Offprint:

Infancy Gospels

Stories and Identities

Edited by
Claire Clivaz, Andreas Dettwiler, Luc Devillers and Enrico Norelli
with the assistance of Benjamin Bertho

Mohr Siebeck 2011

This offprint cannot be purchased from a bookstore.
Matthew 1–2 and the Problem of Intertextuality

MOISÉS MAYORDOMO

I. “Intertextualities”: Definitions, Plurality and Power

Biblical scholars entering the field of literary criticism not only step on terminological quicksand, they also get involved with diverging modes of criticism influenced by the power structures within academia. This is especially evident when one tries to grasp the extent of the concept of “intertextuality”.

1. Intertextuality as a Critical Term

The success story of the term “intertextuality” has been told many times. Julia Kristeva coined the word more or less randomly in a study on Mi-

---

1 I would like to thank Dr. Jenny Read-Heimerdinger for improving my English.
khail Bakhtin. The following quotation has a quasi-canonical status in studies on intertextuality:

"[A]ny text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another."\(^4\)

Bakhtin himself developed his concept of dialogism on the basis of diachronic studies on the novel in antiquity and the Middle Ages.\(^5\) Kristeva universalizes these historical insights and uses them in order to displace the concept of intersubjectivity in favour of intertextuality. She thereby challenges radically structuralism’s bias for textual immanence, closeness, unity and autonomy. Intertextuality is not just one textual property among others, it is a dynamic function of each and every text.\(^6\) In other words: textuality is intertextuality.\(^7\) By dissolving the difference between text and quotation, production and reception, poiesis and mimesis Kristeva undermines the author’s unique status as a God-like genius.\(^8\) The author is no


\(^{6}\) It would be wrong to call this “textual ontology”. As T. BENNETT, *Formalism and Marxism* (New Accents), London: Routledge, 1979 (repr. 2003), p. 47 has emphasized: “Literariness resides, not in the text, but in the relations of intertextuality inscribed within and between texts. It is not a ‘thing’, an essence which the text possesses, but a function which the text fulfils”.

\(^{7}\) “Text” does not only refer to written texts but to every structure of signs.

\(^{8}\) Similarly R. BARTHES, “The Death of the Author” (1968), in S. HEATH (ed.), *Image, Music, Text*, London: Fontana, 1977, pp. 142-148, here p. 146: “We know now that a text is not a line of words releasing a single ‘theological’ meaning (the ‘message’ of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them...
Matthew 1–2 and the Problem of Intertextuality

longer a creator *ex nihilo* but rather constitutes the intersection for a multitude of voices. The natural consequence of dislocating the author’s and the text’s privileged status is that the reading process becomes a constitutive element of interpretation.\(^9\) The main thrust, however, is to decentralize the powers within the field of literary criticism.

Kristeva has not capitalized on “her” concept.\(^10\) Though her understanding of the range of the term is not necessarily binding for all those who work with it, the critical impetus of its “origins” should not be left aside without further discussion.

2. *Intertextuality as a Methodological Concept*

The relationship between different texts has been the object of theoretical discussion since antiquity.\(^11\) The concept of intertextuality very soon found a new home in the traditional study of literary quotations and allusions, becoming something of a fashionable umbrella term for all aspects of textual references. Especially in the German speaking field, it is rather common to criticize Kristeva’s concept of intertextuality for the sake of methodological clarity.\(^12\) The main points of criticism can be summarized as follows: Kristeva blurs any difference between textuality and intertextuality. Without the author, the search for a definitive meaning becomes elusive. An unlimited understanding of intertextuality makes the concept inoperable for the concrete work with single texts.\(^13\) Kristeva’s ideological criticism is itself ideological.\(^14\)

---

original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture”.


\(^{10}\) Indeed, she barely has used it after introducing it into the critical discourse (*ibid.*, p. 44).


\(^{13}\) PLETT, *Intertextuality*, p. 4 complains: “This ‘school’ has never developed a comprehensible and teachable method of textual analyses. Its publications are marked by a strangely abstract quality, at a decided remove from reality”.

\(^{14}\) TEGTMeyer, “Begriff”, p. 56.
If we distinguish two different concepts of intertextuality (one “global” and one “local”), much of the discussion becomes futile.15 Some arguments against Kristeva are based on a misapprehension, especially when her use of the concept is blamed for not being applicable to concrete textual work. The idea that texts are part of a complex net of relations in no way leads to the conviction that analyzing concrete textual relations is not a meaningful activity.


“Classical” exegesis has always dealt with questions of how texts are “used” in the New Testament. Exegetes should, therefore, not be alarmed by the idea that written texts are (or can be) labyrinths of quotations and allusions. It seems that Kristeva’s global concept of intertextuality is a fairly good “description” of how texts were produced and received in early Christianity. It is, thus, important to locate textual phenomena within the horizon of textual networks. Intertextuality in practice can be considered from three perspectives:16

a) Intertextuality from the Author’s Perspective17

We may start with the truism that every author is also a reader. Intertextual features can thus be considered symptoms of the influences working on the mind of an author. If a pre-text is “isolated” (in its most probable textual form), one can get to the “original sources” of an author and construct an account of his or her intentions. Of course, this is classical source- and redaction-criticism and it should not be given a modern guise by simply calling its author-centered procedures “intertextuality”.18 An intertextual approach should change the role of the author from an ingenious individual

15 HOLTHUIS, Intertextualität differentiates roughly between typological intertextuality (reference to normative “system texts” similar to Genette’s “architextuality”) and referential intertextuality (relations between two texts).


