

## Eat this Scroll (Ezekiel 3): Reading as Eating with Special Reference to 'Niddah' (Menstruation)

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*S'appropriier l'écriture équivaut à incarner, au sens strict du mot, le langage. C'est-à-dire à donner corps à la Langue divine en l'absorbant dans le corps humain, en l'introjectant dans la chair. L'écriture dans la Bible s'avale et se mange.<sup>1)</sup>*

Reading with the body, not with the eyes but with the mouth and the stomach. The words from the book in Ezekiel quoted in the title invite and demand to absorb the scriptures into our bodies. They envision reading as eating: no wolfing down of “take away” stuff, but intake of food-incorporation of the word. The proof of the pudding is in the eating.

The passage from which the words are taken, Ezekiel 2:8-3:3, shows that language is physical, and has to be understood with the body. A voice speaks to Ezekiel as follows:

8 But you, human being, hear what I say to you; do not be rebellious like that rebellious house; open your mouth and eat what I give you.

9 I looked, and a hand was stretched out to me, and a written scroll was in it.

10 He spread it before me; it had writing on the front and on the back, and written on it were words of lamentation and mourning and woe.

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1) Julia Kristeva, *Le langage cet inconnue: Une initiation à la linguistique* (Paris: S. G. P. P., 1981), 103.

3:1 A voice said to me, human being, eat what you will get/find; eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel.

2 So I opened my mouth, and I got the scroll to eat.

3 The voice said to me, human being, this scroll shall feed your belly. Fill your stomach with it. Then I ate it; and in my mouth it was as sweet as honey.

2:8 וְאַתָּה בְּרֹאֲךָם שָׁמַע אֶת אֲשֶׁר-אָנִי

מְדַבֵּר אֵלַיךְ אֶל-תְּהִי-מְרִי כְּבֵית הַמְּרִי פֶּה פִּיךְ וְאָכַל אֶת אֲשֶׁר-אָנִי נָתַן אֵלַיךְ:

9 וְאַרְאֶה וְהִנְהִיךְ שְׁלוּחָה אֵלַי וְהִנְהִיבוּ מִגְּלַת-סֵפֶר:

10 וַיִּפְרֹשׂ אוֹתָהּ לִפְנֵי וְהִיא כְּתוּבָה פָּנִים וְאַחֲזֵר וְכָתוּב אֵלַיךְ קִנְיִם וְהִנְהִי וְהִי: 8

3:1 וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלַי בְּרֹאֲךָם אֵת

אֲשֶׁר-תִּמְצָא אֲכֹל אֲכֹל אֶת-הַמְּגִלָּה הַזֹּאת וְלֶךְ דַּבֵּר אֶל-בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל:

2 וְאַפְתַּח אֶת-פִּי וַיֹּאכְלֵנִי אֶת הַמְּגִלָּה הַזֹּאת:

3 וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלַי בְּרֹאֲךָם בְּמִנְךָ תֹּאכַל וּמִעֵד תִּמְלֹא

אֶת הַמְּגִלָּה הַזֹּאת אֲשֶׁר אָנִי נָתַן אֵלַיךְ וְאַכְלָה וְתִהְיֶי בְּפִי כְּרֶבֶשׁ לְמִתּוֹק: 7

Is Ezekiel a “body artist”? Eating the scroll a performance? Symbolic actions were characteristic for the prophets: “Prophets in Israel were known for backing up their word with their bodies (e.g. 1Kgs. 22:11; 2Kgs. 13:14-19; Isa. 8:1-4; 20:24; Jer. 27:2; 28:20-22; 32:6-15).”<sup>2)</sup> Ezekiel’s body is forced to physically digest God’s words. Four times the human being is called to eat the scroll. Twice even a causative verbal form(Hifil) is used in v.2 and v.3: God made him to feed his stomach. The body undergoes the action.

