

THE WRITINGS AND LATER WISDOM BOOKS

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The Bible and Women  
An Encyclopaedia of Exegesis and Cultural History

Edited by Christiana de Groot, Irmtraud Fischer,  
Mercedes Navarro Puerto, and Adriana Valerio

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The Bible and Women  
Hebrew Bible/Old Testament  
Volume 1.3: The Writings and Later Wisdom Books

# THE WRITINGS AND LATER WISDOM BOOKS

*Edited by*

Christl M. Maier and Nuria Calduch-Benages

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## ABBREVIATIONS

AB	Anchor Bible
ADAJ	<i>Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan</i>
AfO	<i>Archiv für Orientforschung</i>
AnBib	Analecta biblica
AOTC	Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries
BA	<i>Biblical Archaeologist</i>
BBB	Bonner biblische Beiträge
BBET	Beiträge zur biblischen Exegese und Theologie
BETL	Bibliotheca ephemeridum theologiarum lovaniensium
BHS	Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
<i>BibInt</i>	<i>Biblical Interpretation</i>
BibIntS	Biblical Interpretation Series
BibOr	Biblica et orientalia
BJS	Brown Judaic Studies
BK	<i>Bibel und Kirche</i>
BKAT	Biblischer Kommentar Altes Testament
BN	<i>Biblische Notizen</i>
BThS	Biblich-theologische Studien
BVC	<i>Bible et vie chrétienne</i>
BZ	<i>Biblische Zeitschrift</i>
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CurBS	<i>Currents in Research: Biblical Studies</i>
DBSup	<i>Dictionnaire de la Bible: Supplément</i> . Edited by Louis Pirot and André Robert. Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1928–.
EgT	<i>Eglise et théologie</i>
ErIs	<i>Eretz Israel</i>
ExpTim	<i>Expository Times</i>
FAT	Forschungen zum Alten Testament
FCB	Feminist Companion to the Bible

FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
HBS	Herders Biblische Studien
HKAT	Handkommentar zum Alten Testament
HTR	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
ICC	International Critical Commentary
IBC	Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching
ITC	International Theological Commentary
JAAR	<i>Journal of the American Academy of Religion</i>
JANES	<i>Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Studies</i>
JAOS	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JBQ	<i>Jewish Bible Quarterly</i>
JHNES	Johns Hopkins Near Eastern Studies
JSJSup	Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Periods
JSOT	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament: Supplement Series
KAT	Kommentar zum Alten Testament
KHC	Kurzer Hand-Commentar zum Alten Testament
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
LD	Lectio divina
LHBOTS	Library of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies
NCB	New Century Bible
NEchtB	Neue Echter Bibel
NovTSup	Novum Testamentum Supplements
NRT <i>h</i>	<i>La nouvelle revue théologique</i>
NTOA	Novum Testamentum et Orbis Antiquus
OBO	Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis
OIP	Oriental Institute Publications
OLA	Orientalia Iovaniensia Analecta
OTG	Old Testament Guides
OTL	Old Testament Library
OtSt	Oudtestamentische Studiën
QD	Quaestiones disputatae
RIBLA	<i>Revista de interpretación bíblica latino-americana</i>
RivB	<i>Rivista biblica italiana</i>
RivBSup	Supplements to Rivista biblica italiana
SubBi	Subsidia biblica
RTL	<i>Revue théologique de Louvain</i>



RStB	<i>Ricerche storico bibliche</i>
SBAB	Stuttgarter biblische Aufsatzbände
SBS	Stuttgarter Bibelstudien
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBT	Studies in Biblical Theology
SemeiaSt	Semeia Studies
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
SOTSMS	Society for Old Testament Studies Monograph Series
SUNT	Studien zur Umwelt des Neuen Testaments
TD	<i>Theology Digest</i>
TDOT	<i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i> . Edited by G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren. Translated by David E. Green. 15 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974–2006.
TLOT	<i>Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> . Edited by Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann. Translated by Mark E. Biddle. 3 vols. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1997.
TP	<i>Theologie und Philosophie</i>
TUAT	<i>Texte aus der Umwelt des Alten Testaments</i> . Edited by Otto Kaiser et al. 3 vols. Gütersloh: Gütersloher, 1982–2002; new edition, 2004–.
VT	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
VTSup	Supplements to <i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WMANT	Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
ZAH	<i>Zeitschrift für Althebräistik</i>
ZAW	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
ZBK	Zürcher Bibelkommentare Altes Testament
ZTK	<i>Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche</i>

