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Changes in the Study of Sacred Texts

Introduction to “Changes in the Study of Sacred Texts”

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The idea for this special journal issue grew gradually from a need to bring together and present some of the fruits of theoretical and methodological discussions the contributors have been part of in the Centre of Excellence *Changes in Sacred Texts and Traditions* (CSTT). This large research community, funded by the Academy of Finland and based in the Faculty of Theology at the University of Helsinki, has brought together in the past six years (2014-2019) some fifty scholars working in the field of biblical studies. The scholars of CSTT represent a wide variety of sub-fields in biblical studies. Their specific research areas include, for example, the study of Ancient Near Eastern sources, the Hebrew Bible, the Septuagint, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and the societies of the Ancient Near East and Second Temple Judaism reflected in these sources. This wide spectrum of research interests has also meant that the scholars have engaged with a great number of sources, both material and textual, and used a variety of different methods. In this way, the CSTT has provided its members with a stimulating environment that has challenged us to constantly engage with other areas of study and diverse methodologies. During the six-year funding period of the CSTT, we have gradually learned the benefits of cross-fertilizing our respective fields of study and the fundamental need for continued discussion and collaboration as a way of enriching our thinking and scholarship. Much of the discussion and debate in the CSTT has focused on different methods and theoretical approaches and the constant need to evaluate and refine them in order for them to answer the challenges presented by the ever-growing and diversifying source material and advancing scholarship. This thematic issue represents some of the results of these methodological discussions as they pertain to the study of texts that are currently part of the Hebrew Bible.

It is evident that the continued discussion about methods, underlying theories, and approaches in dialogue with the analyzed sources and advancements in the field of biblical studies and broader humanities is a necessity. Without such continued discussion, the methodological tools cannot properly account for the different aspects of the source material. Moreover, the constant refinement

of these tools is necessary to confront valid criticism of different methods and hence to maintain their relevance for future studies as well. This is currently true especially for the historical-critical methods but naturally pertains to other methods as well.

The classic division of the historical-critical methods and the weight of traditional axioms are currently restricting rather than enabling attempts to understand the sources under investigation in a more comprehensive and reliable way. These problems are currently widely recognized in the field of biblical studies and much discussed. However, some scholars have seen this methodological issue as severe enough to abandon historical study altogether. It should be recognized that without the study of such diachronic matters as historical-critical methods have sought to answer, theories on social phenomena and the like are without a solid basis and the need to revise the methodology should be a joint effort of the whole field. It is part of the renewal of science that new sources and research questions challenge the existing methods, their axioms, and applicability for particular tasks. New sources often bring about fresh questions that reveal the need for further revision of methodological paradigms. This is how advancing research and methodological considerations form a necessary and hopefully fruitful constant dialogue. Furthermore, methodological reconsideration happens, as all science does, by trial and error. Fresh openings should be welcomed and failures should likewise be better communicated and appreciated since they move the wider conversation forward. For new milestones to be reached and research paradigms gradually changed requires close and meaningful collaboration between experts of different areas and recognition of the need to consider all the available evidence.

The contributions in this journal issue are meant to engage and advance the current scholarly discussion concerning methods and theories used in the study of texts. They aim to demonstrate the need to take into account all the available evidence and different theoretical perspectives and show the benefits of doing so. The finding of the Dead Sea Scrolls revolutionized the study of the Hebrew Bible and Second Temple Judaism. In his contribution, "Textual Plurality of Scripture in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Theories of Textual Transmission," Mika S. Pajunen discusses methodological and theoretical perspectives that have been used to deal with the evident plurality of "biblical" texts among the Scrolls. By offering perspectives on the use of statistics, the influence of certain methodological axioms and background theories, and the broader classification of the biblical Scrolls, Pajunen argues for the broader use of different methods and for further refinement of theories of textual transmission in light of the available evidence. In his article, "An Integrative Approach to Textual History: How Fluid Textual Traditions Challenge Methodology," Ville Mäkipelto continues this discussion on the repercussions of textual plurality and the need to include all the available textual

sources, not just the current “biblical” ones, when discussing the transmission and development of texts and wider traditions. Through a case study on Joshua’s curse on a rebuilders of Jericho, Mäkipelto argues for the use of an integrative approach to textual history that would utilize a plurality of texts and methods. Joanna Töyräänvuori, “Psalm 29 and Methodological Triangulation: What Ugaritic Parallels and Iconographic Motifs can Add to the Interpretation of a Psalm?” likewise argues for the use of wider range of sources, including iconography and material artifacts. She shows through a case study on Psalm 29 how methodological triangulation, i.e., combining different methods and sources to answer a research question, and combining different types of sources can shed further light on not only the primarily investigated text but potentially on aspects of the other sources as well. Timo Tekoniemi, “Enhancing the Depiction of a Prophet: The Repercussions of Textual Criticism for the Study of the Elisha Cycle,” further demonstrates the need for the integration of different methodological approaches and available sources. He argues that literary-critical studies on the Elisha cycle in Kings need to take into account the text-critical evidence, and especially the Old Greek translation that acted as the *Vorlage* of the Vetus Latina manuscript *Palimpsestus Vindobonensis*. Tekoniemi analyzes the textual differences between the Old Greek and the Masoretic Text and concludes that the Elisha cycle was changed through minor changes in the latter from a tragedy to an ideologically more orthodox depiction of Elisha. In the final contribution to the current issue, “Characterizing the Translation Differences within Septuagint Jeremiah According to Known Revisional Tendencies,” Miika Tucker continues the long history of the University of Helsinki in the study of the Septuagint’s translation technique. Tucker investigates the choice of translation equivalents in Jeremiah in view of prior studies that have established the different natures of the translation in Jeremiah a’ (LXX-Jer 1-28) and Jeremiah b’ (LXX-Jer 29-52). Tucker examines the character of Jeremiah b’ in relation to the current scholarly knowledge of the *kaige* and other early revisions and argues that comparison of such revisional tendencies with other non-*kaige* texts allows for a more precise characterization of a translation and its revisional tendencies. Tucker confirms the previously suggested revisional character of Jeremiah b’ and defines it more precisely as an inconsistent revision where residues of the Old Greek translation are still to be found.

Together, the contributions in this special journal issue show the need and benefits of combining different methodological perspectives and available sources in order to gain a fuller and more reliable view of the investigated sources and their underlying phenomena such as textual transmission.