

I. EUROPEAN ELECTRONIC JOURNAL FOR FEMINIST EXEGESIS: LECTIO DIFFICILIOR CELEBRATES ITS 10TH ANNIVERSARY

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Reading the Difficult Way – for Ten Years

There is an anniversary to announce: *lectio difficilior* (www.lectio.unibe.ch) has existed for ten years now! The first issue of this European Electronic Journal for Feminist Exegesis was published in the year 2000 and since then we have had more than 72 articles in three languages (English, German and French) on far-reaching feminist exegetical topics in feminist exegesis, hermeneutics and related disciplines (classical philology, archaeology, Egyptology, studies of the Ancient Near Middle East, ancient history, Judaic studies, history of art, social sciences, psychology, etc). We still are the only European Electronic Journal for Feminist Bible Studies.

It turned out that there are some focal points in our publications. So many articles on deuterio-canonical texts were published,

- Luzia Sutter Rehmann, “Sexuelle Differenzen. Geschichten des Missbrauchs in den Apokryphen Apostelakten – Grundzüge einer Hermeneutik des Konflikts”, in: *lectio difficilior* 2 (2000);
- Janet S. Everhart, “Naked Bodies: Transgendering the Gospel of Thomas,” in: *lectio difficilior* 1 (2005);
- Cornelia B. Horn, “The *Pseudo-Clementine Homilies* and the Challenges of the Conversion of Families”, in: *lectio difficilior* 2 (2007);
- Christina Leisering, “Susanna im Garten: Eine feministisch-intertextuelle Lektüre der Susannaerzählung”, in: *lectio difficilior* 1 (2008);
- Elisabeth Esch-Wermeling, “Paulus lehrt – Thekla lauscht? Annäherungen an textstrategische Phänomene in den Theklaakten”, in: *lectio difficilior* 2 (2008);

and as well on feminist social and religious history,

- Irène Schwyn, “Kinderbetreuung im 9.-7. Jahrhundert. Eine Untersuchung anhand der Darstellungen auf neuassyrischen Reliefs”, in: *lectio difficilior* 1 (2000);
- Silvia Schroer, “Häusliche und außerhäusliche religiöse Kompetenzen israelitischer Frauen – am Beispiel von Totenklage und Totenbefragung”, in: *lectio difficilior* 1 (2002);
- Silvia Schroer, “Feministische Anthropologie des Ersten Testaments. Beobachtungen, Fragen, Plädoyers”, in: *lectio difficilior* 1 (2003);
- Silvia Schroer, “Liebe und Tod im Ersten (Alten) Testament”, in: *lectio difficilior* 2 (2004);
- Luzia Sutter Rehmann, “Der Glanz der Schekhinah und Elisabeths Verhüllung (Lukas 1,24)”, in: *lectio difficilior* 1 (2005);
- Erhard S. Gerstenberger, “Women in Old Testament Legal Procedures”, in: *lectio difficilior* 1 (2005);
- Angela Standhartinger, “Frauen in Mahlgemeinschaften. Diskurs und Wirklichkeit einer antiken, frühjüdischen und frühchristlichen Praxis”, in: *lectio difficilior* 2 (2005);
- Silvia Schroer, “Gender and Iconography from the Viewpoint of a Feminist Biblical Scholar”, in: *lectio difficilior* 2 (2008);

on feminist Judaic studies,

- Irene Pabst, “The interpretation of the Sarah-Hagar-stories in rabbinic and patristic literature. Sarah and Hagar as female representations of identity and difference”, in: *lectio difficilior* 1 (2003);
- Susanne Plietzsch, “Zwischen Widerstand und Selbstaufopferung. Die rabbinische Rezeption der Gestalt der Hanna (Babylonischer Talmud, Berachot 31a-32b)”, in: *lectio difficilior* 2 (2006);
- Tal Ilan, “Gender and Lamentations: 4Q179 and the Canonization of the Book of Lamentations”, in: *lectio difficilior* 2 (2008);
- Christiane Steuer, “Der Fetus ist ein Glied seiner Mutter (ubar yerekh imo): Eine rabbinische Interpretation von Exodus 21:22-24”, in: *lectio difficilior* 2 (2008);

and on masculinity and men’s studies,

- Ernst Axel Knauf, “Bull-jumping David Crosses Gender-lines (Once Again). Three additional remarks to Philippe Guillaume”, in: *lectio difficilior* 2 (2004);
- Moisés Mayordomo Marin, “Construction of Masculinity in Antiquity and Early Christianity”, in: *lectio difficilior* 2 (2006);
- Peter-Ben Smit, “Manliness and the Cross – A Note on the Reception of Aspects of Early Christian Masculinity in Athanasius’ *Life of Anthony*”, in: *lectio difficilior* 1 (2007);

