

Analecta Gorgiana

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Two Sides of a Coin: Juxtaposing
Views on Interpreting the Book of
the Twelve / the Twelve
Prophetic Books

By

Ehud Ben Zvi
James D. Nogalski

Introduction by
Thomas Römer



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INTRODUCTION: THE BOOK OF THE TWELVE—FACT AND FICTION?

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At the end of the 1950s the standard French Introduction to the Hebrew Bible introduced the reader to biblical prophecy as follows: "Who are the classical prophets? ... Men of a message (*dabar*), men of the spirit (*ruah*), these inspired people are ahead of their time; they represent the religion of the future ... The prophetic phenomenon is at the very heart of the Old Testament. One may distinguish between the Speaking and the Writing Prophets. Nevertheless the appearance of the latter, during the eighth century, is accidental. The book has no other function than to extend their preaching."¹ Fifty years later, such a presentation of the biblical prophets and the prophetic books is no longer possible.

The major shift in current research on the prophetic phenomenon in the Hebrew Bible took place in the 1970s. Before that time, the scholarly debate about the prophets was mainly interested in reconstructing their *ipsissima verba*, the Prophet's authentic words. Commentaries on the prophetic books were mainly concerned to distinguish between authentic and non-authentic oracles, the former alone being considered important for the understanding of the prophetic message (and also for the faith of the ancient as well as

¹ André GELIN, "Les livres prophétiques postérieurs," in A. ROBERT and A. FEUILLET (ed.), *Introduction à La Bible. Tome I* Tournai: Desclée & Cie, 1959, 467–582, 471–472. Translation is mine.

modern readers). The prophetic book was nothing else than the record of the prophet's preaching, to which some "disciples" and redactors had unfortunately added invented passages. The new method of redaction criticism radically changed the perspective.² The personality of the prophet is no longer the center of interest. The important task is to explain the reasons for the existence of prophetic books in the second part of the Hebrew Bible. In the most radical redaction critical approaches the prophetic person even disappears (or if he remains he may have pronounced an insignificant amount of oracles which were totally altered by later redactors).³ The existence of the prophetic book does not result from the activity of a prophetic individual but is the work of scribes and redactors. Or to put it as does Konrad Schmid: "There are no 'authentic' prophets in the whole Old Testament. The first writing down of oral *logia* and the choice of how to combine different smaller literary units are already acts of interpretation."⁴

In the last twenty years the redaction critical approach has been combined with investigations on the compositional techniques with which the scribes and/or redactors fostered the unity

² It is often argued that the origin of this approach can be found in the work of Willy MARXSEN, *Der Evangelist Markus. Studien zur Redaktionsgeschichte des Evangeliums* (FRLANT 49; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1956); ET: *Mark, the Evangelist: Studies on the Redaction History of the Gospel* (Ashville - New York: Abingdon 1969). See Norman PERRIN, *What is Redaction Criticism?* (London: SPCK, 1970), who points out that Marxsen "is responsible for the name Redaktionsgeschichte" (p. 33) even if he had some forerunners.

³ Compare Robert P. CARROLL, *Jeremiah* (OTL; London: SCM Press, 1986) and Susanne Rudnig-Zelt, *Hoseastudien. Redaktionskritische Untersuchungen zur Genese des Hoseabuches* (FRLANT 213; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006). Rudnig-Zelt is much more confident in the possibilities of Literarkritik, but both agree about the impossibility to connect the "historical" prophet and the book.

⁴ Konrad SCHMID, "La formation des Prophètes Postérieurs (Histoire de la rédaction)" (ed. Thomas RÖMER, Jean-Daniel MACCHI and Christophe NIHAN, *Introduction à l'Ancien Testament* (MdB 49); Geneva: Labor et Fides, 2004), 318–328, 320. See further Ehud BEN ZVI, "The Prophetic Book: A Key Form of Prophetic Literature," in *The Changing Face of Form Criticism for the Twenty-First Century* (ed. Marvin A. SWEENEY and Ehud BEN ZVI; Grand Rapids, Michigan - Cambridge, UK: 2003), 276–297.

