

THE INTERNATIONAL CRITICAL COMMENTARY

ECCLESIASTES
1–5

A CRITICAL AND EXEGETICAL COMMENTARY

STUART WEEKS

The
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COMMENTARY
on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and
New Testaments

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COMMENTARY

ON

ECCLESIASTES

BY

STUART WEEKS

Professor of Old Testament and Hebrew, Durham University

IN TWO VOLUMES

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For my mother, Moyra Weeks

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GENERAL EDITORS' PREFACE

Much scholarly work has been done on the Bible since the publication of the first volumes of the International Critical Commentary in the 1890s. New linguistic, textual, historical and archaeological evidence has become available, and there have been changes and developments in methods of study. In the twenty-first century there will be as great a need as ever, and perhaps a greater need, for the kind of commentary that the International Critical Commentary seeks to supply. The series has long had a special place among works in English on the Bible, because it has sought to bring together all the relevant aids to exegesis, linguistic and textual no less than archaeological, historical, literary and theological, to help the reader to understand the meaning of the books of the Old and New Testaments. In the confidence that such a series meets a need, the publishers and the editors are commissioning new commentaries on all the books of the Bible. The work of preparing a commentary on such a scale cannot but be slow, and developments in the past half-century have made the commentator's task yet more difficult than before, but it is hoped that the remaining volumes will appear without too great intervals between them. No attempt has been made to secure a uniform theological or critical approach to the problems of the various books, and scholars have been selected for their scholarship and not for their adherence to any school of thought. It is hoped that the new volumes will attain the high standards set in the past, and that they will make a significant contribution to the understanding of the books of the Bible.

G. I. D.
C. M. T.

PREFACE

Ecclesiastes has been treated already in the ICC series, and George Barton's 1908 commentary remains a valuable resource, often cited. Barton necessarily engaged, though, with the scholarship on Ecclesiastes of his own time, much of which was pre-occupied with issues that proved to be of limited interest to subsequent generations. In his own preface, indeed, he felt obliged to write: 'Those who expect to find here the advocacy of new and startling theories of this fascinatingly perplexing book will be disappointed. In the judgment of the writer there has been something too much of these things in the recent literature on Qoheleth.' Arguably, in fact, he wrote at just the wrong time: no modern period has been entirely free of attempts to slice the book into layers, or to butcher it altogether, but in the work of scholars like Siegfried, Haupt, and, rather differently, Zapletal, the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century saw redactional bloodthirstiness of an unprecedented sort. More recent scholars have largely, and rightly, backed away from that whole approach, and although scholarship on Ecclesiastes has yet to achieve even the limited consensus that Barton hoped his own commentary would promote, it has tended to concern itself with very different issues, sometimes returning to questions that had preoccupied scholars long before his time. Things have changed in other areas as well. Although new discoveries have by no means rendered obsolete the extraordinary text-critical work by scholars like Euringer and McNeile, which did much to inform Barton's commentary, they have entirely changed the scholarly perspective on some issues, while modern approaches in linguistics and lexicography are markedly different to those of his era.

So long as texts remain important to us, there will always be a need for new commentaries on them: the texts may not change, but the way we read and receive them most assuredly will. I offer the excuse of Barton's partial redundancy, therefore, not because a new commentary on Ecclesiastes needs an excuse, but because this commentary is not entirely 'new' in that sense: to a great extent, it is merely informed by more recent data and engages with more recent scholarship. Although, to be sure, it has also been influenced

by more recent developments in areas like literary theory, and by modern sensitivities in some areas that were less troubling to earlier generations, there is little in much of my text that would have seemed alien to Barton or his contemporaries. If in very many respects, however, this is a rather old-fashioned piece of work, I feel no need to apologize. Our engagement with a text in every age also requires us to have a form of that text that we can trust (or at least agree), and an understanding of the ways in which its words can be read. Establishing those things for *Ecclesiastes*, so far as is possible on the evidence available, has been my primary purpose, as will be clear from the proportion of space devoted to text-critical and philological issues. Although I have suggested many new readings or interpretations myself, moreover, I have also made an effort throughout to show that, despite the difficulties and the plurality of opinions, reading *Ecclesiastes* should not be a free-for-all, and that many of the ways in which particular passages have been understood (often by very fine scholars) are either wholly speculative or demonstrably wrong. There are many problems, and many places where more than one reading is possible, but the accretion of suggestions over the centuries has made it much harder than it should be for readers to determine what the text certainly does or does not say, and much easier for the less conscientious simply to cherry-pick suggestions that suit their own interpretations.