17 In what follows I will use the term “author” and “narrator” as short-cuts for the external writer(s) and the internal narrating voice. For a theoretical discussion, see M. MAYORDOMO, Den Anfang hören: Leserorientierte Evangelienexegese am Beispiel von Matthäus 1–2 (FRLANT 180), Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998, pp. 80–97.

18 HATINA, “Intertextuality”, pp. 32–33 asks not without irony: “Who would have thought three decades ago that the term ‘intertextuality’ would eventually be adopted by the very group it was intended to dislodge?”
breeding creatively over his sources to the voice of an interpretative community that shapes the numerous ways texts are produced in dialogue with other texts. Within this perspective, the author is not only the subject but also the “object” of texts.

**b) Intertextuality as a Quality of Texts**

Classification is one of the main objectives (if not obsessions) of textually oriented studies. The multiple possibilities of textual relationships have produced a number of rhetorical concepts like quotation, allusion, plagiarism, travesty, contrafacture, cento, pastiche, palinody, or parody. But even commentaries, translations or, for that matter, the manuscript tradition can be considered as forms of intertextuality. Finding proper ways to grade the quality of intertextual intensity is probably the main challenge of classification. The scale between a tagged literal quotation and a loose allusion or a hypothetically reconstructed source offers apparently innumerable possibilities. Classification models have to be rather complex as the following examples may serve to illustrate:

G. Genette subdivides his main concept of “transtextuality” into five categories:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Intertextuality</td>
<td>the use of a text in a new text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Paratextuality</td>
<td>the relationship between the main body of a text and its side texts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Metatextuality</td>
<td>a text whose object of reference is another text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Hypertextuality</td>
<td>the relationship of a text with a textual “blueprint” which serves as the basis for the text without being present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Architextuality</td>
<td>the reference of a text to a specific genre model.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

M. Pfister proposes a complex set of interwoven criteria:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualitative parameters:</th>
<th>How does the text refer to a pre-text? Is the pre-text introduced into its new context without focusing any attention</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) Referentiality:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

19 A number of these terms are analyzed in T. VERWEYEN – G. WITTING, *Einfache Formen der Intertextualität: Theoretische Überlegungen und historische Untersuchungen* (Explicatio), Paderborn: Mentis, 2010.

20 GENETTE, *Palimpsests*.

on its presence or are there explicit signs of usage underlining the character of the quotation? In its most distinctive form of referentiality, the new text becomes a meta-text on the pre-text (e.g. in the form of a commentary).

b) Communicative relevance: How much are authors and readers aware of the (supposed) intertextual reference? To be sure, pre-texts from a cultural or religious “canon” have a very high degree of communicative relevance.

c) Auto-reflexivity: Does the text somehow address its own intertextual procedures?

d) Structurality: How strong is the syntagmatic embedding of the pre-text? Is it a casual or rather selective reference or does the pre-text serve as a “blueprint” for the new text?

e) Selectivity: How pointed, concise and exclusive is the reference to a pre-text? Is it a literal quotation of a text segment or a vague allusion to a whole text?

f) Dialogic relation: What kind of semantic and ideological interaction is triggered by relating one text to another? What kind of influence does the original context of the pre-text exert on the new text? What possible readings of the pre-text can be traced by its new contextual framing?

2. Quantitative parameters:

a) Density and frequency of intertextual references, and

b) number and range of pre-texts.

R. Hays has presented a set of criteria which have proven especially influential in recent New Testament studies:

1. Availability: Is it historically plausible that a certain pre-text was available to the author and/or the original readers?

2. Volume: How strong is the quantitative repetition of pre-textual elements?

3. Recurrence: How often does the same author refer to the same pre-text?

4. Thematic coherence: How well does the pre-text fit into the argumentation or narrative plot of its new context?

5. Historical plausibility: Could the thematic contribution of the pre-text have been intended by the author and understood by the readers?

6. History of interpretation: Have other readers recognized the same textual relationships?

7. Satisfaction: Does the proposed reading make sense?

---

A recent contribution by Hohl Trillini and Quassdorf tries to account for as many elements as possible by "taxonomic cross-associations":²³

1. Relation type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What does the later text do with the earlier text?</th>
<th>Relation types between earlier and later text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Element from) earlier text integrated into later text</td>
<td>inter-, archi- and hypertextuality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Element from) earlier text discussed in later text</td>
<td>metatextuality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Element from) earlier text translated by later text</td>
<td>translation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Element from) earlier text listed in later text</td>
<td>anthology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Element from) earlier text set to music by later text</td>
<td>music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Element from) earlier text illustrated by later text</td>
<td>art</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Quoted elements and their function in the later text:

- **Verbal:** phrase, longer passage, complete text, recurring phrases
- **Thematic:** motif or plot element, plot (complete), genre
- **Nominal:** title, name (place or character)

The models presented here are simple instruments for the analysis of concrete cases of intertextuality. While Pfister and Hays display greater interest in historical and author-oriented questions (which is why they are used by New Testament exegetes), Genette and Hohl Trillini/Quassdorf have a more textual approach. None of these models can claim a total view of the field, so there is no need for purism. Combining different criteria can serve heuristically to cope with intertextuality in the New Testament, but it will not produce in any positivistic sense a precise measurable scale of intertextual intensity.

c) Intertextuality from a Reader’s Perspective

It is obvious that readers, just as authors, bring all their previous reading experiences to the text. To read a text means basically to understand it in relation to other texts, to reconfigure its meaning according to our

