Old Testament exegesis:
Reflections on methodology

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Abstract

The question of methodology remains important in dealing with biblical texts, given the fact that the Hebrew Bible is not an uncomplicated book. Its meaning is embedded in the history of the people who wrote it, read it, passed it on, rewrote it, and read it again. The question addressed in this article is in which manner should exegetes analyze texts? Which methodology should be followed during the exegetical process? What would be the most appropriate method to do justice to the texts of the Hebrew Bible? In both South African and European exegetical arena this debate is still continuing and over the past decades several contributions have kept it alive. The aim of this article is to make a contribution to this ongoing debate. It focuses primarily on Psalms and Pentat-euchal studies. The call is made upon exegetes to pursue a diachronically reflected synchronic reading.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Old Testament (OT) is not an uncomplicated book. Its meaning is embedded in the history of the people who wrote it, read it, passed it on, rewrote it, and read it again (Schniedewind 2004:5). Through this statement it is, at once, implied that the OT was not written at one time or in one place. Part of the richness of the OT literature is its complexity resulting from its redaction and composition, which took place over a long period of time. One can even assert that the power of the OT literature actually lies in this long involved process.[1]

Particular traditions were vital and central to ancient Israel and early Judaism: eventually a written form took shape that was read, interpreted, revised and reread. This outcome reflects a diachronic richness and

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[1] Cf also in this regard Becker (2005:1): "Nun ist das Alte Testament nicht nur eine Sammlung sehr verschiedenartiger Bücher …, sondern es hat einen sehr spezifischen Charackter … Denn die alttestamentlichen Schriften sind nicht das Werk von Autoren im modernen Sinne, sondern verdanken sich einer mitunter komplizierten Wachstumsgeschichte."

complexity that must be accounted for in any discussion of its redaction and composition (Schniedewind 2004:19). The OT is closely linked and tied to the ear in which these traditions were collected, written down, edited, rewritten, and finally brought together in this book (these books), which we today call the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament.[2]

The literature of the OT can be compared to a cathedral which had been built over decades and centuries (Becker 2005:1-2). We can therefore identify different building styles from the different epochs during which building work was undertaken in order to complete the cathedral. Often there is no sign of unity or style. The origins of such a building can only be discovered in the foundations which are hidden underneath the crypt. In order to rightfully understand the building history of such a cathedral, one has to dig into the history of its origins – otherwise one will only comprehend the surface structure. The person who is prepared to put in some effort in order to pursue this history, will be able to make surprising discoveries. Every epoch has its own philosophical framework of mind which makes a cathedral into a mirror reflecting the architectural history as well as theological history of a number of centuries which are all combined into one single building.

Exegetes should approach an OT text in a similar manner, should they endeavour to do justice to the text. It seems that there is a general agreement that texts should be interpreted in their historical contexts, in light of the literary and cultural conventions of their time. Becker (2005:4) puts this assumption to words as follows:

> Die Bibel muβ, wenn man sie ihr eigenes Wort sagen läβt, *historisch* verstanden werden. Gerade um die Bibeltexte ernstzunehmen, sollen sie – befreit von vorgefaβten Meinungen – ihr eigenes Wort sagen können. Und das können sie nur, wenn man sie als geschichtliche Zeugnisse wahrnimmt, die *in* einer bestimmten Zeit und *für* eine bestimmte Zeit entstanden sind.

The famous exegete Bernhard Duhm (1847-1928) also understood his exegetical work in a similar manner. In the introduction to his commentary on the book of Isaiah, he formulated the necessity of a historical understanding of the OT texts as follows: "… so werden diese die beste Schutzmauer für die alten Schriftsteller gegen die Razzien der Dogmatiker aller farben sein" (Duhm 1914:v).

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[2] Becker (2005:3) states as follows: "Die alttestamentliche Texte haben ein Alter von etwa 2800 bis 2000 Jahren; sie stammen aus einer anderen kulturellen Welt; sie sind in einer fremden, völlig anders strukturierten Sprache geschrieben. Wer solche Texte verstehen will, muβ sie in unsere Sprach- und Denkwelt übersetzen, sie für uns erschließen."

The question can now be posed: in which manner should exegetes analyze a text? Which methodology should they follow? What would be the most appropriate method to do justice to such (a) text(s)?