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## INTRODUCTION

*Christl M. Maier and Nuria Calduch-Benages*

This volume belongs to the ambitious international project of an encyclopaedia of exegesis and cultural history named “The Bible and Women.” The project seeks to provide an ecumenical, gender-sensitive interpretation and reception history of the Bible, with a focus on European theological research and Western religious history.<sup>1</sup>

When we undertook the task of editing one volume on the Hebrew Bible in the framework of this encyclopaedia, we embraced the idea as promising and trendsetting. Within the course of the work, however, we gradually became aware of the challenge of collecting texts of authors from four linguistic domains that simultaneously reflect different traditions of exegesis and various scholarly contexts. We are pleased that biblical scholars from five different European countries, Israel, and the United States have contributed to this volume. Each of them is a well-known expert in her or his field of study in their respective linguistic domain. As their essays were originally written in English, German, Italian, or Spanish, they represent diverse social contexts, which differ in terms of gender relations and gender theories, as well as diverse religious affiliations.

### 1. THE SCOPE AND STRUCTURE OF THE VOLUME

The essays presented in this volume cover the third part of the Hebrew Bible canon, the so-called Writings (*Ketuvim* in Hebrew), plus some later wisdom traditions in the books Ben Sira and Wisdom (*Sapientia Salomonis*). The biblical wisdom tradition that forms an integral part of the ancient Near East-

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1. For the scope, hermeneutics, and goals of the project, see the introduction in volume 1.1, *Torah* (ed. Irmtraud Fischer and Mercedes Navarro Puerto, with Andrea Taschl-Erber; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011), 1–30. A shorter form is also available on the project’s website at: <http://www.bibleandwomen.org/EN/description.php>.

ern tradition produced a coherent stream of texts throughout the first millennium BCE and into the Christian era. This coherence was disturbed by the decision to include only the books of Proverbs, Job, and Qohelet into the Hebrew canon. Ben Sira—long known as the Greek translation of a Hebrew original that could be fragmentarily recovered only in modern times—and the originally Greek book of Wisdom belong to the canon of the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, the Septuagint, and therefore may also be treated in volume 3.1 of this project (Pseudepigrapha and Apocrypha). We included in this volume Nuria Calduch-Benages's essay on "good" and "bad" wives in Ben Sira because this wisdom book reiterates the cultural stereotypes that emerge in Proverbs and presents them to a Jewish-Hellenistic audience. With regard to gendered images of both the divine and humanity, the interpretation of personified wisdom, which first appeared in Prov 1–9, would be incomplete without considering its development in the later wisdom tradition. This connection is demonstrated in Gerlinde Baumann's article on the wisdom figure and in a passage of Silvia Schroer's essay on iconic traditions behind Lady Wisdom.

Due to its formation in the second century BCE, the prophetic book of Daniel was not integrated into the canon as part of the Prophets but ended up in the Writings. For Daniel, we asked Isabel Gómez-Acebo to include the Greek expansions on Susanna in order to demonstrate the first step of the book's reception history, which introduces a female protagonist and, thus, gender issues. These threads of wisdom tradition motivated us to deal with the sapiential writings despite their separation within the Jewish and Christian canon.<sup>2</sup>

The essays of this volume are gathered under four headings. The first group of articles traces the living conditions of women, either through a socio-historical reconstruction of Jewish life in Persian-period Judah or through an analysis of family and clan relations in postexilic genealogies.

The next set of essays treats the Israelite wisdom tradition with its numerous female figures: Lady Wisdom and the "strange" woman, the king's mother and the strong woman, the "good" and the "bad" wife. All four articles not only underline the highly judgmental presentation of women and their roles in wisdom but also discuss their societal function and demonstrate that some texts are not as androcentric as commonly assumed.

The third part of the volume assembles articles about women and gender relations in single books, some poetic and others prose. They aim either at

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2. For the original plan to divide the volumes with regard to the canons, see Fischer, Navarro Puerto, and Taschl-Erber, *Torah*, 11–21.

reconstructing women's experience and contexts of living or at unfolding the meaning of female metaphors. For instance, Psalms and Lamentations mostly talk implicitly or generally about women. Their gendered images, however, contribute to the metaphors used for God as well as to the metaphor of the community as a female body.

