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Duane Christensen is well known in the field of biblical exegesis from his commentary on the book of Deuteronomy (WBC, 1991 and 2002), in which he presented himself as an enthusiastic and forceful advocate of the analysis of biblical texts as numerical compositions. Already in his work on Deuteronomy we see a development in Christensen’s thinking on this subject, which made a new edition of the first part of the commentary necessary. Seven years later he appears to be even more convinced of the advantages of this approach. It has been refined and is now incorporated in what he calls the logoprosodic analysis and combined with “archaeomusicology.” On this field Christensen is working together with a number of scholars equally dedicated to these technical methods. Many of them are presenting and discussing their findings on the website www.bibal.net. Most important for Christensen are Casper Labuschagne (on studying the numerical composition) and Ernest McClain (archaeomusicology). In his commentary Christensen often refers to private communications with them. Much of this unpublished material can be found on the website.

The specific and not generally accepted approach makes this a remarkable commentary. Within the same series it can be compared to the three-volume commentary on Psalms by Mitchell Dahood, who also offered a daring, revolutionary reading (in this case based
on the comparison with Ugaritic). The editors of the series gave him the opportunity to go all the way, perhaps giving him the benefit of the doubt. One can respect this courage, taking the risk that in the end the results will not be convincing and that the commentary will stay on the margins of scholarly research. Christensen has a point when he states in his introduction that in his approach he follows the path of one of the first editors, David Noel Freedman, who was very positive about the role of syllable-counting in the structural analysis of Hebrew poetry. Whether Freedman would have agreed that this commentary is part of his initial vision, as is suggested in the dedication (unfortunately, the final nun of the Hebrew word is missing), can be questioned. In any case, a commentary of more than four hundred pages on three chapters of the Hebrew Bible and that is filled with complicated logotechnical discussions has moved far away from the original idea, repeated by the present editor John J. Collins, of a commentary “that is accessible not only to scholars but also to the educated nonspecialist.”

A bibliography of eighty pages and the very useful index of authors attest to much attention to secondary literature. The outline of the history of interpretation is relatively short (7–25), but in the notes and comments nearly everything that has ever been written on the book of Nahum passes in review. However, there is one serious, be it deliberate, omission. That is the discussion of the diachronic approach. Of course, Christensen cannot deny its existence, but he suggests that the historical-critical approach is out of date. The old categories of diachronic and synchronic are in his view misleading, “for we are in the midst of a paradigm shift that requires new ways of thinking about old problems” (56). He is thinking here of reading the book of Nahum as part of the Book of the Twelve. Christensen states that it is of no use to try to reconstruct the book of Nahum as a document that in one form or another existed independently. The only thing we know for sure is that we are dealing with a “meticulously contrived numerical and musical masterpiece that we have at our disposal to study within the context of the Book of the Twelve Prophets” (57). It is good to know the historical background of the Assyrian Empire it describes, but in Christensen’s opinion it is of no use to relate these historical facts to the present literary piece of art, which must have been written during the Babylonian exile or shortly after. Not everyone will agree with this point of view or go along with this paradigm shift. In the recent commentary by Heinz-Josef Fabry (Herders Theologischer Kommentar, 2006), the diachronic approach is alive and kicking. Fabry’s book is mentioned in Christensen’s bibliography, but apparently it was published too late to be incorporated in the discussion. That can hardly be the reason for the omission of the commentary by Lothar Perlitt (Das Alte Testament Deutsch, 2004). Perlitt firmly states that the book of Nahum is not a unity at all: “Nah ist aber nicht das Werk einer planvollen Redaktion, da das Buch auch in seiner kanonischen Endgestalt Abschnitte von
kaum zu entwirrender Unordnung enthält” (3). It is hard to believe that Perlitt is writing
here about the same book.

The problem with both Christensen and scholars such as Perlitt and Fabry is that there is
no external proof for either position, so the burden of proof lies on the quality of the
results of their analysis of the text: Does it give convincing answers to the questions that
arise when reading the text? For the book of Nahum, these questions concern, among
other things, the acrostic elements in the first verses, the relation between the initial hymn
with the rest of the book, and the explanation of the apparent parallels with the other
books of the Twelve Prophets. The question to be answered here is not whether
logoprosodic analysis is a helpful tool. It has proven its value in clarifying the structure of
a number of texts, such as Pss 23 and 67 (see the analysis on www.labuschagne.nl). The
question is: Does it help lead to a better understanding of the book of Nahum?