2.   A QUESTION OF METHODOLOGY

The question of hermeneutics and methodology remains important in dealing with biblical texts. The discussion on methodology in the South African exegetical and hermeneutical debate has not yet been completed (Human 1999:354-368; Prinsloo 1992:182-188). Several contributions during the past years (and decades) have kept this debate alive and well.[3] Although no final conclusions with regard to methodological issues have been reached at all – even into the first decade of the new millennium – it nevertheless seems that the continuing discussion brings some new insights. The duration of the discussion has brought growth and more understanding for different viewpoints and approaches. The aim of this article is to contribute to this ongoing South African debate concerning methodology. Indeed, in this regard I do not want to exclude the European (and Anglo-Saxon) scene at all, as methodological issues are being debated here as well (sometimes in a quite heated manner).[4]

In the subsequent sections I will outline the way in which I foresee the Old Testament exegetical landscape to travel the methodological pathway. It consists of two subsections. In the first one the focus will be on Psalms studies, and in the second part some conclusions will be drawn regarding Pentateuchal studies.

3.   PSALMS STUDIES: BEYOND THE SYNCHRONIC VERSUS DIACHRONIC CONTROVERSY

At the beginning of the twenty-first century Psalm studies are very different from what they were a few decades ago. What holds for all fields of study of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament, holds no less for the interpretation of the Psalms: in recent decades traditional hypotheses and methods have undergone such a process of refinement that they have practically disintegrated (Berges 1999:118-138; Berges 2000:167-198; Zenger 1994:37-54). The last decades of psalm studies have been characterised by a widespread questioning of "assured results" and a willingness to ask new questions and venture down new avenues. New insights question the old

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[3] See Groenewald (2004:544) for some bibliographical references with regard to this debate.

[4] See Groenewald (2004:545) for some bibliographical references with regard to this ongoing debate.

suppositions as well as the epistemologies underlying these suppositions (Spiekermann 1998:137-153; Zenger 1994:43).

It is important to note the following general remarks with regard to Psalms exegesis. Since Gunkel and Mowinckel Psalm scholarship has been dominated by the form-critical and cult-functional approaches (Spieckermann 1998:137ff; Zenger 2000:399-435). Form criticism, with its fixation on the type of Psalms, has, however, shown little interest in the Psalter as a whole (Zenger 2000:414). The Psalms were only treated as songs which were composed independently of each other, resulting in the fact that each Psalm was treated as a closed unit. These approaches ignore the canonical order of the Psalms and rearrange Psalms according to the genre and *Sitz im Leben* of each Psalm; the result, however, has – by no means – been satisfactory. The insight has been growing that these approaches have a limited value in studying the Psalms, and consequently their gains have begun to diminish. Furthermore, today it is acknowledged that these approaches represent one methodological aspect of Psalm analysis among others. The shaping of the Psalter has softened the edges of the form critical categories, thereby not diminishing its validity as an exegetical and a heuristic tool.[5]

Psalm studies, like Biblical studies, have undergone a paradigm shift in the past decades. Texts are now read as texts, that is, as literary entities and canonical wholes. This assumption is manifested in Psalm studies in several ways, the most important of which is the attention paid to the Psalter as a book, as a coherent whole. As a result, one notices an increasing interest in Psalm exegesis from the point of both redaction criticism and composition criticism (Zenger 1994:43).[6] When specific elements in (a) text(s) are perceived as additions, the emphasis in exegesis is, at present, more on a possible "reconstruction" of the theological agenda of these stages of growth together with the "potential" group/groups responsible for these stages of

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[5] In this regard Janowski (1998:397) infers as follows: "Wie in jüngerer Zeit schrittweise erkannt wird, ist der kanonische Psalter das Ergebnis eines komplexen Sammlungs- und Redaktionsprozesses. In dessen Verlauf wird jeder Einzelpsalm in einen grösseren Kontext gestellt, durch den ihm oft ein neuer Sinn und eine zusätzliche Funktion zuwächst." (cf also Millard 1994; Weber 2001; Weber 2003; Wilson 1985.)

