

Anna Elise Zerneck

Response to Thomas Krüger: What Is the Origin of Original Thought?

Abstract: The rules governing the making of texts and the categorization of genres can be interpreted as another example of the tacit knowledge discernable in Old Testament texts. The biblical Hebrew term חכמה, “wisdom”, constitutes one example of this kind of competence.

Die Regeln für die Erstellung von Texten und die Kategorisierung von Gattungen können als ein weiteres Beispiel für das in alttestamentlichen Texten erkennbare implizite Wissen interpretiert werden. Der biblische hebräische Begriff חכמה, “Weisheit”, ist ein Beispiel für diese Art von Kompetenz.

Thomas Krüger’s task to look for tacit knowledge in the Hebrew Bible – to detect knowledge that is not verbalised in a collection of texts from an ancient culture – is not an easy one. Krüger classifies his findings into three types of tacit knowledge: professional knowledge, cultural/social/moral knowledge, and internal and external tacit knowledge. This response can only add two aspects: in a first step it will raise the question of whether a kind of (professional or cultural) tacit knowledge might not be detectable in the making of texts, and in a second step it will add some thoughts on Hebrew terminology.

It is part of the definition of tacit knowledge that these skills “are difficult to put into words and have to be learned in practice”.¹ To find such knowledge in a text looks like an unpromising task. But the rules that govern the making of texts may also have been part of some sort of tacit knowledge. The existence of genres in biblical and extrabiblical texts is well established. Exegetes who are working with a form-critical approach establish a genre by comparing different exemplars. They thereby abstract a pattern or even the ideal plan for a text of this genre, for example for a psalm of thanksgiving or a wisdom sentence. Genres in ancient Israel and the composition of texts according to their rules were probably done in a different way:² the ways of composing a lamentation, a psalm of thanksgiving,

¹ Burke 2016, 38.

² Genres abstracted from ancient texts by modern scholarship (critical or etic genres) have to be differentiated from genres as perceived and delimited in their culture or origin (ethnic or emic genres), Tinney 1996, 11–12; Zerneck 2011, 300–311.

a legal sentence, a love song or a prophetic oracle were presumably not guided by a master pattern book (to be used for the competent and examined specialists only, cared for by some royal or priestly officials), but by learning from examples. And for the ancient authors these might have been “so well internalized that individuals [were] no longer aware that they possess them”.³ There is one biblical text which reflects the transmission of the rules of composition and performance of a genre and the responsible experts: Jer 9:16–21,⁴ concerned with the women’s competence in lamenting the dead.

16 כה אמר יהוה צבאות התבוננו וקראו למקוננות ותבואינה ואל החכמות שלחו ותבואנה
17 ותמהרנה ותשנה עלינו נהי ותרדנה עינינו דמעה ועפעפינו יזלו מים
18 כי קול נהי נשמע מציון איך שדדנו בשנו מאד כי עזבנו ארץ כי השליכו משכנותינו
19 כי שמענה נשים דבר יהוה ותקה אזנכם דבר פיו ולמדנה בנותיכם נהי ואשה רעותה קינה
20 כי עלה מות בחלונינו בא בארמנותינו להכרית עולל מחוץ בחורים מרחבות
21 דבר כה נאם יהוה ונפלה נבלת האדם כדמן על פני השדה וכעמיר מאחרי הקצר ואין מאסף

16 Thus says YHWH Zebaoth: Consider, and call for the mourning women and they shall come; and send for the wise women and they shall come!

17 They shall hurry and raise a wailing over us, so that our eyes may run down (with) tears, and our pupils⁵ flow with water.

18 Oh, a sound of wailing is heard from Zion: “How we are ruined! (How) we are utterly shamed, because we have left (the) land, because they have cast [down]⁶ our dwellings.”

19 Oh hear, women, the word of YHWH, and let your ear receive the word of his mouth; and teach to your daughters a wailing, and each to her neighbour a dirge:

³ Burke 2016, 38, describing “habitus” according to Bourdieu as “a set of skills and assumptions so well internalized that individuals are no longer aware that they possess them”.

