

Wojciech Pikor

"«Ma io ricorderò la mia alleanza con te» : la procedura del rîb come chiave interpretativa di Ez 16", Omberta Pettigiani, Rome 2015 : [recenzja]

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Omberta Pettigiani, «*Ma io ricorderò la mia alleanza con te*». La procedura del *rib* come chiave interpretativa di Ez 16 (Analecta Biblica 207; Rome: Gregorian & Biblical Press 2015). Pp. 457. 34€. ISBN 978-88-7653-673-1.

WOJCIECH PIKOR

The Faculty of Theology, Nicolaus Copernicus University, Toruń
address: ul. Gagarina 27, 87-100 Toruń, Poland; e-mail: pikorwo@wp.pl

Recent years witnessed a growing interest among biblical scholars in the Book of Ezekiel. One of the texts studied with relative frequency is chapter 16, which employs a conjugal metaphor in its theological account of Israel's history. Essentially, two perspectives on the text prevail: one proposes its reading alongside chapters 20 and 23, in which the prophet presents a synthetic overview of Israel's history, employing the perspective of the exodus in chapter 20 before returning to the conjugal metaphor in chapter 23 (e.g. T. Krüger, W. Chrostowski); the other attitude, in turn, is representative of feminist exegesis, which reads Ezek 16 as an account of domestic abuse of Israel-the woman by God-the man (e.g. L. Day, S.T. Kamionkowski). Both of these perspectives are somewhat reductive: the reading informed by the theology of history only seemingly respects the biblical text, for with their use of redaction criticism scholars decompose the text of Ezek 16, while the feminist interpretation overlooks cultural and historical conditions of the oracle included in Ezek 16, approaching the text from the perspective of a contemporary reader. In this context, it seems essential to read Ezek 16 in its final form. Even though such a synchronic attitude is proposed by several scholars (e.g. M. Greenberg, D.I. Block), these readings still fail to holistically interpret the oracle included in this prophecy. Such an attempt, however, has been made by Omberta Pettigiani, who in her doctoral dissertation, written under the supervision of Pietro Bovati SJ and successfully defended at the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome, argues that the literary genre of *rib* (bilateral controversy) most fully reflects the structure and internal dynamics of Ezek 16. The dissertation was published with minor modifications by Gregorian & Biblical Press as «*Ma io ricorderò la mia alleanza con te*». La procedura del *rib* come chiave interpretativa di Ez 16.

In the introduction to her book (pp. 9-18) the author explains the reasons for her study, referring to the existing scholarship on Ezek 16 and proving its reductive attitude to the text. In her view, to interpret the prophecy it is essential to determine its literary genre. Pettigiani then synthetically summarizes the content of the subsequent chapters of her book, thereby indicating the order of her analysis. Her work aims to do more than merely show in what way Ezek 16 functions as *riḇ*. She wishes as well to interpret the function of various metaphors employed in the oracle and to compare Ezek 16 to other prophetic texts of the bilateral controversy category (Deut 32:1-43; Isa 1:2-20; Jer 2:1-4:4; Hos 2:4-24; Amos 3:9-4:13; Mic 6:1-8; Ps 50). Finally, the author intends to analyse the text of Ezek 16 in the context of the whole Book of Ezekiel.

The five chapters comprising the book fully realize the author's scholarly objectives. The first chapter is devoted to the question of Ezek 16's literary genre (pp. 19-43). Pettigiani begins by calling the prophecy *māšāl* to subsequently show how the literary form of *māšāl* is interpreted by contemporary biblical scholars (as allegory, parable and extended metaphor). The author argues that these interpretations classify the literary genre of the prophecy too rigorously, overlooking its two elements: the calling of the prophet to let Jerusalem know her abominations (Ezek 16:2) and the repetition of Jerusalem's accusation in vv. 44-63, both of which are typically treated as examples of editorial expansion. These two elements gain significance when Ezek 16 is read as an account of *riḇ*. To familiarize the reader with the meaning of the term *riḇ* in the Hebrew Bible, the author first explains the court procedure of a bilateral controversy to then indicate features of form and content characteristic of the literary genre of *riḇ* by making allusions to proper biblical texts.

In the second chapter of her book Pettigiani presents selected literary problems of Ezek 16 (pp. 45-91). She first discusses the position of the oracle within the structure of the whole Book of Ezekiel, positing that it functions as an introduction to the section of Ezek 16-24 while occupying at the same time a central position within the first part of the book (Ezek 1-32). The author proceeds to analyse the structure of Ezek 16 before discussing questions of literary criticism. The analysis of the vocabulary employed in vv. 44-63 proves in her opinion Ezekiel's authorship of the fragment. The study of the relation between Ezek 16 and 23 prompts Pettigiani to conclude that Ezek 23 is a text whose redaction precedes the editing of Ezek 16, yet in the canonical perspective it is Ezek 16 that anticipates Ezek 23, enabling the reading of the latter in terms of a promise of life, without negating misfortune and punishment. Then, the author concentrates on Ezek 16:1-3a, especially

on Ezekiel's task of confronting Jerusalem with her sins and transgressions. Chapter 2 ends with a discussion of Ezek 16's metaphorical depiction of Jerusalem as a woman, situated in the context of extra-biblical texts.

The following three chapters offer exegesis of the subsequent fragments of Ezek 16:3b-63, which correspond to the procedure of a bilateral controversy. Chapter 3 (pp. 93-179) is devoted to vv. 3b-14, which contain an accusation called "the remembrance of past blessings". The author pays special attention to two metaphors that complementarily depict the relationship between Yahweh and Israel: the fatherly metaphor has a founding character, depicting the moment of Yahweh's choice of Israel, whilst the conjugal metaphor emphasizes the exclusivity of this relationship, the need for unquestioned fidelity, as well as the gravity of Israel's betrayal.

