Introduction

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The Book of the Twelve – One Book or Many?

Metz Conference Proceedings
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Introduction

Donatella Scaiola / Elena Di Pede

The Minor Prophets, generally referred to as the Twelve, can be considered an interesting field of study both from an exegetical and a theological perspective. They also offer a methodological challenge because they can be studied through different approaches that either complement or oppose one another. Biblical commentators generally select one particular methodology and use hermeneutical presuppositions as a starting point, but without specifying which; the problem is that their choice affects their interpretation of the texts. That is the reason why the conference focused on the two following questions: first, should the Book of the Twelve be read as one book, or an anthology, or rather as twelve separate texts, or again, as something else? And second, how should the individual texts of the Minor Prophets be interpreted? More specifically, how should certain texts – particularly those discussed in the biblical bibliography that exists[1] on the issue – be analyzed? What about Joel, for example, its role and the way it stands in relation with Amos, Jonah, and others? Since the exegetical study of the texts and the theoretical framework are closely linked, the different theories about the interpretation of the Book of the Twelve should be verified by the exegetical study of each of the texts that compose it.

The principal goal of the conference was to explore the link(s) between theory, unstated presuppositions, and exegetical analysis. This allowed for further investigation into the theology or theological themes of the Book of the Twelve, as well as for comparison(s) between all the participants exegetical presuppositions.

Ehud Ben Zvi ("Remembering Twelve Prophetic Characters from the Past") begins his article by stating that for a number of years now, he has been invited to conferences because of his specific approach to prophetic literature, which is epitomized by the expressions he uses, such as the "Prophetic Books Collection", "The Twelve Prophetic Books", and in more recent years, "The Twelve Prophetic Characters of Memory." He then proceeds to explain what his approach consists in. Although he considers what he calls the Hypothesis of the Book of the Twelve

[1] For example, see *Reading and Hearing the Book of the Twelve* (ed. J. D. Nogalski and M. A. Sweeney; SBLSym 15; Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2000); *Thematic Threads in the Book of the Twelve* (ed. P. L. Redditt and A. Schart; BZAW 325; Berlin / New York: de Gruyter, 2003); *Two Sides of a Coin: Juxtaposing Views on Interpreting the Book of the Twelve / the Twelve Prophetic Books* (ed. E. Ben Zvi and J. D. Nogalski [with an introduction by T. C. Römer]; Analecta Gorgiana 201; Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2009.

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to be thought-provoking, he believes that it is more likely to be wrong than right. Within the repertoire of the literati of the early "Second Temple" period, twelve independent prophetic books were organized as (a) collection(s) or rather, (a) sub-collection(s). The literati read each of them and the book (sub)collection(s) in a way that was informed by the general discourse of the period, in particular by the Jerusalem-centered world they belonged to. In his contribution, Ben Zvi expands on these questions and argues for the necessity of additional and, to a large extent, complementary research paths influenced by methodological approaches that differ from the dominant ones. He also underlines the necessity of acknowledging the shortcomings of the existing methodological approaches, as well as the potential of other approaches to shed light on the matters under study.

James D. Nogalski ("The Book of the Twelve Is Not a Hypothesis") explores the extent to which the shape and shaping of the Book of the Twelve contributes to our understanding of canon development and the reading of prophetic literature. The synchronic and diachronic studies that have been written in recent decades consider the Twelve as a redacted entity that can be read meaningfully as such, an approach that has given rise to criticism and triggered the author's present endeavor. Nogalski explains that ancient sources identify a collection of twelve prophetic writings that were written on a single scroll and counted as one book. Moreover, several of these ancient sources attest to a hermeneutical approach suggesting that the Twelve should be read together as well. In this sense, the Twelve is not a hypothesis, but a historical fact that begs for explanation(s).