---


²⁴ They ground their concepts in Genette’s classification with two modifications: a) different relation types can converge in one single work (e.g. a text can quote and criticize at the same time); b) the strict separation between intertextuality (quotation) and hypertextuality (adaptation) is not helpful; both terms rather describe the ends of a continuum.
memory. Any empirical study will confirm that these intertextual implicatures may not correspond to the intention of the text’s historical author. As so often, authorial intentions and readers’ ways of understanding do not happily come together. More important, though, is the change of perspective brought about by looking at the reading process: the main focus is not on classification but on the function intertextual references play in the reception of the possible ways a text can be understood. According to the phenomenology of reading developed by Wolfgang Iser, all social and cultural norms and traditions of past literature which are taken into the literary world (the so-called “repertoire”) constitute a relation of foreground and background. In the foreground we perceive these elements as part of a sequential reading experience, but in the background they activate the multiple contexts which they are taken from. That means that every quotation or allusion to “Scripture” brings the “old” context into the “new”, triggering thereby a creative process of imagination difficult to control. Authors can overtly display or playfully hide their intended intertextual references but once the reader is aware of their presence many possible

---

25 For a historical approach it is, of course, impossible to read “as if” we were the original readers because we never will have access to all the “intertexts” available to them and we will never read or hear these texts within the same social space as they did. Finally, the original readers cannot be constructed as a unified hermeneutical entity.


27 M. Riffaterre, “Production du texte: L’intertexte du Lys dans la vallée”, in *Texte* 2 (1984), pp. 23–33 tries to cope with this discrepancy by making a difference between “mandatory intertextuality” (references which have to be recognized in order to understand the text fully) and “aleatoric intertextuality” (connections which readers are free to establish to whatever texts come to their mind). The problem of marking clear borders between the mandatory and the aleatoric is obvious.


connections unfold. Intertextual references are therefore like metaphors\(^\text{30}\); they are special gifts for mindful and attentive readers.\(^\text{31}\)

4. Conclusion

Bearing in mind the hermeneutical and methodological potential of different approaches to intertextuality it seems unwise to decide in favor of one single understanding, either global or local. Much to the contrary, holding both aspects in a critical dialogue can serve as a corrective against inherent shortcomings and thereby prevent the intertextual approach to a concrete set of texts from aiming at a positivistic total understanding.

II. Intertextuality in Mt 1–2

1. Matthean Auto-Reflexivity

As Jonathan Pennington has put it rather poetically: "[W]hen Matthew is cut he bleeds Bible."\(^\text{32}\) Not surprisingly, Matthew's "use" - a highly significant metaphor in itself - of the "Scriptures"\(^\text{33}\) has received much critical attention, especially the so-called "formula" or "fulfilment quotations".\(^\text{34}\)

\(^{30}\) Cf. STILL – WORTON, “Introduction”, p. 12: “[E]very quotation is a metaphor which speaks of that which is absent and which engages the reader in a speculative activity. This speculation centres not on the/a historical source but on the signifying force of a textual segment which, simultaneously within and without the text, can have its origin only in the moment[s] of reading”.

\(^{31}\) I borrow the gift-metaphor from a line by Paul Celan used as a title by I. FÜSSL, Geschenke an Aufmerksame: Hebräische Intertextualität und mystische Weltauffassung in der Lyrik Paul Celans (Conditio Judaica 68), Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2008.


\(^{33}\) I use the term "Scriptures" in order to avoid the anachronistic "Old Testament" and the linguistic problems of the term "Hebrew" or "Greek Bible". The plural corresponds with Matthew's own use of Αὐτοί γὰρ Ἰσραήλ (21.42; 22.29; 26.54,56).

The relevant texts are: 1.22–23 (birth of Jesus); 2.15 (flight to Egypt); 2.17–18 (killing of the infants); 2.23 (move to Nazareth); 4.14–16 (mission in Galilee); 8.17 (healing); 12.17–21 (secrecy motif); 13.35 (use of parables); 21.4–5 (entry into Jerusalem); 27.9–10 (death of Judas); cf. also 26.54 and 26.56. Without going into the whole discussion, there are a few aspects which are more or less uncontested: first, the characteristic formula of introduction (with the verb πληρῶ) is not attested in other texts. Though the closest model stems from Mk 14.49 (Ίνα πληρωθῶσιν αἱ γραφαὶ)\(^{35}\), the redactional character of the Matthean introductory formula is obvious.\(^{36}\) Secondly, the textual form of the formula quotations does not always correspond to the (known) Septuagint tradition.\(^{37}\) Thirdly, the formula quotations are never spoken by characters within the narrative but represent the “voice” of the narrator.\(^{38}\)

The narrator in the first canonical Gospel, being mostly a covert non-intrusive narrator, makes his voice audible through these explicit intertextual comments and leads the implied reader by giving explicit interpretations of the events narrated.\(^{39}\) If one applies Pfister’s parameter of auto-

---

\(^{35}\) Cf. also Lk 22.37 (with τελέω instead of πληρῶ); John 12.38; 13.18; 15.25; 17.12; 18.39,32; 19.24,36.


\(^{37}\) The most extensive study on the problem of textual-form is now MENKEN, Bible.

