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Reception of Biblical texts within the Bible: A starting point of midrash?

During the last decades, Old Testament exegesis has undergone an important shift concerning the concept of using texts in other literary contexts of the collection, which is hereafter called “Bible”.¹ After a short consideration of recent discussion on the topic, this article deals with several examples of inner-biblical reception of texts, a phenomenon which may be viewed as one of the starting points of the genre which would later be called midrash.

The art of (late?) biblical narrative as skillful artistic construct of text references

The reception of texts on a larger scale obviously begins in post-exilic times. This may be due to the fact that – in my opinion – the greater part of text production in Ancient Israel does not belong to the pre-exilic era, but also served to join the two epochs to produce a continuum in the history of Israel/Judah, thus making valid all the traditions of the age of the kingdom for later generations.

Preliminary remark on defining position and interests

As a bible-scholar teaching Old Testament at a catholic faculty of a state university, I do not write from the perspective of a Jewish studies’ scholar, but from theological disciplines. Holding a chair for “Old Testament and women’s studies” at Bonn University in Germany for seven years, I am familiar with inter-

¹ It is problematic to speak of “biblical texts” at a point in time, when all these texts, later collected within a collection, held not only as holy, but also as canonical, were still in *statu nascendi*. But it is obvious, that the process of building the OT canon took several centuries and began with the canonization of the *Torah* in Persian times, followed by the closing of *Nebiim* (evidenced by Ben Sira 48:22–25; 49:7–10 and the fact that Daniel is not part of the prophets, it surely took place before 200 B.C.E.) and finally, about two hundred years later, the third part, *Ketubim*.

disciplinary research, especially in the field of gender studies. I published a commentary to the book of Ruth² in 2000, where I develop the understanding of this book as a feminist commentary to the Torah as well as filling narrative gaps in the *neviim rischonim*, particularly concerning the genealogy of King David. Now I am preparing a commentary to the book of Jonah,³ evidently like Ruth, a relatively late narrative masterpiece of the Hebrew Bible, which I also would like to interpret as a commentary to texts about Israelite prophecy, especially on the problem of successful communication between God and His people as well as that of the salvation of the *gojjim*.

Since 2006 I have been working as initiator and one of the general editors of the 20-volume series “The Bible and Women”,⁴ a reception history on biblical texts about women and female readings of the Bible throughout the centuries, which has been published in four languages.

With this background, I am aware of modern concepts of intertextuality including all the problems created for biblical hermeneutics by applying it to biblical texts⁵ as well as with historical concepts of Jewish exegesis, without being an expert in this field.

Different interpretations of text-links in different methodologies

The so called historical-critical method (“Historisch-kritische Methode”) treated such interwoven texts as “parallels”, noting the fact, but generally not using it as very relevant for the sense of a passage. The first groundbreaking publication, well cited in German research contexts, was the article on midrash-exegesis by Isaac Leo Seeligmann.⁶ The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls especially initiated a development of research concerning the phenomenon of the “rewritten Bible”,⁷ about texts that, using older texts to a broad extent, retell stories by using their gaps and filling them with new ideas.

2 Irmtraud Fischer, *Rut. Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament*. Freiburg: Herder, 2005.

3 The commentary will be published in the new bilingual series “International Exegetical Commentary on the Old Testament” by Kohlhammer, Stuttgart, presumably in 2014.

4 See more under www.bibleandwomen.org.

5 In an early stage of the discussion, Thomas R. Hatina, “Intertextuality and Historical Criticism in New Testament Studies: Is There a Relationship?” *Biblical Interpretation* 7 (1999), pp. 28–43 formulated several serious objections.

6 Isaac Leo Seeligmann, “Voraussetzungen der Midraschexegese.” In: International Organization for the Study of the Old Testament (ed.), *Congress volume Copenhagen*. Leiden: Brill, 1953 (*Vetus Testamentum Supplementum* 1), pp. 150–181.

7 This term was coined by Geza Vermes in 1961 (see Geza Vermes, *Scripture and Tradition in Judaism. Haggadic Studies*. Leiden: Brill, 1973 (*Studia Post Biblica* 4)).