The book of Ezekiel was probably written during or after the Babylonian exile(593-539 B. C. E). This period is marked by an enormous increase of written texts. Literary prophetic

2) E. Davis, *Swallowing the Scroll: Textuality and the Dynamics of Discourse in Ezekiel’s Prophecy*, JSOTSup 78 (Sheffield: Almond, 1989), 70.

tradition emerges. The symbolic action of eating the scroll is a first reaction to this phenomenon.<sup>3)</sup> It tries to establish a relation between the written and the spoken word. The written word is put in the prophet's mouth and thus becomes oral again. The spoken word and the written one are intertwined: the explication lies in the application. Could eis-egesis thus be the true ex-egesis?

Ezekiel is aware of the multiplicity of languages, mention is made of "strangers who speak a foreign language you can't understand"(Ez. 3:5). In 593 BCE, Ezekiel is in Babylon at the river Kedar, far away from home. Still there is no need for him to speak a foreign tongue. The prophet may address his fellow exiles from Judah in his own language. However, this does not make his task much easier. His audience is a "rebellious house"(Ez. 2:8).

When we have a closer look on the scroll, that has writing on its front and on its back it becomes obvious that this is hard to produce, and awkward to read. There would be no point in eating it either, it would sit heavy on the stomach. Still it looks as if the only way to digest these indicting words is to eat them. Now in this process, the words are transformed. In the prophet's mouth, the scroll tastes like honey.

The exact content of the scroll remains hidden, even if it is described with three increasingly dramatic terms. The first, in an unusual masculine plural form,<sup>4)</sup> translated most of the times as "lamentation." The second seems to refer to mourning complaints and derives from a verb that is also used to denote the cooing of pigeons(Is. 38:14; 59:11) and the groaning of lions (Is. 31:4). It is a sound of longing and of pain. The third term

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3) Cf. Davis, *Swallowing the Scroll* who asserts that Ezekiel is a product of written prophecy.

4) Walter Zimmerli, *Klagelieder 1-24*, I, Teilband, BK XIII/1 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1969), 10.

is just a brief cry of agony:  $\text{׃}$ (*hi*). It could not be more poignant, yet it expresses all the suffering and sorrow. It cannot be, nor need it be, translated as it is an *onomatopoeia*. It is easily understood in any language: *uei*(Septuagint/Greek), *vae*(Vulgate/Latin), *woe* (English).<sup>5</sup> Sound and meaning are one.

The human body plays an important role in the book of Ezekiel, not only in the symbolic actions(Ez. 4:8-12; 5:1-4; 12), but in the lamentations as well(Ez. 6). The body of the prophet literally reflects the cultural traumatic experiences the people have undergone. Further uses the book of Ezekiel the female body to depict the calamities befalling Judah, and the people's guilt that caused them. Chapters 16, 19, and 23 portray the people as a woman, more precisely as a prostitute. In four texts in particular, the female body during menstruation symbolizes the awful and sinful situation of the land(Ez. 7; 18; 22; 36). I shall focus on these passages.

The background of this investigation is the cultural anthropological work by Mary Douglas, who states that in many societies, the (female) body functions as a symbol for that society's norms and values.<sup>6</sup> She perceives in different contexts the human body as a reflection of the society. It serves as a boundary marker. The human body is a microcosm which reflects the macrocosm, the social and religious community. Everything which trespasses the boundary of the human body can cause pollution. It seems that fluids like sexual emissions become symbolic expressions of cosmic transgressions. Alike in the Hebrew Bible generally, the female body symbolizes the community and its socio-religious concepts.

My questions will be: What kind of book are we asked to

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5) This differs from the Korean translations who read here a descriptive word for pain.

6) Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge, 1966).

eat, along with Ezekiel? First I shall describe how the female body during menstruation is designated through language. And, how does language transform our bodies? In a second step I will discuss the implications of this designation for hermeneutics and anthropology in gender perspective.