\(^{38}\) To be sure, there is a number of quotations from Scripture in Matthew’s Gospel spoken by Jesus (4.4,7,10; 5.21,27,31,33,38,43; 9.13; 11.10; 12.7; 13.14–15; 15.4,8–9; 19.4–5,18–19; 21.13,16,42; 22.32,37,39,44; 26.31) with only three exceptions (the priests and scribes in 2.5–6, John the Baptist in 3.3 and Satan in 4.6). However, the Matthean introductory formula is never used in these instances.

reflexivity to Matthew’s narrative, the most obvious aspect to focus on is the conspicuous presence of special introductory formulae which link scriptural intertexts and Matthean narrative by the concept of “fulfilment”. The verb πληρόω literally means “fill, make full”. Since Jesus presents his mission in terms of “fulfilling” (5.17; cf. 3.15) the concept of “making full” can be considered a leading metaphor for Matthew’s intertextuality. The presence of scriptural quotations in Matthew’s narrative is thus not an “external” but an “inchoative” element. They mark the story of Israel as the beginning of the story of Jesus. The Scriptures are integral to the Matthean Jesus story because, according to its theological understanding, Jesus is integral to the story of Israel as its inherent goal. Nothing could make this understanding clearer than opening with a genealogy (1.2–17) which retells Israel’s story in its most condensed possible form (some forty names) leading from Abraham to Jesus. We may rightly ask whether this conceptual framework is theologically plausible; we may also suspect that this emphasis may have a pragmatic level of apologetics or polemics – but with regards to the analysis of Matthean intertextuality these critical matters are marginal. The concept of “fulfilment” is the auto-reflexive frame for the narrator’s inclusion of scriptural quotations and allusions. This, of course, does not mean that an intertextual approach to Matthew has to limit itself to the “formula quotations” or that they are to be given precedence over all other forms of intertextuality. The following case studies, which in no way exhaustible, may serve to illustrate the wide scope of intertextuality.
2. Case Studies

(a) The "Book of Genesis" (1.1a)

The intertextual complexity of the Matthean narrative is evident from its very first words: βιβλος γενέσεως. Interpreters are divided as to whether Mt 1.1 should be viewed as the title of the whole book or only of the birth story (basically chapter 1). Both words together form a syntactic unit clearly pointing to Gen 2.4 and 5.1. Exegetes have taken great pains to secure the exact text form the author was using. Many of these efforts, however, are frustrated not only by the fact that the fragmentary character of the material does not lend itself to such certainties but also because in a residual oral culture the idea of an "original" or "fixed text" may amount to a far-reaching anachronism. Hence, if we look into our available texts in the Greek or Hebrew Bible(s) we should not too easily give in to the tempting phantasy that we are actually looking at the "same" text the evangelist or his original audience had in mind. At best, we manage to single out some textual samples from the endless "kristevean" net of intertexts, thereby pausing the dynamic exchange of texts.

We can compare meticulously the Greek and the Hebrew wording and observe that βιβλος in Gen 2.4 does not have a Hebrew counterpart and that it probably is an assimilation to 5.1 where it translates ἡ τέχνη. We can analyze the context of both pre-texts and conclude that at least in the LXX version they clearly serve as introductory formulae. If we read the LXX version against the background of the specific Platonic interests of Alexandrian Judaism, we may suspect that juxtaposing "heaven and earth" and γενέσεως in 2.4 reflects Platonic cosmogony. We can further look at Jewish interpretations of Gen 2.4 and 5.1 in order to arrive at a more complete intertextual "genealogy" for Mt 1.1. Finally, we can identify redactional

---

44 The present article gives me an opportunity to update and revise some of my exegetical thoughts developed in MAYORDOMO, Anfang, pp. 196–345, to which I refer for fuller argumentation in some cases.


46 Gen 2.4: αὕτη ἡ βιβλος γενέσεως οὐρανοῦ καὶ γῆς. 5.1: αὕτη ἡ βιβλος γενέσεως ἀνθρώπων.


49 PHILO, for instance, betrays a Platonic understanding of Gen 2.4 (All 1.19; cf. also Op 129; All 1.21; Post 65; Quaest in Gn 1.1): βιβλος refers to the "perfect Logos", the rational principle of cosmic order, in which everything was "written" beforehand. The
changes (deletions, alterations, and expansions) and draw conclusions about the production or reception of the text. In this case, the most striking change is the “deletion” of αὐτή ἡ in Mt 1.1 which underlines its character as a title and draws a possible connection to the Greek title of the first book of the Bible.\(^5\) Bearing in mind the wide circulation of γένεσις as a book title\(^5\), one can assume that the connection between Matthew’s Gospel and the book of Genesis was as easy to establish as it is for us to link Joyce’s Ulysses to Homer or Graham Greene’s Monsignor Quixote to Cervantes.\(^5\)

In terms of volume or selectivity Mt 1.1 is not a long “quotation”; it is not even tagged as such. But, standing at the beginning of the narrative as a title, its communicative relevance is extremely high. Matthew’s story not only opens with a strong emphasis on its principal intertext, the Scriptures of Israel in their Greek version, but it also inscribes elegantly the story of Jesus into the “sacred narrative” of Israel. In some sense, Matthew’s narrative is not simply dependent on the Scriptures it refers to; it rather presents itself as “Scripture”. The intertextual linking of the “Genesis” of the world (Gen titulus; 2.4), of humanity (Gen 5.1) and of Jesus Christ (Mt 1.1) opens many possibilities for reflection, which cannot be controlled by the author’s intention. However, a reading sensitive to the hermeneutical intricacies of intertextuality should refrain from imposing a simple cause-and-

---


\(^5\) Greek γένεσις as a title is attested in B, S (A has γένεσις κόσμου and reflected in PHILO, Poster C. 127; Aet. Mund. 19; MELITO in EUSEBIUS, Hist. eccl. IV.26.14 and ORIGEN in EUSEBIUS, Hist. eccl. VI.25.2; Justin, Dial 20.1. In Abr. 1–2, PHILO reflects not only on the title γένεσις but also on its relation to the whole book.

effect scheme on the relationship between pre-text and text. Intertexts as sacred and venerated as those invoked by Mt 1.1 are not simply the “cause” of Christological statements; they rather serve to trigger emotions, they are more impressionistic than straightforwardly informative.

