issue publishes in a variety of languages too. In the current edition the reader will encounter English, German and Venda.

Old Testament Essays as a publication has become more and more an example of what is known as "histoire croisée," if not in single contributions then definitely in the contrasting and playing off against each other of these individual contributions. *Histoire croisée* focuses on "empirical intercrossings consubstantial with the object of study, as well as on the operations by which researchers themselves cross scales, categories, and viewpoints."¹ It connects different contexts with each other and tries to generate meaning in this way. *Histoire croisée* is a point of departure or perspective and not a methodology. It recognises intersections and interwovenness in history. It is dynamic, reciprocal and transformative.²

Histoire croisée puts the issue of historicity on the table by way of a threefold process through the object, the categories of analysis, and the relationships between researcher and object.³ The observer is never outside the

¹ Michael Werner en Bénédicte Zimmermann, "Beyond Comparison: Histoire Croisée and the Challenge of Reflexivity," *History and Theory*, Vol. 45/1 (2006): 30.

² Marjet Brolsma, "Cultuurtransfer en het tijdschriftenonderzoek," *COntEXTES* 2008. §8. Accessed 7 October 2012. Online. <http://contextes.revues.org/3823> ; DOI : 10.4000/contextes.3823.

³ Werner en Zimmermann, "Beyond Comparison," 33.

process of observation, but in fact part of the observation.⁴ The notion of "intersection" is crucial to comprehend *histoire croisée*: "This creates a point of intersection where events may occur that are capable of affecting to various degrees the elements present depending on their resistance, permeability or malleability, and on their environment."⁵

At these intersections one can expect a plurality of complex configurations where nothing is static. The intersection itself is a moment of intersecting in which the different participating elements change. This creates an interwovenness of several crossings where different elements impact on one another. Nothing remains untouched in the process, be they persons, entities, objects, or practices.⁶

Old Testament scholars are required to juggle at least two different contexts, namely that of the text and their context of meaning production. They are obliged to present time specific constructions and reconstructions. In the outcome of these re/constructions, some will focus on the text while others will focus on aspects around the text such as theology, socio-political factors, textual and narrative structures, history, rhetoric, to name a few. More scholars endeavour to relate the text to the demands of their own time, such as the religious discourse in a society, the social ills plaguing a group of people, or ideologies with which the text is read in order to propagate a particular point of view.

This celebratory issue starts with an article by Ulrich Berges. He discusses Isaiah 53 with regard to a specific socio-political and religious discourse in Germany regarding the cross as a symbol for Christianity. The cross plays a role in legal, political and religious circles. With the help of Isaiah 53 Berges illustrates how the cross keeps the hope in a God alive. He describes how this symbol makes its voice heard across religions and ideologies, ultimately also in Germany where he explores how the Old Testament text in fact possesses a socio-political relevance.

Elewani Farisani inquires into the context of teaching Hebrew in African communities where an indigenous language prevails. His article is significant in that it is expressed in one of the African indigenous languages and one of the eleven official languages in South Africa, namely Venda. Moreover, the renewed focus on Hebrew in an African indigenous context serves as an indicator to academic decision makers about the future of Hebrew at universities, especially his institution where Semitic languages have been under the axe the

⁴ Werner en Zimmermann, "Beyond Comparison," 34: "They are involved in the object, if only by language, by the categories and concepts used, by historical experience or by the preexisting bodies of knowledge relied upon."

⁵ Werner en Zimmermann, "Beyond Comparison," 37.

⁶ Werner en Zimmermann, "Beyond Comparison," 38.

last five years with economic grounds given as reason. In his article, he exploits the way Hebrew is taught in general, before he attempts to look at how Hebrew can be taught in a context of African indigenous languages.

In contrast to Berges' apologetic approach towards Christianity, Jaco Gericke proposes what is in his mind quite controversial, namely the "fourth paradigm", that is, reading the Old Testament text as an atheist. It is a paradigm that does not believe that the Bible is the Word of God, God's Word in human speech, or human words about God. From this view, the text comprises of human words without any transcendent signification.

Linking up with Berges' approach to the relevance of the Old Testament for today, but with a definite textual focus, is Benjamin Giffone's description of Lamentations as a portable and adaptable basis for tradition. He ascribes its portability and adaptability to the design of the text as well as to interpretive creativity. The former, in terms of literary features, make the book transcend adversity in contexts beyond its original historical setting. For that reason Lamentations succeeded in standing outside historical place and time to speak to and for the faith communities.

James Alfred Loader's essay is a good example of an intersection between an ancient text and a contemporary heuristic key. He employs an art concept with allusions to the medical world to explore memory in the Old Testament, namely prosthetic memory. A prosthesis is an add-on, without which certain movements for example are impossible. These prostheses can be found in several instances in the Old Testament in terms of didactic content. What makes it prosthetic is its invitation to accept responsibility to engage with the past and to base conscious decisions for religious and ethical life on it.

Linking up with Farisani's teaching of Hebrew and Loader's observation regarding didactic content in the Old Testament, Magdel le Roux explores the topic of teaching and interpreting the Old Testament in Africa. Taking her cue from a recent study on the future of humanities in South Africa, she argues that there are numerous points of convergence between most cultures in Africa and the Old Testament that can be profitable for teaching the Old Testament. However, the outcome of this convergence is that the reception of the Old and New Testament in Africa differs considerably from that in other countries and continents.

