

What Are They Saying About the Minor Prophets?

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When Augustine coined the term ‘Minor Prophets’ for the twelve books from Hosea to Malachi,¹ it was not a slur on their status but a comment on their brevity by comparison with the ‘Major’ (i.e. longer) prophetic books. Many scholars now prefer what is in fact older terminology: ‘the Book of the Twelve’, often abbreviated to ‘the Twelve’ which is what, for convenience, I shall use here. Each of the Twelve has its own introduction (Hos. 1:1; Amos 1:1; Jon. 1:1; Hab. 1:1 and so on) and, until recently, has mostly been studied as a self-contained text. Yet these twelve books always form a distinct group in biblical manuscripts, whether Jewish or Christian. They sometimes follow the ‘Major Prophets’ (as in modern vernacular bibles) but often precede them. But they are never separated - although Micah might well have gravitated nearer to Isaiah (cf. Isa. 2:2-5; Mic. 4:1-5) or Jonah been inserted after 2 Kings 14:27 (‘Jonah son of Amittai’) or Haggai and Zechariah linked with Ezra (concern for the rebuilding of the Temple). In fact, the Twelve seem to have been a fixed unit from at least the second century BCE when Ben Sira referred to ‘the twelve prophets’ (Sir. 49:10). But only within the last few decades have biblical scholars seriously considered the Twelve as a work, marked by its own growth-history, agenda and significance.² Although significant work has appeared on the individual books,³ there will not be space to do justice to it, and so I will focus on the main developments in the more innovative features of recent research.

¹ In *De Doctrina Christiana* 2.13

² In patristic times, there were complete commentaries on the Twelve (three have survived in Greek from the fourth and fifth centuries CE). Jerome seems to have been the first to treat the books piecemeal.

³ For a useful survey of each book that also considers its place in the Twelve, see P.L. Redditt, *Introduction to the Prophets* (Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2008), pp. 195-355.

The Twelve as a Unified Collection?

The earliest explanation for the appearance of the Twelve as a group, was that the component books were too short to survive as individual scrolls and so were assembled and subsequently copied together. There may be some truth in this, at least in the pre-codex era (after which tradition would, presumably, have kept them together). But it doesn't explain why they are always the same twelve in the same order.⁴ New questions have been asked. Can stages of growth in the collection be isolated, using the tools of source and redaction criticism? Is the final juxtaposition of books accidental, or does it reveal a coherent theological viewpoint or even story-line? Around these questions, two main areas of research and debate have evolved. The first, which can be called diachronic, tries to identify historical strata, each with its own theological character, and the stages by which these were combined. The second, which can be called synchronic, reads attentively across the surface of the texts, either from the supposed point of view of the editors and their audiences (canonical reading), or from that of the modern reader (reader response). The methodologies often overlap, though occasionally they are polarised. But before going any further, it will be helpful to trace each of the major lines of development, the diachronic and the synchronic.

Diachronic Approaches: A History for the Twelve?

An attempt to trace the development of individual books into an organised whole was made as early as the mid-nineteenth century CE (Ewald), followed in the opening decades of the twentieth century by further reconstructions (Steuernagel, Budde Wolfe).⁵ No great interest was, however, generated until an unpublished Yale thesis by Dale Schneider (1979) aligned stages of chronological growth with canonical concerns: that is, the meaning which each formative stage might have had for the communities which triggered re-writing. During the 1980s, there were further redactional studies by Weimer, who drew attention to different linguistic layers shared across the Twelve, and Bosshard, who noted parallels with the growth of the Isaiah corpus.

A new impetus came with James Nogalski's two-volume work on 'Literary Precursors' and 'Redactional Processes'.⁶ In the first volume, Nogalski argued

⁴ The sequence of the first six books differs in Hebrew and Greek Bibles, but each remains stable; see below, n. 14. The order is sometimes aberrant in the Pseudepigrapha.

⁵ For details see B.A. Jones, *The Formation of the Book of the Twelve: A Study in Text and Canon* (Atlanta: SBL, 1995); M.A. Sweeney, *The Book of the Twelve Prophets* 2 vols. (Berit Olam; Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2000), pp. xxi-xxii.