- Cynthia R. Chapman, “Sculpted Warriors: Sexuality and the Sacred in the Depiction of Warfare in the Assyrian Palace Reliefs and in Ezekiel 23:14-17”, in: *lectio difficilior* 1 (2007);
- Thomas Staubli, “Geschlechtertrennung und Männersphären im Alten Israel”, in: *lectio difficilior* 1 (2008);

or postcolonial biblical studies,

- Elzbieta Adamiak, “Gestohlene Bibel. Feministische Exegese im Kontext Mittel-Ost-Europa”, in: *lectio difficilior* 1 (2001);
- Hanna Stenström, “Is a liberating feminist exegesis possible without liberation theology?”, in: *lectio difficilior* 1 (2002);
- Seong Hee Kim, “Rupturing the Empire: Reading the Poor Widow as a Postcolonial Female Subject (Mark 12:41-44)”, in: *lectio difficilior* 1 (2006);
- Surekha Nelavala, “Jesus Asks the Samaritan Woman for a Drink: A Dalit Feminist Reading of John 4”, in: *lectio difficilior* 1 (2007).

Apart from these groups of subjects, readers could also find special, unexpected, even surprising themes. Examples of what I mean by “far-reaching articles” are: The reception of the Book of Job by Simone Weil;¹ text-critical questions of the translation and pronunciation of YHWH;² the holy family in Jesus-films;³ clothing in the Book of Esther;⁴ archaeological gender research;⁵ questions of canon;⁶ feminist approaches to the Image Ban;⁷ reflections on

¹ Elisabeth Pernkopf, “Ich will dich fragen... Simone Weil im Gespräch mit Hiob”, in: *lectio difficilior* 2 (2006).

² Kristin De Troyer, “The Names of God. Their Pronunciation and Their Translation. A Digital Tour of Some of the Main Witnesses”, in: *lectio difficilior* 2 (2005).

³ Adele Reinhartz, “Die ‘Glückliche Heilige Familie’ in den Jesus-Filmen”, in: *lectio difficilior* 2 (2002).

⁴ Jopie Siebert-Hommes, “‘On the third day Esther put on her queen’s robes’ (Esther 5:1). The Symbolic Function of Clothing in the Book of Esther”, in: *lectio difficilior* 1 (2002).

⁵ Julia Müller-Clemm, “Archäologische Genderforschung: (K)ein Thema für die Palästina-Archäologie? Ein Forschungsüberblick mit Beispielen zur ‘Archäologie des Todes’”, in: *lectio difficilior* 2 (2001).

⁶ Mieke Bal, “Religious Canon and Literary Identity. Plenary lecture Nijmegen, Conference ‘Literary Canon and Religious Identity’”, in: *lectio difficilior* 2 (2000); Ilse Müllner, “Dialogische Autorität. Feministisch-theologische Überlegungen zur kanonischen Schriftauslegung”, in: *lectio difficilior* 2 (2005).

⁷ Kune Biezeveld, “Der Splitter und das Bild. Das Bilderverbot aus neuer Perspektive”, in: *lectio difficilior* 2 (2003).

the categories of ‘pure’ and ‘impure’;⁸ female mediation;⁹ women as possible authors of biblical texts;¹⁰ and many others.

This electronic journal enables many people all over the world to read about feminist scholarship. “All over the world” means exactly that: *lectio difficilior* has more than 550 readers per month in more than 40 countries, mainly in Western Europe and the U.S., but also in countries like Poland, Iran, Lebanon, Haiti, or Nigeria.

Comparable to this is the range of emails written to the administration (lectio@theol.unibe.ch). Several demands for help in research on certain topics, thanks for decisive ideas for sermons, education, bible reading groups or women’s meetings. An example of positive response is Ovidiu Creanga’s email from King’s College in London in August 2008: “I’m writing to congratulate the editors of this great electronic journal for their assiduous work in promoting quality scholarship on the Hebrew Bible via the Internet. Personally, I have found many of the articles published by you very stimulating and, in fact, I wish to use them in my own scholarship.” In the main we have very few negative reactions to articles or to the journal as a whole.