In the next article the issue of *histoire croisée* is very much in focus. Madipoane Masenya (ngwan'a Mphahlele) and Hulisani Ramantswana looked into the way scholarship in *Old Testament Essays* since 1994 was involved in terms of bringing the scholar's own context into relation with the Old Testament. Focusing on the uniqueness of South Africa and its post-apartheid context, they present the reader with a daring and courageous study. The choice of the point of departure is deliberate: the advent of a new democratic dispensa-

tion and the demise of official racist and racialised policies. Their aim is to investigate how South African scholars integrated the subject-matter of biblical studies/Old Testament studies with their particular African context. Their conclusion is that the research context regarding the Old Testament remains a context with Eurocentric epistemologies as the order of the day.

In direct opposition to Gericke's atheist paradigm for reading the Old Testament, and definitely not in congruence with Masenya and Ramantshwana's ideas, Daniel Simango provides a biblical-canonical reading of the image of God in Genesis 1:26-27. He argues that the image of God is both moral and relational in perspective, since it involves a moral likeness to God as well as a relationship between God and humankind like that between parent and child.

Simango's article alludes to the problem Gerrie Snyman addresses in his article that in fact is a response to an earlier reference by Masenya regarding Eurocentric epistemologies, namely the utilisation of the master's tools in the debate between Western and African hermeneutics. At issue for Snyman is the question of mimesis: not only of the text but also of methodologies with which the text is read. Here the Book of Esther seems to be indicative. The Jews seemed to have turned into what the enemy had in mind for them. Similarly, it appears inevitable that in a postcolonial context the master's tool will be used to deconstruct the master's power. But using the master's tools brings a particular question to the fore in terms of the definition of Eurocentric epistemologies. Is the notion of text Eurocentric, especially when one looks at what textuality evolved into in postmodernism? He asks whether one should think in terms of different rationalities in the debate between Western and African hermeneutics.

The innerworkings of textuality is illustrated by Till Steiner in his in depth look at the different layers of the text of Ps 48. With the help of heuristic categories of perceived space, conceived space and lived space he shows how the pre-exilic layer of Ps. 48 regarding the impregnability of Jerusalem as the city of God has changed from perceived space to narrated space. His remark about change in perception of space and collective memory echoes some of Loader's remarks on memory in his own article.

In line with Steiner's focus on the text is Beat Weber's study on the employment of the Asaph texts in Psalms and Chronicles in order to test the hypothesis that the office of the Prophet changed into that of Exegete in the Second Temple Period. He subsequently identifies an Asaphite continuum after investigating the divine oracles. This continuum would not have been possible without the involvement of agency over a long time.

Linking up with Weber as well as Farisani's focus on Hebrew is Willie Wessels' contribution on prophetic literature. He investigates the words *maśśā'*

YHWH (doom oracle) which occurs seven times in Jeremiah 23:33-40. Wessels investigates the meaning of this expression in the collection of prophetic oracles. His focus is on the text and how the text can be understood.

Hansi Wüncch similarly focuses on the text and provides an emic reading of Genesis 38. This chapter is traditionally seen as a disruption in the Joseph narrative, but Wüncch argues there is enough reason to regard this chapter as fully integrated and intentionally placed.

Although context in the latter three presentations is not overtly present, their focus on the biblical text provides a necessary building block in the comprehension of the text and its historical formation in a specific time. After all, any relationship with the text starts with its reading and basic understanding. It is then for other scholars to employ those basic reading results in their interpretation of the text in tandem with other factors that create the intersectionality referred to by a *histoire croissée* perspective.

The article by Sigmund Wagner-Tsukamoto is an example of an economics scholar utilising the work done in Old Testament Studies to provide a fresh reading of Genesis 3. He observes in the end that paradise had to be lost to begin a discourse on social order in the Old Testament. In his article that targets an interdisciplinary audience, ranging from economics (specifically constitutional economics, rational choice economics and economic game theory) to biblical scholarship, theology and science of religion, Wagner-Tsukamoto argues that the paradise story avoided a "game over" scenario in which Adam and Eve either were killed or were elevated to become gods themselves. He employs constitutional economics supported by game theory and rational choice theory to inquire into reasons why the initial allocation of rights between God and Adam and Eve invited defection and why eviction from paradise rather than killing was the better option despite it being a reflection under certain conditions of what is seen as "rational foolishness" in a prisoner's dilemma (PD) analysis.

Old Testament Essays presents its readers with the results of research in the Old Testament. Two elements are implicated, namely the biblical text and the interpreter. Other elements may intersect with this basic relationship, such as the socio-historical or –political context of the interpreter reading the text in terms of the precepts of what constitutes scientific research. Another element that intersects with this basic relationship is the location where Old Testament research is conducted and published, namely the guild of Old Testament scholars in the Old Testament Society of South Africa and *Old Testament Essays* as its publishing arm.

Without the contribution of Old Testament scholars worldwide, the journal would not have been able to publish. Thus, on the occasion of the 25th volume of *Old Testament Essays*, a word of thanks is appropriate to all those

who supported the journal, either by subscribing to the journal, writing articles, peer-reviewing of submissions, reviewing of books, editing or laying out. No journal can operate without an article editor or a book editor. The foundations laid by Jasper Burden and the team he gathered to launch *OTE* initially, as well as the structure that Phil Botha gave to the journal with Johan Coetzee (previous article editor), provided the journal with a solid base. To Hans van Deventer (current article editor) and Willem Boshoff (book editor) I want to express sincere thanks for fulfilling their tasks and so helping to sustain and maintain the journal's excellence. To Gerda de Villiers and Yolande Steenkamp a word of thanks for the language editing of the journal, the laying out of the text and especially the enforcing of the style rules that give the journal a professional look. A word of sincere thanks to Ann Potgieter for the administration of the journal, the dispatching of 300 journals at a time and invoicing each recipient. It is a mammoth task.

And a sincere word of thanks to you, dear reader, who participates in sustaining the journal by reading the articles, using them in your own research and eventually citing those you engage with.

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