(b) Tamar in the Genealogy (1.3a)

Matthew’s genealogy (1.2–17) is in itself an “echo” of genealogies in the Scriptures. According to Genette’s nomenclature, this is first of all a case of “architextuality”, viz. a reference to a genre model. The genealogy as a way of introducing its main figure unfolds a fascinating play between the demands of the genre model, the expectations of the readers and the performance of the text. Matthew’s narrator clearly transgresses some genre-demands by interrupting the monotonous flow from one generation to the next at some points. In particular, the presence of four (or five, including Mary) women has called for a series of different explanations. I would like to concentrate on the intertextual possibilities of one name: Tamar. An intertextual reference consisting of only one word (minimal selectivity) may not look too promising, but names constitute one of the most important ways of interrelating texts. In that respect, Matthew’s genealogy reconfigures “characters” from different parts of Scriptures and builds a new “plot” leading to the birth of Jesus. One stage along this way is Tamar. The name recalls the story of Judah and Tamar (Gen 38) – a story with a rich Jewish “Wirkungsgeschichte”. This history is part of a inter-

53 Most of these can be found in the books of Genesis (e.g. 4.1–2, 17–26; 5.1–32; 10.1–32; 11.10–32; 25.1–6, 12–26; 35.21–26; 36.1–43; 46.8–27) and 1Chronicles (ch. 1–9).

54 LUZ, “Intertexts”, p. 128: “In the case of the genealogy, the selectivity of the biblical intertext is very low – the genealogy refers to the whole Bible – but its communicability and structurality are high”.

55 This is not the place to repeat my arguments in MAYORDOMO, Anfang, pp. 243–250. The proposal that non-Jewish identity accounts for the presence of all four women has been recently reinforced by M. KONRADT, Israel, Kirche und die Völker im Matthäusevangelium (WUNT 215), Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007, pp. 288–292. For a different approach that takes all five women into consideration, cf. P.-B. SMIT, “Something about Mary? Remarks about the Five Women in the Matthean Genealogy”, in NTS 56 (2010), pp. 191–207.


Matthew 1–2 and the Problem of Intertextuality

271

textual net informing the reception of Tamar’s name in the Matthean genealogy.

The intertextual “career” of Tamar starts within the Scriptures: in Ruth 4.11–12, she is praised alongside Rachel and Leah who “built up the house of Israel”. The Jewish reception of this story concentrates mainly on questions of culpability. The wording of LXX Gen 38.26a (perfect form instead of a Hebrew comparative: דָּאָנְאָווֹתָא Θαμαρ וּלְאָמָר) makes clear that Tamar is right on account of her actions. The retelling in Jubilees 41 expands on Judah’s guilt for a sexual offence (Jub. 41.23–28; cf. T. Jud. 12.1–12) but introduces Judah’s Canaanite wife in her stock role as schemer (Jub. 41.2, 7; T. Jud. 10.6). The first-person narrator in T. Jud. presents himself as a tragic hero, a victim of alcohol, lust and the sexual power of women (8.2; 11.1–4; 12.3, 5–6; 13.3–8; 14.5–6; 15.5–6).58 Later Rabbinic texts seek to alleviate the patriarch’s guilt by emphasizing the guiding hand of God leading eventually to the Messiah.59 In L.A.B. 9.15–16 Tamar is praised by Amram, the father of Moses, as someone who perseveres in producing offspring and is called “our mother”. Philo interprets Tamar as an allegory for virtue, victory and wisdom (Deus 137; Congr. 124–126; Leg. III.74; Fug. 149–150, 154). Tamar’s non-Jewish ancestry is not mentioned in Gen 38. Some later texts trace her lineage to Aram (Jub. 41.1–2; T. Jud. 10.1, 6).60 L.A.B. 9.5 comes to Tamar’s defence, “for her intent was not fornication, but being unwilling to separate from the sons of Israel she reflected and said, ‘It is better for me to die for having intercourse with my father-in-law than to have intercourse with Gentiles (gentes).’”61 The text seems to consider Tamar as an Israelite or at least a proselyte.

The “interfigurality” of Tamar’s name does not primarily evoke the theme of non-Jewish identity but recalls a complex story with a rich “after-


58 Cf. at length MENN, Judah, pp. 107–213.


60 There are two persons with the same name: Aram, son of Sem (Gen 10.22; Jub. 7.18; 9.5; cf. PHILO, Virt. 221), and Aram, a descendant of Terach, Abraham’s father (Gen 22.21; Jub. 34.20). Especially BAUCKHAM, “Tamar’s Ancestry”, pp. 314–318 emphasizes that Tamar was considered part of the family of Abraham.

61 D.J. HARRINGTON, “Pseudo-Philos”, in J.H. CHARLESWORTH (ed.), The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, New York: Doubleday, 1985, p. 315. The consequent rejection of intermarriage is a main topic in L.A.B. (cf. 18.13–14; 21.1; 30.1; 43.5; 44.7; 45.3).
life”. Once one enters the intertextual net, many possibilities unfold which enable readers to enrich their understanding of the text. 62

(c) The First Formula Quotation (1.22–23)

Directly after the speech of the angel, the narrator marks the significance of the narrated events by an explicit intertextual reference. 63 The voice of the angel (1.20–21) and that of the narrator (1.22–23) are in such close parallelism that their communicative authority can be considered to be on the same level. 64 The question is: what exactly is being interpreted by the following explicit quotation? Τοῦτο δὲ ὁλον γέγονεν can be read in a limited way: the birth story properly speaking; or rather more broadly: the history of Israel that has been retold in the genealogy. 65 Everything from Abraham on moves towards one goal: the birth of Jesus.

