

Editorial:
“Be exalted, o God, above the Heavens!”
(Psalm 108:6) - Studies in the Book of Psalms
and its reception

Presented to Phil J. Botha on his 65th birthday

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Philippus (Phil) Jacobus Botha

A new psalm had to be composed for new circumstances. It made use of a well-known oracle of God, but in a new political, social, religious, and/or historical context, that oracle had a new message. In a context of praise, it opened a perspective to the future. It emphasized in a new way that God had to bring about the new dispensation, and that he would. They gave the faithful a new historical and cosmological perspective.¹

This issue of *Old Testament Essays* is dedicated to Philippus (Phil) Jacobus Botha on the occasion of his 65th birthday and subsequent retirement from the Department of Ancient and Modern Languages and Cultures at the University of Pretoria. In a publication on Psalm 108 referred to above, Phil Botha defined the poem – a composition based upon Pss 57:8-12 and 60:7-14 – as a new psalm that “had to be composed for new circumstances”. It is a great honour for everyone involved in this project to dedicate this issue to our esteemed colleague and friend as he reaches the stage in his life cycle where he inevitably enters new circumstances. It is our sincere wish that the diverse and wide-ranging contributions in this volume will aid him in the process of composing a new life-psalm based upon the many enriching moments he experienced and the many inspirational contributions he made during his long and fruitful academic career.

Phil Botha obtained a BA degree in 1977, majoring in Hebrew and Greek, a BA (Hons) in 1979, specializing in Semitic Languages, a BD in 1980, a Post-Graduate Diploma in Theology in 1981, an MA (Semitic Languages) in 1983, and a DD (Old Testament Studies) in 1987. All the qualifications were obtained *cum laude* at the University of Pretoria. His MA dissertation in Semitic Languages, titled *Polemiese trekke in die Paasfeeshimnes van Afrem die Siriër* and his DD thesis in Old Testament Studies, titled *Die teologiese funksie van die Torah woordveld in die driehoeksverhouding Jahwe-vrome-vyand in Psalm 119*, set the tone for his research interests during his long and fruitful academic career. His extensive list of publications illustrates his keen interest in Patristic literature in general and the work of the Syriac church father, Ephrem, in particular. His dissertation and his many publications in the field signal him as one of the very few Syriac specialists in Africa, while his publications, as well as his participation in numerous international conferences, clearly illustrate that he enjoyed international recognition in the field.

Phil Botha’s magisterial doctoral thesis on the psalm of psalms, Psalm 119, cemented his place as an invaluable dialogue partner in the field of Psalter

* To cite: Gert T M Prinsloo and Beat Weber, “‘Be exalted, O God, above the Heavens!’ (Psalm 108:6) Studies in the Book of Psalms and its reception. Presented to Phil J. Botha on his 65th birthday.” *OTE* 32 no. 2 (2019): 288-301. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.17159/2312-3621/2019/v32n2a2>.

¹ Phil J. Botha, “Psalm 108 and the Quest for Closure to the Exile,” *OTE* 23/3 (2010): 574-596 (593).

studies in general and wisdom influences in the Book of Psalms in particular. His impressive list of publications on the Book of Psalms, his countless contributions to local and international Hebrew Bible conferences, as well as his current role as co-organizer of the "Writings" programme unit at the Society of Biblical Literature International Meeting all attest to the significant footprint Phil Botha leaves and continues to contribute in the study of the Hebrew Psalter, again both locally and internationally. He indeed made an indelible impact in our scholarly field. Especially during the last decade or so Phil Botha's research endeavours focused on the wisdom influences in Books I and II of the Psalter. He argued that the final editors of the Book of Psalms were associated with wisdom circles in the late Persian and early Hellenistic periods. They were, in turn, influenced by material in the Book of Proverbs. We are looking forward to seeing much more of Phil's meticulous research in this field in the years to come.