⁶ J.D. Nogalski, *Literary Precursors to the Book of the Twelve and Redactional Processes in the Book of the Twelve* (BZAW 217, 218; Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1993).

that growth was not just the result of haphazard collocations of completed books, but that editors had, at various times, prepared books to be read in sequence by making textual adjustments. The evidence for this he found in a series of ‘catch-words’ and/or ‘thematic synonyms’ regularly occurring at the ‘seams’ between books. This has proved fruitful but controversial. Some of these proposed catchwords or phrases are striking, but others are too scattered or too insignificant to bear the weight Nogalski gives them; also there is no clear definition of what constitutes a ‘catchword’ or a ‘seam’, and the distinction between catchwords and thematic links is blurred. Nogalski addresses these criticisms in an article in which, while defending his core findings, he makes clearer distinctions and helpfully develops the thematic aspects (thereby overlapping with synchronic studies).⁷

The important work pioneered by Nogalski, was continued by others, including a panel of scholars mainly, though not exclusively, North American, who produced several significant publications with an emphasis – again not exclusive – on redaction, through which developments may be tracked.⁸ The two sides of the debate were subsequently summarised by Nogalski and Ehud Ben Zvi,⁹ and in January 2011 an international colloquium was held in Münster to assess recent developments. Papers given at this conference are nearing publication.¹⁰

Much light has undeniably been shone on links between various books. One of the problems with the redactional approach, however, is that it has resulted in many different reconstructions: stages of growth have been demonstrated to be anything between three and thirteen. Some broad lines have emerged, for instance that there was probably an early stage when Hosea, Amos, Micah and Zephaniah were brought together by means of their historicising superscriptions into a ‘Book of the Four’; and that Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi were edited together in the Persian period. Clearly, the Twelve bear the marks of a long and complex history, and this in itself is an important conclusion. But for the developmental details, and the ideologies that shaped the growth, there is as yet no consensus.

⁷ J.D. Nogalski, ‘Intertextuality and the Twelve,’ in J.D. Watts & P.R. House (eds.), *Forming Prophetic Literature* (Sheffield: Academic Press, 1996), pp. 102-24.

⁸ J.D. Watts, & P.R. House (eds.), *Forming Prophetic Literature: Essays on Isaiah and the Twelve in Honour of John D.W. Watts* (Sheffield: Academic Press, 1996); J.D. Nogalski, & M.A. Sweeney (eds.), *Reading and Hearing the Book of the Twelve* (Atlanta: SBL, 2000); P.L. Redditt, & A. Scharf (eds.), *Thematic Threads in the Book of the Twelve* (Berlin/New York: W. de Gruyter, 2003).

⁹ E. Ben Zvi and J.D. Nogalski, *Two Sides of a Coin: Juxtaposing Views on Interpreting the Book of the Twelve/the Twelve Prophetic Books* (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2009).

¹⁰ J.D. Nogalski & J. Wöhrle (eds.), *Perspectives on the Formation of the Book of the Twelve* (BZAW; Berlin: W. de Gruyter, forthcoming).

Synchronic Approaches 1: Systematic Editing?

Partly in tandem with, and partly in reaction to, the work of redactional reconstruction went attempts to make sense of the Twelve as they lie before us now, to tell their story, to listen for their changes of register. Some recurring literary features were highlighted by Herbert Marks in an influential article,¹¹ but the first major attempt to trace a unifying story-line came in 1990 with a monograph by Paul House.¹² House read the twelve books as a kind of divine comedy, with an ultimately hopeful ending, with structure, plot and characters understood in literary, even Aristotelian categories. The ‘plot’ moves through sin (Hosea to Micah), and catastrophe (Nahum to Zephaniah) to restoration (Haggai to Malachi); the ‘characters’ include God, the prophets, Israel/Judah, and various foreign nations.