of the prophetic books. In 1983 Rolf Rendtorff argued that the book of Isaiah couldn't be understood as a simple juxtaposition of a Proto-, Deutero-, and Trito-Isaiah. There are thoroughgoing themes and catchwords (the idea of consolation: 12,1; 40,1; 66,13; *kabod yhw*: 6,3; 40,5; 66,18, the designation of Yhwh as the "holy one of Israel," etc), which show that the same redactor or group of scribes edited all 66 chapters of the book.⁵

This interest in compositional techniques is also a new trend in Psalms research. It appears that these should not be considered as strictly independent units, which have been gathered by juxtaposition. The group that edited the psalms apparently had in mind to organize them according to thematic and theological devices.⁶ Does this mean that these scribes wanted their audience to hear or their readers to read the psalms as a "book" from the beginning to the end? The same question is, even more heavily, debated as to the so-called "Book of the Twelve," the "Minor Prophets." There is no doubt that these twelve prophets were considered in the last three or two centuries B.C.E. to constitute one book, approximately as long as the book of Isaiah (see 4 Ezra 14,44; *Contra Apionem* 1:38–42). And there is no doubt that the Dodekapropheton presents an arrangement that suggests the reader a walk through history from the time when Israel (the North) existed through the Assyrian and Babylonian invasions and deportations to the rebuilding of the Jerusalemite Temple in the Persian period. One may nevertheless ask the question whether this chronological organization was at the very beginning of the "Twelve" or whether it is a much later attempt to organize originally independent documents in a meaningful way. Should one speak of a "Book of the Twelve" or better of

⁵ Rolf RENDTORFF, *Das Alte Testament. Eine Einführung* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1983), 210–212; ET: *The Old Testament. An Introduction* (London: SCM Press, 1985). See also "Zur Komposition des Buches Jesaja," *VT* 34 (1984), 295–320.

⁶ Frank-Lothar HOSSFELD and Erich ZENGER, *Die Psalmen. Psalm 1–50* (NEB 29; Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 1993); *Psalmen 51–100* (HThKAT; Freiburg - Basel - Wien: Herder, 2000). For a skeptical evaluation of this idea: Erhard S. GERSTENBERGER, "Theologies in the Book of Psalms," in *The Book of Psalms. Composition and Reception* (ed. Peter W. FLINT and Patrick D. MILLER; VT.S 99; Leiden - Boston: Brill, 2005), 603–626.

an “anthology” or a compilation of different prophetic scrolls brought together for economical or archival reasons?

The two contributions in this volume by James Nogalski and Ehud Ben Zvi reflect the current state of the discussion. These authors present opposite views about the formation and composition of the Twelve. Both articles originated in presentations for a doctoral program for students of the Hebrew Bible, organized by the French speaking universities in Switzerland (Fribourg, Geneva, Lausanne, and Neuchâtel) and held in Geneva on December 6th 2008. In the name of the organizers of this meeting I would like to express my warmest thanks to Professors Ben Zvi and Nogalski for the long trip they undertook and especially for their excellent papers and their openness to discussion. Even if this discussion did not resolve the question, it certainly contributed to clarification and to a better understanding of both positions. It is therefore a good initiative to publish both articles together in order to make them available to a broader audience.⁷

I do not want to take any position or choose my camp in writing this brief introduction. Instead, I would like to highlight some of the questions and arguments trying to locate those in the broader context of scholarly research on the Hebrew Bible.

Let us begin with some agreements. Both authors agree that at the end there is a “book of the Twelve” and that it is possible to read the twelve “chapters” of this book as being part of a comprehensive prophetic “message” (even if there is disagreement about the degree of coherence). Nogalski and Ben Zvi also share the opinion that the specific character of each of the twelve prophets is to be acknowledged in one way or another. Neither Nogalski nor Ben Zvi argue for the idea that all the components of the Book of the Twelve were written at the same time by the same author. However, they strongly disagree on the meaning of the Twelve. Is the Book of the Twelve an idea that already originated in the Persian period (Nogalski) or did the idea emerge much later and without real impact for the understanding of the twelve Minor Prophets (Ben Zvi)?

⁷ French versions of both papers will be published together with other contributions to the doctoral program which dealt with the origins and formation of the prophetic books.