Chapter 4 constitutes an exegesis of the second part of the accusation, included in vv. 15-43 (pp. 181-268). The author first pinpoints those elements of vv. 15-34 that indicate the perverse character of Jerusalem's sins (idolatry, child sacrifice, prostitution). Then, through her analysis of vv. 35-43, Pettigiani shows the foretold punishment to be the consequence of Israel's sins.

The last section of the oracle – vv. 44-63 – is analysed in Chapter 5 (pp. 269-366). Pettigiani maintains here that the incorporation into the oracle of the history of Sodom's and Samaria's unfaithfulness serves to make Jerusalem recognize her sins. This change of heart will be possible due to shame, which together with silence will constitute an act of acknowledging the validity of earlier accusations and an act of accepting God's forgiveness. As a result, Yahweh's relationship with Israel – called "the everlasting covenant" – will be restored. The final part of the book is the conclusion, in which the author synthetically presents the results of her research conducted in individual chapters, emphasizing once again the dynamics of the bilateral controversy of *rib* in Ezek 16 (pp. 353-366). The book ends with the list of abbreviations used (pp. 367-374), bibliography (pp. 375-425), the index of authors (pp. 427-439), the index of scriptural references (pp. 441-451) and the table of contents (pp. 453-457).

Omberta Pettigiani convincingly proves the legitimacy of reading Ezek 16 as an account of the bilateral controversy of *rib*. Identifying within the text elements characteristic of *rib*, the author emphasizes the significance of the presence of vv. 44-63, which serve not only to strengthen the accusation but primarily to make the readers accept God's initiative of the new covenant. The bibliography and, even more so, the footnotes make it clear that the author is well-versed in the existing literature on the subject. The study has a lucid structure while the way of developing academic arguments may be treated as

an exemplary one, mainly thanks to the introductions and conclusions to key parts of the book (and not only the five major chapters). The inclusion into the strictly exegetical chapters of textual criticism and philological discussions concerning the analysed fragments of Ezek 16 seems a good strategy. Typically, such concerns are raised at the outset of the study, when the text's translation is presented – and its composition analysed – for the first time. On account of the substantial length of Ezek 16, however, the shift of the textual and philological discussions to the exegetical part makes it easier for the reader to follow Pettigiani's argumentation. The exegetical part of her analysis may also be praised for its existential inclinations. Frequently, the semantic analysis of a given term is accompanied by the phenomenological description of an attitude or phenomenon the term in question refers to (e.g. the analysis of the activity of remembering on pp. 208-212).

With such a detailed analysis of the text that Pettigiani offers as well as an enormous amount of secondary literature consulted for the sake of her study, one complaint that may be made is that the author at times mentions two opinions on an analysed word or expression without making it clear which opinion seems more accurate or without trying to make the two compatible. To give an example, in her discussion of the command in v. 6: "I said to you in your blood, «Live!»", Pettigiani first cites the opinion of Walther Zimmerli, for whom this word is a wish of blessing (pp. 127-128), to then refer to Meir Malul, who sees these words as an adoption formula on the basis of the Akkadian parallels (p.131).

What is more, at times the author accepts an opinion expressed by another scholar without paying attention to opposite points of view. For instance, in her analysis of Yahweh's gesture of spreading his cloak over Jerusalem presented in v. 8 as a mature woman, the author refers to a traditional interpretation of a similar gesture in Ruth 3:9 as a marriage proposal (pp. 157-158). She fails to mention at that point the opinion of S. Tamar Kamionkowski, whose work she cites from repeatedly elsewhere in her study; speaking of Ezek 16:8 and Ruth 3:9 Kamionkowski invokes several Akkadian parallels in which the expression "to spread one's cloak over someone" is a euphemism denoting sexual intercourse (S.T. Kamionkowski, *Gender Reversal and Cosmic Chaos. A Study on the Book of Ezekiel* [JSOT.S 368; Sheffield 2003] 106-110).

A similar reservation may also be made with reference to Pettigiani's analysis of the term 'ôy in v. 23, which she interprets as a "lament of mourning not over the killed children but over the mother who kills them" (p. 215). What other elements of v. 23 and its context can be treated as typical of a lament? There are none. It seems rather that the term 'ôy plays a rhetorical function, drawing attention to the words of accusation that follow.

What is also questionable is the author's comparison of Jerusalem's silence brought by shame, mentioned in v. 63, to Ezekiel's silence foretold in 3:27 and 24:27. Pettigiani posits that "the prophet's and the people's silence point to the necessity of the word, which refers to its own truth and hence is based on prior listening to Yahweh's word" (p. 346). However, Ezekiel's silence has a double meaning: not only does it foreshadow the people's future reaction to Jerusalem's destruction, but it signals first and foremost the absence of God's word addressed to the prophet, which augurs the moment of punishment.

Highlighting the presence of the features of the bilateral controversy of *rib* in Ezek 16, the author makes numerous allusions to other biblical texts (most frequently Isa 1:2-20; Jer 2:1-4:4; Hos 2:4-24) which make use of the logic of such a controversy. It would be a good idea to mention these texts again in the conclusion to show the specificity of Ezek 16 against the background of other prophetic texts of the *rib* category.

Omberta Pettigiani's reading of Ezek 16 as an account of the bilateral controversy of *rib* constitutes a significant contribution not only to the interpretation of chapter 16 but also to that of chapter 23. Instead of focusing on individual features of the oracle, of decomposing it, as it were, through redaction criticism, or of censoring it due to one's feminist expectations, it seems proper to read the text as a whole, following its logic of a bilateral controversy, whose aim is not only to accuse and predict punishment but also to make Israel aware of their guilt and show them the way to renew their relationship with Yahweh.