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Rezension von: Izaak de Hulster, Iconographic Exegesis and Third Isaiah (FAT, II/36; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009)

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Images have played a part in biblical exegesis for several decades. The work of the "Fribourg School," founded by Othmar Keel, has been influential in the discipline. However, until today the use of images and iconography in exegesis is limited, due in part to a deliberate reluctance within traditional word-centered exegesis, but also in part due to the lack of methodology. This is regrettable because biblical exegesis should employ all available information and material in order to obtain the best possible historical understanding of a biblical text. Archaeology has provided a plethora of iconographic material from Palestine and the ancient Near East that should not be ignored in biblical studies.

Because the interpretation of images may seem both easy and difficult at the same time, iconography is in need of a clear methodology. At first sight, an image can be understood without translation and explanation; a depicted human being can usually be perceived as a human being by anyone. On the other hand, this immediacy of understanding can lead to misinterpretation. An image "speaks" differently than a text. It has a "language" that to be "read" properly.

It is the aim of de Hulster's study to provide such a methodology for the use of iconographic material in biblical exegesis. As the use of iconography in exegesis is still quite limited, de Hulster understands his study as an introduction to the field and as an invitation to further discussion about the usefulness of iconographic exegesis.[1] For this reason, the study provides many references to previous studies and suggestions for further readings (which partly explains the abundant 70 page bibliography).

The study is based on a 2008 PhD dissertation at Utrecht University and still bears many marks of this academic genre: the author strives to be comprehensive at every point, he provides (sometimes lengthy) definitions and discussions of questions that are not crucial to the study's theme, and his argument is at times redundant.

De Hulster's study consists of two parts. The first formulates a methodology of iconographic exegesis ("Towards a way"/"The way constructed"; pp. 1–118), whereas the second ("Walking the way constructed"; pp. 119–257) presents three case studies of iconography's contribution to the understanding of biblical texts using examples from Third Isaiah.

The first part consists of interdisciplinary theoretical reflections with regard to such topics as hermeneutics, culture and imagination. This section reveals de Hulster's quite broad approach to historical exegesis, which includes all real and intellectual data (see fig. 3.1 on p. 36). The presentation of iconographical methods in their stricter sense is limited to pp. 63–91, where de Hulster discusses concrete methodological questions about choosing images and applying them to exegesis. The method proposed is based on the models of interpretation of images by Erwin Panofsky and Oskar Bätschmann, without, however, addressing in detail the concern in the art-historical discussion about interpreting images. A distinct section of the first part (pp. 105–118) is devoted to the question of metaphor, as the images very often contribute to the understanding on texts on a metaphorical level.

After a short historical introduction to Third Isaiah, the second part presents three case studies from this Persian period text that have been selected accidentally to test the method's applicability. The first example, Isa 56:1–8, pays special attention to the expression *yad (wa-shem)* in Isa 56:5. This expression is interpreted in light of archaeological material such as a memorial monument for a childless person erected by the deity itself in the temple. The second example interprets Isa 60:1–7 and its metaphorical language of light. Here, the discussion turns to pictorial sources that are often understood as solar motifs such as the rosette often found in Persian period Yehud and the famous unique Yehud coin depicting a

bearded man sitting on a "wheel-chair" (BMC Palestine XIX 29). The images show that YHWH could be linked to solar imagery and the association to royal power and righteousness that accompany it. The third example analyses the metaphors of wine press treading and trampling down enemies as well as their combination in Isa 63:1–6. This combination of metaphors can be found in ancient Near Eastern images as well, for example in illustrations of the Egyptian Book of the Dead.

The results of the case studies are neither very surprising nor very innovative. One can observe a gap between the sometimes complicated and extensive methodological discussion and the rather limited results of the case studies. One shortcoming of de Hulster's method is evident here: the author takes for granted some interpretations of pictorial material in his case studies without questioning their background. This can be seen, for example, in the interpretation of the rosette as solar symbol with royal connotations (pp. 178–94).

As mentioned earlier, de Hulster's goal is to provide a methodology for iconographic exegesis. Therefore, he is not interested in the interpretation of images and pictorial artifacts *per se*, but in the relevance images have for the understanding of biblical texts. Iconography is here restricted to an auxiliary discipline of biblical exegesis. As a result de Hulster seems to maintain a superiority of the biblical text.

In contrast to de Hulster's approach, one could maintain a broader perspective such as that found in Othmar Keel's "Fribourg School," where the aim is to reconstruct the society of Ancient Israel and its cultural world with the help of all available data. In this approach the biblical text is a data source on the same level with all other sources of information. All these sources should be considered in a constant dialogue, so that not only images explain texts, but also texts explain images, and all sources contribute to a better understanding of a distant culture.

In conclusion, de Hulster's monograph is an appreciated contribution to a field of exegesis still insufficiently populated. For readers unfamiliar with pictorial material from ancient Israel and with iconographic methodology, it may be a welcomed introduction. However, the use of images and pictorial material in biblical exegesis and the reconstruction of ancient Israelite history can—and should—go further than de Hulster proposes.

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[1]Scholarly discussions have taken place, e. g., in panels on iconographic exegesis organized by de Hulster. Their proceedings are published in Izaak J. de Hulster and Rüdiger Schmitt, eds., *Iconography and Biblical Studies: Proceedings of the Iconography Sessions at the Joint EABS/SBL Conference, 22-26 July 2007, Vienna, Austria* (AOAT 361; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2009). In two contributions to this volume, de Hulster presents his iconographic exegesis in a more concentrated manner than in his monograph under review here.⬆