Phil Botha's academic career spans almost four decades. He joined the (then) Department of Semitic Languages at the University of Pretoria in 1980 as a part-time lecturer. After a period of two years' compulsory military service he returned to the academic world in 1983 as a researcher in the Centre for Islamic Studies at the Rand Afrikaans University. He joined the Department of Semitic Languages at the University of Pretoria in January 1984 as a full-time lecturer. He was subsequently promoted to senior lecturer (1988), associate professor (1994) and professor (1998). During his long career he made an immense contribution to the University of Pretoria in general, the Faculty of Humanities in particular, and especially in the field of Ancient Near Eastern Languages and Cultures during often painful and difficult processes of change at the university and various amalgamations of departments over a number of years. For his entire academic career, Phil Botha was one of the most prolific authors of scientific publications in his department. He was chair of the departmental research committee for many years and served in the Faculty of Humanities' research and postgraduate committees for almost two decades. He was the Faculty's research information coordinator from 2013 to 2018. Colleagues valued his wisdom, phlegmatic personality, calming influence and unique and dry sense of humour. Most important – Phil Botha inspired successive generations of students by his dedication, humility, sincerity and generosity. His influence on students is clearly visible in the fact that he successfully supervised twenty postgraduate students in the pursuit of their MA dissertations and/or PhD theses. He often served as an external examiner for postgraduate students from other universities. His international and local recognition is attested to by the fact that he has been a National Research Foundation rated researcher since 2002.

In the context of this issue of *Old Testament Essays* dedicated to Phil Botha, special mention should be made of his immense contribution as editor of this journal. He was the editor-in-chief of the journal for fourteen years, from 1994 to 2009. By the time Phil became editor, *Old Testament Essays* was the local mouthpiece of the Old Testament Society of South Africa, a journal

published once a year, containing mainly local conference contributions. Under his leadership, *Old Testament Essays* became an internationally recognised scholarly journal, now Scopus indexed, published three times a year, containing at least 20 articles per issue, with up to 40% of each issue contributed by international scholars. For this reason alone we are privileged to dedicate this issue of *Old Testament Essays* to Phil Botha on the occasion of his 65th birthday.

Honouring Phil Botha as an academic leader will not be complete without honouring Phil Botha, the human being. For his entire academic career he also served his church and community in various capacities. This is attested to by the many contributions he made in popular publications intended for the general public, his involvement in many projects that strove to make the Bible and knowledge about the Biblical social-historical context accessible to everyone interested in studying the Bible, and his invaluable participation in many Bible translation projects, not least of all the new Afrikaans translation project initiated by the South African Bible Society, *Die Bybel: 'n Direkte Vertaling*, to be published in 2020. Over many years the Department of Ancient and Modern Languages and Cultures received many guests from abroad. Phil Botha always impressed every guest with his hospitality, generosity, kindness, sincerity and caring. As editors we are serious when we claim that what is said about Job in Job 1:1 is true of Phil Botha. He is indeed blameless and upright; he fears God and shuns evil! Above all, Phil Botha is a family man. He cares deeply for his wife Annali and their children and grandchildren. His family provides him with gratitude, pride, and joy. We are privileged that they can all share in our modest attempt to recognise Phil Botha as a special human being.

Gert Prinsloo and Beat Weber acted as guest editors for the present issue. They wish to thank the editor-in-chief, Prof Hulisani Ramantswana, and the article editor, Prof Jaco Gericke, for their unwavering support through the entire process which culminated in the publication of this issue. The editors recognise also the important role Prof Gerrie Snyman (UNISA), Phil Botha's successor as editor-in-chief of *Old Testament Essays*, played in the realisation of this *Festschrift*. He provided invaluable information, advice and assistance throughout the project. The project commenced in earnest in March 2018 when Beat Weber suggested during one of his regular visits to the Department of Ancient and Modern Languages and Cultures as one of their valued research associates that Gert Prinsloo and he should initiate a *Festschrift* for our esteemed colleague and friend. Over many years a special bond developed between Beat Weber and Phil Botha and they participated in some joint research endeavours. Over a period of four decades the three Semitic professors at the University of Pretoria, Henk Potgieter, former head of the Department of Semitic Languages and later the Department of Ancient Languages and Cultures, Gert Prinsloo and Phil Botha forged a special friendship, collaborated in many research projects, and endeavoured in many ways to instil in their students a love for the Ancient Near Eastern Languages in general and the Hebrew Bible in particular. A

significant number of those students are now academics in their own right. Henk and Gert, and we are convinced scores of students we taught during the last four decades, remember the many hours we could spend with Phil, both socially and in earnest academic discussions, with gratitude.

Right from the start, the decision was made to invite international and local scholars working in the field of the Psalter and who had a specific and special relationship with the honouree to contribute to the volume. The guest editors were overwhelmed by and extremely grateful for the reaction by everyone that has been approached. The present issue is the result of that initial initiative and the positive reaction by the invited authors. The issue contains twenty-three contributions, eleven by authors from South African universities and twelve from abroad, many of them also with special links with South African universities. The contributions all focus on the study of the Psalter, ranging from studies on single psalms to the reception of the Psalter in contemporary rock music.

