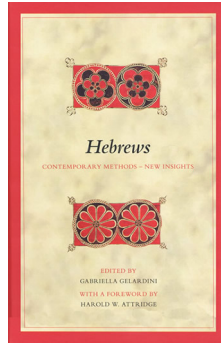


## ○ REVIEW OF G. GERLARDINI (ED.), *HEBREWS*

Christina Petterson, Macquarie University

Correspondence to Christina Petterson: christina.petterson@scmp.mq.edu.au

Christina Petterson reviews G. Gelardini (ed.), *Hebrews: Contemporary Methods – New Insights*, Leiden: Brill, 2005.



A friend of mine and former colleague at the Department of Biblical Exegesis in Copenhagen, Stefan is at the moment working on his dissertation on the letter to the Hebrews. He characterises his own work as good old fashioned exegesis, and mine as weird (and not very wonderful) postcolonial-SBL-ish stuff. When this book arrived, I leafed through it and immediately thought that this most certainly was something Stefan would be interested in. At the same time he had leafed through it and thought this is something Christina would be interested in... (As far as the title goes, he is completely wrong; I guess I am more to the flashy kinds, my all time favourite being Stephanie Stillman's paper from AAR's national meeting in 2005, entitled 'A hard habit to break. The work of mapping postconciliar Catholicism on nuns' bodies').

*Hebrews: Contemporary Methods – New Insights* is a collection of 14 articles, the first of its kind within Hebrews scholarship, edited and introduced by Gabriella Gelardini, with a foreword by the grand... man of Hebrews studies, Harold Attridge. The collection is divided into 3 parts: Cultic language, concepts and practice in Hebrews; Sociology, ethics and rhetoric in Hebrews; and Textual-historical, comparative, and intertextual approaches to Hebrews.

The articles in part 1 have the cultic language and practice in common. However, the three first articles (E. & W. Stegemann; Willi-Plein and Eberhart) also share a common interest in metaphors. But the articles seem to address issues outside this collection, which made some of the arguments difficult to follow. This is especially the case with the first article, by Ekkehard W. and Wolfgang Stegemann, 'Does the cultic language in Hebrews represent sacrificial metaphors? Reflections on some basic problems'. I vaguely sensed a paradigm shift of profound significance, but without the German context and the debates it remained a vague sense. And I could not for the life of me understand the non-metaphorical reading of the death of Jesus in Hebrews. Either it was because the result seemed essentially high-Lutheran which seemed to

clash rather violently with the hip Derridean perspective in the first half or I missed some vital point on the first, second and third reading.

Willi-Plein ('Some remarks on Hebrews from the viewpoint of Old Testament exegesis') continues on the basis of the discussion of metaphors in Hebrews, instigated in the first article. Refusing to concede to a notion of metaphorical language (because it seems it implies that images described in metaphors do not exist) in Hebrews the article is a reading of the Day of Atonement ritual in Hebrews from an OT perspective. I found the extreme territorial markings of the OT/NT distinction very intriguing. Several times the article's specific viewpoint of OT exegesis is made explicit, but one place combined with a resignation in regards to the 'new (christological) meaning'. This I found decidedly odd, because Old Testament studies (as opposed to Hebrew bible studies or Jewish bible studies) is per definition a Christian subject, encouraging readings that are theologically palatable. The reading is thus undertaken with theological presuppositions that are hidden behind a severe separation of the two groups of texts that sees the NT interpretation as irrelevant or outside the OT guild.

Christian A. Eberhart, 'Characteristics of sacrificial metaphors in Hebrews' continues the sacrificial theme that was predominant in Willi-Plein's article in a long and thorough article on cultic language in Hebrews and its background in HB/OT. His argument is that Hebrews continues within and combines two strands of metaphorical interpretation of sacrifice already present in HB/OT.

We leave the metaphors here and move on to Scott W. Hahn's 'Covenant, cult and the curse-of-death: *diathēkē* in Heb 9:15-22', which is a very carefully argued essay on the covenant motif in Hebrews. He argues for an understanding of covenant that moves beyond the post-enlightenment assumption of the separation between cult and law. Hahn is aware of the theological complexities that would emerge from this reading and follows it up with a detailed exegesis of the texts in question (10:19-22) that takes these into account. Very enjoyable.

Then we move on to two hard-core form critical interpretations of Hebrews: Elke Tönges, 'The epistle to the Hebrews as a "Jesus-midrash"' which investigates Hebrews as a Midrash by comparing introductory formulae, eschatology and use of HB figures. I did find some really interesting observations in the article concerning the shift from a written to an oral tradition. But my interest drowned in the tedious attempt to yet again posit some connection with a text-external frame of reference, in this case the rabbinic tradition. The same may be said of Gabriella Gelardini, 'Hebrews, an ancient synagogue homily for Tisha be-Av: Its function, its basis, its theological interpretation', which is, as the title avidly suggests, an extensive argument for understanding Hebrews as part of the Palestinian Triennial Cycle.

Ellen Bradshaw Aitken's article 'Portraying the temple in stone and text: the arch of Titus and the epistle to the Hebrews' opens part 2, and its focus on sociology, ethics and rhetoric. In response to a veritable void of explicit political and ideological readings of Hebrews, Aitken presents a refreshing reading of Hebrews setting it within a Roman imperial context, namely the Flavian triumph in Rome. Comparing Hebrews' use of the sanctuary of Israel to promote its message of true rule with the Flavians use of the same sanctuary for the same purpose, she interprets Hebrews' interpretation as an act of resistance to the imperial power and an attempt to construct an ethic and religious identity under the threat of the Roman empire. The concluding reflections point at the abuse of this triumphalism in current political practice. (One might argue that if the purpose of the Flavians and Hebrews are the same, the postulate of Hebrews as a

resistance rest upon theological assumptions rather than essential features of the text. This then unsettles the notion of abuse making it a more a question of political perspective.)