The quoted text does not come as a surprise, at least not for readers who know their Scriptures. 66 By quoting the text, the narrator “forces” the reader to “listen” to the Jesus-story in light of the promised “Emmanuel”. We have here a clear form of reader guidance. By giving an explicit text (Is 7.14), the narrator unfolds a dynamic reading that is difficult to control. The “intrusion” of the old text into a new literary context may induce the reader to reflect and meditate on possible interconnections. Some ambiguities of the Hebrew version are absent in the Greek text. 67 A vague messian-
ic understanding can be glimpsed in the way the child is introduced. Unlike the Hebrew text, the Greek highlights the distinctive character of the child in a very specific way: he has the ability to distinguish good from evil before he knows either (LXX Is 7.15–16). As Martin Rösel has pointed out, the Septuagint version implies an understanding of the child as a heavenly gifted figure. 68 Although other textual elements from the Isaiah context may enrich the interpretation of the Matthean narrative, 69 the narrator makes sure that no reader misses the main point: the narrative makes Scripture "complete". Not only the birth but also the peculiar circumstances of Mary's pregnancy make sense within this neatly tied net of prophetic intertextuality. Over against the name of Jesus commanded by the angel (1.21), the scriptural quotation introduces a new name. The slight transposition from singular καλέσεις (LXX) to plural καλέσονς (Mt) shows that the second name in some sense "exceeds" the first one: it is not the individual name given by the father, but a programmatic "theological" name. 70 The plural form clearly transcends the present plot development. The name "God-with-us" foreshadows the development of the whole narrative and leads the readers to search for ways of reading that may actually make them part of those who "call" Jesus "Emmanuel". 71 It is a striking fact that Jesus is not called "Emmanuel" in the narrative. This communal dimension develops its own dynamics outside the text (see esp. Mt 18.20; 28.20).

(d) The Star - An Intertextual Signal? (2.2)

The "star of Bethlehem" has attracted many admirers not only astrological but also textual ones. Many exegetes entertain the possibility of an allusion

---

68 RÖSEL, "Jungfrauengeburt", 149.151. For a different interpretation of the text, see LUST, "Septuagint".

69 M. OBERWEIS has called attention to many elements (maybe too many) from LXX Isaiah that have shaped the wording of Mt 1–2: "Beobachtungen zum AT-Gebrauch in der matthäischen Kindheitsgeschichte", in NTS 35 (1989), pp. 131–149 (141–146). W. CARTER, "Evoking Isaiah: Matthean Soteriology and an Intertextual Reading of Isaiah 7–9 and Matthew 1:23 and 4:15–16", in JBL 119 (2000), pp. 503–520 (508–513), suggests that the whole context of Isaiah 7–9 underlines God's salvific intentions in view of an imperial threat.

70 The narrator's translation (δ ο εστιν μεθεµητευοµενον µεθ ήµων ο θεος) echoes LXX Is 8.8 (µεθ ήµων ο θεος) and 8.10 (µεθ ήµων κύριος ο θεος).

To be sure, the connections on a verbal level are rather low. On a structural level, some narrative similarities spring to the mind: the Gentile prophet Balaam blesses Israel, foretells a mighty ruler and interferes with a wicked king. Somewhat similarly, the Gentile μάγος come to adore the child and interfere with king Herod. Traces of an early Jewish messianic interpretation of Num 24.17 may corroborate the plausibility of an intertextual link between both texts. Obviously Num 24.17 was not only available both to author and readers, it can also be connected in meaningful ways with the Matthean narrative context. On the other hand, the narrator does not care to mark his allusion, the volume of verbal correspondence is rather low (basically: the “star”) and the book of Numbers is not explicitly quoted in Matthew’s Gospel. There are some structural similarities but it seems rather implausible that the Balaam episode serves as the model for the structure of the Matthean narrative.

This may be a good example of “aleatoric” intertextuality. When neither the text nor a historical account of the cultural context in which the text was produced makes a decision more or less plausible, we may assume that

---


73 LXX Num 24.17: ἀναστελεῖ ἄστρον ἐξ Ἰακωβ, καὶ ἀναστήσεις ἄνθρωπος ἐξ Ἰσραήλ (“A star shall rise up from Jacob, and a man shall arise out of Israel”). Mt 2.2–7,9–10 uses ἄστρον while LXX uses the more general ἄστρον. LXX ἀναστελεῖ may have an echo in Matthew’s ἐν τῇ ἀναστολῇ. In Num 23.7 Balaam is said to come ἀπ’ ἀναστολῶν like the μάγος in Mt 2.1. Some of the connections drawn by Brown, Birth, p. 193 or Vermees, Scripture, pp. 172–173, are far more subtle.

74 The messianic character of texts like CD 7,19; 4QTest 9–13; 1QM 11,6 is disputed. TestLev 18,3; TestJud 24.1 may have been influenced by Christian redaction. A possible messianic interpretation of Bar Kokhba as a “star from Jacob” (jTaan 4,8/68d) or evidence from the targumim (M. Pérez Fernández, Tradiciones mesiánicas en el Targum Palestiniense, Jerusalem – Valencia: Institución San Jerónimo, 1981, pp. 271–282) is hardly relevant for the present Matthean context.

