



Kowalski, Beate

***Die Rezeption des Propheten Ezechiel in der
Offenbarung des Johannes***

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More than twenty years ago I began to notice the haphazard way in which allusions to the Old Testament in Revelation were cited in commentaries, lists of allusions, and even critical articles (see Jon Paulien, “Decoding Revelation’s Trumpets: Literary Allusions and the Interpretation of Rev 8:7–12” [doctoral diss., Andrews University Seminary 11; Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 1988], 121–54; and idem, “Elusive Allusions: The Problematic Use of the OT in Revelation,” *BibRes* 33 [1988]: 37–53). Among the defects I noted were the lack of systematic search for possible allusions, a casualness in laying out the evidence upon which allusions were chosen, and the lack of a clear distinction between “allusions” and “echoes.”

I challenged scholarship at that time to more careful analysis on the basis of words, themes, and structures. I invited classification of potential allusions according to the likelihood of authorial intention. I encouraged making a clear distinction between allusions (where authorial intention was reasonably clear) and echoes (where it was unlikely or nonexistent). And I invited interpreters to be more systematic in laying out the evidence for their assessments of when John was alluding to previous literature and when he was not.

Beate Kowalski’s book on the use of Ezekiel in Revelation is the best available example of the approach I was calling for in my dissertation. She canvasses all major predecessors

for potential allusions to Ezekiel in Revelation. She uses tools such as BibleWorks for Windows to uncover possibilities that have not yet been dealt with in the literature. She assesses all of these possibilities in terms of words, themes, and structures, utilizing both the Greek and the Hebrew of the Old Testament. She carefully lays out the grounds upon which she decides when John is alluding to the Old Testament and when he is not. I, therefore, consider her book the state of the art on assessment of allusions in biblical studies. Her method should be a starting point for future work on the use of the Old Testament in the book of Revelation.

It is a general consensus in New Testament scholarship that Revelation makes extensive use of the Old Testament. As a result, specialized studies of the use of various Old Testament books in Revelation have been undertaken in recent years. Kowalski felt, however, that a thorough verbal and structural analysis of the use of Ezekiel in the Apocalypse was lacking. This has been particularly true in German-language scholarship, where her work is something of a first.

Kowalski begins with a survey of earlier attempts to understand John's use of Ezekiel, such as those by A. Vanhoye, Jeffrey Vogelgesang, and Jean-Pierre Ruiz. None of these scholars offers the kind of extensive and detailed focus she attempts in her book, however. She then surveys the major attempts to establish a method for assessing allusions to the Old Testament in Revelation. Among others, these include works by G. K. Beale, Stanley Porter, J. van Ruiten, Sverre Bøe, and myself.

Building on these earlier attempts, Kowalski organizes her book into two main parts, each about two hundred pages long. In the first part she examines the verbal evidence for allusions to Ezekiel in the book of Revelation. In the second part she examines in depth the clusters of allusions between Revelation and Ezekiel, examining their implications for the structure and theology of Revelation. There is a concluding section in which she explores the implications of her work for the current discussion on intertextuality.

Kowalski's assessment of allusions to Ezekiel in Revelation begins at the level of words. She lays out in parallel the text of Revelation in the Greek and also the texts of the LXX and the MT for the suggested allusions. She identifies not only verbal parallels but the frequency of such parallels and also instances where the word order and/or the grammatical constructions are the same. She also explores whether a given allusion is based on knowledge of the Hebrew or that of a Greek translation. Her goal is to provide evidence for "all possible allusions to Ezekiel" (250: "aller möglichen Anspielungen auf Ez"). The evidence is presented on a verse-by-verse basis throughout the book of Revelation.

Her findings indicate that the author of Revelation made verbal use of at least 135 verses in Ezekiel in 126 verses of Revelation. She also draws the conclusion that five of these verbal allusions should be considered “quotations” rather than merely allusions. These five are found in Rev 2:7 (Ezek 31:8); 7:1 (Ezek 7:2); 10:10 (Ezek 3:3); 18:18 (Ezek 27:32); and 21:7 (Ezek 11:20). She defines a “quotation” as occurring when the number (six to eight words in these five cases) and order of words and their grammatical form are so unique between Ezekiel and Revelation that chance can be ruled out as an explanation for their overlap (264–65).

