

Editorial

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With this third and final edition of 2021 and of the 34th year of *Old Testament Essays*, we are pleased to publish fourteen new articles in the field of Old Testament scholarship. Taken together, the original research featured in the pages to follow represents both diversity and unity of interests, methods, texts and objectives as ancient texts are understood through the lens of current concerns and concepts.

Several articles share interest in exploring new ways of taking up older and more traditional literary-critical themes. This is evident in Joshua Spoelstra's investigation of the sister-wife episodes in Genesis (12:10–20; 20:1–18; 26:1–13). As a start, the author identifies parameters around the fourth story in the series, the latter characterised by very similar motifs. He concludes that there is a viable case of an inverted sister-wife type-scene in Gen 29–31 and offers a hypothetical rationale for the literary strategy so often employed in the Jacob-Cycle of narratives in Genesis.

Focusing also on narrative and characterisation, Orly Keren and Hagit Taragan ask us to consider once again Jonadab, son of Shimeah. Described as "A Figure Wrapped in Controversy," the authors argue that an increased appreciation for the intricacies involved in the construction of this character requires us to revisit the two brief scenes in which this nephew of David appear, namely 2 Sam 13: 3–5 and 30–37. Jonadab is shown as controversial, especially with reference to his moral status, in the following four contexts: the words employed to describe him, the narrator's evaluative point of view on his interpersonal actions and relations, the type of character he is within the story as a whole and the revision of older characterisation still present in the same chapter.

New ways of studying biblical language and how these add to the insights of older forms of biblical criticism are the focus of Nicholas Campbell's "Counting the Jeremiah's – Machine Learning and the Jeremiah narratives." Motivated by the lack of consensus on how we are to answer some of the redaction-critical questions arising from a close-reading of the prose sections of Jeremiah (chapters 26–45), the author asks whether machine learning can be of relevance to the ongoing discussion. It is concluded that this type of analysis and the variables introduced by the author into the design of the study at hand, though useful, are also limited when utilised as an exegetical approach to the study of the Old Testament.

June Dickie's article, 'What "Persuades" God to Respond to the Psalmist's Cry? Use of Rhetorical Devices Related to "Vows of Future Praise"

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in *Some Psalms of Lament* considers the decisive role played by language, specifically, rhetorical strategy Dickie questions popular understandings of the motivation behind vows in certain genres of prayers which suggest that future praise would be conditional on God's positive response. In addition, the author looks at the role of other possible rhetorical devices in giving form and content to constructions of the divine promise. Building on what she takes to be the foundational principles of Persuasion Theory, the article offers a fresh take on the nature of praise within the context of lament and the power dynamics that underlie the covenant relationship between God and the people.

A second shared focus in some of the contributions to the volume is the decisive influence of past and present ideologies, often specifically with reference to the ever-relevant category of gender. For example, in his article concerned with the empowerment of women, Doniwen Petersen looks at both the roles, images and limited contributions of women in Deuteronomy and the associated socio-economic dimensions of the Covenant Code. In doing so, Pietersen seeks to describe the link between disempowerment and certain poverty alleviation laws, thereby offering a contemporary theological appropriation of the ancient patriarchal discourse.

The question of ethics in various gender-based relationships governed by ancient constructions of crime and punishment of a very specific type lies at the centre of Shaul Bar's "Death by Stoning in the Hebrew Bible and in Post-biblical Traditions." Observing how different modes of death appear in the Hebrew Bible, the author looks for the rationale that would account for the detailed form of descriptions accompanying the laws related to this form of execution. By examining associated contents in the Bible as well as their later Jewish reception in the Talmud, it is argued that it is indeed possible to make sense of certain peculiarities in the depiction by taking into consideration the different anthropological and eschatological beliefs present/absent in the different texts and contexts.

Similarly concerned with issues of ideology and gender and the way these also interact in the interpretative process itself, Robert Wafawanaka explores what he calls "Toxic Masculinity in Africa and the Bible." In this contribution, the author highlights possible problems arising from adopting, with good intentions, a so-called "Strong-man Model" in Feminist Biblical Interpretation. In an interesting and deconstructive comparative assessment, Wafanaka argues that older attempts to show how female characters (such as Sarah, Hagar, Yael, Rahab, Jezebel and Abigail) were portrayed as being equal or superior to their male counterparts may reinforce the discourse of toxic masculinity which the article rejects as a standard of human greatness.