75 However, Mt 9.36b (“like sheep without a shepherd”) echoes Num 27.17. Possible allusions are Mt 8.2 (the healing of leprosy in Num 12.10,13); Mt 11.29 (the gentleness of Moses in Num 12.3). Mt 5.33–37 (do not swear) can be vaguely connected to Num 30.3.
there are latent intertextual connections that are not necessarily connected with an author’s intention or a reader’s capabilities. Texts with such a high intertextual density as the early Christian ones are capable of connecting with many texts from Scriptures. The Matthean narrative has many intertextual “gems” for attentive readers. But again, an intertextual reading should be careful not to associate aleatoric connections too definitively with the author’s intent; and it surely should refrain from using these connections as the basis for abstract theological constructions.

(e) The Intertext of the Jewish Leaders (2.5–6)

The Jewish leaders and the narrator of the Matthean Jesus story share a profound knowledge of Scripture. When interrogated by King Herod, the Jewish leaders have no reason to hesitate. They know from Scripture what the readers know from the narrative: Bethlehem is the birth place of the Messiah (cf. Joh 7.41–42). The combination of Micah 5.1 and 2Sam 5.2 betrays in its Matthean setting some peculiarities. As a matter of fact, one may ask whether in ancient cultures, people who were used to hear texts would take notice of subtle differences between a text and a verbal model or “master copy”. One element, though, may have caught their attention: over against the Scripture reference, the Jewish leaders emphasize that Bethlehem is by no means (οὐδαμῶς) the most insignificant among the rulers of Judah. The negation attracts attention and functions precisely as an open alternation. As the place of Jesus’ birth, Bethlehem can hardly be considered “insignificant”. This ironic reference achieves two effects: it uses Jesus to characterize Bethlehem (and not the other way round) and it makes the Jewish leaders the unknowing spokesmen for Matthean theology. The “blind guides”, as the Matthean Jesus will later call the Jewish leaders (23.16), give credit to the Matthean Jesus on the basis of Scripture. Against their better judgment, they will stay on the side of Herod’s power and violence. A second element calls for an explanation: the combination with 2Sam 5.2 is not really necessary for answering the king’s question. The Jewish leaders, again unknowingly, witness to the messianic leader-


77 LXX Mi 5.1a: Καὶ οὖ, Βηθλεεμ ὁκὼς τοῦ Ἐφραὴμ, ὀλγοστός εἰ τοῦ εἶναι ἐν χιλιάδοις Ιουδα.

ship of Jesus (ἡγούμενος) as the perfect Davidic shepherd-king (ποιμανεῖ τὸν λαόν μου).

(f) God Calls his Son from Egypt (2.14–15)

The flight to Egypt gives way to a new formula quotation from the book of Hosea. Hos 11.1 is the beginning of a short recapitulation of the basic story of Israel. The central sign of God's persistent love is his deliverance from slavery in Egypt. God's "son" in this context refers to the people of Israel (as in Ex 4.22–23). If text and pre-text are brought into conversation, a permutation between Israel and Jesus becomes evident. Both can be viewed as the "son" of God. This quotations thus starts a fascinating "dialogue" between Israel and the figure of Jesus in Matthew's Gospel (cf. especially Mt 4.1–11).

(g) The Persecution of the Child (2.16)

Stories of royal children persecuted by wicked rulers are inscribed deeply in our "cultural encyclopedia" (U. Eco). Not surprisingly, many studies have uncovered the literary indebtedness of some motifs in Mt 2 to popular narrative traditions in antiquity. Depending on the material one analyzes, different sets of motifs can be extracted. Although the haggadic material

---


80 The introduction formula is the same as in 1.22. Hosea is generally an important point of reference for Matthew's story: in particular, Hos 6.6 is quoted in Mt 9.13 and 12.7. An allusion to Hos 2.1 is found in Mt 5.9, to Hos 6.2 in Mt 16.21 and to Hos 6.6 in Mt 23.23.


82 D.B. REDFORD, "The Literary Motif of the Exposed Child (cf. Ex. 2,1–10)", in *Numen* 14 (1967), pp. 209–228, analyzes 32 examples and constructs three types: "I. the child is exposed through shame at the circumstances of its birth; II. the king (or whoever is in power), either at the instigation of an oracle or simply because the child is a potential threat, seeks to kill the child who is fated to supplant him; III. a general massacre
concerning the birth of Moses is the most important point of reference for
the Matthean narrative, it is obvious that we cannot rule out the interplay
of Mt 2 with many popular stories of birth and persecution. The use of a
set of motifs brings a “touch of Exodus” into the narrative: the birth of a
hero, a wicked ruler, the killing of children, flight, etc. In terms of inter-
textuality, this dimension of the Matthean story cannot be related to one
single text. Genette’s concept of “architextuality” may be of help here: the
story follows loosely a specific genre model.

(h) Rachel Weeps (2.17–18)

The model of “fulfilment” reaches its theological limits when the brutal
murdering of children is narrated. How can this be part of scriptural wit-
ness? The high degree of intertextual auto-reflexivity becomes evident in a
small but significant change in the wording of the introductory formula to
the quotation from LXX Jer 38.15 (Hebrew: 31.15): 84 The narrator uses
tòte instead of πνή. The finality of the narrated events is clearly toned
down. By naming the prophet Jeremiah, the narrator probably calls to the
mind his character as a “tragic” prophet. 85 The quotation emphasizes the
reaction of grief (which is not part of the narrative) and recalls Rachel as a
mother-type. This note of despair is not predominant in Jer 31. Again, the
knowledge of the pre-text’s context can help to “colour” the understanding
of Mt 2 with a note of hope. 86

(i) Mt 2.23 – Unde?