From this detailed and thorough work she draws a number of interesting and useful conclusions. When she orders the allusions according to the text of Revelation, she finds that there is a relative absence of allusions to Ezekiel in the seven letters and in the central part of the book (chs. 12–15). On the other hand, allusions to Ezekiel are heavily clustered in Rev 4; 7; 10; and 17–21 (each chapter contains allusions to Ezekiel in 30 to 70 percent of the verses). When she orders the allusions according to the text of Ezekiel, on the other hand, she discovers that they are primarily clustered in Ezek 1–3; 8–11; 16; 23–27; and 37–48. Particular focus is on the visions in Ezek 1; 8–11; 37; and 40–48.

Kowalski also notes that eighteen verbal allusions seem drawn from the MT and eleven from the LXX, but in most instances it is impossible to tell which form of the Old Testament is favored in the allusion. The upshot of this evidence is that John used the Old Testament out of memory rather than by direct reference to a written exemplar. There is no decisive evidence that he favored the Greek or the Hebrew of the Old Testament.

The second major section of the book raises the question whether the very structure of Revelation is dependent on the structure of Ezekiel. Kowalski determines that seven major sections of Ezekiel have significant structural parallels to sections of Revelation. She also determines that five major themes of Revelation are strongly parallel to Ezekiel. These five themes are (1) the way “prophets” and “prophetesses” are handled, (2) women representing cities, (3) the specific signs of theophany, (4) the way “scroll” is used, and (5) divine plagues. This structural work supports twenty-seven specific allusions to the Old Testament. Since there is considerable overlap between the lists based on verbal and structural research, the total number of verses in Revelation that contain allusions to Ezekiel, according to an appendix at the end of the book, is 139. Many of these, however, are allusions to multiple locations in Ezekiel, so the actual number of assumed allusions is quite a bit higher (while this type of count is problematic, the total number of allusions listed is around 200).

The final chapter explores how Kowalski's research affects some of the major issues in the current debate about Revelation's use of the Old Testament. There is space here to list only a few of her major conclusions:

1. While Ezekiel is a major background text for Revelation, she finds that there is no single verse in Revelation that is totally dependent on Ezekiel and Ezekiel alone. Throughout the book of Revelation the influence of a variety of Old Testament documents is continually observable. No one Old Testament book provides the definitive source for any part of Revelation.
2. The images and motifs of Revelation are extremely fluid; one cannot take a basic meaning and project it throughout the text. No major word is used with exactly the same meaning in every context. The fluidity of the images is more reminiscent of poetry than of narrative.
3. Revelation is not so much a "rereading" (*Wiederlesen*) of the OT as it is a "further-reading" (*Weiterlesen*) of the Old Testament. While there is both continuity and discontinuity between Ezekiel and Revelation, John seems to expand the meaning of the Old Testament text in light of his vision of the Christ. On the other hand, so critical is the usage of the Old Testament to the meaning of the vision that the book cannot be understood apart from these allusions.
4. Regarding the question of whether Revelation is primarily based on a vision or on literary research, Kowalski's findings lead her to the conclusion that the vision is the dominant factor. John's literary efforts are in service of the vision rather than the reverse. In spite of the many allusions, there is much in Revelation that is completely original. None of the existent Jewish methods of exegesis are consistently utilized in Revelation. Revelation is much more than simply a mosaic of Old Testament texts and motifs; it is a work of powerful originality. In this conclusion she seems to side more with Steve Moyise than with Greg Beale.

This book is thorough and useful throughout. Particularly helpful are numerous charts in which the textual evidence is laid out in detail. These charts enable the reader to review her work quickly and to evaluate her judgments on the basis of the same evidence she has unearthed. This is the very kind of thoroughness I think is needed in order to move the assessment of allusions beyond intuition and occasional rigor to a systematic evaluation of the evidence. In my mind, Kowalski's book sets a new standard for the field.