[6] According to Dietrich (2004:10), "nach und nach verfeinerte sich das methodische Instrumentarium, mit dessen Hilfe man immer komplexer werdende Fragen zu klären hoffte. Waren an der Entstehung eines Textes etwa mehrere Hände beteiligt – in welcher Reihenfolge und mit welchen Intentionen? Gab es zu den Texten mündliche Vorstufen, und wirkten bei ihrer Entfaltung Gattungsmuster prägend mit? Wie war die Abfolge der Überlieferungs- und Wachstumsstufen bis hin zur kanonischen Endgestalt vorzustellen, und welchen Veränderungen waren die Texte noch danach unterworfen?"

growth.[7] The redaction-critical endeavour is combined with a canonical reading of the text: it is the question regarding the significance of the individual text's position for the interpretation of this specific individual text.[8] Some recent studies have begun to note ways in which the shape of the Psalter may suggest the presence of some editorial purposes.[9] Admittedly, the results that have come from these studies are by no means conclusive, perhaps because the editors had a variety of purposes, but the probing that has begun suggests new ways of approaching Psalm studies. In this approach, we may be concerned to ask questions about what the editors of the canonical book of the Psalms intended to convey by the particular selection of Psalms that they have made available to us. In the Psalter we may therefore note the contribution of both the creators of the original Psalms and that of the editors. The objective of a compositional-critical reading of the text can be summarised as follows: to observe the literary microcosmos of the text within the macrocosmos of the text in a balanced manner.[10]

It is important to note that the net result of this recent interest in the Psalter is to bring it into the same arena in which most biblical books, for decades, have found themselves: an arena where they are treated as unified

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[7] According to Le Roux (1993:53) "*redaction history* examines the text's growth from the first written edition through all the stages of development, compilation and editorial commentary, to its final form. This comprises an explanation of the fusion of transmissions or traditions, the many additions and their influence on the text's final shape. In short, redaction history endeavours to organise and explain in terms of history. The importance of redaction history for the exegesis of the Old Testament is obvious. First, a theological framework of the final redactor is provided. At a specific point in time the final editor shaped the final text and conferred a 'final' meaning to it. Second, this meaning can be explained in terms of theological views of an earlier stage of development." Cf in this regard also Deist (1994:288): "*Histories* het hier 'n *ideologie-kritiese* bodem. Die teks (met sy boodskap word beskou as 'n *produk* van sosiale en ander omstandighede. Die historiese analise van die teks (gepaard met ander historiese inligting oor die tyd) moet derhalwe die ideologiese tendense uit die tekste rekonstrueer. Vir dié doel het die historiese-kritiese eksegetiese metode homself aangebied, terwyl 'n spesifieke geskiedteoretiese raamwerk die resultate van dié teksanalises in 'n samelewingskonteks plaas." Cf also the discussion of "Redaktionsgeschichte" by Becker (2005:76-97), "redactiekritische methode" by Beuken (1986:173-187) and "redaction historical approach" by Steck (1995:79-98).

[8] In this regard Zenger (1999:443) infers as follows: "Als wichtigste neue Perspektive beurteile ich selbst den Versuch, die Einzelpsalmen in ihrem größeren literarischen Kontext zu sehen, sei es als Teiltexte einer Psalmengruppe, sei es als Teiltexte des gesamten Psalmenbuchs."

[9] A helpful survey of recent publications on this trend is offered by Prinsloo (1995:459-469). In this survey he indicates the roots of this approach in the work of Gunkel and Mowinckel, whilst also highlighting the differences in current European and North American research. Compare also Howard (1999:329-368) and Mitchell (1997) for extensive bibliographical overviews.

[10] Spieckermann (1998:145) postulates as follows: "Primäre Orientierung der Auslegung an der Textebene bedeutet: Orientierung der Auslegung am einzelnen Psalm und am Psalter als Buch. Literarischer Mikrokosmos und Makrokosmos müssen in einem balancierten Verhältnis wahrgenommen werden. Einerseits gäbe es ohne die Mikrokosmen der Psalmen mit ihrer je eigenen Geschichte und Individualität den Makrokosmos des Psalters nicht. Und andererseits ist der Psalter nicht einfach das Konglomerat von 150 Psalmen, sondern eben ein literarischer Makrokosmos, ein weithin überlegt gestaltetes Gebilde, in der kanonisierten Endfassung gleichsam die endgültige Manifestation der einem jeden Psalm innewohnenden Intention, über seine Ursprungssituation hinauszuwachsen und in einem Ensemble von Stimmen dem Gotteslob in seiner ganzen Spannweite und Tiefe Stimme zu geben."

compositions and are mined for the treasures to be found in their whole message, as well as in their component parts. It furthermore also concurs with recent trends, for example, in the study of the twelve minor prophets (the *Dodecapropheton*). Much recent research on the book of the Twelve has focussed on the book as an edited whole (Barton 2000:33-37; Jeremias 1998:122-136. Compare Redditt (2001:47-80) for an extensive overview in this regard.). Scholars conducting this research do not advocate abandoning attention to the individual books or even the individual messages of the prophets, but they do advocate going beyond such readings to a more canonical approach. They begin with the observation that the Twelve constitute one book in the Hebrew canon. They point to superscriptions, catchwords as well as catchphrases at the onset and ending of each respective book, allusions, shared themes, and even an overall plot as evidence of a deliberate unity. They hold that reading the Twelve as a whole, supplements usual techniques of reading and yields insights missed by reading them only in isolation from one other. Therefore, this new development in Psalm studies can only be a salutary one.