## 1. Menstruation and the female body

In Ezekiel 36:17-18 the land of Israel is likened to women during their menstruation. According to this text, the defiling conduct of the house of Israel caused the expulsion from the land:

Son of man, when the house of Israel lived in their own land, they defiled it by their ways and their deeds. Their ways before me were like the uncleanness of a woman in her menstrual impurity.<sup>7)</sup>

Many questions rise like: How to digest a text in which 'menstruation' is used polemically to describe the impure and deplorable state of the land? Who has written such a text, abusing the female body for his own purposes? The Hebrew word which is used here for menstruation is *niddah*(נדדה). In the book Leviticus, this is a technical term for the situation of a woman during her monthly cycle.

A Hebrew-German dictionary defines the core meaning of *niddah* as abhorrent and impurity('Abscheuliches, Unreines').<sup>8)</sup> Specific meanings are "1: impurity of the female blood flow" and "2: impurity generally", distinguishing several levels: the

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7) *English Standard Version* 2001.

8) Wilhelm Gesenius, *Hebräisches und Aramäisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament*, Frants Buhl, ed., 17th ed. (Berlin: Springer Verlag, 1959), 487.

physical description of the blood flow, and its possible religious or cultic implications. The dictionary qualifies the loss of blood in moral and religious terms. The *Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*, for its part, renders *niddab* as “I...impurity (unless...II flow of blood)” and “II...flow of blood (unless...I impurity).”<sup>9)</sup> It is left to the user of this dictionary to make their choice. In commentaries on Leviticus,<sup>10)</sup> as well as in Bible translations, impurity and menstruation are thus often used as synonyms. But is there any justification for this in the texts as the Hebrew knows a word of its own for “impurity”?

Personally, I tend not to translate the Hebrew term at all, and to just transcribe it with *niddab*. One reason for this is that it enables me to demonstrate the shift in understanding of the term. Secondly, it will thus become apparent that there is no equivalent to the term in the English language or indeed in our modern western perception of the body generally. Three different dimensions of *niddab* will be highlighted. We will discover a development from a neutral term to a polemic one.

### 1.1. *Niddab* as a cultic and neutral term<sup>11)</sup>

The meaning of the Hebrew word *niddab*(נִדְבָב) presumes knowledge of Lev. 15. This text uses a cultic language and is written in a sober tone. The structure of the chapter balances out the male and female body and both are often described with the same expressions. The topic of the final chapter of

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9) David Clines, ed., *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* (Sheffield: Sheffield Press, 1993ff), 621-624.

10) Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, Anchor Bible (Garden City/New York: Doubleday, 1991), 744.

11) Cf. Dorothea Erbele-Küster, *Körper und Geschlecht: Studien zur Anthropologie in Lev 12 und 15*, WMANT 121 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchner Verlagshaus, 2008).

the so-called purity laws in Leviticus 11-15 is male and female bodily fluids. The aim of these chapters is to prevent the sanctuary from being desecrated. They try to reduce ambiguity and use the body as a means to achieve this goal. In Lev. 15 both the female and the male body are perceived in relation to the sanctuary. Nonetheless Lev. 15 points out differences by marking the female body with a special term whereas the impure state of a man after the loss of semen is not designated by a special term.

In this chapter the Hebrew word *niddah* occurs 9 times-out of 27 instances in the Hebrew Bible as a whole and gives a certain definition of the term. The introductory verse about women in Lev. 15:19 reads:

When a woman has a discharge, her discharge being blood from her body, she shall remain in her menstrual separation [*niddah*](נדדה) seven days.<sup>12)</sup>

The Hebrew text uses different expressions to describe the situation of the woman: The words “her discharge being blood” indicate a physical phenomenon whereas *niddah* is different from that, it is rather a cultic classification.<sup>13)</sup> The statements in verse 25 on a discharge of blood that would last exceptionally long-“many days, not at the time of her menstrual separation (*niddah*)” and “beyond her period of menstrual separation (*niddah*)”-stress the temporal aspect of *niddah*. *Niddah* will last for a specific period of time(seven days, cf. Lev. 12:2), whereas the period of blood loss may be shorter or longer. *Niddah*, in

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12) David E. S. Stein, ed., *The Contemporary Torah: A Gender-Sensitive Adaption of the JPS Translation* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2006).

