

Editors' Foreword

The International Exegetical Commentary on the Old Testament (IECOT) offers a multi-perspectival interpretation of the books of the Old Testament to a broad, international audience of scholars, laypeople and pastors. Biblical commentaries too often reflect the fragmented character of contemporary biblical scholarship, where different geographical or methodological sub-groups of scholars pursue specific methodologies and/or theories with little engagement of alternative approaches. This series, published in English and German editions, brings together editors and authors from North America, Europe, and Israel with multiple exegetical perspectives.

From the outset the goal has been to publish a series that was “international, ecumenical and contemporary.” The international character is reflected in the composition of an editorial board with members from six countries and commentators representing a yet broader diversity of scholarly contexts.

The ecumenical dimension is reflected in at least two ways. First, both the editorial board and the list of authors includes scholars with a variety of religious perspectives, both Christian and Jewish. Second, the commentary series not only includes volumes on books in the Jewish Tanach/Protestant Old Testament, but also other books recognized as canonical parts of the Old Testament by diverse Christian confessions (thus including the deuterocanonical Old Testament books).

When it comes to “contemporary,” one central distinguishing feature of this series is its attempt to bring together two broad families of perspectives in analysis of biblical books, perspectives often described as “synchronic” and “diachronic” and all too often understood as incompatible with each other. Historically, diachronic studies arose in Europe, while some of the better known early synchronic studies originated in North America and Israel. Nevertheless, historical studies have continued to be pursued around the world, and focused synchronic work has been done in an ever greater variety of settings. Building on these developments, we aim in this series to bring synchronic and diachronic methods into closer alignment, allowing these approaches to work in a complementary and mutually-informative rather than antagonistic manner.

Since these terms are used in varying ways within biblical studies, it makes sense to specify how they are understood in this series. Within IECOT we understand “synchronic” to embrace a variety of types of study of a biblical text *in one given stage of its development*, particularly its final stage(s) of development in existing manuscripts. “Synchronic” studies embrace non-historical narratological, reader-response and other approaches along with historically-informed exegesis of a particular stage of a biblical text. In contrast, we understand “diachronic” to embrace the full variety of modes of study of a biblical text *over time*.

This diachronic analysis may include use of manuscript evidence (where available) to identify documented pre-stages of a biblical text, judicious use of clues within the biblical text to reconstruct its formation over time, and also an examination of the ways in which a biblical text may be in dialogue with earlier biblical (and non-biblical) motifs, traditions, themes, etc. In other words, diachronic study focuses on what might be termed a “depth dimension” of a given text—how a

text (and its parts) has journeyed over time up to its present form, making the text part of a broader history of traditions, motifs and/or prior compositions. Synchronic analysis focuses on a particular moment (or moments) of that journey, with a particular focus on the final, canonized form (or forms) of the text. Together they represent, in our view, complementary ways of building a textual interpretation.

Of course, each biblical book is different, and each author or team of authors has different ideas of how to incorporate these perspectives into the commentary. The authors will present their ideas in the introduction to each volume. In addition, each author or team of authors will highlight specific contemporary methodological and hermeneutical perspectives—e.g. gender-critical, liberation-theological, reception-historical, social-historical—appropriate to their own strengths and to the biblical book being interpreted. The result, we hope and expect, will be a series of volumes that display a range of ways that various methodologies and discourses can be integrated into the interpretation of the diverse books of the Old Testament.

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Author's Foreword

This volume is the fruit of a project undertaken in partnership with my esteemed colleague Carolyn J. Sharp, who teaches at Yale Divinity School. It began nearly fifteen years ago and was carried out through transatlantic visits, meetings at conferences in the United States and in Europe, and countless e-mails. The result is a two-volume commentary on the book of Jeremiah that emphasizes new hermeneutical perspectives in Jeremiah research from different points of view. In my interpretation of Jer 1–25, based on a feminist hermeneutics, I employ insights from postcolonial theory and trauma studies. In engaging these perspectives, Carolyn Sharp and L. Juliana Claassens (University of Stellenbosch) have been my constructive dialogue partners and have supported me, as colleagues and friends, in my research and writing.

Our project was initiated with essential support from the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation and the Dean of Yale Divinity School, Harold Attridge. I thank him, as well as our colleagues in the United States and Europe who exchanged and discussed ideas with us, in New Haven and in Marburg. Members of the program section “Writing/Reading Jeremiah” invited me to present my conclusions for discussion at meetings of the Society of Biblical Literature and motivated me to think beyond the usual boundaries. The German Research Foundation made it possible for me to devote a year to intensive research. Helmut Utzschneider debated the analysis of dramatic texts with me. My Marburg colleagues and students never tired of discussing Jeremiah with me in seminars and graduate colloquia. Josephine Haas and Sarah Döbler gave me energetic support in reading and correcting the German manuscript. Walter Dietrich, senior editor of the IEKAT/IECOT series at the time, offered encouraging comments on my manuscript in its various versions. Alexander Müller proofread the German manuscript with the greatest care. In a joint effort, Linda Maloney and I translated it into English, including the German quotations of works for which no English editions were available, and Justin Howell reviewed that version. Florian Specker of Kohlhammer supervised the correct formatting and indexing of both manuscripts. To all of them—and many others besides—I offer my most sincere thanks.

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