A second area in which there have been far-reaching changes in the past few decades is in the studies of Hebrew poetry. These studies naturally range beyond the book of Psalms, but the Psalms are the largest corpus of Hebrew poetry. The individual Psalms have increasingly been seen as individual works of art. Poetic analysis has recourse to different approaches which are all – taken *in sensu lato* – within the domain of the literary sciences: poetology, structural analysis of different provenance, metaphor research, aesthetic theory of style and rhetoric, reader-response-criticism, etc (Spieckermann 1998:144). These different analyses are combined with the so-called "final-text exegesis", which attempts to take the end form of the text seriously as opposed to the historical-critical exegesis which (sometimes) attaches more importance to the first or more original form of the text (Zenger 1994:43).[11]

4. THE PENTATEUCH BETWEEN SYNCHRONY AND DIACHRONY

In numerous publications Eckart Otto has already indicated both the necessity and the value of a combined synchronical and diachronical reading of the

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[11] Cf in this regard also Prinsloo (1985:2): "Historical criticism must face the charge that, on the strength of its romantic supposition that the earliest source is the most authentic or the best, it has often failed to take proper account of the final text. In its attempt at reconstructing the so-called 'original' text it makes so much of the origin and growth of the final version that the latter is largely neglected."

Pentateuch.[12] According to him, it may be that some scholars reject the historical interpretation of the Old Testament. This historical interpretation, however, was and is an inevitable development of human consciousness. It may be that some scholars try to find a way out of the dilemma of modern historical-critical exegesis (with its masses of hypotheses) by falling back upon an (only) unhistorical synchronic reading of the "given" text, which has the danger of falling into the trap of a fundamentalistic reading of the text.[13]

The question would therefore be: what are the methodological possibilities we are faced with today? It seems that we have three possibilities to choose from, namely (i) a source critical analysis; (ii) a synchronic analysis; and (iii) the integration of a synchronical and diachronical text reading (Otto 2005:24-26).

4.1 Approach I: Source critical analysis

In the first instance exegetes normally reconstruct the text behind the text by using tensions, contradictions and other inconsistencies which occur in the given text.[14] Inconsistencies in the given texts are regarded as a source critical indication of a multiplicity of hands which had been responsible for the formation of the text. On the basis of this methodological endeavour most literary critical studies detect numbers of literary layers of redactions and textual additions resulting in a text torn apart like a literary patchwork (cf Becker 2005:39f).

Otto (2005:24), however, infers that a major problem with this approach is that it overlooks the fact that when more hands are involved in the formation of a text, it should have smoothed the inconsistencies in a text and caused more coherency in the text. The logical deduction is thus that these hands would have improved the coherency by smoothing tensions and contradictions in the text. It is a presupposition of the Enlightenment that modern exegetes are in a better position to interpret a Biblical text than its authors and readers

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[12] I only mention some of his latest publications: Otto (2004a:470-485); Otto (2004b:14-35); Otto (2005:22-49); Otto (2007) (forthcoming).

[13] Le Roux (1992:13) infers as follows in this regard: "Those inclined to a more fundamentalistic view of Scripture and those convinced of the supremacy of the immanent approach usually viewed historical criticism as either dangerous of redundant."

[14] Becker (2005:38) defines the goal of this method as follows: "So besteht die Aufgabe der Literarkritik darin, einen Einzeltext, einen größeren Textkomplex oder ein Buch auf seine literarische Einheitlichkeit hin zu befragen, mögliche Quellen herauszuarbeiten und Schichten freizulegen. Es handelt sich bei der Literarkritik also um ein *analytisches* Verfahren: Sie nimmt ihren Ausgangspunkt beim vorliegenden Text und sucht sein schriftlichen Vorlagen oder Vorstufen freizulegen, bis sie zum ältesten erreichbaren Kern vorgestoβen ist."

in antiquity.[15] This leads us to the following statement: if we detect tensions and inconsistencies in the text, our aim should not be in the first instance to try and smooth the text by means of a literary critical dismembering of the text. This approach actually has nothing to do with a historical approach to the text, because the mere idea that biblical texts are a patchwork of hundreds and thousands of fragments, and even pieces inserted into the texts, would be an improbable assumption (Otto 2005:23-24).