13) Cf. Baruch Levine, *Numbers 1-20*, Anchor Bible (Garden City/New York: Doubleday, 1993), 464: “Such a woman [a menstruating one] was declared to be impure during her period, but it is not the word *niddāb* that, by itself, connotes that impurity!”

this context, is a technical term for the cultic position which is caused by blood flow and which will last for seven days. In English we do not have an equivalent for this. *Niddab* cannot be translated as ‘menstruation’ in all cases, since the duration of the blood flow is variable whereas *niddab*, the exclusion from the sacred, will last for seven days by definition. *Niddab* as such is a situation caused by the blood flow and presupposes a cultic understanding.

The question now is, in which sense does the body, especially the loss of blood, matter? In some way the term *niddab* in Leviticus may refer to the bleeding, but blood as such is never called unclean in that book, and the period of *niddab* is fixed: 7 days, regardless of the actual length of the menstruation. The period during which women are regarded as a danger for the sanctuary or to put it the other way round where women are endangered by the sanctuary is independent from the actual length of blood loss.

After an analysis of the meaning of the word in Lev. 15 and 12 as a cultic and neutral concept, I come back to the question why menstruation and disgust are intermingled in Ezekiel, like in the accusation of the land in Ez. 36:17.

### 1.2. *Niddab* as a socio-religious concept

In the context of a set of regulations for the exiles-addressed are the male ones-in Ez. 18:5-7, the case of a possible sexual relation between a man and his neighbor wife is presented in parallelism with sexual contact between a man and a menstruating woman:

- 5 If a man is righteous and does what is just and right
- 6 if he does not eat upon the mountains

or lift up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel,  
does not defile his neighbor's wife  
or approach a woman in her time of menstrual  
impurity.<sup>14)</sup>

Lev. 15 states that intercourse with a menstruating woman will render a man ritually unclean for seven days. Lev. 18 even speaks of the total exclusion from the community which means the death of both man and woman(verse 9). The abstention from a woman in her *niddah*, according to Lev. 18:3, serves as a sign of distinction between Israel and other nations. Ezekiel 19:5-7 resembles Lev. 18:19, but differs from it in a crucial way, as it transforms a cultic concept into a moral one. Ez. 22:10 reiterates as well the list of taboos of Leviticus:

In you the fathers' nakedness is uncovered;  
in you they violate women in their menstrual uncleanness.

*Niddah* designates here, in fact, the woman herself. Even the woman during her menstruation is specified as "unclean" it becomes clear that the view on a woman during her period is not that negative: *niddah* is a woman's shield against any attempt to violate her. While Lev. 15 has the purpose of protecting the sanctuary and other people who may become unclean through contact, the moral lesson of Ezekiel 18 gives no clues for a negative appreciation of a menstruating woman.

As the prophet Ezekiel stems from priestly circles he uses the language and ideas from the so-called priestly book Leviticus, but in a rather loose way and with a different intention. The catalogue of prohibited sexual relations of Lev. 18 is transformed in Ez. 18 and 22 into a question of justice. The transformative process of the cultic term *niddah* moves in the book of Ezekiel

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14) *English Standard Version* 2001.

on into a polemic one.

### 1.3. *Niddab* as a polemic concept

In two texts from Ezekiel (chapters 7 and 36; see also Ezra 7), the term *niddab* is used to indicate and confirm religious, cultural, and ethical differences. These texts should all be seen in the context of post-Babylonian Exile literature. They presuppose the use of *niddab* in Leviticus, and transform it into a literary indication of what is foreign, outside the native system -under the assumption that such a clear-cut distinction can be defined. In Ez. 7:19-20 we read in the accusation about the land:

they shall fling their silver into the streets, their gold shall be treated as *niddab*(נִדְבָב)—as something which is like in the status of a menstruating woman. Their silver and gold cannot save them on the day of the wrath of GOD. They shall not satisfy their hunger or fill their stomachs with it. For it was the stumbling block of their iniquity. From their beautiful ornament, in which they took pride, they made their abominable images, their detestable things; therefore I will make of it an object of *niddab*(נִדְבָב) to them.