L. Juliana Claassens adds to the critical discussion on the biblical use of female imagery in the world of the text in her essay entitled "The Ethical Obligation to Disrupt: Facing the Bloody City in Nah 3:1-7." She focuses on some of the polemical, patriarchal portrayals of the collective geographical scapegoat as somehow a female entity constructed metaphorically from the

source domain of pollution imagery. Claassens shows how the ethical implications of calls for disruption can be considered an important way of looking at associated prophetic traditions through the lens of gender, postcolonial and queer biblical interpretation.

The prophetic literature and its religious language are also the foci of Kang Bin, who takes a closer look at "The Rhetoric of Honour and Shame in Understanding the Fate of the King of Tyre Ezek 28:1–19." Building on insights that the political and economic relationship with Judah influenced the choice of religious language in the oracles against Tyre, Bin reflects on the place of honour/shame rhetoric in Ezek 28:1–19. From this perspective, Bin adds to our appreciation of the supervening social-scientific dimension, considering the biblical writer's intention to offer some comfort to and perception of meaningfulness to the people in exile.

The cardinal role of women as ideological scapegoats appears in Hans-Georg Wüch's "Dismiss All Foreign Wives!" The Understanding of the Torah in Ezra–Nehemiah as a Step towards Exclusive Judaism." Based on the general consensus that parts of the Mosaic Law were already assumed to have the status of Torah during the Persian period, the author seeks to make sense of the demand to divorce all foreign wives, which, contrary to how it is presented in the text, is not reflective of the diverse requirements in the Pentateuch. The study argues that the particular requirement fits into the contemporaneous identity politics characterising a particular variety of emergent exclusivism variety of Judaism.

Another article which also focuses on Ezra-Nehemiah and again with a specific interest in ideology, albeit in the context of the recent history of interpretation, is by Louis C. Jonker and it examines the last contributions of the influential Chronicles scholar, Gary Knoppers. Jonker takes us on a journey through Knopper's posthumously published last book, characterised by an ideological-critical turn not present in his earlier research. The interesting examples discussed to this end include the 'conspicuous' disappearance and downplaying of specific people and places in texts of Ezra-Nehemiah.

In her "Making Some Sense of the Paradox: Polyphony, Conflicting Ideologies, Dialogism and the Dialectic Dynamics of Ecclesiastes," Barbara M. Leung-Lai seeks to correlate some of the recent advances in the study of Ecclesiastes. In this article, we are presented with what she refers to as "four intentionally hammered out reading strategies," namely 'reading polyphonically; reading "cross the grains"; reading dialectically and reading narratively.' The author concludes that such a multi-level approach represents a useful and insightful holistic approach to understanding the paraconsistent logic governing the diversity and contradictions of Qohelet's words.

Nidhani de Andrade's contribution is about "Reconciliation in the Templeless Age: The Servant as Sanctuary in Isaiah 53. Our attention is turned away from the classic Jewish and Christian polemics about the identity of the character to its function. More specifically, by looking at the cultic elements involved in the construction, the author suggests that servant represents the way

a person rather than a place would have to fill “the cultic void” in a time without a temple.

The articles section concludes with “The Anti-Yahweh Label *laššāw*’ in Jeremiah (PART 1) by C. Wynand Retief. The author looks at three texts (Jer 2:30; 4:30 and 6:29) making a case that the religious language under consideration represents a carefully crafted derogatory allusion to the god Baal and to the associated illegitimate covenantal relation to Israel.

Thus, with this variety of topics, texts and trajectories, we close this editorial with a few words of gratitude. We express our appreciation to everyone who made the present edition possible, including the authors featured, those who reviewed the submissions, the editorial team members—general, article, book review or language focused—and you, the reader. Ultimately, as a proudly South African academic journal of the Old Testament Society of South Africa, we are honoured to continue to provide a platform for high-quality biblical scholarship, engaging ancient and contemporary contexts and concerns, giving a voice to colleagues working both locally and abroad. Indeed, this part of our vision and mission is well reflected in the contributions to the present edition.

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