Jennifer Barbour, 'You do not know what disaster may happen in the land': echoes of Israel's city-laments in Qohelet's closing poem.

Summary:

This paper considers the possibility that the book of Qohelet is 'haunted' by collective memory of the nation's literary account of its history, considered through the example of the poem in 12:1-7. I compare with the Hebrew city-lament genre the poem's features of a city landscape, desertion, silenced agriculture, representative population, the lament *Kontrastmotiv*, darkness, and elegiac perspective. I suggest that this fits the poem's immediate context, in the preoccupation with sudden calamitous events of Chs. 11-12, and also its wider context in the book, in which the final poem of urban decline acts as a pendant to the opening royal fiction where a splendid city was constructed.

This paper is a shortened version of the last chapter of my DPhil thesis, which is entitled 'The story of Israel in the book of Qohelet: an intertextual study', outlined below.

Introduction

Summary of scholarship on the presence of Israel's history in the book of Qohelet, both historical allusions and ideas about history in the book. Summary of different scholarly views on the nearest literary affinities of the book (Stoic diatribes, the Biblical wisdom literature, etc). I will be proposing to draw it closer to other Second-Temple Jewish writing, inside and outside the Hebrew Bible. Method for identifying allusions: different models of intertextuality.

Chapter One

'All Princes, I': Biblical exegesis and historical reflection in 1:1, 1:12-2:26

The royal fiction sets a historically-reflective context for the book by its exegesis of biblical traditions about Israel's kings, presenting Qohelet as a composite Biblical monarch. This is critically done, using the stereotype of the Eastern king popular in Greek literature and also utilised in other Second-Temple Jewish writings; thus at the outset the book is concerned with Israel's history and with contemporary exegesis of the past.

Chapter Two

History, allusion and intertext in 1:4-11 and 3:1-8

Consideration of the opening poem of 1:4-11 as the meditations of King Qohelet on history in the public sphere (תחת השמש), including allusion to Biblical creation traditions and also prophetic expectation, with particular engagment with parts of the book of Isaiah (ראשנים / אחרנים). Comparison of the poem at 3:1-8, here read as part of the 'seeing everything' of the royal quest: exploration of the ancient exegetical tradition which relates the times of the poem to times in Israel's history, and the further possibility that the poem contains exegesis of Jeremiah's 'to build and to plant' refrain, thus reflecting the nation's own record of its past experiences.

Chapter Three

Monarchy, prophecy and exile in Israel's collective memory in Qohelet 4-6

Collective memory theory as a way of understanding Qohelet's particular kind of allusion, especially to nationally remembered traumatic events. Survey of reflection on the events of the collapse of the kingdom and the exile in other Second-Temple texts. Examination of 4:13-16 as a reference to a repeated biblical pattern of disrupted succession, related to the anxiety about succession and inheritance in the whole book. Echoes in Qohelet of the biblical language of prophetic criticism of the monarchy, and of biblical figurative language for the experience of exile, particularly in chs. 4-6.

Chapter Four

Heroes and villains of Israel's story in 4:17-5:6 and 9:11-18

Allusions to the Saul story at 4:17-5:6 and to the biblical and developing post-biblical traditions about Sennacherib's siege of Jerusalem in 701 at 9:11-18. Comparison with Ben Sira and Wisdom of Solomon for similar ways of alluding to Israel's history.

Chapter Five

The biblical language of city-lament in 12:1-8

Mirroring in obverse the construction of 'Solomon''s kingdom at the start of the book, the scene of a decaying community in 12:1-8 has its nearest figurative models in the Bible's stock of images for laments over fallen cities, especially Jerusalem. This observation draws on an ancient tradition of exegesis, found in Jerome and rabbinic writings; on this account, the close of the book is also historically concerned and contributes to inner-biblical exegesis of the story of the nation's past.

Conclusion

Consideration of the importance of Israel's history in the argument of Qohelet. This helps to elucidate further the question of who Qohelet's conversation partners are: evaluation of several commentators' reconstruction of the argumentative stance of Qohelet (Lohfink, Fox, Krüger), and of several accounts of Qohelet's place among the different streams of Second-Temple Judaism (Boccaccini, Collins, Sacchi), with some proposals for re-alignment.