*Niddab* is used here in a context of abominations and impurities, and it is translated often as such.<sup>15)</sup> The land (Israel) is seen as a woman during her menstruation by the returnees

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15) Taria S. Philip, *Menstruation and Childbirth in the Bible: Fertility and Impurity*, SBL 88 (New York/Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang Pub, 2006) calls this a metaphorical usage of *niddab* which leads that menstruation and impurity are taken as synonyms: “One kind of impurity, the impurity of menstruation, now represents impurity itself”(37).

from the Babylonian exile. The catastrophe of the exile was due to religious and cultural pollutions. The amoral situation of the country is compared to a woman during her monthly blood flow. Menstruating women are equated with impurity, and a land deserving harsh judgment is presented as a menstruating woman-to the extent that impurity becomes a feminine concept, and that impurity as such is associated with women. Whereas Leviticus outlines a fictitious program, and can be read as a theoretical discourse, Ezekiel 7 uses the concept of *niddah* to stigmatize the women of a specific historical situation. This exilic Diaspora literature puts boundaries, not only between peoples, their cultures and religions(the Hebrews vs. the Egyptians, Canaanites, Babylonians, and Greeks), but between the sexes as well.

Ez. 36:17 and 7:19 use the term *niddah* as part of a prophetic accusation, stressing the impurity of the land. This usage harks back to the cultic ideology of Leviticus, even if it is transformed into a moral and socio-political symbolic system. All the passages of Ezekiel that allude to a woman in her menstruation have been “eaten up” so that I will move on to the second part about the implications of these findings for hermeneutics and anthropology.

## 2. Implications for biblical hermeneutics and anthropology

### 2.1. Body, language and practice

I have tried to show that there is a shift in gravity of the understanding of *niddah* in the purity laws towards the use of the word in Ezekiel: from a neutral concept to designate the woman during menstruation to a polemic metaphorical one for

something that is regarded as impure and should be shunned. Does this use in Ezekiel reflect a social practice?

Nothing has been said so far about the religious and historical background of the purity laws or about the way menstruation rites as a religious practice was performed in Ancient Israel. Could it go back to an experience of taboos?<sup>16)</sup> Do the regulations entail a social isolation as a protection and rest for women, next to the cultic isolation? Often a rather general cross-cultural comparison is eluded as supportive evidence that so called primitive<sup>17)</sup> religions and cultures exclude women during their menstruation from social life. However, we have no evidence of it in Ancient Israel.

The regulations in Lev 15 like most other texts from the Hebrew Bible have been formulated from a male perspective on women and their bodies. Thus the body is not a fixed object as we have seen in our exposition on *niddah*. The perception of the body has been formed by language, and as such the body has been formed itself. The perception of the physiology and the construction of a system of symbols are interwoven: in the discursive practice the period of *niddah* is said to last

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16) In the discussion on a similar version of this article at the Women's Center of Theological Study of EHWU University on 10 of April 2009 a traditional Korean practice was mentioned to me: In former times a rope has been put in front of the house after having given birth in order to protect the inside (the woman and the newborn child) and in order to protect the society from the woman. This reflects the ambiguity of the state of the woman. The Hebrew word for impure likewise entails both: being endangered by the holy and being dangerous to the holy place (thus the community). That's why I suggest to translate the Hebrew word נִדְּבָה with "taboo", "in conflict with the cult", "impure in cultic aspects." Cf. my translation of the book Leviticus, Ulrike Bail, et al., eds., *Bibel in gerechter Sprache* (Gütersloh: Mohr/Siebeck, 2007).