To that extent, at least, this is intended to be a commentary for commentators, who will find, I hope, not just my opinion, but also all the information that they need to reach their own conclusions about the more controversial passages. For that reason, the philological and text-critical notes are undoubtedly daunting for the non-specialist, although by translating readings where appropriate, I hope I have at least made it possible for those without any expertise in the languages to get a good sense of the issues, and for those with a limited knowledge to work their way through them. I have, in any case, summarized key issues from the notes in the main commentary, which is pitched at a more general audience. Inevitably, this main commentary is more particularly an expression of my own views, although I have tried to summarize and engage with those of others, and again to clear away some of the assumptions and speculations that have established themselves over the years.

The main commentary is also, perhaps, significantly less old-fashioned, and I am not sure how Barton or his contemporaries

would have reacted to my understanding of the book as a thought-provoking entertainment, loosely in the form of a memoir, or to my suspicion that it devotes great effort to undermining some of the ideas that are often considered to be its key assumptions. Given the history of the book's interpretation, however, and despite my predecessor's optimism that he might recall critics to some consensus of judgment, I am very sure indeed that my ideas will no more unify scholarship around them than have those of any other commentator on Ecclesiastes. If this book is not to prove wholly ephemeral, I hope that it will make some lasting contribution to scholarly house-keeping—throwing out the rubbish, polishing the silverware, and upgrading the appliances—at least until such time as a new ICC is due.

A number of previous scholars have commented on how time-consuming and frustrating it is to work closely with Ecclesiastes, and had I paid more attention to those comments when I took this task on more than a decade ago, I might not have agreed so readily: on a personal note, I owe thanks and apologies to friends, family and colleagues who have put up with the extent to which it has gradually taken over my life and consumed my waking hours. Equally, I am grateful to the many colleagues and students, especially at Durham, who have discussed the text with me over the past decade, and made it possible to share the otherwise very lonely task of writing a commentary. My particular gratitude, however, is reserved for Graham Davies, who as series editor has contributed so much to the closing stages of this volume, and whose encouragement has been important throughout the many years it has taken. I am also indebted to Duncan Burns, who has worked so hard on the material at the production stage, and saved me from many infelicities.

The commentary has spread into a second volume, but the nature of Ecclesiastes is such that it is difficult to talk sensibly about any of it without having examined it all. Accordingly, the critical notes and much of the commentary are all but complete for that volume, and I hope that it will appear reasonably soon after this first.

Durham, January 2019

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ABBREVIATIONS AND SIGLA

AAWG.PH	Abhandlungen der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen, Philologisch-Historische Klasse
AB	Anchor Bible
ABR	<i>Australian Biblical Review</i>
ACCS	Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture
ACEBT	<i>Amsterdamse Cahiers voor Exegese van de Bijbel en zijn Tradities</i>
AF	<i>Archivo di Filosofia</i>
AION	<i>Annali Istituto Orientale di Napoli</i>
AJSL	<i>American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literature</i>
ANETS	Ancient Near Eastern Texts and Studies
AOAT	Alter Orient und Altes Testament
APR	<i>American Poetry Review</i>
AS	<i>Aramaic Studies</i>
ASE	<i>Annali di storia dell'esegesi</i>
Asp	<i>Asprenas. Rivista di scienze teologiche</i>
ATD	Das Alte Testament Deutsch
AUSS	<i>Andrews University Seminary Studies</i>
BAI	<i>Bulletin of the Asia Institute</i>
BASOR	<i>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</i>
BAT	Die Botschaft des alten Testaments,
BBB	Bonner biblische Beiträge
BBC	Blackwell Bible Commentaries
BBR	<i>Bulletin for Biblical Research</i>
BDAG	W. Bauer, F. W. Danker, W. F. Arndt, and F. W. Gingrich, <i>Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> (3rd ed.; Chicago & London, 2000)
BDB	F. Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs, <i>A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> (Oxford, 1906)
BDD	<i>Bekhol Derakhekha Daehu Journal of Torah and Scholarship</i>
BEATAJ	Beiträge zur Erforschung des Alten Testaments und des antiken Judentum
BeO	<i>Bibbia e oriente</i>
BETL	Bibliotheca ephemeridum theologicarum lovaniensium
BH'	<i>Biblia Hebraica</i> (Stuttgart, 1905–1906). The text of Ecclesiastes was prepared by S. R. Driver