In the last three decades a lot of research was done also by using intertextuality as methodological concept, although most of the biblical scholars undertook the original concept of Julia Kristeva⁸ with greater or lesser modifications.⁹ Meanwhile, discussions on pretexts and hypertexts in contemporary exegesis are omnipresent. Biblical scholars also learned much from ancient Jewish exegesis, which held the links between texts as very important, while disregarding the date of origin.¹⁰

The impact of this shift, caused by the use of manifold concepts and methodologies,¹¹ on OT exegesis nowadays is evident: “parallels” are no longer held as mere fact. Although the current German-speaking scientific community is still partly afraid of canonical exegesis, accusing it of losing the historical dimension and becoming a-historical, it is accepted that texts are interwoven with others and that this is relevant for the understanding of texts. This approach often is called “innerbiblische Schriftauslegung”, inner-biblical exegesis.¹²

Another revolution took place by introducing reader-oriented concepts in exegesis, thus no longer speaking of Wirkungsgeschichte but of reception history. The

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- 8 Julia Kristeva, “Bakhtine, le mot, le dialogue et le roman.” In: *Critique* 239 (1967), pp. 438–456.
- 9 E.g. Georg Steins, *Die “Bindung Isaaks” im Kanon (Gen 22). Grundlagen und Programm einer kanonisch intertextuellen Lektüre*. Freiburg: Herder, 1999 (Herders Biblische Studien 20), who defines the canon as only a collection of reference, or Claudia Raker, *Judith über Schönheit, Macht und Widerstand im Krieg. Eine feministisch intertextuelle Lektüre*. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2003 (Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 334), whose hermeneutics, despite the recent French discussion, nonetheless tries to evaluate the intertextual results also for historical questions. See also publications of the “Amsterdam school” (e.g. Klara Butting, *Die Buchstaben werden sich noch wundern. Innerbiblische Kritik als Wegweisung feministischer Hermeneutik*. Berlin: Alektor, 1993 (Alektor Hochschulschriften), esp. pp. 14–17).
- 10 This axiom, that there is no backwards and afterwards in the Torah is expressed in Qoh Rab bah 1:12; cf. Christoph Dohmen and Günter Stemberger, *Hermeneutik der Jüdischen Bibel und des Alten Testaments*. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1996 (Kohlhammer Studienbücher Theologie 1.2), p. 101.
- 11 Especially in the last decades narratological studies have gained ground. See esp. Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry*. New York: Basic Books, 1985; Shimon Bar Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible*. Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989 (Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 70/Bible and Literature Series 17); David M. Gunn/ Danna N. Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993 (Oxford Bible Series); Mieke Bal, *Narratology. Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985. In the German speaking context Ilse Müllner, *Gewalt im Hause Davids. Die Erzählung von Tamar und Amnon (2 Sam 13,1–22)*. Freiburg: Herder, 1997 (Herders Biblische Studien 13), applied Bal’s sophisticated narratological concepts to biblical texts; see also Sönke Finnern, *Narratologie und biblische Exegese. Eine integrative Methode der Erzählanalyse und ihr Ertrag am Beispiel von Matthäus 28*, Tübingen: Mohr, 2010 (Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 2/285), although on New Testament texts.
- 12 A very informative overview on the various approaches is given by Konrad Schmid, “Innerbiblische Schriftauslegung. Aspekte der Forschungsgeschichte.” In: Reinhard G. Kratz, Thomas Krüger, and Konrad Schmid (eds.), *Schriftauslegung in der Schrift. Festschrift für Odil Hannes Steck zu seinem 65. Geburtstag*, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2000 (Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 300), pp. 1–22.

focus of such a concept is not on the text itself and its effects on later generations, but on the text's cultural context, where it picks up texts, motifs and narratives.

As a contemporary researcher with a composite identity, involved in research projects with multi-faceted approaches, I suggest that most of the links between texts are relevant, some of them really important, and in late texts, links are generally intended. Therefore the question of literary-history is not to be ignored by OT-scholars.