Further, her decision to separate the examination of words and structures is an interesting one. In my own work I distinguished between verbal and structural parallels, but I

examined them on a text-by-text basis rather than as distinct entities for the book as a whole. Since Kowalski is comparing two specific books (instead of examining the Old Testament as a whole), however, her approach makes sense to me in this case. On the other hand, I believe this approach causes her to underplay the value of structural parallels for the assessment of specific verbal evidence. It would have been preferable had she returned to the verbal evidence at the end and reexamined her verbal judgments in light of the structural work. If she had done this she might have nuanced her support for some of the allusions that lack structural evidence.

When I compared Kowalski's statistics with a weighted list of allusions drawn from major Revelation scholars of the last century, I found some interesting data. The weighted list totals 823 possible or probable allusions to the Old Testament, of which less than half are cited by the majority of commentators. Of the 823, 116 are to Ezekiel, about 14 percent.

Projecting Kowalski's statistics for Ezekiel to the entire Old Testament would result in roughly one thousand to fifteen hundred total intentional allusions. This total is considerably higher than most listings of the past. In spite of the quantity and weight of her detailed work, therefore, I cannot avoid the feeling that she has implemented some bias toward Ezekiel where the evidence is less than perfectly clear. On the other hand, the weighted list produced a clustering of allusions to Ezekiel in Rev 1; 4; 6–7; 11; and 18–21. These results are close enough to hers that I find her overall conclusions with regard to structure quite convincing.

I would have liked to have seen more emphasis on the concept of “echo” (*Autoreflexion*), however. John often utilizes themes that can be traced to the Old Testament as a source but not by way of an intentional use of specific texts. While Kowalski mentions the category of *Autoreflexion*, it does not seem to play a major role in this book. This lack of emphasis may have caused her to put more allusions into the “certain” category than should actually be the case. Defining some parallels as “echoes” allows one to consider the parallel without insisting that the author intentionally created the parallel.

To illustrate this problem I would point to Ezek 1:26. According to Kowalski, John alludes to Ezek 1:26 thirteen times in Revelation (272). But is John consciously coming back to this specific verse over and over, or is it more likely he is reflecting a general awareness of elements of Ezekiel's vision? For example, in Rev 4:9–10 the phrase “the one sitting on the throne” occurs twice. Are both phrases a specific invitation for the reader to consider the text of Ezek 1:26 in its context, or do they represent a general recollection of the whole passage (something Kowalski is quite prepared to accept in the case of Ezek 16 and 23 in Rev 17)? I agree with Kowalski that the primary ground for a

parallel here is a recurring motif (117–18), but such a recurring motif is more likely an echo of Old Testament awareness than a consciously repeated allusion to Ezek 1:26.

Another illustration of the problem is her listing Rev 11:1 as alluding to Ezek 40:3, 5, 47; 41:1; 42:16–19; and 43:13. While the verbal connections between these texts are impressive and carefully worked out, is it likely that John was intentionally alluding to each of these specific locations in that particular verse? Is it not more likely in this case that his vision steered him in the general direction of Ezekiel's account, thereby "echoing" a wide variety elements in the earlier account without requiring a conscious intention?

I must say, in her defense, that the text of her book is much more nuanced than a mere listing can suggest. But it does seem to me that a consistent use of the category of echo would cast doubt on the validity of some of her judgments. There seems to be a slight bias toward a full listing of Ezekiel's influence. It will thus be interesting to see how future studies will relate to her assessments of specific allusions.

Finally, while I heard a lot of German growing up in New York City, reading German is definitely a second language for me. So I grant that for most scholars in English-speaking countries this book will be a tough read. Yet I found the rewards well worth the struggle. This is a book I would have explored carefully, even if I had not been asked to do this review. I believe its content is significant enough that it deserves to be made available in English translation, where it can exert a wider influence on the scholarly study of Revelation.