It is not astonishing that Nogalski and Ben Zvi emphasize different arguments and facts. Nogalski puts much weight on the chronological continuity in the Book of the Twelve, which can hardly be disputed. There are, however, some differences between the sequence of the Twelve in the Massoretic Text and the LXX.⁸ Nogalski asserts that the Massoretic tradition preserves the original arrangement, but this view is disputed.⁹ The sequence of LXX perhaps reflects the tripartite eschatological scheme that also structures the books of Isaiah; Jeremiah LXX and Ezekiel.¹⁰ In this case we would have for the Twelve a situation that compares to the book(s) of Jeremiah: There are apparently two competing ideas about the sequence and the way in which the Book of the Twelve should be read. For Ben Zvi, the difference between MT and LXX indicates that in the Persian time there was no idea of a unified book, since there were different possibilities to arrange the (ten or already twelve?) scrolls together. But would this argument also apply to the book of Jeremiah? Apparently even Jeremiah was conceived in different ways as one book, in the Massoretic as well as in the LXX arrangement.

Whereas Nogalski insists on the presence of catchwords at the “seams” of each prophetic unit, Ben Zvi points to the fact that the Book of the Twelve has no general title; most of the twelve books, however, display individual titles, which are a signal that the reader

⁸ In LXX, Amos comes second and Joel fourth, and Jonah precedes Nahum (the whole LXX sequence is: Hos, Am, Mî, Joel, Ob, Jon, Nah, Hab, Zeph, Hag, Zech, Mal).

⁹ Marvin A. SWEENEY, “Sequence and Interpretation in the Book of the Twelve,” in *Reading and Hearing the Book of the Twelve* (ed. James D. NOGALSKI and Marvin A. SWEENEY; Society of Biblical Literature. Symposium Series, 15; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000), 49–64.

¹⁰ Konrad SCHMID, “Die Literatur des Alten Testaments. II. Hintere Propheten (Nebiiim),” in *Grundinformation Altes Testament* (ed. Jan Christian GERTZ; Uni-Taschenbücher 2745; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007), 303–401, 362–63. For another explanation see Jean-Daniel MACCHI, “Les douze petits prophètes,” in *Introduction à l’Ancien Testament* (ed. Thomas RÖMER, Jean-Daniel MACCHI and Christophe NIHAN; Le Monde de la Bible, 49; Genève: Labor et Fides, 2004), 379–382.

should understand them separately.¹¹ The presence of catchwords and overlapping themes can easily be detected (some examples: Jo 4,16 echoes Am 1,2; Am 9,2–4 prepares Ob 4; Zeph 3,19 parallels Hag 1,2 etc)¹² but were the ancient hearers or readers aware of them? They did not have concordances or computers at their disposal to quickly check out parallels or recurring words. It is also true, as recalled by Nogalski that Exod 34,6–7 and the “day of Yhwh”¹³ play an important role in the Book of the Twelve. Nevertheless, as Ben Zvi rightly underlines, none of these themes is limited to the Twelve. The same holds true for recurring words; most of them also appear in the three Major Prophets or in other texts of the Hebrew Bible.

The differences between Nogalski and Ben Zvi also reveal different methodological approaches. Nogalski clearly favors the redaction critical approach combining it with insights from synchronic methods (intertextuality, compositional techniques), whereas Ben Zvi investigates the text above all as a historian interested in the implied ancient readers’ perspective in the Persian (or early Hellenistic) period. Nogalski is sympathetic to reconstructions of earlier stages of the Book of the Twelve, especially the “Book of the Four” (Hos, Am, Mi, and Zeph, as advocated by Albertz and Wöhrle¹⁴) and a scroll containing Haggai and Zech 1–8 (Schart).¹⁵

¹¹ Ehud BEN ZVI, “The Prophetic Book: A Key Form of Prophetic Literature,” in *The Changing Face of Form Criticism for the Twenty-First Century* (ed. Marvin A. SWEENEY and Ehud BEN ZVI; Grand Rapids/Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), 276–297.