The essays of part 4 explore narratives about great female protagonists, such as Ruth, Esther, and Susanna, who prove their wit and strength in situations of conflict. While some essays interpret these protagonists as examples of virtue and faith, they also demonstrate that these female figures may be ambivalent role models for contemporary female readers.

## 2. CONTENTS AND GENRES OF THE WRITINGS

With regard to contents, literary style, and genre, the Writings assemble very different texts, which may be variously classified. Some offer poetry, such as the books of Psalms, Proverbs, Song of Songs, Lamentations, and Qohelet, to which Job may be added despite its short narrative frame. Proverbs, Job, and Qohelet (with Ben Sira and Wisdom) clearly belong to the wisdom tradition and thus have a didactic purpose. Psalms, Song of Songs, and Lamentations provide prayers, songs, and liturgical texts, albeit of very different tone and contents. Ruth, Esther, and Dan 1–6 contain narratives of brave women and men in Diaspora who, despite adverse conditions, succeed through faith and righteousness. Daniel 7–12 holds prophetic visions, which in symbolic camouflage announce the forcible end of subsequent Greek and Hellenistic rulers. Ezra-Nehemiah is a historiographical narrative about the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the reestablishment of a Judean community after the exile. Chronicles replicates the history of the Judean kingdom from a postexilic perspective starting with nine chapters of the genealogies of “all Israel.”

Regarding this collection of rather diverse texts, most of which were written or edited in the Persian and early Hellenistic period, it is obvious that they present vastly different gender relations. Yet all texts are clearly products of a patriarchal society in which a person is first determined by social status, that is, as free person or slave, then by social class, and within the same class by gender, age, and other factors.<sup>3</sup> While the biblical texts mirror this pyramid of social hierarchy called patriarchy, some of them also represent voices of the marginalized or criticize hegemonic discourses of power. Due to this intriguing feature of the biblical texts—the inclusion of a variety of voices and

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3. See Fischer, Navarro Puerto, and Taschl-Erber, *Torah*, 9–10.

perspectives—many different interpretations may emerge depending on the hermeneutic position of the interpreter.

The Writings that form the third part of the Hebrew Bible canon were produced in Jerusalem and its environs from the fifth to the beginning of the second century BCE, a period of political and economic crises, in which different empires dominated Judah. Therefore, most of their authors may not have known each other and did not communicate their views to one another. Since their texts have been assembled in the same corpus, however, their differing views on women and gender issues may now be perceived as a written discourse on gender hierarchy, societal values, and power relations. In relating each book to a specific date and location, which may be more or less evident, modern Bible scholars may detect some development of views and arguments, or seemingly persistent ideas. Evidently, the Writings, with their numerous strong female figures, offer modern readers a fascinating tapestry of women's lives and roles as perceived by ancient authors.

### 3. THE RANGE OF APPROACHES TO THE TEXTS

The attentive reader of this volume will realize that the articles differ in the methodology they bring to the biblical texts. Therefore, we asked each author to briefly introduce her or his hermeneutics and approach at the beginning of the essay.

Tamara Cohn Eskenazi aims at reconstructing the lives of women in the postexilic era through biblical and extrabiblical sources, introducing readers to the economic and social situation in Persian-period Yehud, the formative period for some of the Writings. Sara Japhet's treatment of Chronicles as a history of Israel that is based on previous accounts in Samuel and Kings as well as on local Judean traditions of the early Hellenistic period demonstrates how a historiographical narrative is shaped by the interests of its authors. She reads the bone-dry genealogies of Chronicles, which modern recipients often intentionally ignore, as a countervoice to the strong rejection of marriages with foreign women advocated in Ezra-Nehemiah and Prov 1–9.

The articles about the wisdom tradition focus on the portrayal of female characters with a critical eye on the ideologies these characterizations promote. From a gender-sensitive perspective, such characterization of women and their roles in society is neither neutral nor merely descriptive, but often prescriptive by offering role models for ancient readers, both men and women. As Gerlinde Baumann elaborates, the figure of personified wisdom enriches the imagery of the divine, yet was also used to promote a certain ethics and behavior in leading circles of the Persian and Hellenistic period.

In contrast, the cultural stereotypes of the “strange” and the “strong” woman in Proverbs and the “good” and “bad” wives in Ben Sira generated role models for women in a patriarchal society and an upper-class milieu. Christl Maier and Nuria Calduch-Benages discuss both the benefits and the risks of such stereotyping. Similarly, Vittoria D’Alario interprets notions about women in Qohelet as alternating between misogyny and appreciation. She also demonstrates how wisdom texts that have long been named “misogynist” may offer astonishing insights into the authority and power of women.

