The function of metatexts in the narrative books of the Old Testament: Source citations and other deictic elements as approach to biblical "historiography"

Mathis Kreitzscheck, Georg-August-Universität Göttingen

Thesis: The narrative books of the Old Testament use metatexts such as source citations to warrant claims made about the past.

1. Literary genres dealing with the past differ from each other from a perspective of pragmatics. To get a better understanding of the pragmatics of biblical narratives, the paper examines deictic phrases in Hebrew texts from the Old Testament. The analysis of deixis shows that some verses have less of a literary than a rhetorical function, i.e., they address the reader.

2. Source citations (e. g. 2 Ki 13:12) or formulae like "until this day" are examples for the use of deixis for rhetorical purposes. By connecting the time of the narration with the time of the narrator, they provide the reader with information about texts and are therefore looked at from a perspective of textual linguistics and called "metatexts" or "metatextual notes".

3. A statistical overview and a more detailed analysis of example phrases shows how this approach offer insights into the rhetorical or communicative role of such textual elements. A closer look at certain phrases in Joshua and Esther suggests that some deictic phrases are metatexts that function as testimony for the veracity of the tradition offered in the text. This in turn helps better understand the overall impetus of biblical narrative texts about the past, when it comes to questions about the link between history and theology or genre discussions about historiography.