¹² James D. NOGALSKI, “Intertextuality in the Twelve,” in *Forming Prophetic Literature. Essays on Isaiah and the Twelve in Honor of John D. W. Watts* (ed. James W. WATTS and Paul R. HOUSE; Journal for the Study of the Old Testament. Supplement Series 235; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 102–124.

¹³ James D. NOGALSKI, “The Day(s) of YHWH in the Book of the Twelve,” in *Thematic Threads in the Book of the Twelve* (ed. Paul L. REDDITT and Aaron SCHAT; BZAW 325; Berlin / New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2003), 192–213.

¹⁴ Rainer ALBERTZ, “Exile as Purification. Reconstructing the ‘Book of the Four,’” in *Thematic Threads of the Book of Twelve* (ed. Paul L. REDDITT and Aaron SCHAT; BZAW 325; Berlin - New York: de Gruyter, 2003), 232–25; Jakob WÖHRLE, *Die frühen Sammlungen des Zwölfprophetenbuches. Entstehung und Komposition* (BZAW 360; Berlin / New York: Walter de

Ben Zvi without denying the fact that the prophetic books result from a long process of rewritings and redactional activity is very skeptical about the possibility of reconstructing the different stages of their formation. He claims that the redactors swiped away all traces of editing and additions because they wanted the readers to read *one* book of Hosea, Amos etc.

Who were the authors of the Book of Twelve? In his paper Nogalski makes the interesting suggestion that the composition of the Book of the Twelve was made by a group of Levites during the Persian period, who edited the Book of Twelve by inserting hymnal passages having in mind a public (and cultic?) reading of the Book. Ben Zvi ascribes each scroll of the Minor Prophets to the “literati” of the Persian period, who were also the authors of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. Here things may become somewhat paradoxical. If one follows Ben Zvi’s idea that the same group of literati were at the origin of all prophetic books and were able to create any “deuteronomistic,” “priestly” or whatever style, one could conclude, contrary to what he argues, that this strengthens the idea of the unity of the book of the Twelve. On the other hand, Nogalski, emphasizing the original independency of most of the books of the Twelve and postulating late redactional interventions, recognizes in a way the specificity of most of the Twelve’s components. So maybe “the truth is out there” to pick up the slogan of a popular science fiction television series.

The articles by Nogalski and Ben Zvi printed in this volume raise important questions, which are to be addressed in any field of historical critical research on the Hebrew Bible. Without pretending to be exhaustive I would emphasize the following:

How do “redactors” or “literati” work? Ben Zvi insists on the fact that biblical texts nowhere inform their readers about the redactional processes they underwent: “The ongoing process of redac-

Gruyter, 2006). Jörg JEREMIAS, *Der Prophet Hosea* (ATD 24/1; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1983) and Schart (see next footnote) argued that only Hosea and Amos were put together in a first step.

¹⁵ Aaron SCHAT, *Die Entstehung des Zwölfprophetenbuches: Neubearbeitungen von Amos im Rahmen schriftübergreifender Redaktionsprozesse* (BZAW 206; Berlin - New York: de Gruyter, 1998). See also Jakob WÖHRLE, “The Formation and Intention of the Haggai-Zechariah Corpus,” *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* 6/10 (2006): <http://www.jhsonline.org>

tion was not bent on promoting, or archiving and analyzing itself; instead its function was to shape a series of texts in which the last, if successful, was meant to supersede and erase the memory of the previous one.¹⁶ There are however indications that some texts at least do inform the reader about their growth. The best example is Jer 36. In this narrative the reader learns that there were at least two different scrolls containing oracles of Jeremiah, and that the second one had been enlarged at the time it had been written on the basis of the first scroll. There are also literary devices such as juxtaposition (see for instance Gen 16,9–11) or the *Wiederaufnahme* (repetitive resumption, see for instance the repetition of Am 7,9 in 7,17 in order to insert 7,10–17), which informs an attentive audience about the growth of a text.

