

# Editors' Foreword

The International Exegetical Commentary on the Old Testament (IECOT) offers a multi-perspectival interpretation of the books of the Old Testament to a broad, international audience of scholars, laypeople and pastors. Biblical commentaries too often reflect the fragmented character of contemporary biblical scholarship, where different geographical or methodological sub-groups of scholars pursue specific methodologies and/or theories with little engagement of alternative approaches. This series, published in English and German editions, brings together editors and authors from North America, Europe, and Israel with multiple exegetical perspectives.

From the outset the goal has been to publish a series that was “international, ecumenical and contemporary.” The international character is reflected in the composition of an editorial board with members from six countries and commentators representing a yet broader diversity of scholarly contexts.

The ecumenical dimension is reflected in at least two ways. First, both the editorial board and the list of authors includes scholars with a variety of religious perspectives, both Christian and Jewish. Second, the commentary series not only includes volumes on books in the Jewish Tanach/Protestant Old Testament, but also other books recognized as canonical parts of the Old Testament by diverse Christian confessions (thus including the deuterocanonical Old Testament books).

When it comes to “contemporary,” one central distinguishing feature of this series is its attempt to bring together two broad families of perspectives in analysis of biblical books, perspectives often described as “synchronic” and “diachronic” and all too often understood as incompatible with each other. Historically, diachronic studies arose in Europe, while some of the better known early synchronic studies originated in North America and Israel. Nevertheless, historical studies have continued to be pursued around the world, and focused synchronic work has been done in an ever greater variety of settings. Building on these developments, we aim in this series to bring synchronic and diachronic methods into closer alignment, allowing these approaches to work in a complementary and mutually-informative rather than antagonistic manner.

Since these terms are used in varying ways within biblical studies, it makes sense to specify how they are understood in this series. Within IECOT we understand “synchronic” to embrace a variety of types of study of a biblical text *in one given stage of its development*, particularly its final stage(s) of development in existing manuscripts. “Synchronic” studies embrace non-historical narratological, reader-response and other approaches along with historically-informed exegesis of a particular stage of a biblical text. In contrast, we understand “diachronic” to embrace the full variety of modes of study of a biblical text *over time*.

This diachronic analysis may include use of manuscript evidence (where available) to identify documented pre-stages of a biblical text, judicious use of clues within the biblical text to reconstruct its formation over time, and also an examination of the ways in which a biblical text may be in dialogue with earlier biblical (and non-biblical) motifs, traditions, themes, etc. In other words, diachronic study focuses on what might be termed a “depth dimension” of a given text—how a

text (and its parts) has journeyed over time up to its present form, making the text part of a broader history of traditions, motifs and/or prior compositions. Synchronic analysis focuses on a particular moment (or moments) of that journey, with a particular focus on the final, canonized form (or forms) of the text. Together they represent, in our view, complementary ways of building a textual interpretation.

Of course, each biblical book is different, and each author or team of authors has different ideas of how to incorporate these perspectives into the commentary. The authors will present their ideas in the introduction to each volume. In addition, each author or team of authors will highlight specific contemporary methodological and hermeneutical perspectives—e.g. gender-critical, liberation-theological, reception-historical, social-historical—appropriate to their own strengths and to the biblical book being interpreted. The result, we hope and expect, will be a series of volumes that display a range of ways that various methodologies and discourses can be integrated into the interpretation of the diverse books of the Old Testament.

Fall 2012 The Editors

# Author's Preface

The story of Tobit has increasingly attracted the attention of scholarly research in recent decades. The publication of the Dead Sea Scrolls by Joseph Fitzmyer in 1995 has been an important factor in this. A further milestone was the publication of the medieval Jewish Aramaic and Hebrew texts of Tobit by Stuart Weeks, Simon Gathercole, and Loren Stuckenbruck (2004). This work set scholarly research on the text of Tobit on a new foundation. As such themes and motifs as “Jewish identity and the Diaspora,” “magic and traditional medicine,” “angels and demons,” “Torah,” and “prayerful piety” play an important role in the Tobit account, it also has a key position in discussions in the context of ancient Jewish religious history. I myself am pleased to have been able to participate in research on this text since the early 1990s and to have been able constantly to discover new things while doing so.

As this commentary finds its conclusion and reaches the end of a long journey, it is appropriate to express my thanks. First and foremost I would like to mention the Volkswagen Foundation (VolkswagenStiftung), which granted my application for the project “Historical-critical commentary of the Tobit narrative in its ancient Jewish, early Christian, and medieval Jewish versions” in the context of the Opus Magnum support grant. Its financing of a secondment allowed me to concentrate fully on work on this commentary for two years (10/2016–9/2018). Private lecturer Dr. Kathrin Liess, of Munich, substituted for me so comprehensively in teaching duties during this period that classes in my department were able to continue without any restrictions. Thanks are also due to the Ruhr-Universität Bochum’s Department of Protestant Theology and to the board of the university for their generosity in accommodating such a long “absence” from everyday university life. I would like to thank the Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, Stuttgart, for permission to use the text of Tobit from “Septuaginta Deutsch. Das griechische Alte Testament in deutscher Übersetzung, ed. Wolfgang KRAUS and Martin KARRER, © 2009, Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, Stuttgart” as the basis for my work in the German original edition of this commentary.

My thanks also goes to all those who participated in the progress of the work itself, first and foremost my student aids Sophia Daniel, Natalie Gabisch, Richard Jamison, Leonie Stör, and Isabel Wolf; special thanks goes to Karina Krainer, who saw the project through from beginning to end with great perseverance and care. Thanks is also due to the chief editor of the IEKAT (IECOT) series, Prof. Dr. Walter Dietrich, for his commitment in supervising this commentary as well as Florian Specker of the editorial department of Kohlhammer Verlag for his patience and encouragement in the preparation of the manuscript. In regard to the careful assistance for the English translation (provided by David Orton), my special thanks goes to Andrea Häuser from Kohlhammer Verlag and PD Dr. Jonathan M. Robker of Münster/Weißenhorn.

Finally, I would like to thank everyone who took an interest in Tobit and his family, in Sarah and Asmodeus and the angel Raphael, over the course of this commentary’s long preparation and everyone who inspired me in my work through their questions and their stories, as well as through invitations to work-

shops and lectures. My work on this narrative was led by fascination with a text in which many different motifs of the ancient Jewish imagination flow together and whose tradents constantly revealed new facets of its material that imbued both Jewish and Christian traditions with meaning.