Hermeneutical premise

This publication has a lot to say regarding defining midrash, and midrash is defined by various articles in manifold ways. In this article I am not working with midrash in a classical sense but trying to trace a blank, a prototype of what would later on develop into midrash. The precondition of such an understanding of midrash is a canonical text, which means, that you shall not add anything to or take away from the text (cf. already Deut 4:2; 13:1). At first sight, therefore, midrash is not an appropriate concept for biblical exegesis, since it deals with the growth of text in progress, as "Bible" means having only a fixed canon. But if we take into consideration that the formation of the "canon" is a long-lasting process, we may presume that "mid-rashing" starts with this process. Therefore, the starting point of midrash is not the closed canon of TeNaK, but rather the decision that special texts express an important message of God and therefore are worthy to preserve for later generations. As canonized texts are no longer open for commentary or updating to address the significance for changed situations, the re-writing of texts or the composing of stories by using figures, motifs, topics etc. along the lines of well-known literature may not take place within "biblical" texts, but by creating new ones, which themselves afterwards became canonical texts. Such a process always intends to actualize texts and never merely to interpret texts in their presumed historical contexts. There is no retelling or rewriting without acquiring, and the creation of tradition alongside a canonical text is always appropriation. In this sense, biblical texts may be the starting point of a process that later leads to the literary genre of midrash.

The Bible as "story" tells "history" by using "patterns": some examples

The last decades have seen an intensive effort to identify connections between texts. To honor the Viennese research on the Hebrew Bible, it must be said that in German-speaking OT-exegesis one of the first scholars who dealt with meth-

odological issues concerning such relationships was the Viennese Georg Braulik.¹³ Since then there has been a vivid discussion from various methodological and hermeneutical points of view. I would like to offer now some examples of texts that pick up other existing (later biblical) texts and which cannot be decoded if the quoted text is not taken into consideration.

Quotations of “Leitwörter” relevant for exegesis of the later text

At the level of words, intertextuality is normally difficult to trace – with the exception of two phenomenons: so called “Leitwörter” and the use of extremely rare words or those of uncommon grammatical forms. Normally these indicate intertextuality if there are also other signals connecting the two texts.

As a good example for a relevant “Leitwort”, connecting two texts of the Bible is the word *לקט* glean, in Exod 16 (V.4.5.16.17.18.21.22.26.27) and Ruth 2 (V.2.3.7.8.15[2x].16.17[2x].18.19.23).¹⁴ All told, the word occurs only in these two texts: nine times in Exod 16 and twelve times in Ruth 2. Both texts are dealing with hunger and desire for bread. In both texts one has to work to obtain bread that God provides in order to save people from starving. Therefore, the two texts speak not solely of the common theme that God takes care of the hungry, since in Ruth 2 a Moabitess is starving with her mother-in-law, not God’s people. The use of the same “Leitwort” in such an extensive way means that the later book of Ruth is widening God’s grace also for Moabites, which is particularly significant for those people who are to be excluded by law (Deut 23:4 ff.), because they didn’t offer bread and water when Israel passed by on the way to the promised land. Now, as is told in the book of Ruth, the Moabites not only collect grain for bread in the fields of Moab (1:1.2.6.22 *קצו*) for the starving refugees coming from Judah, but also in the fields of Bethlehem (*קצו* is “Leitwort” of Ruth 2).

Another example would be the allusion of Song 7:11 to Gen 3:16 by use of the very rare word *תשוקה* (the only other incidence: Gen 4:7). In both texts, the paradise-story and the Songs of Songs are set in beautiful garden-landscape, and in both the relationship of man and woman is in question, this suggests that the schir-haschirim with its famous love-songs is presenting a counter-utopia to the broken gender-relationship of Gen 2 – 3:¹⁵ The female desire is no longer re-

13 See Georg Braulik’s monographic like article, “Das Deuteronomium und die Bücher Ijob, Sprichwörter, Rut.” In: Erich Zenger (ed.), *Die Tora als Kanon für Juden und Christen*. Freiburg et al.: Herder, 1996 (Herders Biblische Studien 10), pp. 61–138.

14 Cf. Braulik, *Deuteronomium*, p. 118.

15 This has already been seen by Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978 (Dt.: *Gott und Sexualität im Alten Testament*. Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1993 (Gütersloher Taschenbücher 539), p. 186) and Francis Landy, *Paradoxes of*

sponded to by male domination (3:16), but now it is the man who desires his eligible woman, and she responds to him adequately with love.

