Top Notch Participant Tracking in the Hebrew Bible

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The declared purpose of HIPHIL Novum is to aim high by publishing papers on next generation biblical research for education and research. Among other things, we want to promote first-rate, high-tech, front-end research that may be too technical for more prestigious journals, yet it embodies approaches, methods, and data that shapes the future and in few years will influence global technology for Biblical Studies.

For the 2016 volume, I can personally vouch for a perfect blend between mastery and mentoring, the old expert mentoring the young scholar. Thirty years ago I myself as a young scholar visited the Vrije Universiteit, and at first hand I experienced how the young researcher Eep Talstra was developing an annotated linguistic database of the Hebrew Bible and creating an attractive research environment in the Werkgroep Informatica. After forty years of research, Professor Eep Talstra is now crowning his impressive life project with sophisticated research on computer-assisted research. HIPHIL Novum is proud to publish the latest in-depth and fully technical account of how artificial intelligent programming is able to distinguish between actors and speakers in the Biblical texts. The paper "Approaching the mountain of Exodus 19: thou shalt explore syntax first" by Eep Talstra underpins the first command that thou must explore patterns of clause relations, verbal valence and participant tracking. He illustrates this in dealing with the linguistic challenge to produce solid evidence for when God, Moses and the elders are acting and speaking, and what it takes for a sophistic series of computer programs to trace such evidence through the text.

In the Spring of 2015 I stayed in Amsterdam as an affiliated researcher at the Eep Talstra Center for Bible and Computer, and I participated in the process of evaluating the output of Talstra's linguistic tools. We were in dialogue not only on the computational performance of the instruments on Exodus 19, but also on seminal work by Talstra on the Book of Zechariah. It is therefore with distinct pleasure that I am able for this volume to publish a second contribution inspired by this kind of top notch research in Amsterdam. In the paper "Participant-Reference Shifts in Zech. 1:1-6. An Assessment of Diachronic and Synchronic Approaches", the young scholar Christian Højgaard Jensen uses the output of the participant tracking programs for a reading of the opening passage of Zechariah 1. He also adheres to the first command to always start with the linguistic investigation before proceeding to literary interpretation. Jensen's paper illustrates how a young scholar can use the master's research on participant tracking for fruitful assessment of interpretations and translation. Building on the computer-assisted analysis of shifts in participant-reference, Jensen makes a fine case for adapting the top notch research in Amsterdam to discourse theory and Role and Reference Grammar in future research.