The issue is divided into two sections. In the first section, the focus is upon individual psalms. Johann Cook (University of Stellenbosch) compares Ps 39 (LXX 38) in its Hebrew and Greek form, departing from the question whether it can be classified as a retributive psalm. Gianni Barbiero (Pontifical Biblical Institute) argues that Ps 41:14 constitutes an inherent part of Ps 41 and should not be regarded as a redactional addition. Sigrid Eder (Katholische Privat-Universität Linz, Austria) investigates the chances and limits of narrative psalm analysis with her narratological analysis of Ps 64. W. Dennis Tucker, Jr. (Baylor University, USA) indicates that although Book IV of the Psalter (Pss 90-106) responds to the events of the exile, Ps 92 nevertheless confesses that the world remains well-ordered under YHWH's rule. Susanne Gillmayr-Bucher (Katholische Privat-Universität Linz, Austria) traces and analyses the various possibilities to interpret the images of the rivers and majestic waters in Ps 93:3-4. Henk Potgieter (University of Pretoria) argues that various already existing poetic compositions have been incorporated in Ps 116. While the psalm can be regarded as an anthology, it is nevertheless a unique composition. Madipoane Masenya (Ngwan'a Mphahlele) (University of South Africa) compares Ps 127:3-5 to a number of African/South African proverbs to reveal an underlying worldview that sets great store by large families and the celebration of women's roles as mothers. With reference to Ps 128, Hendrik Viviers (University of Johannesburg) illustrates that a material place is not only shaped physically and psychologically/spiritually by its inhabitants, but in turn also shapes them. Susan Gillingham (University of Oxford, UK) traces the reception of Ps 137 in Jewish and Christian circles and argues that it reveals different approaches to suffering. Huli Ramantswana (University of South Africa) engages in a decolonial reading of Ps 137 in the light of South Africa's struggle songs. Finally, David Firth (Trinity College Bristol, UK) proposes a unified reading of Ps 139 which uses

ambiguity as a central technique for developing different experiences for those who pray this psalm within the subgroup of the prayers of the accused.

In the second section, the focus shifts to groups of psalms, and the Psalter and its relations to books, themes and theologies. Phillip Sumpter (Nazareth Evangelical College, Israel) engages in a synchronic reading of Pss 1-14 in order to demonstrate the logic of the arrangement of the group of poems. Bernard Gosse (Antony, France) argues that the so-called first Davidic Psalter (Pss 3-41) reaffirms the Davidic Messiah and reveals the influence of the Book of Proverbs, especially Prov 30:1-14 in its emphasis on YHWH as the champion for the plight of the poor. Lodewyk Sutton (University of the Free State) engages in an intertextual reading of the concept of darkness in Pss 88 and 139 from the perspective of anthropological space. Beat Weber (Basel/University of Pretoria) investigates the concept of the (war)bow in two Asaph psalms (Pss 76; 78) and Hos 1-2, 7 to argue that the intertextual commonalities signal a common prophetic-levitic-northern Israelite environment. Pieter van der Lugt (Dokkum, The Netherlands) engages in a detailed synchronic analysis of Pss 90-100 to argue that the eleven poems constitute a literary cycle consisting of two sub-cycles of five poems each. Gert Prinsloo (University of Pretoria) conducts an intertextual reading of the poetic "twins," Pss 111 and 112 and concludes that Ps 112 is deliberately composed according to the "pattern" of Ps 111 and can be interpreted as a "midrash" on Ps 112. Nancy deClaissé-Walford (Mercer University, USA) analyses the role of Pss 135-137 in the shape and shaping of Book V of the Psalter. She argues that their assurance of Yahweh's presence and provisions allow David, in Psalms 138-145, to lead the postexilic people in blessing, praise, and thanks to the sovereign God. Johannes Bremer (Theologische Fakultät Trier, Germany) investigates the neglected topic of "land" in the Book of Psalms. Herrie van Rooy (North-West University) explores the place of Manuscript 18 in the history of the East Syriac Psalm headings to demonstrate the originality of many of the readings in this manuscript. Jaqueline du Toit (University of the Free State) compares popular examples of children's Bibles from two distinct traditions (Jewish American children's Bibles and Afrikaans children's Bibles) to argue that such Bibles are relevant for modern readerships in the deceptive simplicity of their textual engagement and their close alliance to the everyday. Jaco Gericke (North-West University) investigates the concept of divine justice from a philosophical point of view to indicate how concepts, concerns and categories in the analytic philosophy of properties can be used to update, refine and expand the explanatory framework for discussing related texts in the Book of Psalms on their own terms. Finally, Christo Lombaard (University of South Africa) explores different notions of the Psalter's ancient musicality and their later musical reception, specifically in Bono's Psalmic spirituality.