Texts could not have been formed in this way in antiquity, because the materials for the texts (scrolls) were far too expensive to imagine that they were writing and re-writing the one and same text again and again just in order to insert glosses. Even more important is the fact that by dissecting the text into its smallest units and identifying glosses, would mean to renounce the opportunity to identify hidden intentions and interests in the text, and thus loose a historical understanding of the given text. In this way literary criticism, as a tool of the historical interpretation of biblical texts, is becoming more and more counter-productive and has to be revised in view of historical hermeneutics (Otto 2005:24).

4.2 Approach II: Synchronic analysis

The second option would be that exegetes follow a different strategy in order to overcome this textual complexity, namely an unhistorical synchronical analysis (which also is not viable) (Le Roux 2005:9-12). Adherents to this approach try to ignore the tensions in the text, arguing that there are no inconsistencies in the given text. They deny the relevance of the historical-critical exegesis altogether, and advocate a synchronic interpretation of the text, claiming that the text is the only reliable basis for its interpretation.[16] They interpret the text without taking note of the historical authors' intentions, or even the question of how the text could have developed historically.[17] It

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[15] Otto (2004a:472) infers as follows in this regard: "Je größer die historische Tiefe der Fortschreibung eines Textes ist und also je mehr Hände an ihm gefeilt haben, umso mehr werden die literarische Kohärenz und Kohäsion eines Textes befördert und werden Inkohärenzen ausgeglichen. Wenn also literarische Spannungen und Brüche in einem Text stehen bleiben, so ist damit zu rechnen, dass damit eine Absicht verfolgt wird, Spannungen und Brüche auf der Sprach – wie der Inhaltsebene Teil also der Kommunikationsstrategie eines Textes sind."

[16] Le Roux (1992:14) offers critique of this viewpoint, stating that "the text is not a timeless object containing eternal truths which was written during one sitting. It originated in specific circumstances and is the product of its time. A historical investigation therefore focuses on the circumstances and the age in which it originates, as well as that in which it is transmitted."

[17] Cf in this regard Becker (2005:4): "Die Bibel muβ, wenn man sie ihr eigenes Wort sagen läβt, *historisch* verstanden werden. Gerade um die Bibeltexte ernstzunehmen, sollen sie – befreit von vorgefaβten Meinungen – ihr eigenes Wort sagen können. Und das können sie nur, wenn man sie als geschichtliche Zeugnisse wahrnimmt, die *in* einer bestimmten Zeit und *für* eine bestimmte Zeit entstanden sind."

seems that this approach pretends that the Bible is an uncomplicated book. The Bible, however, reflects a diachronic richness and complexity that must be accounted for in any discussion of its composition (Schniedewind 2004:19). A major problem is the fact that adherents of this approach deny the fact that the canon itself is the result of a long historical process.[18]

If theologians in general, and Biblical scholars in particular, want to be heard not only in a clerical context, but also in a secularized democratic society, they are obliged and even forced to avoid a fundamentalistic approach of an unhistorical Biblicism. If Biblical scholars want to engage in any ethical discourse taking place in modern-day societies, their only chance of being heard at all is by utilizing hermeneutical tools of a historical nature.[19] This means, and it must be stated categorically, that African (read: South African) Biblical scholarship cannot and should not work with unhistorical tools of biblical fundamentalism (Otto 2005:23). Should they do this, they would foster a sectarian mentality at odds with modern enlightened ways of thinking which formed, and are still forming, our society/societies.[20]

4.3   Approach III: The Pentateuch between synchrony and diachrony

It seems, however, that there is a way out of the above-mentioned dilemmas by means of a third way: to integrate a synchronical and a diachronical

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[18] Otto (2004a:470) infers as follows in this regard: "Der Damm gegen eine Historisierung des Verständnisses der Bibel brach mit der Einsicht, dass der Kanon selbst historisch geworden ist, die Exegese des biblischen Textes in der Konsequenz sich also keiner Spezialhermeneutik, die die Auslegung kanonischer Schriften der Bibel von der anderer Zeugnisse antiker Kultur unterscheidet, bedienen kann, sondern die Bibel methodisch wie jeder andere Text der Antike interpretiert werden muss, will die biblische Exegese vor dem modernen historischen Welt- und Textverständnis als Ausdruck modernen Wahrheitsverständnisses bestehen."