Occurrence of a phrase in only one other similar context

Also the next example, in which a phrase connects only two texts of the Bible, shows that this phenomenon has an important impact on exegesis. The nameless wife of Job, in biblical exegesis and also in reception history, normally is blamed for being a bad spouse, because she advises her husband to curse God and to die. It has been commonly discussed that in the first two chapters of the book of Job, the word בָּרַךְ is used for both blessing and cursing. In the speech of Job's wife it has almost always been translated as "to curse". As Christl Maier and Silvia Schroer¹⁶ have shown, there is no need to do so. On the contrary, it is not even convenient, because in her advice to Job (2:9: you still persist in your integrity מְחַזֵּק בְּתַמָּוֶתָהּ) she is quoting the speech of God (2:3: he still persists in his integrity וְעַתָּה מְחַזֵּק בְּתַמָּוֹתָיו). If Satan prophesies to God that Job will curse you to your face (1:11; 2:5: אֶל־פְּנֵיךָ יְבָרְכֶךָ) she advises him bless God and die! (2:9: בָּרַךְ אֱלֹהִים וּמָת). As she does not speak about cursing/blessing in God's face (בָּרַךְ אֶל־פְּנֵיךָ), as is typical of Satan's argumentation (1:11; 2:7), בָּרַךְ in 2:9 should not be translated as "curse" but as "bless". But what causes the woman to believe that his only destiny would be death?

Here the technique of picking up unique phrases can help:¹⁷ Job 2:7 states that the Satan afflicted (נָבָה) a severe inflammation on Job from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head (בְּשָׁחִין רָע מִכַּף רֵגְלוֹ עַד קֶדְקֶדוֹ). A first look at this sickness would suggest a severe skin-disease, but having a closer look at the phrase, it occurs only one other time in the Bible, in Deut 28:35. In the context of the great covenant-curse it is announced that the people would suffer if they do not obey the commandments. It is stated that God will afflict (נָבָה) you with a severe inflammation ... from the sole of your foot to the crown of your head (בְּשָׁחִין רָע מִכַּף רֵגְלֶךָ עַד קֶדְקֶדְךָ). Taking this into consideration, the wife of Job takes his suffering as sign, particularly because all his other afflictions (loss of all children and wealth) affected her too. But the disease strikes only her husband, not her.

Paradise. Identity and Difference in the Song of Songs. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1983 (Bible and Literature Series), pp. 251–252.

16 Cf. Christl Maier and Silvia Schroer, "Das Buch Ijob." In: Luise Schottroff and Marie Theres Wacker (eds.), *Kompendium Feministische Bibelauslegung.* Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2007, pp. 192–207, esp. 202, now available also in English: "Job: Questioning the Book of the Righteous Sufferer." In: Luise Schottroff and Marie Theres Wacker (eds.), *Feminist Biblical Interpretation. A Compendium of Critical Commentary on the Books of the Bible and Related Literature.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012, pp. 221–239, esp. 232–235.

17 For argumentation see Irmtraud Fischer, *Gotteslehrerinnen. Weise Frauen und Frau Weisheit im Alten Testament.* Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2006, pp. 97–109.

Although she holds him blameless, she detects the uniqueness of his illness as the expression of a curse leading to death. Deut 28:35 therefore is indispensable for understanding the harsh reaction of the distressed woman.

Modelling figures after exemplary characters

Especially in late biblical narrative literature we may notice that figures are very often depicted along the features or special deeds of biblical characters. It is evident, for example, that the figure of Ruth is designed along the matriarchs. Rachel and Leah, as well as Tamar, are mentioned explicitly in Ruth 4:11 – 12, but Ruth 2 shows the Moabite protagonist also as a “new Rebecca”, when she – like Rebecca and Abraham, her father in law, did – leaves her own country to live in the promised land (Ruth 2:11; cf. Gen 12:1 – 4 and 24:4 – 7.58).¹⁸

Esther, as a “new Joseph”, saves her people at the court of a foreign king, evidencing that sometimes integration and assimilation are more successful than the resistance Mordecai has chosen to exemplify.¹⁹ Likewise the deuterocanonical Judith, who decapitates Holofernes, is not only designed as a “new David”, who also strokes the head of his enemy with his own sword, and as a “new Yael”, killing the crown of the army in the tent by striking his head, but, because of their victory-songs in Exod 15 and Judg 16, also as a “new Moses”, “new Miriam” and “new Deborah”.²⁰

This phenomenon of shaping figures shows that gender does not matter. On the contrary, it looks like late story telling/writing prefers cross-gender identification. Nonetheless it is worth noting that this functions only in one direction: only female figures are shaped along male lines, never the other way round.