How to analyze the presence or lack of titles and conclusions? It is a fact that the Book of the Twelve has no general title whereas most of the Twelve display a superscription. But if one takes a look at the Pentateuch there is no title at the beginning either. *Beresbit bara'* certainly is not a title for the whole Torah, but for Gen 1 or 1–3. The case of the Pentateuch is interesting for the debate about the Twelve, because the same questions arise. As for the Twelve, the Pentateuch or even the Hexateuch including Joshua is constructed as a chronological sequence: from the beginning of the world until the death of Moses or the conquest of the land and the death of Joshua. The only book of the Torah that bears a real title is the book of Deuteronomy.¹⁷ There are three identifiable concluding formulas in Lev 26,46; 27,34 and Numb 36,13, which interrupt the sequence between Leviticus and Numbers. How to take these observations into account? In one stage of its formation the Torah was clearly meant to be read as one “book,” but it is also obvious that the different narrative and legal materials that are now incorporated into the Penta- or Hexateuch were originally transmitted independently. The construction of a chronological framework is perhaps linked with the promulgation of a (proto-) Pentateuch in the middle of the Persian era. So when the Torah claimed to be authoritative it was presented as one “book,” but without hiding

¹⁶ See BEN ZVI (below), p. 59.

¹⁷ This observation could give credit to the original distinction between Deuteronomy and the “Tetrateuch.”

the diversity of the compiled material. Interestingly, the same observations may apply to the “Enneateuch” because the books of Genesis to Kings also follow a chronological progression from the beginning of the world to the destruction of Jerusalem, or from expulsion from the paradise to the expulsion from the land.¹⁸ Again, it is difficult to explain the aim of this arrangement. Were all these books meant to belong and to be read together? Was the Enneateuch an attempt to create the Israelite *historia* despite the (later) canonical separation between Torah and Nebiim? The so-called Primary History was certainly never understood as a single book, but this did not exclude the possibility of a chronological reading of the story. Could the same also apply to the Twelve?

The question of the end of the Dodekapropheten. There is an ongoing debate about the question whether the book of Malachi was always an independent unit or whether it was part of Zechariah. Another debated issue is the status of the book of Jonah inside the Twelve. Recent investigations argue for a late date and a late integration of this untypical book into the Twelve.¹⁹ Was it perhaps conceived to stand at the very end of the collection? One Qumran manuscript attests the position of Jonah after Malachi²⁰ but unfortunately there is no evidence for the other books in this manuscript so the question must be left open. Coming back to the very end of Malachi, one should ask whether the last verses Mal 3,22–24 were conceived to conclude only the Book of the Twelve.²¹ It seems to me that the final passage of Malachi was added in order to conclude the whole *Nebiim*, which means that these verses were written at earliest in the

¹⁸ Bernard GOSSE, “L’ inclusion de l’ensemble Genèse - II Rois, entre la perte du jardin d’Eden et celle de Jérusalem,” *ZAW* 114 (2002): 189–211.

¹⁹ Ehud BEN ZVI, *The Signs of Jonah: Reading and Rereading in Ancient Yehud* (Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 367; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003); SCHMID, “Propheten,” 382–382.

²⁰ Odil H. STECK, “Zur Abfolge Maleachi – Jona in 4Q76 (4QXIIa),” *ZAW* 108 (1996), 249–253.

²¹ Hans-Peter MATHYS, “Anmerkungen zu Mal 3,22–24,” in *Vom Anfang und vom Ende. Fünf alttestamentliche Studien* (Beiträge zur Erforschung des Alten Testaments und des Antiken Judentums 47, Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2000) 30–40.

second century B.C.E. The expression "law of Moses" (3,22), does not occur elsewhere in the Latter Prophets but in the Former Prophets forms an inclusion with Josh 1,7-8. Both texts emphasize the hermeneutical principle that the Prophets can only be read and understood in reference to the Law. The mention of the return of Elijah (3,23) establishes a link with the Former Prophets of whom Elijah is the main character and enables or confirms the possibility of an eschatological reading of the Twelve. Did the Book of the Twelve originally end with Mal 3,21, a passage that contains thematic similarities with the last verse of the book of Isaiah and that also mentions the imminence of Yhwh's day? Was this an invitation for the ancient readers of the Twelve to understand the whole book in this eschatological, proto-apocalyptic perspective? Or is this reading limited to Malachi? The answer will be different whether one follows the arguments of Nogalski or those put forward by Ben Zvi. However, both options are not necessarily exclusive, as shown by the history of reception of the twelve Minor Prophets.