Yair Zakovitch ("Do the Last Verses of Malachi [Mal 3:22–24] Have a Canonical Function? A Biblical Puzzle") argues that the language of the last verses of Malachi (3:22–24) shows a purposeful relation to other verses inside that book (see e. g. Mal 3:1–10). Moreover, the verses seem to have been written in order to close a larger literary unit and not just the book of Malachi. Is this unit the Book of the Twelve Minor Prophets? Or the whole corpus of the prophet books? Or even, perhaps, the whole canon? If the last option is preferred, then it is necessary to examine what compositions were included in that canon, and what their order was.

Malachi is also at the core of Innocent Himbaza's contribution ("Les thèmes théologiques de Malachie et le concept du livre des XII Prophètes"). The author argues that the location of the book of Malachi is a strategic one, for it closes both the corpus of the Twelve Prophets and that of *Nebiim*. Its position makes it a target for all kinds of editorial interventions, either putative or real, on the two corpuses. Moreover, the book of Malachi has its own theological themes, and a way of dealing with them that challenges the reading of this booklet in the context of the Twelve Prophets. Himbaza offers a study of the dual redactional project of Malachi that explores both the singularity of the booklet and the place it occupies at the end of the Twelve Prophets and of the corpus of *Nebiim*.

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Guido Benzi ("Rhetorical Analysis, Interpretation, and Location of Hosea 1–3 in its Relation to the Twelve Prophets Scroll") carries out a detailed rhetorical analysis and interpretation of the first three chapters of Hosea. He demonstrates that the structure of this section is meant to highlight the central *rîb* (Hos 2:4–25), which is framed by two sequences (1:2–2:3 and 3:1–5) that echo each other and describe the special prophetic action ordered by God to Hosea. Hos 4:1 is clearly the beginning of a new section. The redaction and the development of the themes of the lost and found covenant between God and the people of Israel show that the first three chapters of Hosea may be envisaged not only as the beginning of the booklet, but also as the beginning of the whole Scroll. Furthermore, the textual relation between Hos 1–3 and the central and final sections of the Twelve is highlighted.

Another prophetic figure of the eighth century, Amos, is studied by Hervé Tremblay ("*Vox clamantis in deserto*? L'enseignement d'Amos sur la justice sociale dans le contexte de la théorie de l'unité des douze"). In his analysis of Amos's involvement in social justice, Tremblay tries to answer the central question of the conference. Taking up the dossier of the Twelve and their exegesis, he begins with a critical assessment of the different hypotheses and then turns to the central theme of the book of Amos which, more often than not, is often absent in the "minor" prophets. The author endeavors to understand whether the editors intended to make Amos "the firstborn of many brethren" (Rom 8:29) within the Twelve, or whether he should be considered a "lone wolf."

At the center of the Twelve, following the Masoretic order, the book of Jonah seems to be an intruder because of its style and its particular literary genre. Although it does recall the themes present in the other books of the corpus, it also overturns them, thus playing a specific role that should not be overlooked. To demonstrate this thesis, Claude Lichtert ("Entre rappels et renversements: les particularités littéraires et théologiques du récit de Jonas") explores three aspects. The first is theological: the Twelve indict mainly Israel for its faults and admonishes it to convert, but this does not mean that the Nations are not targeted as well. Jonah's message is that everyone is concerned by the issue of conversion. Thus the example of Nineveh becomes a *mise en abyme* of what is expected of Israel. The second aspect Lichtert focuses on is the literary genre: Jonah is the only book of the Twelve which is a narrative; even Jonah's prayer in chapter 2 fits perfectly in its dynamic. The third aspect is devoted to the literary structure of the text: Jonah is composed of two corresponding sequences which highlight the tension between God's unexpected behavior and that expected of the prophet.

In his contribution, Christophe Nihan ("Remarques sur la question de l'"unité" des XII") examines the numerous intertextual links that characterize the Twelve and raises the question of their interpretation, thus bringing to the fore the main methodological issues at stake in the current debate. By placing a few selected examples in relation with recent studies on the subject, he shows that intertextu-

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ality contradicts the hypothesis of a simple juxtaposition of the books that make up the whole of the Twelve, and at the same time that intertextuality cannot be explained through the hypothesis – dominant today – of linear redactions within the collection. Nihan argues for a new approach that would take into account all aspects of the question, including the meaning of the terms used to describe the Twelve: (for example, "book", "collection" or "anthology"), the principles of organization and arrangement that can be highlighted in the Twelve, and the socio-historical context of the whole production.