17) The term is misleading it is not used here as a counterpart to advanced, higher developed religions rather than as a descriptive term for tribal religions and cultures who do make a strong boundary between the material and spiritual world!

seven days. Physiological aspects are vaguely eluded-blood loss is quoted-however the duration of *niddah* is independent of the duration of the blood loss.

Symbolic patterns as the idea of impurity and pollution re-inforce social practices. In Leviticus as well as in Ezekiel the female body is (mis)used as a symbol of the community and of socio-religious representations, which in turn are formed by rituals and purity laws. Genital blood which trespasses the border of the female body is regarded as impure: "The danger which is risked by boundary transgression is power. Those vulnerable margins and those attacking forces which threaten to destroy good order represent the powers inhering in the cosmos."<sup>18)</sup> As such the female body becomes the instrument in these texts to set religious and cultic boundaries.

## 2.2. Reading as Eating-a program for a biblical anthropology

Like Ezekiel 3, some Psalms stress the close relationship between the reading process, the human body and identity. In the Psalms the corporality of the human being is related to one's spirituality and emotions. Ps 17:15 puts it this way:<sup>19)</sup>

In righteousness I will see your face;  
When I wake up, I will be satisfied with seeing your  
likeness.

Being satisfied is a central motif both in Ez. 3 and in Ps. 17. Through satisfaction-by seeing God in Ps. 17, by God's words in Ez. 3-the body is transformed. Reading is thus a phys-

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18) Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 161.

19) Cf. Dorothea Erbele-Küster, *Lesen als Akt des Betens: Eine Rezeptionsästhetik der Psalmen*, WMANT 87 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2001), 187.

ical process just as the Hebrew verb קרא(*qara*) express it which means “calling” as well as “reading” implying that to read is to read aloud. Different pronunciations involve different muscles.<sup>20)</sup> As I learned, in Hangul ㄱ(*giyeok*) is not just like the English k, the shape of the korean letter refers to the body, more precisely the throat, where the sound should be produced. Alike in Ez. 18 and 22, the female body should be related to God and God’s holiness which implies that the body is protected against exploitation and sexualisation instead.

A radically different view is found in Ez. 36:17-18: Rereading this text from a gender sensitive perspective has shown how the metaphorical use of cultic language instrumentalizes the female body in order to depict as unclean not only the land, but indeed women themselves.<sup>21)</sup>

The body plays an important role in the anthropology of reading, as the quoted passages have shown. To Ezekiel 3, reading is eating. The human being has to eat what is written, in order to be able to speak like a book. In two different but however complementary ways, Ez. 3 and Ez. 22 deal with the physical experiences of violence, suffering and pain by those under siege in Jerusalem and by the exiles in Babylon. Drawing on “refugee studies” we can read Ezekiel as reflections on traumatic experiences by refugees.<sup>22)</sup> Passages like Ez. 3 where the

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20) Cf. Christoph Wulf, *Anthropologie: Geschichte, Kultur, Philosophie* (Reinbeck bei Hamburg: Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verla, 2004), 154: “Bei der Artikulation sprachlicher Laute ist der menschliche Körper sowohl aktiv handelnd als auch passiv empfangend. [...] Sprache wurzelt in einer unmittelbaren Bewegung des menschlichen Körpers, in der Artikulation der Stimmwerkzeuge.”

21) Cf. Fokkelen van Dijk-Hemmes, “De vrouw als metafoor in profetisch beeldspraak. Een analyse van Ezechiël 23,” *Teksten van Fokkelen Dijk-Hemmes, J. Bekkenkamp en F. Dröes, De dubbele stem van baar verlangen*, Verzameld en ingeleid door (Zoetermeer: Meinema, 1995), 178-186; S. Tamar Kamionkowski, *Gender Reversal, and Cosmic Chaos: A Study of the Book of Ezekiel*, JSOT.ss 368 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003).

body of the prophet has to undergo pain<sup>23)</sup> and passages like Ez. 22 where the female body is protected could then be understood as answers to the historical, social and spiritual reality of exiles.