Exegetes are used to find intertexts which are not explicitly tagged. Mt
2.23 is the opposite case: the quotation is tagged but the quoted text cannot
be found in a known tradition. It is, as France has put it, an “elusive ‘quo-

---

83 Cf. Jos., Ant 2,205–9; further material in A. VÖGTLÉ, Messias und Gottessohn:
Herkunft und Sinn der matthäischen Geburts- und Kindheitsgeschichte, Düsseldorf: Pat-
mos, 1971, pp. 32–41.
84 The verbal dissimilarities between the different versions (Hebrew and LXX A, B)
are not relevant for the process of reception.
85 Jeremiah is also named in Mt 27.9 (death of Judas): tòte ἐπιθυμήθη τὸ ῥηθέν διὰ
Ἰερεμίου (the quotation following corresponds to Zech 11.13). Cf. M.J.J. MENKEN, “The
References to Jeremiah in the Gospel according to Matthew (2.17; 16.14; 27.9)”, in ETL
60 (1984), pp. 5–24. For the Jewish view on Jeremiah, cf. C. WOLF, Jeremia im
Frühjudentum und Urchristentum (TU 118), Berlin: Akademie, 1976; M. KNOWLES,
86 Cf. DAVIES – ALLISON, Matthew, vol. 1, pp. 267–269; FRANCE, “Formula-Quo-
tation”.

The great amount of work that has gone into finding a plausible pre-text has produced many, and somewhat complicated, suggestions ranging from a reference to Samson’s Nazirite vow (Judg 13.5,7; 16.17) to an interconnection with Is 11.1 or a rather general witness to Jesus’ modest provenance. The arguments on all sides seem to neutralize each other. Interestingly enough, the meaning of the whole section 2.19–23 is pretty clear: the family’s settlement in Nazareth “fulfills” a scriptural utterance that witnesses to a person coming from that town. We may conclude that either the pre-text was known from sources not available to us or that the narrator is so reliable that he can make such a connection without having a definitive text in mind. After all, Nazareth is never mentioned in the Scriptures.

III. Conclusion

Intertextuality in practice is not a set of clear-cut methodological procedures to be applied mechanically to a text and its pre-text. If one wishes to operate on the basis of the (idealized, romanticized) author and his “intention”, the search for the pre-text (in its historically most reliable form) and the analysis of the eventual redactional changes will constitute the most important aspects of the exegetical work. The specific ways the author “uses” his or her pre-texts can be evaluated according to ancient modes of interpretation. Hermeneutically, however, “intertextuality” is not interchangeable with classical “influence studies”. From an intertextual perspective, the author not only “uses” a text or is “influenced” by other authors, he or she is only capable of writing by virtue of all the texts which have shaped his or her specific way of speaking.

Intertextuality as an endless interplay between (at least) two texts and their contexts is a literary phenomenon impossible to pin down to one sin-

---

89 The Matthean Jesus shows no traces of being a “Nazirite” (cf. Mt 9.25; 11.19).
90 This suggestion presupposes readers capable of recognizing a “homophonic” relation between Hebrew נזר and Greek Ναζωραῖος (cf. France, Matthew, pp. 92–93).
91 This is clearly the meaning of Ναζωραῖος in Mt 26.71 (where Matthew changes Ναζωρινὸς in Mk 14.67); Lk 18.37; John 18.5,7; 19.19; Acts 2.22; 3.6; 4.10; 6.14; 22.8; 26.9.
92 Maybe the “change” in the introductory formula from “prophet” (1.22; 2.5,15; 13.35; 21.4: διὰ τοῦ προφήτου) to “prophets” (2.23: διὰ τῶν προφητῶν) points to the vagueness of Matthew’s intertext.
ingle meaning. Even if one thinks that "authorial intention" guarantees the reconstruction of a unified meaning,\textsuperscript{93} it is plain that once an author chooses to reconfigure his or her text according to other texts he or she is losing control over the possibilities of interconnecting these texts. Even from the point of view of an author, "intertextuality" opens a vast field of connotations which cannot be anticipated or limited by such a vague category as "intent". Thus, every pre-text is an offer for readers to play, to dwell upon, to meditate upon and to see new aspects in texts.

An analysis of Mt 1–2, even when limited to concrete pre-texts, shows that a global understanding of intertextuality has much to recommend itself. The concrete examples are symptomatic upheavals within a complex web of textual interconnections. The pre-text does not only have a certain "function" within its new context (as a part of a complex mechanism), it belongs to "a discursive space of a culture"\textsuperscript{94} out of which the new text emerges. In the case of Matthew, "Scripture" is not simply a stone pit for extracting texts; "Scripture" articulates a frame which makes the Matthean Jesus story meaningful. The dialogical structure inscribed in Matthew’s narrative is an agent of Christological reflection. The intertextual density of Mt 1–2 serves as reading instruction for the whole narrative and brings Jesus into connection with God’s story with Israel right from the beginning. Finally, an intertextual reading should respect and underline the fact that the dialogue between "texts" has – unlike the present article – no real end.

\textsuperscript{93} For a skeptical position regarding "authorial intent", cf. MAYORDOMO, Anfang, pp. 170–187.

\textsuperscript{94} J. CULLER, The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction (Routledge Classics), London: Routledge, \textsuperscript{2}2001, p. 114: Intertextuality is "less a name for a work’s relation to particular prior texts than a designation of its participation in the discursive space of a culture [...] the relationship between a text and the various [...] signifying practices of a culture".