

## Society of Biblical Literature International Meeting, Vienna, July 6-10, 2014

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The meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature in Vienna, June 6-10, 2014, was the 32<sup>nd</sup> international congress in the history of the society, this year organized in cooperation with the European Association of Biblical Studies (EABS). Ever since the first International Meeting in Salamanca (Spain) in 1983, these SBL global gatherings have been held annually outside North America and are designed to provide their own unique forum for international scholars who might be unable to attend the annual congress in the USA. The American meeting is in fact the largest single gathering of biblical scholars worldwide. The International Meetings, however, with their significant attendance and widely varying locales, provide an alternative but no less prestigious platform for scholarly discourse across continents.

It is worth noting that the SBL, founded in New York City in 1880, is deemed the oldest and largest learned society devoted to the critical study of the Bible across a variety of academic disciplines. In fact, members of the society specialize in fields as diverse as – to quote John E. Kutsko, SBL Executive Director, in his welcoming address to the SBL members gathered in Vienna – “Akkadian philology, archaeology of gender, computer-assisted research, psychoanalytic criticism, and translation theory, in addition to the textual and interpretive histories of biblical literature and other scriptures.” Since 1881, the society has published its flagship *Journal of Biblical Literature*, one of the oldest and most distinguished journals of biblical scholarship and widely considered the premier journal dedicated to the study of the Bible. The first annual meeting of the SBL, held in New York City in June of 1880, attracted as much as eighteen people. Currently, by contrast, the society’s thousands of members represent over 2,200 institutions in ninety-four countries and six continents.

For their part, the SBL's International Meetings usually draw between 500 and 800 attendees from over 40 countries, and the meeting in Vienna in July 2014 was no exception in this respect. The picturesque country of Austria was hosting the International Meeting for the second time. For both gatherings, in 2007 and 2014, the host institution was the University of Vienna, the oldest university in the German-speaking world, founded in 1365. The meeting had the specific support of four of the university's faculties: Historical and Cultural Studies, Philological and Cultural Studies, Catholic Theology, and Protestant Theology. Helping also to organize the event were the Institute of Jewish Studies and the Arbeitsgemeinschaft Jüdische Studien in Österreich. The latter offered sessions on the following topics: "Bible and Cinema", "Midrash, Halakhah and Reception", and "Reception of the Bible in the Sign of World War One." Truly, the program of this year's International Meeting in Vienna proved exceedingly rich. The opening address on July 6 was given by Prof. Armin Lange of the University of Vienna, chair of the 2014 International Meeting Local Program Committee: *Between Messiah and Halakhah: Jeremiah 33:14-26 and Its Reception in Judaism and Christianity*. On July 7 and 8, an impressive 58 sessions took place on each day, with each session comprising from two to five lectures; on July 9, there were 55 sessions. On the final day, 47 sessions were organized, yielding a total of 218 sessions during the entire four-day long congress (on July 6 the only event was the plenary opening session).

This year's congress, as always, was open to a wide range of participants, including both doctoral students and many well-known professors renowned for their contributions to biblical scholarship. Among the world-class experts in attendance were Joseph Blenkinsopp, David Clines, John J. Collins, Francis Moloney, Thomas Römer, Ben Witherington, and Lawrence Schiffman, just to name a few. For the benefit of students, the society designed some special sessions, such as "Grants and Funding: Q&A session for Students and Post-docs" (8 July) and "The Job Market Inside and Outside of Academia: A Q&A Session for Students and Post-docs" (July 9). The former focused on applying for funding and locating funding bodies for research projects in different European contexts. The latter gave insights into the current situation in the academic job market and the process of applying for jobs, from the perspectives of both the applicant and an institution's human resources department. The Annual Meetings held in the USA provide some special career opportunities in the form of an Employment Center, offering the capability of listing jobs online, displaying candidates' credentials and registering for interviews. The International Meetings, however, do not currently provide such opportunities in any organized way.

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We were pleased to note the presence of several biblical scholars from Poland, and indeed some actively participated in the congress by presenting their recent papers. Teresa Stanek, from the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, delivered the lecture *Liturgical Division of the Torah as the Unit Delimitation Tool: Preliminary Remarks* (10 July). Ilona Skupińska-Lovset, from the University of Łódź, gave a talk entitled *Excavating Bethsaida: Archaeological Documentation of Religious Life* (10 July). Two professors of New Testament exegesis at the Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw, Janusz Kręcidło and Bartosz Adamczewski, delivered their lectures on *Chapter 21 of the Gospel of John as an Ecclesiological Relecture of John 1–20 in the Community of the Beloved Disciple* (8 July) and *Paul's Final Reconciliation with the Jerusalem Leaders?* (9 July) respectively. Łukasz Niesiołowski-Spanò, from the University of Warsaw, gave a lecture entitled *The Process of Ethnogenesis in Palestine. Whose Task Was It?* (7 July). Jacek Stefański, a professor at the Major Seminary of the Diocese of Kalisz, offered a lecture on the topic *Speaking in Tongues or Making Noises? Reexamining 1 Corinthians 14* (7 July). Tomasz Twardziłowski, a PhD student from the Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw, presented two lectures: *The Cry of Stones (Lk 19:39-40) from the Perspective of Ecological Hermeneutics* (7 July) and *Feminist Interpretation: The Unreachable Model for Ecological Hermeneutics?* (10 July). Among the participants of the congress were also Wojciech Węgrzyniak, from the Pontifical University of John Paul II in Cracow, and Krzysztof Napora and Adam Kubiś, both of the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin.

The numerous publishers and other exhibitors who brought their latest in-print and digital resources (e.g. BibleWorks, Accordance, Logos) enriched the SBL meeting in Vienna. On July 9, a panel discussion took place on the topic of E-books. Representatives of Brill Publishers, De Gruyter, Mohr Siebeck, Peeters Publishers, and Vanderhoeck & Ruprecht all participated in the discussion, addressing the question of whether the E-book is really the future of publishing. On the same afternoon, the publishing representatives also organized a 3-hour long demonstration about online book publishing. It should be noted that Peeters Publishing and the Nida Institute of Biblical Scholarship, an arm of the American Bible Society, also served as official sponsors of the congress. For instance, the later offered the session “Translating Alterity: Reflections on Bible Translation in Light of Psychoanalytic Theory.”

Vienna – as one of the most famous European capitals and a major world crossroads and cultural center – lent itself to field trips and other relevant connections. Among these were congress-sponsored guided visits to “The

Ephesus Museum” (one of the world’s largest and most important collections of artifacts from Ephesus) and “The Papyrus Museum” of the Austrian National Library. Participants of the International Meeting also benefited from the official gatherings of other organizations convened in Vienna at the same time. For example, SBL members had the chance to attend the meeting of the Anglican Association of Biblical Scholars, organized off-site at the Christ Church, with the additional opportunity of meeting the local Anglican congregation. The SBL members benefited also from several sessions organized by the European Association of Biblical Studies (EABS): “Anthropology and the Bible”, “Editorial Techniques in the Hebrew Bible in light of Empirical Evidence”, “Graeco-Roman Society and the New Testament”, “Since Fiction and the Bible”, and “The Reception of the Scripture in the Patristic Exegesis (II-VIII centuries)” among others. In fact, EABS, who meet once a year in various European venues, made a point in 2014 of coordinating their annual gathering with the SBL International Meeting in Vienna.