Knut Backhaus addresses the old form-critical distinction between theology and paraenesis in 'How to entertain angels: Ethics in the epistle to the Hebrews'. Noting two traditional disproportions in Hebrews i) between theology and ethics (the theological mountain giving birth to a moral mouse), and ii) between the universal claim and the exclusive group ethic, the article engages with these disproportions and through the application of sociology of knowledge and cultural anthropology shows how they actually are in harmony in the overall argument of Hebrews. The group ethics carries us into the next article by Benjamin Dunning, 'The intersection of alien status and cultic discourse in the epistle to the Hebrews'. Dunning situates the letter to the Hebrews within a discourse of outsiderhood, which functions as a means of creating a community identity within an extremely diverse world, namely the socio-religious world of Greco-Roman antiquity. Dunning argues that Hebrews is defining itself within the Roman world by making use of images associated with the Levitical tradition. (One could argue that the extensive usage of the cultic language and OT and Jewish heroes seems to be a rather comprehensive argument and if Hebrews is addressing a Roman situation it seems to be comparable to killing a flea with a sledgehammer (or as we say in Danish to shoot sparrows with canons). More fundamentally one could also point to the absolute dependency of Hebrews' argument on the ongoing function of the Levitical cult and its strategies of inclusion of exclusion.

Last article in group 2 is Helmut Löhr, 'Reflections of rhetorical terminology in Hebrews', which is an investigation into the use of rhetorical terms in Hebrews in order to reflect on the possibility of whether Hebrews consciously is deploying rhetorical strategies. He traces a number of concepts in Hebrews and their context in the art of rhetoric ranging from Isocrates in the 5th century BCE to Nikolaos of Myra in the 5th CE and finds that they have connections to technical rhetorical discourse, which enables Löhr to confirm the assumption of Hebrews as an example of deliberative rhetoric.

Part three on textual historical, comparative and intertextual approaches is also a mixture of new and old. Pamela M. Eisenbaum, 'Locating Hebrews within the literary landscape of Christian Origins' overtly states that she will address the familiar questions of authorship, date and addressees from a new framework, namely the literary context, or landscape of early Christian texts. While the questions Eisenbaum asks and the observations she presents generate many thoughts and perspectives, the answers and the obsessing desire to answer them are disappointing in that she closes down the vast field of opportunities she has just served up with great enthusiasm. The same may apply to Giorgi's article, 'Hebrews and the heritage of Paul', which also presents a refreshing look at Hebrews within New Testament writings and papyrus evidence (as did Eisenbaum), which also yield multiple interesting questions and directions for further pursuits. However, he also wishes to present us with the reconstruction of early Christianity.

James C. Miller, 'Paul and Hebrews: A comparison of narrative worlds' – If the article is motivated by a lack of interpretations of the narrative universe of Hebrews, I fail to see why it is necessary to compare with Paul. Furthermore the construction of Paul's narrative universe based on the corpus of Pauline letters was supposed to give a more thorough analysis of Paul. From the references to the Pauline letters (Romans: 33; Galatians: 9; Philippians: 6; 1 Corinthians 2; 2 Corinthians 2), it seems rather clear that the construction of the Pauline narrative universe is entirely governed by the construction of the view of salvation history in Hebrews, that again

is thoroughly coloured by a salvation-by-faithish understanding of Paul. So it should come as no surprise that remarkable similarities occur.

Jennifer L. Koosed and Robert P. Seesengood, 'Constructions and collusions: The making and unmaking of identity in Qoheleth and Hebrews' – A more careful, interesting and yielding construction of comparison is found in this rich article, where the history of inquiry of these two ambiguous texts are brought into conversation. Instead of looking for yet another author, Koosed and Seesengood explore the questions and answers concerning authorship and the theological and cultural assumptions that govern them. I especially enjoyed the reflections on the texts' openness as the means of self-preservation, ensuring that they are read again and again. Hebrews: Contemporary methods – new insights appears to answer this claim and so this article is a perfect ending to this collection.

And while I am on the subject of editing: there seems to have been put a lot of care in placing each article in this collection. When read from one end to another the articles flow and touch upon the argument in the next, or implicitly rely upon an argument in the former. Some of the articles gain extra force from their context in the collection. But something did nag me as I read the articles, and when I read Backhaus it struck me, since he mentions that his article is a translation from the German. It is the orchestration of several scholarly discourses so as to construct an illusion of coherence, the principle of unison being the English language. In spite of being in English, several of the articles address a German theological situation, which is apparent from the references as well as the content. Of the 16 contributors to this volume 6 are from German universities, 5 from universities in the USA, 2 from Canada, 2 from Switzerland and 1 from Kenya.

While it is more or less up to the individual scholar if or to what extent they wish to contextualise their interpretations, or speak as the author of Hebrews, without mother, father or genealogy (Koester 2001: 58), it would have been helpful had there been an indication of their place and voice within their respective traditions in the introduction seeing as their differences have been collapsed in English. This would underscore the fact that these articles, and exegetical work in general are not only important for Hebrews scholars; they also have bearing on the exegetical environments from where they arise and with which they engage.

In sum, I would say that both Stefan and Christina could find several things of interest in this collection.

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## REFERENCES

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- Schottroff, Luise. *The Parables of Jesus*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press; 2006