With this diverse collection of essays on the Book of Psalms we all, editors and contributors, dedicate this issue of *Old Testament Essays* with deep appreciation of and heartfelt gratitude to our friend and colleague.

Publications of Phil J. Botha

During his long career spanning almost four decades, Phil Botha (ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-00031910-8372>) contributed extensively in the field of Hebrew Bible and Syriac Patristic Studies. These publications attest to his academic citizenship, but also to his acute awareness that our academic endeavours should also be made accessible to the general public. In the context of this volume dedicated to him, we shall not list his numerous publications intended for general readership. We will concentrate on his so-called "scientific," peer-reviewed publications.

Contributions in peer-reviewed, accredited journals

- 2019 Together with Weber, B. "'The Lord is my light and my salvation ...' (Ps 27:1): Psalm 27 in the Literary Context of Psalms 25-34." *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages* 45/2: forthcoming.
- 2019 "Psalm 32: A social-scientific investigation." *Old Testament Essays* 32/1: 12-31.
- 2018 "Psalm 5 and the polarity between those who may stand before Yahweh and those who may not." *HTS Theological Studies* 74/1: <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v74i1.5087>.
- 2018 "Psalm 4 and the poor in the post-exilic province of Judah: A textual and contextual reading." *Journal of North-West Semitic Languages* 44/2: 23-39.
- 2018 "Psalm 62: Prayer, accusation, declaration of innocence, self-motivation, sermon, or all of these?" *Acta Theologica* 38/2: 32-48.
- 2017 "Psalm 39 and its Place in the Development of a Doctrine of Retribution in the Hebrew Bible." *Old Testament Essays* 30/2: 240-264.
- 2017 "Psalm 55 Interpreted in View of its Textual, Metatextual and Intertextual Connections." *Scandinavian Journal for the Old Testament* 31/1: 131-154.
- 2016 "Psalm 101: A supplication for the restoration of society in the late post-exilic age." *HTS Theological Studies* 72/4: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/hts.v72i4.3389>.
- 2016 "True Happiness in the Presence of YHWH: The Literary and Theological Context for Understanding Psalm 16." *Old Testament Essays* 29/1: 61-84.
- 2015 "Ephrem the Syrian's hymn *On the Crucifixion* 4." *HTS Theological Studies* 71/3: <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v71i3.3012>.

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- 2014 "The Exegesis and Polemical Use of Ps 110 by Ephrem the Syriac-speaking Church Father." *Old Testament Essays* 27/2: 395-411.
- 2014 Together with Kritzinger, J. P. K. "The significance of the second cave episode in the Vita Malchi." *HTS Theological Studies* 70/1: <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v70i1.2004>.
- 2013 Together with Kritzinger, J. P. K. "Rhetoric and argument in Chapter VI of Jerome's Vita Malchi." *Ekklesiastikos Pharos* 95: 283-293.
- 2013 "'I am like a green olive tree': The wisdom context of Psalm 52." *HTS Theological Studies* 69/1: 1-8.
- 2013 "Orthodox Ventriloquism in the Pseudo-Ephremic Sermon on Palm Sunday (Ephrem the Syrian, Sermones II, Sermon 3)." *Journal of Early Christian History* 3/2: 21-34.
- 2013 "Psalm 53 in Canonical Perspective." *Old Testament Essays* 26/3: 583-606.
- 2012 "Interpreting 'Torah' in Psalm 1 in the light of Psalm 119." *HTS Theological Studies* 68/1: 1-7.
- 2012 "Pride and the suffering of the poor in the Persian period: Psalm 12 in its Post-Exilic context." *Old Testament Essays* 25/1: 40-56.
- 2012 "Psalm 91 and its wisdom connections." *Old Testament Essays* 25/2: 260-276.
- 2011 "Poetry and Perlocution in Psalm 26." *Old Testament Essays* 24/1: 30-48.
- 2010 "Psalm 108 and the Quest for Closure to the Exile." *Old Testament Essays* 23/3: 574-596.
- 2010 Together with Potgieter, J. H. "'The Word of Yahweh is right' – Psalm 33 as a Torah-psalm." *Verbum et Ecclesia* 31/1: 1-8.
- 2009 "Answers Disguised as Questions: Rhetoric and Reasoning in Psalm 24." *Old Testament Essays* 22/3: 535-553.
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