In keeping with the other volumes on the Hebrew Bible canon, Silvia Schroer examines relations between texts and iconographic traditions that result from a common cultural set of motifs. The ancient Near Eastern images of creation and world order as well as gods and goddesses presented on artifacts of Syrian-Palestinian art provide a fuller understanding of many of the metaphors in poetic texts like Psalms, Song of Songs, and Proverbs.

Where dating is impossible on account of a long tradition history of single texts, such as the book of Psalms, Donatella Scaiola focuses on emblematic feminine symbols like the mother metaphor, which adds to the imagery of both the divine and the holy city of Jerusalem. Ulrike Bail and Nancy Lee use the method of gendering voices in the text, proposed by Athalya Brenner and Fokkeli van Dijk-Hemmes, to interpret various songs of lament. By pointing to intertextual links between Ps 55 and the story of Tamar (2 Sam 13), Bail is able to read a lament psalm as a prayer that encourages victims of sexual violence to voice their grief. In Lamentations, Lee detects a strong female voice that takes the lead in expressing complaint about God’s violent punishing. This voice, she argues, represents the experience of women and may even belong to a female composer. In reading the female protagonist of the Song of Songs through the lens of the wisdom tradition in Gen 2–3, Gianni Barbiero argues that the empowerment of Shulammitte does not contradict a fulfilling love attachment.

The articles on female protagonists in narrative texts analyze their characterization with regard to explicit or implicit gender hierarchies and to women’s options for finding their place in a patriarchal world. Miren Junkal Guevara Llaguno interprets Ruth and Naomi as women who reclaim their life and memory to become a source of empowerment for female readers in their struggle for life. Susan Niditch discusses a range of feminist readings of the Esther figure and demonstrates that the expectation and worldview of the interpreter is key to Esther’s reception. By revealing the subtleties of the biblical character, the interpreters demonstrate that their diverse readings of Esther are based on rather ambivalent images of women. Isabel Gómez-Acebo interprets the figure of Susanna, whose story has been added to the original text, as a female counterpart to Daniel. Susanna’s struggle against

gender hierarchies gives way to the idea that a people's liberation can only be completed if both men and women fight for it.

The essays of this volume do not offer exhaustive or exclusive interpretations of the Writings. Their common characteristic is to focus on gender issues, power relations, and ideologies within the texts and in current interpretations. The latter belong to the texts' reception history in Western academic circles, which until recently have been dominated by male scholars and therefore often prolonged the inherited androcentric tradition. Most of the articles do not deal explicitly with the reception history of the Hebrew writings, but many do offer a critique of incomplete or gender-biased interpretations by either arguing against standardized exegesis or by carving out countertraditions that lead to new, gender-sensitive readings of these texts.

The translation of German, Italian, and Spanish contributions into English is a complex task insofar as scholarship differs in the respective linguistic domains, especially with regard to the interpretation of single biblical books as well as to feminist issues. We tried to translate the essays into comprehensible English and in some instances included footnotes that indicate which translations of the Bible have been used. Through more detailed biographical notes on our authors, we try to illuminate these different traditions of research.

#### 4. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The research colloquium held in Marburg in July of 2011, in which most of the authors submitted their first theses to a critical discussion, was generously sponsored by the German Research Foundation (DFG). The department of Protestant Theology at the University of Marburg supported the colloquium by providing rooms, administrative support, and student assistants. We thank both institutions for fostering our research. For their assistance in organizing the colloquium, we thank Mareike Schmied, Andrea Schönfeld de Weigel, and Maurice Meschonat.

In 2011, our project was awarded the Leonore Siegele-Wenschkewitz Prize, named after the German church historian Leonore Siegele-Wenschkewitz (1944–99). With this award, the Verein zur Förderung Feministischer Theologie in Forschung und Lehre e. V., the Protestant Church of Hesse and Nassau, and the Protestant Academy Arnoldshain honor studies or projects that promote feminist theology or gender studies in theological contexts. We are grateful for this endorsement of our work and have spent the award money on the translation of some essays.

We especially thank our esteemed authors for their willingness to contribute to this volume, their cooperation in the colloquium, their open-mindedness to all our requests regarding their articles, and their patience to wait



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Marburg and Rome, April 2014

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