Although this particular attempt to understand the Twelve attracted criticism, it also stimulated other scholars to investigate possible literary, thematic, and narrative coherence. Notably, Marvin Sweeney is so far unique in offering complete (though brief) linear readings of both Hebrew Masoretic Text (MT) and Greek Septuagint (LXX).¹³ He is convinced that synchronic readings should come before attempted historical reconstructions. He finds in the alternative order of LXX a clearer, and earlier, logic than in MT (against Nogalski, who assumed that LXX had disrupted MT’s order).¹⁴ LXX, he argues, starts with a clear focus on the fate of the Northern Kingdom (Hosea-Amos), before shifting to Judah and then to foreign nations. But by placing Joel after Hosea, MT blurs this ‘storyline’. Hosea and Joel are intended to be ‘programmatically’ and the remaining ten books elaborate various aspects of the dual theme of Israel/Judah and the Nations against the backdrop of the eighth to the fifth centuries BCE (although the sequence is not, and is not intended to be, strictly chronological). Sweeney has certainly identified a number of clearly significant elements in

¹¹ H. Marks, ‘The Twelve Prophets,’ in R. Alter & F. Kermodé (eds.), *The Literary Guide to the Bible* (London: Collins, 1987), pp. 207-33.

¹² P.R. House, *The Unity of the Twelve* (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1990).

¹³ M.A. Sweeney, ‘Sequence and Interpretation in the Book of the Twelve,’ in Nogalski & Sweeney, *Reading and Hearing*, pp. 49-64. A study of LXX Hosea-Jonah can be found in K. Jeppesen, ‘“The Lord God has Spoken and who will not Prophesy?” From Osee to Jonas in the Septuagint,’ in C. McCarthy & J.H. Healy (eds.), *Biblical and Near Eastern Essays in Honour of Kevin J. Cathcart* (London: T & T Clark, 2004), pp. 105-17.

¹⁴ The order of LXX is Hosea, Amos, Micah, Joel, Obadiah, Jonah; that of MT Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah. The last six books follow the same order in both traditions., The jury is still out on which sequence is the earlier. There may have been a plurality of versions circulating together: B.A. Jones, ‘The Book of the Twelve as a Witness to Ancient Biblical Interpretation,’ in Nogalski & Sweeney, *Reading and Hearing*, pp. 65-74; or earlier and later versions may have overlapped: J. Barton, *Oracles of God: Perceptions of Ancient Prophecy in Israel After the Exile* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1986), p.85 (he comments on the apparent lack of concern about the differences). The original translation of the Twelve may have followed the Masoretic order, not, as is generally assumed, the ‘Greek’ one: J.M. Dines, ‘Verbal and Thematic Links between the Books of the Twelve in Greek, and their Relevance to the Differing Manuscript Sequences’ in Nogalski and Wöhrle, *Perspectives on the Formation of the Twelve*, forthcoming.

both LXX and MT, but with very broad brush-strokes. To produce this kind of overall movement, he has to ignore much of the small print, so to speak, the various details that don't fit. The shift from pre-exilic to post exilic contexts is clear, but very general. The historical location of the two textual traditions – in the reigns of Hezekiah and Josiah for the Hebrew behind LXX, and the period of Ezra-Nehemiah for the Hebrew behind MT – is interesting, but based on many uncertainties; it inevitably suffers from the same problems as other redactional schemes: historical and textual presuppositions for which there is no firm evidence.

Synchronic Approaches: 2: A Themed Anthology?

Others understand the Twelve not as a tightly knit sequence, but as a more loosely organised 'anthology', given a certain unity through recurring linguistic features, themes and motifs. There is a marked difference between the findings and viewpoints of those who argue for unified editing, such as Nogalski, House and Sweeney, and those who argue along anthological lines. In the latter case, there is a spectrum of scholarly positions as to how tight the organisation is. Marks thinks the order is mainly inconsequential, although with some guiding principles.¹⁵ Ben Zvi denies any purposive arrangement.¹⁶ More representative is the view of Terence Collins.¹⁷ From an avowedly redactional perspective, Collins argues that (analogously to what seems to have happened with Isaiah), post-exilic writers brought together into one scroll a number of individual books which had come to be recognised as authentically 'prophetic'. The organisation is not haphazard: the individual books 'supplement one another in a way that only becomes evident when we read them through from start to finish as a single work'. He thus comes close to a systematic reading, though with different emphases from Sweeney's. Books are linked by recurring themes and verbal formulations 'like so many threads ... particularly noticeable at the main points of juncture, namely, the end of one section and the beginning of another.'¹⁸ Independently of Nogalski, whose more detailed monograph appeared in the same year, Collins noted the significance of catchwords, though without using the term and without positing extensive editorial intervention, which marks Nogalski's position. He is more interested in identifying thematic 'threads'.¹⁹ As this is an area which has produced a number of different results, it is worth making some comparisons.