Telling stories for interpreting legal texts

As a forerunner of the later halakhic midrash we may detect those narrative texts, which evidently deal with legal texts and try to modify their usual application. I would like to explicate this with the help of two examples dating most probably from the 4th cent. B.C.E., which obviously have the intention of opening the Israelite religion to the gentiles.

In my commentary on the book of Ruth, I demonstrated that the whole book may be seen within this genre, trying to abrogate the so called Moabite-Paragraph (Deut 23:2 – 9), which excludes Moabite people from becoming members of the post-exilic

18 Cf. Fischer, *Rut*, pp. 176 – 177.

19 For connections between Joseph and Esther see Butting, *Buchstaben*, pp. 49 – 86.

20 Raket, *Judit*, pp. 228 – 272.

community while at the same time adapting the androcentric law in favor of female subjects.²¹ As Jürgen Ebach²² noticed just years before, the book of Ruth tells its story by annihilating the justification for the exclusion: because they didn't supply Israel with food while in their own land. Once the Moabite woman provides bread for Naomi even in Bethlehem, it is no longer arguable to exclude Moabites.

The book of Ruth shows herein a similar universalistic theology like the book of Jonah. The law concerning prophecy in the Torah, Deut 18:9 – 22,²³ on the one hand takes for granted that prophecy is an office for guaranteeing the communication (exclusively) between the God of Israel and his people. It does not foresee that a prophet could be sent to the nations. On the other hand, a prophet is called by YHWH and gifted with the only legitimate means of communication, the word. Driven by God's word (1:1; 3:1), Jonah has to prophesy the decline not to his people, but to the capital of his greatest enemy and strongest imperial power of the narrated time, the Assyrian metropolis Nineveh. The book is strongly influenced by a universalistic theology that tries to open the Israelite religion for the gentiles.²⁴ Israelite prophets repeatedly faced the experience that the people do not hear the word and do not fear God. But Jonah, by fleeing his mission, meets God-fearing people already on the ship (Jon 1:5 – 16). Finally, when he does his job and prophesies against Nineveh, the inhabitants likewise immediately hear the word of Jonah's God, and do penitence for their sins. So like the Moabite Ruth, the Ninevites are more disposed to hear the word and to act on what is asked of them. The success of the message, which Jonah does not appreciate, suggests that the word of God should be communicated also to the gentiles, even if they are the most feared enemies.

The reception of this overall important law concerning prophecy within this part of the canon is evident of the process of narrative filling in the gaps of this law, as the story Jonah does, or that of Jeremiah and Hananiah, by illustrating an aspect of the law, not given by God, but only presumed (Jer 28; Deut 18:20 – 22). Likewise we are able to trace it in the story of the woman of En-Dor, who uses

21 A short version of my understanding of the book is published in English: Irmtraud Fischer, "The Book of Ruth – a 'Feminist' Commentary to the Torah." In: Athalya Brenner (ed.), *Ruth and Esther. A Feminist Companion to the Bible (Second Series)* 3. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999, pp. 24 – 49.

22 Jürgen Ebach, "Fremde in Moab – Fremde aus Moab. Das Buch Ruth als politische Literatur." In: Jürgen Ebach and Richard Faber (eds.), *Bibel und Literatur*. München: Fink, 1985, pp. 277 – 304.

23 For such an understanding of prophecy as conceived by a legal text of the Torah see Irmtraud Fischer, *Gotteskündinnen. Zu einer geschlechterfairen Deutung des Phänomens der Prophetie und der Prophetinnen in der Hebräischen Bibel*. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2002, pp. 32 – 62.

24 The interconnectedness of biblical texts with the book of Jonah and the consequences for Jewish exegesis is shown by Uriel Simon, *Jona. Ein jüdischer Kommentar*. Stuttgart: Verlag Kath. Bibelwerk, 1994 (Stuttgarter Bibelstudien 157); he does not pay much attention to the law of prophecy.

false practices for prophesying the future, described in Deut 18:9 – 14, to counsel the king. As she lets Saul swear by YHWH, it is apparent that she fulfils her prophetic gift to summon the dead prophet Samuel in order to ask him in the name of Israel's God about the future fate of Saul's military fortune. Therefore she should be called "prophetess of En-Dor" and not the "witch".²⁵

This story functions exactly like what later would be called a halakhic midrash, because it shows that false practices are futile for they do not bring a new message: the defunct Samuel announces nothing other than what he had said when he was still alive. The engagement with the question, how can prophecy succeed, continuously led to creating new stories regarding Deut 18:14 – 22. This phenomenon creates within the extensive part of the Hebrew Bible called Prophets macro-structures as shown below.