<i>BH</i> ³	<i>Biblia Hebraica</i> (Stuttgart, 3rd edn, 1929–37). The text of Ecclesiastes was prepared by F. Horst.
BHBib	Bibliotheca Hispana Biblica
<i>BHQ</i>	<i>Biblia Hebraica Quinta Editio</i> (Stuttgart, 2004-). The text of Ecclesiastes was prepared by Y. A. P. Goldman.
<i>BHS</i>	<i>Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia</i> (5th ed.; Stuttgart, 1990). The text of Ecclesiastes was prepared by F. Horst.
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
BibInt	Biblical Interpretation
BibOr	Biblica et Orientalia
BibScRel	Biblioteca di Scienze Religiose
BibSem	The Biblical Seminar
<i>BIOSCS</i>	<i>Bulletin of the International Organization for Septuagint and Cognate Studies</i>
<i>BJRL</i>	<i>Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester</i>
<i>BK</i>	<i>Bibel und Kirche</i>
BKAT	Biblischer Kommentar Altes Testament
BLS	Bible and Literature Series
<i>BN</i>	<i>Biblische Notizen</i>
BRLJ	The Brill Reference Library of Judaism
<i>BSac</i>	<i>Bibliotheca sacra</i>
BSPS	Boston Studies in the Philosophy of Science
BWANT	Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten und Neuen Testament
<i>BZ</i>	<i>Biblische Zeitschrift</i>
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
<i>CAD</i>	<i>The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago</i> (Chicago & Glückstadt, 1956–2010)
CB	Coniectanea biblica
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CBQMS	Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series
<i>CBR</i>	<i>Currents in Biblical Research</i>
CBSC	The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges
CC	Continental Commentaries
CCSL	Corpus Christianorum: Series Latina
CIS	Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum
CO	Cahiers d'Orientalisme
COut	Commentar op het Oude Testament
CrStHB	Critical Studies in the Hebrew Bible
CSEL	Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum
<i>CSR</i>	<i>Christian Scholars Review</i>
<i>CTM</i>	<i>Concordia Theological Monthly</i>
<i>DCH</i>	D. J. A. Clines (ed.), <i>Dictionary of Classical Hebrew</i> (Sheffield, 1993–2016)

<i>Did</i>	<i>Didaskalia. Revista da Faculdade de teologia de Lisboa</i>
DJD	Discoveries in the Judaean Desert
DJSS	Duke Judaic Studies Series
<i>DSD</i>	<i>Dead Sea Discoveries</i>
EBib	Études Bibliques
EdF	Erträge der Forschung
<i>EI</i>	<i>Eretz-Israel</i>
<i>EQ</i>	<i>Evangelical Quarterly</i>
EQÄ	Einführungen und Quellentexte zur Ägyptologie
<i>EstBib</i>	<i>Estudios bíblicos</i>
ET	English translation
<i>ETL</i>	<i>Ephemerides theologicae lovanienses</i>
<i>EvT</i>	<i>Evangelische Theologie</i>
<i>ExpTim</i>	<i>Expository Times</i>
FAT	Forschungen zum Alten Testament
<i>FO</i>	<i>Folia orientalia</i>
FOTL	Forms of the Old Testament Literature
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
FSBP	Fontes et subsidia ad Bibliam pertinentes
<i>Fund</i>	<i>Fundamentum: Zeitschrift der Freien Evangelisch-Theologischen Akademie Basel</i>
GCS	Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderte herausgegeben von der Kirchenväter
GKC	W. Gesenius, <i>Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar. As edited and enlarged by the late E. Kautzsch... Second English edition. Revised in accordance with the twenty-eighth German edition, 1909, by A. E. Cowley</i> (Oxford, 2nd edn, 1910)
<i>GLECS</i>	<i>Comptes rendus du Groupe Linguistique d'Études Chamito-Semitiqes</i>
<i>GM</i>	<i>Göttinger Miszellen</i>
GO	Göttinger Orientforschungen
<i>HALOT</i>	L. Koehler, W. Baumgartner, and J. J. Stamm, <i>The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament. Translated and edited under the supervision of M. E. J. Richardson</i> (4 vols; Leiden, Boston & Köln, 1994–99)
<i>HAR</i>	<i>Hebrew Annual Review</i>
HAT	Handbuch zum Alten Testament
HCM	Holmstedt, R. D., J. A. Cook, and P. S. Marshall, <i>Qoheleth: A handbook on the Hebrew text</i> (Baylor handbook on the Hebrew Bible; Waco, 2017).
HCOT	Historical Commentary on the Old Testament
<i>Hen</i>	<i>Henoch</i>