¹⁵ H. Marks, 'Twelve Prophets,' pp. 207-08.

¹⁶ E. Ben Zvi, 'Twelve Prophetic Books or "The Twelve"?' A Few Preliminary Considerations,' in Watts & House, *Forming Prophetic Literature*, pp.125-56.

¹⁷ T. Collins, *The Mantle of Elijah: The Redaction Criticism of the Prophetic Books* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993).

¹⁸ Collins, *Mantle of Elijah*, p. 65.

¹⁹ A metaphor which was to gain ground; cf. Redditt & Schart, *Thematic Threads* (above, n.8).

Unifying Themes?

Collins identifies no less than eight major themes: covenant-election, (in)fidelity, (in)fertility, (re)turning, divine justice/mercy, divine sovereignty, the Jerusalem temple/Mt Zion, the nations as enemies/allies. He finds a clear ideology emerging for the future of the true Israel as restored Judah, but an ambiguity as to how far foreigners will participate in its life and worship.

In an article published a year after Collins' monograph, Richard Coggins extracts two major themes: Israel's relationship with foreign nations, and attitudes towards the cult. In the first case, he traces a movement in which foreign powers are first God's instruments of punishment (Hosea-Micah; cf. Isa 10:5-6), then evil oppressors themselves needing to be punished (Nahum-Habakkuk; cf. Isa 10:7-19), but who finally gain some acceptance (Haggai-Malachi). Although historically implausible, he suggests, this 'story-line' 'is a remarkably effective device for showing how transformations can come about in the most unpromising situations' and can provide 'a clear thematic development'.²⁰ In the second case, attitudes towards the cult shift from condemnation of insincere practice (Hosea-Amos) to emphasis on the need for proper observance (Haggai-Malachi). Again, this is a very broad movement; it does not, for instance, allow for the more positive approach already in Joel. But Coggins' argument is that a complete reading of all twelve books holds together the post-exilic community's concern for a purified cult, centred on the Jerusalem Temple, as essential for its survival and well-being.

Others have identified one theme which takes precedence over the rest. The one most often highlighted is the motif of 'The Day of the Lord' which is found – explicitly at least – almost exclusively in the Twelve.²¹ Others include 'Davidic hope'²² and 'wisdom.'²³ Within the latter, a concern for 'theodicy' can be discerned, especially through the repeated use of Ex. 34:6-7.²⁴ Coggins suggests that, along the lines of Sir. 49:10, where 'the twelve prophets' are described as

²⁰ R.J. Coggins, 'The Minor Prophets – One Book or Twelve?' in S.Porter et al (eds.), *Crossing the Boundaries: Essays in Biblical Interpretation in Honour of Michael D. Goulder* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), pp. 57-68, here p. 65. Coggins' answer to his own question is 'both,' p. 68.

²¹ See e.g. D.L. Petersen, 'A Book of the Twelve?' and R. Rendtorff, 'How to Read the Book of the Twelve as a Theological Unity' in Nogalski & House, *Reading and Hearing*, pp. 3-10 and 75-87; J.D. Nogalski, 'The Day(s) of YHWH in the Book of the Twelve' in Redditt & Scharf, *Thematic Threads*, pp. 175-191; J. Barton 'The Day of Yahweh in the Minor Prophets,' in McCarthy & Healy, *Biblical and Near Eastern Essays*, pp. 68-79.

²² A.P. Petterson, 'The Shape of the Davidic Hope across the Book of the Twelve' *JSOT* 35 (2010) 225-46.

²³ e.g. R.C Van Leeuwen, 'Scribal Wisdom and Theodicy in the Book of the Twelve,' in L.G. Perdue et al (eds.), *In Search of Wisdom* (Louisville:Westminster John Knox Press, 1993), pp. 31-49; R.L. Hubbard Jr., Review of Nogalski & Sweeney, *Reading and Hearing* in *JSS* 49(2004) 153-55, here, p. 155.