With regard to the acrostic, Christensen elaborates what he had written earlier on this
topic in articles in ZAW in 1975 and 1987. I was happy to see that he now incorporates
the discovery made by Labuschagne and me of a line acrostic/telestic in Nah 1:1–3 (see
my “Acrostics in the Book of Nahum,” ZAW 110 [1998]: 209–22), but I am less convinced
by his follow-up, proposing the theory that an existing alphabetic acrostic poem was
“bent” to new purposes by the author of the book of Nahum. The author would have
hidden in this way a message in 1:1–9 that, according to Christensen, would have been: “I
am the exalted Yhwh, / and I am in the presence of sin. / In the sweeping torrent, a full
end he will make of her place; / and his enemies he pursues into darkness. / What will you
devise against Yhwh? / A full end he himself will make” (213). The basic problem with
this theory is that it does not explain why an author would have exerted himself with all
these complicated literary tricks to hide such a message, which does not add anything that
is not already apparent in the text at first sight. It is interesting to note in this connection
that recently Thomas Renz, independent from Christensen, also launched a theory about
the author having adapted an alphabetic acrostic: “A Perfectly Broken Acrostic in Nahum
1?” (Journal of Hebrew Scriptures 9 [2009]; online: http://www.arts.ualberta.ca/JHS/
Articles/article_125.pdf). It shows that there are still other and also more convincing ways
to explain the acrostic elements.

With regard to the book of Nahum as one coherent unity, not everyone will be convinced
by the way this unity is presented by Christensen. He defends at length a seven-part
structure. Each of these parts has a meaningful center. Together they would give the
perfect outline of the book, with the center of the middlemost part as the kernel of the
message. These verses, 2:12–13, portray Assyria as a devouring lion. It takes a lot of
reasoning, like giving it a double meaning as also referring to the lion of Judah, to make
this center meaningful. Again, it can be remarked that there are also other ways of
defining the overall structure of the book. Christensen mentions with approval (43) the way I indicated a concentric structure of Na 2–3 (see now my improved description in B. Becking, *Exile and Suffering*, 2009, 153–57), but here the middle part is formed by the repeated reference to the announcement of Yhwh of hosts: “behold, I am against you” (2:14 and 3:5). Moreover, the concentric structure starts in 2:1 and ends in 3:18–19 with the repeated references to mountains and listening, combined with the notion of feasting. Within the book as a whole, this points to a division between chapter 1 and chapters 2–3 and contradicts the sevenfold structure as indicated by Christensen.

With regard to the book of Nahum as a part of the Book of the Twelve, it should be noted that the formation of this compilation is still a matter of much dispute. This concerns not only the structure of the compilation, including the right order of the books, but also the process that eventually resulted in the present compilation. It is far from certain that the correspondences between the different books should be regarded as indications of the fact that we are dealing here with the work of one brilliant author. It is also possible and, I believe, more plausible to explain these correspondences diachronically as indications of a process of growth. The book of Jonah seems to have been written as a reaction to the book of Nahum. The same can be assumed with regard to the book of Habakkuk, because of the many formal parallels. When they were brought together and put in a primarily chronological order, there may have been some redactional reworking, for instance, in relating the end of the book of Micah to the beginning of the book of Nahum.

One final point to be mentioned here is that Christensen does not feel obliged to enter in all kinds of text-critical discussions, because there are in his opinion hardly any indications of textual corruption (64–66). This is very important for his theory, because his logoprosodic analysis is based on a very precise counting of syllables. Any addition or removal of words has significant consequences. It is important for him that we can be sure that the text remained unchanged in the period between the Babylonian exile and the moment of establishing of the Hebrew texts many centuries later by the Masoretes. On this and the other points mentioned above, it is not enough or at least not convincing to simply state that the text is well-preserved and a coherent masterpiece. Other possibilities should have been left open and discussed. The study of the ancient manuscripts, especially of the Greek text, can also yield more information about matters such as the acrostic (see my article in *Pericope* 7 [2009]: 228–40).

Readers of this remarkable commentary get more than one would expect from a commentary on one of the Minor Prophets. They receive a thorough introduction in the rules of the logoprosodic method and a fully worked out application of these rules in the analysis of this prophetic book. Readers also receive a full-scale discussion of all philological questions that can be asked when reading this text and all possible answers
that have been given in the history of interpretation. But after more than 450 pages, readers may be left with the impression that they have learned more about Christensen’s theory than about Nahum’s prophecy.