In all above discussed cases, language and body are interrelated. Ez. 22 formulates the war crimes committed against men and women. Ez. 3 relates how the complaint is swallowed and transformed in the body. The moment the words are physically absorbed their language changes: bitter becomes sweet. Body language thus serves as a remembrance of injustice, and as a token of God's righteousness.

### 2.3. Translation as Incarnation

Ezekiel 3, through its eating metaphor, highlights the crucial role of the act of reading, thus the receiver. And reception starts with translation. Or to put it more precisely: reception is translation.<sup>24)</sup> Translators are mediators between cultures, languages, and communities; translation is contextualization, as intercultural hermeneutics has shown.<sup>25)</sup>

Linguistic patterns determine what one perceives and how one thinks about it. But how can the linguistic system of Ancient Israel be translated into the linguistic system of mine which

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22) Cf. Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, *A Biblical Theology of Exile(Overtures to Biblical Theology)* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 2002), 75-104.

23) Kamionkowski, *Gender Reversal and Cosmic Chaos*, 67-70 interprets de passive role of Ezekiel in this passage and others(f.ex. in Ez. 3:26 his muteness) as an experience of emasculation("gender-reversal").

24) I would like to thank Arijan Verheij whse comments and corrections were helpful in this process.

25) Cf. Volker Küster, *Text und Kontext: Zugleich ein Versuch über die Minjung Theologie* (Nettetal: Steyler Verl, 1996).

is so different? Do we expose the Hebrew concepts of the body that are foreign to us in our translations? Or do we try to incorporate and thereby risking to annihilate them? The authors of the early Greek translation, the Septuagint, were faced with the same question. They chose a medical term, dropping the cultic dimension altogether. Likewise in English we do not have one single word referring to the cultic state of a woman due to her menstruation like the Hebrew *niddah*.

So, how to render *niddah*?<sup>26)</sup> Translations like “monthly flow” or “menstruation” seem at first hand an easy solution and could be understood as an inculturation, however the primary connotation is medical rather than cultic. My option in this article was mainly twofold: Either I rendered *niddah* with a rather long and awkward paraphrase “the cultic status of the women stemming from her menstruation” or with a transcription in order to show the strangeness-the untranslatability of this concept within the English text. My rereading of these passages did reveal the polemic use of *niddah*, thus the negative image of menstruating women which are transported by texts like Ezekiel 36 whereas some translations do hide it while rendering it with “impurity”, or “abhorrent thing.” Cross-references in a translation of the texts in Ezekiel to Leviticus 15 and its cultic and neutral use could open criticism: “The assumption is that once the constructedness of sexual difference in a text is revealed, alternative readings and alternative cultural choices may open up. Such methods are highly self-conscious or self-critical; they focus on the process of “reading” as an act of re-inscribing the text, re-appropriating or even re-writing it.”<sup>27)</sup>

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26) Spontaneously after my presentation of the paper at iktionos on 16 of April 2009 one member of the audience made the suggestion to render *niddah* with “waste of life” #korean# implying a neutral concept without despise for woman. At first sight this seems attractive as it could also allude to the intrinsic concept of Leviticus which states that the *nefesch*(life) is in the blood(Lev. 17:13v).

That's why I exposed the strangeness of the conceptions in my rereading.

I want to close this reflection on translation and the article as a whole with referring to the Korean language(Hangeul) as an example of contextualization. The creation of Hangeul in the 15th century was a process of inculturation: transforming the foreign, Chinese characters into native Korean characters, thus into the body of Korean culture. The oral Korean language was transformed into a script. Han(한) meant "great", "including everything" in archaic Korean, while geul(글) is the native Korean word for "script" Han, however, could also be understood as the Sino-Korean word 韓 "Korean", so that Hangeul came to signify "Korean script." This dynamic process of inculturation or rather accommodation goes on when English words take over a vernacular Korean shape and body.

Thus if text and context are interwoven in the hermeneutical circle, and if the text no longer has priority over the context, then the presupposition of one source that we simply need to move from one world into another becomes problematic. Translation as an intercultural process realizes itself beyond the supremacy of one language over another. An intercultural oriented theory of translation envisages a continuing series of encounters in a process that creates a space of "inter" and "between."