[19] Cf also Le Roux (1992:14): "The growth of Old Testament texts should not only be closely linked to Israel's history, but their historical probability should also be illustrated. If someone believes that a certain theological trend in text A originated during the exile, he must explain why that time in Israel's history was favourable for such a development. He must be able to illustrate why circumstances in Israel gave rise to that theological view. Theories about the origin and theology of text must, in other words, be historically possible."

[20] Labuschagne (2000:32-33) outlines the dangers of fundamentalism as follows: "Het fundamentalisme heeft, als geen andere denkrichting of geestelijke stroming in de moderne tijd, een wig gedreven tussen geloof en wetenschap en er alles toe bijgedragen om de kloof tussen de twee in stand te houden. Deze rampzalige denkrichting heeft, hoe je het ook wendt of keert, de bijbel en het christelijke geloof onberekenbare, en onherstelbare schade berokkend en de bijbel bij veel mensen in diskrediet gebracht … Naar mijn oordeel vormt het fundamentalisme in onze tijd een van de grootste bedreigingen voor de wereldvrede … Een van de voornaamste eisen waaraan voldaan moet worden om het fundamentalisme te kunnen bestrijden, is dat meer dan voorheen ernst moet worden gemaakt met de integratie van wetenschappelijke kennis in onze wereld- en levensbeschouwing … Met het goede spoor bedoel ik een wereld- en levensbeschouwing en een bijbelopvatting waarin de resultaten van de wetenschap serieus worden genomen en volkomen zijn geïntegreerd."

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interpretation of the given text. The question that needs to be asked here is: how does the Pentateuch view its own textuality? According to Otto (2004a:470ff) the Pentateuch itself offers a theory regarding its literary development, which is much more sophisticated than any post-biblical theory of its mosaic authorship (cf also Schniedewind 2004:118ff). The idea of a mosaic authorship of the whole of the Pentateuch was a post-biblical idea, which can be traced back to the first century BCE (Otto 2003:1090). The Biblical references to the mosaic authorship within the Pentateuch are restricted to the Torah only, and specifically to the Covenant Code at Mount Sinai (Ex 24:4, 7; 34:27) and the mosaic interpretation of the Sinai-Torah in the land of Moab, according to Deuteronomy (Dt 31:9). The plot of the final text of the Pentateuch demands a reader who not only differentiates between *narrated time* and *time of narration* (Otto 2004a:481ff), but takes into account the multiple authorship of the Pentateuchal narratives. This reader must also be able to differentiate between the written Sinai-Torah, and its mosaic interpretation in Deuteronomy. In the Pentateuch, mosaic authorship is confined to the Torah, and in a strict sense only to the legal sections – it thus does not include the narrative sections. The authors of the Pentateuch had no problem with the doublets and the different sources, because they were aware that several anonymous authors were responsible for this corpus of literature. It seems that they were not interested at all in identifying the different authors of the Pentateuchal narratives.

According to Otto (2007:6-7) this distinction between the *time of narration* and the *narrated time* is a literary tool which we as modern readers can use to deal with the indications in the texts that multiple authors were involved in the scribal process. We can therefore leave the inconsistencies in the text, on the presupposition that we do not regard Moses as the only author of the Pentateuch who wrote down all the narratives on the last day of his life. The Pentateuch itself offers a theory of its literary origins. This theory differentiates between God as the author of the Decalogue, Moses as the author of the laws, and anonymous writers who wrote the narrative sections. Modern historical-critical exegesis of the Pentateuch has already indicated that the plot of the canonical Pentateuch (on a synchronic level) holds Deuteronomy to be an exegetical interpretation of the Covenant Code (Otto 1997:322ff; Otto 2000:234ff; Otto 2003:1097f). In order to rewrite the Covenant Code, Deuteronomy's legal stipulations re-interpret the Covenant Code's legal regulations by using the requirement of cult centralisation (Dt 12)

as a hermeneutical key.[21] According to Otto (2004b:22) the ancient Pentateuchal theory of the function of Deuteronomy within the plot of the canonical Pentateuch thus coincides with the modern historical-critical theory of the literary history of Deuteronomy. This would be the best criterion for validating a modern hypothesis of the literary history of a Biblical text.