Intertextuality is not limited to the numerous internal references that can be found in the Twelve; it also exists between the Twelve and other prophetic books such as Isaiah. Jean-Daniel Macchi ("Ésaïe dans les XII: Ésaïe 2,2–5 et son parallèle en Michée 4,1–5") studies this aspect, dealing with two parallel texts, Isa 2:2–5 and Mic 4:1–5. He analyzes each of the two pericopes in their own contexts in order to understand their specific function and attempts to understand the reasons which prompted the authors of Micah or Isaiah to rework a theme based on another prophetic setting.

Donatella Scaiola ("The Twelve, one or many Books? A Theological Proposal") aims at demonstrating that the Book of the Twelve is one book and not an anthology. The first part of her article is devoted to a *status quaestionis*, in which she states the hermeneutical assumptions and the methodology underlying her investigation and then takes the frame of the book into account. In the third part, she explores one of the most important, evident and frequently studied examples of intertextuality in the Book of the Twelve, Exodus 34:6–7, to support the thesis that this could be the main theological aspect of the Book and the core of its unity.

The issue examined during the conference is a complex one, and that is the only point on which all the participants agreed. The authors' presuppositions led them to read the text(s) differently, and their approaches were sometimes irreconcilable, even discordant; it is therefore no surprise that contrasting answers emerged from their contributions and the various questions they addressed. Notwithstanding, putting together in a single scroll twelve texts that differ in style and language and even, sometimes, express conflicting messages actually creates logical bonds between these writings, whether an initial or editorial desire for unity existed or not. Each of the booklets has its own coherence, of course, but we are convinced that reading them all together produces more meaning, if only because such an approach is a way of keeping in mind the (sometimes paradoxical) tension between them, as well as the complex history of how the Book of the Twelve came into being. As this collection indicates, today's readers are probably more concerned about understanding how this paradoxical tension works, whatever the original redactional project (canonical, liturgical, intertextual, theological, anthropological, social, identity-related – even all of the above). Indeed, the authors in this volume may have used or coined different terms or

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expressions – polyphony (Ben Zvi), paradigmatic resumption / illustration of history (Nogalski), canonical links between the Twelve and the entire *Nebiim* and the Torah (Zakovitch) – but in the end, each of them insists, in its own way, on the huge benefit that can be gained by reading the Twelve both together and separately, as one would read a fragmentary work. As Roland Barthes once said about his own production: "Then if you put the fragments one after the next, is no organization possible? Yes: the fragment is like the musical idea of a song cycle (*La Bonne Chanson*, *Dichterliebe*): each piece is self-sufficient, and yet it is never anything but the interstice of its neighbors: the work consists of no more than an inset, an *hors-texte*."[2]

Much work remains to be done from the methodological and theological points of view, starting with the terminology used to analyze the Book of the Twelve. Scholars speak about the unity of the Book, about intertextuality, inner-biblical exegesis, *midrash*, *Fortschreibung*, but all these terms need to be defined clearly and their nuances brought out. Moreover, the perspective(s) from which author(s), editor(s), redactor(s) view the Book of the Twelve (either as an entity or as individual booklets) must be investigated further. We hope that this book has offered a contribution to the exegetical and theological discussion.

We wish to thank all the contributors to this volume, as well as "Écritures" (EA 3943), the research center located at the University of Lorraine, Metz, France, for making both the conference and this collection possible.

[2] "Quoi, lorsqu'on met des fragments à la suite, nulle organisation possible? Si: le fragment est comme l'idée musicale d'un cycle (*Bonne Chanson, Dichterliebe*): chaque pièce se suffit, et cependant elle n'est jamais que l'interstice de ses voisines: l'œuvre n'est faite que de hors-texte.", R. Barthes, *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* (Écrivains de toujours), Paris, 1975, 89–90, quoted according to *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*, translated by Richard Howard, Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994, 97.

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