<i>HeyJ</i>	<i>Heythrop Journal</i>
<i>HS</i>	<i>Hebrew Studies</i>
HSAT	Die Heilige Schrift des Alten Testaments
<i>HSCP</i>	<i>Harvard Studies in Classical Philology</i>
HSS	Harvard Semitic Studies
HTKAT	Herders theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
<i>HUCA</i>	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
ICC	International Critical Commentary
<i>IEJ</i>	<i>Israel Exploration Journal</i>
<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
ITC	International Theological Commentary
JAJSup	Journal of Ancient Judaism Supplements
<i>JAOS</i>	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JBQ</i>	<i>Jewish Bible Quarterly</i>
<i>JESOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Evangelical Study of the Old Testament</i>
<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
<i>JHebS</i>	<i>Journal of Hebrew Scriptures</i>
<i>JJS</i>	<i>Journal of Jewish Studies</i>
J-M	P. Joüon, <i>A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew. Translated and revised by T. Muraoka</i> (2 vols.; Subsidia biblica, 14/1-2; Rome, 1991)
<i>JNES</i>	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
<i>JNSL</i>	<i>Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages</i>
<i>JOTT</i>	<i>Journal of Translation and Textlinguistics</i>
<i>JPh</i>	<i>Journal of Philology</i>
JPSBC	The JPS Bible Commentary
<i>JQR</i>	<i>Jewish Quarterly Review</i>
<i>JSem</i>	<i>Journal of Semitics</i>
<i>JSIJ</i>	<i>Jewish Studies, an Internet Journal</i>
<i>JSJ</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Periods</i>
JSJSup	Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
JSPSup	Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha: Supplement Series
<i>JSQ</i>	<i>Jewish Studies Quarterly</i>
<i>JSS</i>	<i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i>
JSSSup	Journal of Semitic Studies Supplement Series
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
<i>KAI</i>	H. Donner and W. Röllig, <i>Kanaanäische und aramäische Inschriften</i> (Wiesbaden, 2nd edn, 1966–69)

KAT	Kommentar zum Alten Testament
KHC	Kurzer Hand-Commentar zum Alten Testament
kjv	King James Version
KTR	Kieler Theologische Reihe
KTU	M. Dietrich, O. Loretz, and J. Sanmartín, <i>Die keilalphabetischen Texte aus Ugarit</i> (Alter Orient und Altes Testament, 24; Kevelaer & Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1976; 3rd edn. Munster, 2013)
LASBF	<i>Liber annuus Studii biblici franciscani</i>
LHBOTS	Library of Hebrew Bible / Old Testament Studies
lit.	literally
LSAWS	Linguistic Studies in Ancient West Semitic
LSJ	H. G. Liddell, R. Scott, H. S. Jones, <i>A Greek-English Lexicon</i> (9th ed.; Oxford, 1996)
LTP	<i>Laval Theologique et Philosophique</i>
MdB	Le Monde de la Bible
MGWJ	<i>Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums</i>
MJSS	<i>Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences</i>
MM	J. H. Moulton and G. Milligan, <i>The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament</i> (London, 1930)
MPIL	Monographs of the Peshitta Institute Leiden
MSU	Mitteilungen des Septuaginta-Unternehmens
NBE	Nueva Biblia Española
NCB	New Century Bible Commentary
NCLS	Nottingham Classical Literature Studies
NEchtB	Die Neue Echter Bibel
NGTT	<i>Nederduitse gereformeerde theologiese tydskrif</i>
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NJPS	New Jewish Publication Society translation
NT	New Testament
OBO	Orbis biblicus et orientalis
OCT	Oxford Classical Texts
OIP	The University of Chicago Oriental Institute Publications
OLA	Orientalia lovaniensia analecta
OLP	<i>Orientalia lovaniensia periodica</i>
OLZ	<i>Orientalistische Literaturzeitung</i>
ORS	Oriental Research Series
OTE	<i>Old Testament Essays</i>
OTL	Old Testament Library
OTS	<i>Oudtestamentische Studiën / Old Testament Studies</i> (journal)
OTS	<i>Oudtestamentische Studiën / Old Testament Studies</i> (series)
PAAJR	Proceedings of the American Academy of Jewish Research
PAT	D. R. Hillers and E. Cussini, <i>Palmyrene Aramaic Texts</i> (Baltimore and London, 1996)