Given the discussion so far, the difference between diachronic and synchronic analyses of the Pentateuch can be summarised as follows: exegetes who work diachronically are looking for a text behind the text and a truth in these texts behind the given text. Exegetes who work synchronically search for the truth in the text beyond the intentions of the historical authors (Otto 2007:7-8). A decisive point for the future of Old Testament scholarship has been formulated in this statement. It seems that the given text of the Pentateuch opens windows for the historical situation of both authors and readers, when looking from a perspective of *narrated time* into *time of narration*.

There is, however, one decisive matter in which the Pentateuch's own theory differs from modern hypotheses regarding the Pentateuch's literary history. Although the ancient authors of the Pentateuch differentiated between *narrated time* and *time of narration*, their main concern was the *narrated time*, into which they wove threads of the *time of narration*. An important task for modern-day exegetes when interpreting the Biblical text is to reconstruct the *time of narration* which forms the historical horizon against which this endeavour is undertaken. The modern-day exegete must therefore locate the authors in their respective time-slots in history in order to understand their theological and political intentions, which in this specific instance would be their justification with regard to the formation of the Pentateuch.

5.   CONCLUSION

We must therefore recognise the fact that Old Testament scholarship, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, is faced methodologically with a fundamental challenge to combine synchronic and diachronic textual reading. It is therefore no longer a question of either a synchronic or diachronic reading of a specific text. Synchronic reading can no longer regard historical refinement as a redundant endeavour – the same can be postulated for the opposite.

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[21] Otto (2000:251) infers as follows: "Es weist im Gesetz (Dtn 12-26) unverkennbar priesterliche Züge auf: die Zentralisierung der Opfer (Dtn 12:13-19; 20-27) steht als Hauptgebot an der Spitze des dtn-vordtr Deuteronomiums. Die Eröffnungsposition dieses Gesetzes verdeutlicht, dass die Opferzentralisation nicht nur hermeneutischer Schlüssel für die Revision des Bundesbuches, sondern auch Ausgangspunkt und Zentrum der folgenden Gesetze ist."

Berges (2000:170)[22] infers as follows in this regard:

> Die Herausforderung an die aktuelle alttestamentliche Exegese liegt nicht in einem methodologischen aut-aut von Diachronie oder Synchronie, sondern in einem spannungsvollen et-et. Einer so geforderten "diachron reflektierten Synchronie" methodisch und inhaltlich den Weg zu bahnen, scheint die Aufgabe der Zukunft zu sein.[23]

This new theoretical understanding therefore necessitates a diachronically reflected synchronic reading of the text. Barr (1995:7) states as follows: "... the diachronic consideration explains the synchronic ... fact"; that is to say, they are inextricably linked to one another.[24] Therefore, it can be deduced that synchronic analysis without diachronic input only touches the textual surface.[25]

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[22] See also Berges (1999:119-120): "De uitdaging waarvoor de huidige exegese van het oude testament staat is dat ze niet zozeer methodologisch moet kiezen tussen ofwel diachronie ofwel synchronie, maar beide tegelijk in spanning tot elkaar moet hanteren ... zo 'n 'diachroon bereflecteerde synchronie' ... lijkt onze opdracht voor de toekomst."

[23] In this regard Deist (1983:86-87) infers as follows: "What we need is a marriage of structural and historical awareness *within the perceiving mind of the exegete* ... An exegete has to be trained to be constantly on the lookout for all sorts of structural and historical indicators in the text and to integrate them into the process of understanding. From this integrated process of perceiving he has to create his story (or narrative) of what the text means." See also Barton (1994:15); Beuken (1994:26-27); Deist (1995:44-47); Dohmen (2003:167-169); Human (1999:357-360); Joyce (1995:127); Rendtorff (1993:52); Ryou (1995:4-7); Talstra (1993:264-265); Talstra (1995:207-208).

[24] Cf also Deist (1995:46): "... synchronic interpretation still demands the incalculation of *the time factor* ...".

[25] In this regard Spieckermann (1998:145) postulates as follows: "Auch in der Psalmenexegese gilt: Synchrone Textbeschreibung bleibt ohne diachrone Analyse oberflächlich. Diachrone analyse bleibt ohne Ausrichtung auf die Synthese und das dort gegebene synchrone Miteinander der Textelemente museal".

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