⁴ Most commentators see Jer 9:16–21 as a unit: Holladay 1986, 309–310; Seybold 1993, 128; Wanke 1995, 108; Werner 1997, 110; Fischer 2005, 362–363; Gulde 2007, 161–162; Schmidt 2008, 209–210; Schroer 2011, 94. Discussion: Gulde 2007, 160–168. Lundbom 1999, 557–568 sees two poems: Jer 9:16–18; 19–21.

Many commentators consider those passages in Jer 9: 16, 21 as secondary which introduce the text as YHWH’s speech and which are shorter (16) or lacking (21) in the Septuagint, cf. BHS; Wanke 1995, 108; Werner 1997, 110. Discussion: Holladay 1986, 310; Lundbom 1999, 559, 567; Gulde 2007, 160–168. This is the best solution at least for 21. Seybold 1993, 129–130 and Fn. 24 (198) re-constructs a poem in Jer 9: 16aß–17, 20, 21aß. b.

⁵ Holladay 1986, 313.

⁶ Discussion: Holladay 1986, 310.

20 “Oh, Death has come up into our windows, he has entered our palaces, to cut off the child from the street and the young men from the squares.

21 (Speak thus – oracle of YHWH:) Human corpses shall fall like dung on the open field, and like grain stalks after the reaper, and no one is gathering.”

Lamenting is a job for women (16) and is done vicariously for the public. Its effect is very emotional: the audience expects to cry (17). How to lament is a knowledge transmitted from mother to daughter and from one to the next or neighbour (20). The result is קינה, the lament for the dead (19).⁷ How to do a קינה properly probably did not only consist of the rules of saying the proper words, but also comprised the rules for their performance, perhaps clothing and behaviour, the way of declaiming/speaking/singing/crying and other criteria. The women who are knowledgeable in the art of lamenting are the experts, they are called מקוננות, “mourning women”, and החכמות, “the wise ones”,⁸ and transmit their competence to their daughters and to other women.⁹

This leads to questions about terminology. In several texts cited by Krüger, the phenomenon he interprets as tacit knowledge, or the person having this knowledge, is described with forms of the root חכם. The craftsmen working on the tabernacle have received חכמה וחכמה (Ex 36:1), “skill and intelligence” in the ESV, from YHWH. The competence needed for being a judge which is required of the future leaders of the people is described in very similar terminology, they are called אנשים חכמים ונבנים וידעים, “wise, understanding, and experienced men”. Might not therefore Hebrew חכמה “wisdom” comprise what is called “tacit knowledge” in late 20th and early 21st century CE concepts? It comes as no surprise then, as Krüger points out, that the internal place of this knowledge is לב, the “heart” – both for King David who is sinning by counting the people (2 Sam 24:10) and for the craftspeople working on the tabernacle who are חכם לב (Ex 36:1).

⁷ Schroer 2009, 305; 2011, 86–87.

⁸ This passage is interpreted as describing professionals by Wanke 1995, 108; Lundbom 1999, 559–556; Fischer 2009, 100; Schroer 2009, 304. Both terms stand in parallelism; there is no need to see different groups in the “mourning women”, the “wise women” (16) and the “women” (19), Fischer 2009, 101; cf. Schmidt 2008, 210. Holladay 1986, 312–313, suggests that the text may mock women mourning the death of Baal. Given the wide attestation of professional mourning women, this interpretation is unnecessary.

⁹ This is interpreted in different ways: Seybold 1993, 108; Wanke 1995, 109: teaching the non-professionals is necessary because of the overwhelming need for mourning (cf. Lundbom 1999, 565); Werner 1997, 111: this shows that the catastrophe spans more than one generation; Fischer 2005, 365: the dimensions of the catastrophe require an enlargement of the repertoire of mourning; Schmidt 2008, 211: now all women are meant; Gulde 2009, 70: the teaching is a taunt against the people in Jerusalem who believe in their invulnerability.

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