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Baumann, Gerlinde

Gottes Gewalt im Wandel: Traditionsgeschichtliche und intertextuelle Studien zu Nahum 1,2-8

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Duane L. Christensen
Graduate Theological Union
Berkeley, California

This revision of Baumann's dissertation at the University of Marburg successfully bridges two worlds. On the one hand, the work stands as a model of the best in German critical scholarship of times past in its thoroughness and meticulous detail. At the same time, the work moves well beyond the familiar world of historical-critical methodology to include a competent foray into intertextual studies and matters of particular concern in feminist circles. In the brief foreword to her study, the author expresses a special word of thanks to Georg Braulik for his assistance while the author was in residence at the Benedictine Schottenabtei in Vienna. To this reviewer, these words evoke pleasant memories of numerous visits in years past to take advantage of Braulik's mastery of the book of Deuteronomy and its vast secondary literature.

The thirty-two pages of bibliography in Baumann's study represent a masterful survey of pertinent scholarly works in which virtually all of the items listed are in fact incorporated into the body of the study itself, which is arranged in four major sections. In the introduction (1-38) Baumann examines the problem of Nahum and violence with a survey of scholarly opinion on the subject, which explores the background of her own work. Her brief look at the study of Nahum at the University of Marburg is instructive. Starting with the work of Franz Lambert published in 1525, such work includes that of Karl Justi

(1820), Julius Wellhausen (1892), Jörg Jeremias (1965), Hermann Schulz (1973), and Aaron Schart (1998). Baumann thus takes her place within an elite circle of scholarship on this particular text. In my personal opinion, her work surpasses that of her predecessors at Marburg.

The second section (39–178) is a detailed study of the Hebrew text of Nah 1:2–8, which constitutes Baumann’s primary contribution. On the matter of the date, structure, and arrangement of the book of Nahum, the author contrasts the work of Seybold, who dates the content of the book in at least four redactional layers ranging through time from 660 to 400 B.C.E., with that of Becking, who finds “conceptual coherence” in Nahum. She places herself somewhere between these extremes by taking a more or less traditional stand within German critical scholarship, with Gunkel and others of times past, to find in the psalm of Nahum in 1:2–8 a secondary addition to the book as such.

It would be better to draw a sharper distinction between the intended date and setting the author of the work in question has chosen for the reader to use in the process of interpreting the book, and the historical setting of the author/composer of the book, which itself constitutes an integral part of the Book of the Twelve Prophets from the time of its original composition. It is possible that the author/composer of Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah is one and the same person. Baumann comes close to recognizing this possibility in a subsequent section of her study, where she raises the question of “Nah-Hab-Zeph als Dreiprophetenbuch?” (239–40). She also explores in some depth the literary relation between Mic 7:18–20 and Nah 1:2b–3a (see 94–102), but again she fails to draw the implication so far as date and setting for the composition of the two books as such. She agrees with Nogalski, who finds a close tie between the ending of Micah and the beginning of Nahum (186), but Baumann is unaware of more objective evidence to show how closely these books are tied together in terms of the phenomenon of numerical composition (see my forthcoming commentary in the Anchor Bible series).

The detailed textual analysis, which constitutes the heart of Baumann’s study, is particularly strong on matters of intertextuality. She subsequently expands this interest at some length in the third major section of her book, where she explores the “Nahum-Psalm” in relation to what she calls “Ko-Texten” (179–242). The bulk of this section focuses on ties with other books within the Book of the Twelve Prophets. There is much here that merits careful reflection, as the author shows considerable depth in her awareness and understanding of current trends among contemporary scholars working on this matter. She divides the other books into three groups, finding the closest parallels in Micah and Habakkuk; the second closest parallels in Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, and Zephaniah; and the more distant parallels in Hosea, Amos, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.

The greatest weakness I personally find in Baumann's impressive book is in the area of Hebrew prosody, which she apparently has chosen to ignore. She may be aware of the debate long ago between Bickell (see p. 8) and Gunkel, in which the very text she has chosen to study was the focus of a long and sharp debate on the relative merits of an earlier version of the method of syllable counting, as championed by Bickell, and the method of counting word-stress units on the part of Gunkel, who was following Julius Leye in these matters. Between 1880 and 1894 Bickell published at least five studies dealing with Nah 1 (and/or related texts) on matters of prosody. Only one of these publications makes its way into Baumann's lengthy bibliography. At the time of this debate, Wellhausen was apparently too far along writing his own commentary on the Book of the Twelve Prophets (published in 1892) so that he stood somewhat aloof of the debate and chose to reject the work of both Bickell and Gunkel on the presumed acrostic hymn in Nah 1. Behind that fierce debate of an earlier era was a much older method of prosodic analysis, which once dominated the field of Old Testament research from the mid-seventeenth century on into the second half of the nineteenth century—namely, the old Alting-Danzian system of counting morae, a method that was still alive in the twentieth century in the work of Elcanon Isaacs (1918). Unfortunately, the method had been misused in some circles to the point of being thoroughly discredited for the wrong reasons. Gunkel won the methodological debate that raged over the text of the presumed acrostic psalm of Nahum, and Eduard Sievers refined the new methodology of counting word-stress units in a series of significant studies (1901–1907). That method continues to exert a dominant influence in the study of Hebrew prosody, though Baumann has wisely chosen to ignore it. As early as 1960 David Noel Freedman began to formulate a new version of the syllable-count method, working in tandem with Frank M. Cross. The new syllable-count method was applied in a spate of articles by Cross and Freedman and their students, especially from 1970 to 1976, and continues to the present time. Christensen's study of the "oracles against the nations" (1972), which includes the psalm of Nahum and is based on the syllable-count method of Frank Cross, was published in 1975. Douglas Stuart's systematic assessment of Cross's approach to archaic poetry at Harvard and Alan Cooper's doctoral dissertation at Yale, which is based on the work of J. Kurylowicz, both appeared in 1976. Christensen introduced a new impulse in 1982 with the substitution of counting morae instead of syllables. Two years later this method was modified further to incorporate the inclusion of syntactic accentual-stress (SAS) units, as defined by Kurylowicz. A further revision of that methodology to include word-count (logoprosodic analysis) is presented in his Anchor Bible commentary on Nahum (forthcoming).

A related problem of interest so far as the psalm of Nahum is concerned is the presence or absence of an acrostic pattern in this poem and the question of the correct boundaries of the passage in question. On both issues my conclusions differ sharply from those of

Baumann. It is one thing to show mastery of a particular methodology, as she does throughout the entirety of this masterful study within the mainstream of German critical scholarship. It is something else altogether to be in fact correct. I am thoroughly convinced that the poem in question should be delineated as Nah 1:1–10—including the two-part heading, which is an integral part of the poem that follows, as Spronk already observes in his commentary (1997). Moreover, there is more than one acrostic pattern to be found here, contrary to the arguments of Floyd, which Baumann more or less accepts (see her section “Ist Nah 1,2–8 ein Akrosticon?” [52–60]). An original alphabetic acrostic pattern was deliberately “bent” by the author/composer of this text and applied to new ends, in a manner not clearly understood by Baumann, even though an earlier form of my own arguments was published in 1989 in an article that appears in Baumann’s bibliography.