<i>PEQ</i>	<i>Palestine Exploration Quarterly</i>
PG	Patrologia graeca (Patrologiae cursus completus: Series Graeca). Edited and published by J.-P. Migne. 162 vols. Paris: 1857–86
<i>PIBA</i>	<i>Proceedings of the Irish Biblical Association</i>
PL	Patrologia latina (Patrologiae cursus completus: Series Latina). Edited and published by J.-P. Migne. 217 vols. Paris: 1844–64
POS	Pretoria Oriental Series
<i>PSB</i>	<i>Princeton Seminary Bulletin</i>
PTA	Papyrologische Texte und Abhandlungen
<i>PzB</i>	<i>Protokolle zur Bibel</i>
<i>RA</i>	<i>Revue d'Assyriologie</i>
<i>RB</i>	<i>Revue biblique</i>
<i>RECAPO</i>	<i>Revue d'Études des Civilisations Anciennes du Proche-Orient</i>
<i>REJ</i>	<i>Revue des études juives</i>
<i>RevQ</i>	<i>Revue de Qumran</i>
<i>RevScRel</i>	<i>Revue des sciences religieuses</i>
<i>RIBLA</i>	<i>Revista de interpretación bíblica latino-americana</i>
<i>RivB</i>	<i>Rivista biblica italiana</i>
RivBSup	Supplementi alla Rivista Biblica
RNBC	Readings: A New Biblical Commentary
<i>RSR</i>	<i>Recherches de science religieuse</i>
RSV	Revised Standard Version
<i>RTP</i>	<i>Revue de théologie et de philosophie</i>
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
SBLABib	Society of Biblical Literature Academia Biblica
SBLAIL	SBL Ancient Israel and Its Literature
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLMasS	Society of Biblical Literature Masoretic Studies
SBLSCS	Society of Biblical Literature Septuagint and Cognate Studies
SBLSS	Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series
SBLWAW	Society of Biblical Literature Writings from the Ancient World
SBT	Studies in Biblical Theology
<i>ScEs</i>	<i>Science et esprit</i>
SDM	Scripta et documenta
<i>SEE-J Hiphil</i>	Scandinavian Evangelical E-Journal: Hiphil
SeL	Storia e Letteratura
<i>SJOT</i>	<i>Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament</i>
<i>SJT</i>	<i>Scottish Journal of Theology</i>
<i>SPAW</i>	<i>Sitzungsberichte der Königlich preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften</i>
<i>SR</i>	<i>Studies in Religion</i>
SLL	Studies in Semitic Languages and Linguistics

SSU	Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis: Studia Semitica Upsaliensia
<i>StudBT</i>	<i>Studia Biblica et Theologica</i>
STDJ	Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah
STHB	Supplements to the Textual History of the Bible
STLI	Studies and Texts (Philip W. Lown Institute of Advanced Judaic Studies)
<i>StPat</i>	<i>Studia Patavina</i>
StT	Studi e Testi, Biblioteca apostolica vaticana
<i>TAD</i>	B. Porten and A. Yardeni (eds.), <i>Textbook of Aramaic Documents from Ancient Egypt</i> (3 vols.; Jerusalem, 1986–93)
<i>TDOT</i>	G. J. Botterweck and H. Ringgren (eds.), <i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i> (Grand Rapids, 1974–2006)
THBW	Theologisch-homiletisches Bibelwerk
ThOrAr	Theologische und orientalische Arbeiten
THOTC	The Two Horizons Old Testament Commentary
<i>ThViat</i>	<i>Theologia viatorum</i>
<i>TJ</i>	<i>Trinity Journal</i>
<i>TLZ</i>	<i>Theologische Literaturzeitung</i>
TOTC	Tyndale Old Testament commentaries
TransSup	Supplément à Transeuphratène
TSAJ	Texte und Studien zum Antiken Judentum
TSJTSA	Texts and Studies of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America
<i>TSK</i>	<i>Theologische Studien und Kritiken</i>
TSMEMJ	Texts and Studies in Medieval and Early Modern Judaism
TThSt	Trierer theologische Studien
TUGAL	Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur
<i>TynBul</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
<i>TZ</i>	<i>Theologische Zeitschrift</i>
<i>UF</i>	<i>Ugarit-Forschungen</i>
VCSup	Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae
<i>VD</i>	<i>Verbum domini</i>
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
VTSup	Vetus Testamentum Supplements
WAS	Wiener alttestamentliche Studien
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
<i>WTJ</i>	<i>The Westminster Theological Journal</i>
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
<i>WZKM</i>	<i>Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes</i>
<i>ZAH</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Althebräistik</i>
<i>ZAW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>