Translation is therefore an act of hospitality on both sides:<sup>28)</sup> we may incorporate the other, the foreign elements when we translate. I take refuge in the foreign language and at the same time I host the foreign language in my own room. The French philosopher Paul Ricoeur calls this hospitality of language.<sup>29)</sup>

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27) Charlotte E. Fonrobert, *Menstrual Purity: Rabbinic and Christian Reconstructions of Biblical Gender* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 9.

28) I am grateful to the hospitality of iktinos/Seoul, especially to prof. dr. Jungwook Kim.

Hospitality excludes violence-it is rather incarnation, welcoming, and ‘*sacramental intake*.’<sup>30)</sup> “Acts of translation add to our means; we come to incarnate alternative energies and resources of feeling”<sup>31)</sup> or as Ez. 3 puts it: it is in-take, incorporation of scripture, of the word, and being transformed by it.

<주요어>

독서, 식사, 상징, 생리, ‘니다’, 문화인류학

<Key Words>

Reading, Eating, Symbol, Menstruation, Niddah, Cultural anthropology

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29) Paul Ricoeur, *Sur la Traduction* (Paris: Bayard, 2004), 20.

30) Georg Steiner, *After Babel: Aspects of language & translation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, <sup>3</sup>1998; org. ed. 1975), 315.

31) *Ibid.*, 315.

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<초록>

## 이 말쑤를 먹어라!(겔 3)

-식사로서의 독서: 문화인류학적 관점에서 본 히브리어  
'Niddah'(생리)와 그 번역 문제-

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에스겔 3:1-3에 따르면, 성경의 독자들은 말쑤를 먹고 몸에 흡수하여야 한다. 즉, 독서는 식사이다. 그렇다면, 에스겔은 어떤 책을 먹어서 그 언어가 우리의 몸을 변형하도록 제시하고 있는가? 필자는 (여성의) 몸이 사회의 규범과 가치를 상징한다는 매리 더글라스의 문화인류학적 관점을 통하여, 에스겔서에서 몸, 특히 여인의 몸이 어떤 역할을 하는지 살피고자 한다. 에스겔서는 네 본문에서 생리 중에 있는 여성의 몸이 처참한 땅의 상태를 상징하는 데 사용되고 있다(겔 7; 18; 22; 36). 따라서 필자는 여성의 몸이 이 본문의 언어에서 어떻게 묘사되고 있는지 살피며, 이것들이 인류학과 해석학에 어떤 함의를 가지는지 보고자 한다. 우리는 식사로서의 독서라는 은유를 통하여 성경 번역이 성육신하여야 함을 살필 수 있을 것이다.

<Abstract>

## **Eat this Scroll (Ezekiel 3): Reading as Eating with Special Reference to 'Niddah'(Menstruation)**

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The words from the book in Ezekiel quoted in the title invite and demand the reader to absorb the scriptures into one's body. They envision reading as eating. The passage in Ezekiel 2:8-3:3 shows that language is physical, and has to be understood with the body.

I shall focus on some specific parts of the book of Ezekiel where the body plays a prominent role, especially the female one. My questions will be: What kind of book are we asked to eat, along with Ezekiel? And, how does language transform our bodies?

The background of the investigation is the cultural anthropological work by Mary Douglas, who states that in many societies, the (female) body functions as a symbol for that society's norms and values. Ezekiel (mis)uses the female body to depict the disaster and misbehaviour of Israel. In four texts in particular, the female body during menstruation symbolizes the awful and sinful situation of the land(Ez. 7; 18; 22; 36). First I shall describe how the female body is designated through language in these passages. In a second step I will discuss the implications for anthropology and hermeneutics. Reading as eating seems to be a program for a biblical anthropology. And as Ezekiel 3, through its eating metaphor, highlights the crucial role of the act of reading, translation will be understood as incarnation.