Modelling parts of the canon along texts

The last phenomenon presented here deals with the reception of biblical texts and concepts in a larger scale than a single text. It concerns the macro-structures, visible in books, within collections of books, or even in parts of the canon.

One of the best examples, already much described,²⁶ is the alignment of the closing of the books of Genesis and of Deuteronomy: The first biblical book that narrates the story of the chosen family ends with the death of Jacob/Israel, the main character of the book (Gen 50), who blesses his sons before he dies (Gen 49). The last book of the Torah ends with the death of the central figure since the book of Exodus; before dying, Moses blesses the Twelve Tribes, which have grown out of the sons of Jacob (Deut 33).

We are able to show the same parallelism for the opening and closing of the Christian Bible that begins in Gen 1 – 2 with the creation stories about heaven and earth and ends in Rev 21 – 22 with the new creation, by using not only the typical collocation "heaven and earth" from Gen 1:1 – 2:4a, but also the motif of the tree of life, typical for the Eden-narrative (Gen 2:9; 3:22.24; Rev 22:2.14.19).²⁷ The idea of

25 See for detailed argumentation Fischer, *Gotteskünderinnen*, pp. 131 – 157.

26 For example Matthias Millard, *Die Genesis als Eröffnung der Tora. Kompositionen und auslegungsgeschichtliche Annäherungen an das erste Buch Mose*. Neukirchen Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2001 (Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament 90), pp. 43 – 91.

27 In the Hebrew Bible a similar closing is to be seen in Isa 65 – 66. For all elements resumed from Gen 1 – 3 at the end of the book of Isaiah see Odil H. Steck, "Der neue Himmel und die neue Erde. Beobachtungen zur Rezeption von Gen 1 – 3 in Jes 65,16b – 25." In: Jacques van Ruiten and Marc Vervenne (eds.), *Studies in the Book of Isaiah. Festschrift Willem A. M. Beuken*, Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1997 (Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium 132), pp. 349 – 365.

returning to creation as it was conceived by God and to paradise with the prospect of eternal life functions as literary inclusion for the whole Bible. The last book here tells about a new beginning, without negating all the history which led to salvation.

These features, correlating the ends of the first and the last book of the Torah in the Hebrew Bible and those of the beginning of the first and the end of last book of the Christian Bible, may well be a case of composition or also redaction and therefore treated from the perspective of composition- or redaction-history. But is this the only significance of this literary fact? This phenomenon of rewriting biblical texts obviously is not only a literary strategy for producing fine literature, but has immense theological significance in its adaptation of the message to new situations, contexts and times.

Consequences for biblical exegesis today

In considering the comprehensive phenomena of “retelling” and “rewriting” “biblical” stories, we should be aware that “midrashing” is a process that goes along with the processes of canonization.

Such a process of picking up quite famous and literary full written texts to make new stories is already detectable in the adaptation of extra-biblical myths (e. g. the flood narrative in Gen 6 – 9) within the Bible. Although the concepts of narratology as well as intertextuality do not ask historical questions, in particular not those concerning the problem of the growing of texts, it is not impossible to make this questioning also fruitful for historical-critical exegesis – if it is conceived not only as an engagement for questioning the development of a text up to its canonization, but also as a dedication to the afterlife of patterned words, phrases, motifs, topics, texts, books and collections of books. As such, this kind of inner-biblical exegesis²⁸ may be held as one of the starting points of midrash.

28 Cf. the essay Michael Fishbane, “Inner Biblical Exegesis: Types and Strategies of Interpretation in Ancient Israel.” In: idem, *The Garments of Torah. Essays in Biblical Hermeneutics*. Bloomington/Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989 (Indiana Studies in Biblical Literature), pp. 3–18, esp. 16: “Exegesis arises out of a practical crisis of some sort – the incomprehensibility of a word or a rule, or the failure of a covenantal tradition to engage its audience.”