Other reactions: There has developed close contact and even cooperation with other internet journals, especially with “Open Theology” (www.opentheology.org/), an open and inclusive journal concerning any particular academic programme, country or religion. Again and again we have emails about one and the same article, for example, our ‘best-seller’: Esther A. de Boer, “Mary Magdalene and the Disciple Jesus Loved”, in: *lectio difficilior* 1 (2000). There must be about four per half year. They range from generally positive (or a few negative) reactions to letters with detailed exegetical discussions. And then there are the small things: one day we received an email from Betty Fox whose father was Joseph Rumshinsky. His yet un-played opera was discussed by Helen Leneman (“Ruth and Boaz Love Duets as Examples of Musical

⁸ Veronika Bachmann, “Die biblische Vorstellungswelt und deren geschlechterpolitische Dimension – Methodologische Überlegungen am Beispiel der ersttestamentlichen Kategorien ‘rein’ und ‘unrein’”, in: *lectio difficilior* 2 (2003).

⁹ Mercedes L. García Bachmann, “‘And YHWH saw and was displeased’: Mediation as human responsibility (Isaiah 59)” in: *lectio difficilior* 1 (2005).

¹⁰ Ernst Axel Knauf, “Vom Prophetinnenwort zum Prophetenbuch. Jesaja 8,3f im Kontext von Jesaja 6,1-8,16”, in: *lectio difficilior* 2 (2000); Mayer I. Gruber, “Women’s Voices in the Book of Micah”, in: *lectio difficilior* 1 (2007).

Midrash”, in: *lectio difficilior* 1 (2006)). She was delighted by that and emailed Helen via *lectio difficilior*. I do not know what came out of this contact.

In fact working for this journal does not only involve administration and editing. The redactional work in *lectio difficilior* is a way to move feminist scholarship on from theoretical reflection to practice: What exactly is feminist exegesis? Does the combination of a female author and a women’s topic suffice? And the question that has existed since the beginning of feminist scholarship: Can male scholars do feminist research?

The commendable work in the production of such a journal is done by many women. The beginning of *lectio difficilior* was in 1998: At a meeting of contributors to the *Kompendium Feministische Bibelauslegung*, edited by Luise Schottroff and Marie-Theres Wacker, that took place in Münster (Germany) in December 1998, the suggestion was made to start with a journal. Its aim was especially to give young scholars the possibility to publish their research. From the very beginning an electronic version was preferred, because it is less expensive and it corresponds to the current needs of internationally oriented scholars better than a printed version. And as pointed out above: it enables so many women and men not living near to a University to read feminist research. So Silvia Schroer founded *lectio difficilior* together with Caroline Vander Stichele (Amsterdam, 2000-2005) and an interdisciplinary and cross-confessional editorial board consisting of Eleni Kasselouri (Thessaloniki, 2000-2006), Judith Frishman (Utrecht, 2000-2007), Christl Maier (Berlin, Yale, Marburg, 2000-now), Shelly Mathews (Greenville/USA, 2008-now), Susanne Scholz (Dallas/USA, 2004-now) and Hanna Stenström (Uppsala, 2000-now). Caroline Vander Stichele retired in 2005 from being a main editor and Tal Ilan from Berlin took over her task in 2006. The administrative work was done by Irène Schwyn (2000-2003), Alison Sauer (2003-2004) and Ulrike Sals (2004-now). Although it is much work for us all and financing the *lectio difficilior* is difficult, for every issue it all seems worthwhile! We are listed in several databases, cited in several scholarly works and have become well known meanwhile so that the *lectio difficilior* team can look back on a story of success and forward to exciting and intriguing articles in the future. Ad multos annos!

Lectio difficilior (LDiff) es una revista electrónica de exégesis feminista muy conocida, que se fundó hace diez años. En el artículo se presentan los temas principales, los contactos con las lectoras y los lectores, su intercambio de cartas electrónicas con la administración y se da un resumen de la historia de la revista.

Lectio difficilior (LDiff) ist eine weithin bekannte elektronische Zeitschrift für feministische Exegese, die vor zehn Jahren gegründet wurde. Dieser Artikel gibt einen Überblick über die thematischen Schwerpunkte, gibt Einblicke in die Kontakte mit den Leserinnen und Lesern und deren Email-Korrespondenzen mit der Administration und fasst die Geschichte der Zeitschrift kurz zusammen.

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