²⁴ e.g. J. Barton, 'The Canonical Meaning of the Book of the Twelve,' in J. Barton & D.J. Reimer (eds.), *After the Exile: Essays in Honour of Rex Mason* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1996), pp. 59-73, here p. 71.

‘comforting’ Israel and ‘delivering them with confident hope,’ the overall theme is one of optimism and encouragement.²⁵

Collins (wisely) does not isolate one theme *par excellence*. He considers the ‘threading together’ of the individual collections as being skilfully done. Like Nogalski, he understands the placing of Hosea as both an introduction to the whole collection and a summary of it. The positioning of Joel continues Hosea’s themes of conversion and blessing, emphasised by several verbal links (e.g. Joel 1: 10 and Hos. 2: 22; Joel 1: 18 and Hos. 2:22,). Thus far, he and Nogalski are identifying similar phenomena, although Collins has highlighted echoes rather than catchwords. Their interpretations are however, different: for Nogalski, the purpose of Joel’s juxtaposition with Hosea is to highlight the role of the nations in Israel/Judah’s fall and rise, whereas for Collins it is to bring the Jerusalem Temple centre stage. The difference of interpretation highlights a problem with this way of making sense of the Twelve: both features are prominent, but how they are related to the rest of the books, and which predominates, is more to do with the perceptions of the modern readers than with the certain intentions of the original compilers. Or perhaps, both elements are central and it is a failure on the part of the modern exegete not to accommodate both. The blurring of viewpoints in many contemporary ‘readings’ is one of the criticisms made by Ben Zvi and shows the importance of defining reading strategies, especially when attempting to recover the intentions of the compilers.

Reading Strategies for the Twelve

Collins has some perceptive observations on the kind of clues one should be following. The shared quotation in Joel 3:16 and Amos 1: 2 (‘The Lord roars from Zion ...’) is an obvious one, but less often noted is that Joel 3: 18 (‘the mountains shall drip sweet wine ...’) anticipates the disconcertingly optimistic ending of Amos in 9: 13. When Amos is read as the sequel to Joel, the reader should have been prepared. There are many similar links, created by inter-textual echoes. Collins notes that such dovetailing is a unique feature of the Twelve.²⁶ What he has observed, without using the word, is a kind of dialectic, where each book takes up, reverses and restates the story-line of the previous one, adding its own emphases, twists and innovations. Eventually, Collins suggests, the various ‘threads’ are brought together in Zechariah (remarkable for its concentration of inter-textual allusions), and summed up at the end of Malachi, where themes and language recall Hosea.²⁷ This, in my view, is a more fruitful way of ‘reading’ the Twelve than looking for a single, linear plot-line,

²⁵ Coggins, ‘One Book or Twelve’ p. 67.

²⁶ Collins, *Mantle of Elijah*, p.68.

²⁷ *Mantle of Elijah*, p.78.

and more in keeping with a Semitic mind-set than our modern ‘cause and effect’ one. It also helps to make sense of many of the small details that appear not to ‘fit’ and about which Coggins is uncertain as to whether they were intentional or random.²⁸

There would thus be a connection between the thrust of the entire collection and that of individual books, Amos or Micah, for instance, which move between judgement and salvation but end with the latter. What I have called a ‘dialectical’ progression within and between books could be likened also to a fractal relationship: chaos theory is perhaps not irrelevant to making sense of the apparently erratic content of the component parts and the broad coherence of the whole. Other images that have been used for the overall arrangement include ‘collage’, where apparently contradictory elements may in fact have been positioned to create a desired effect;²⁹ and ‘network’ (as opposed to ‘arrow’).³⁰

The synchronic readings of Collins and Coggins, presented as a themed anthology with a broad overall development, are not really that far removed from the connected narrative envisaged by Sweeney, although they allow for more untidiness. What all have in common is a conviction that it makes sense to read the Twelve as a meaningful whole whose growth is marked by historical development.³¹

Reading too much out of the Twelve?

But not all scholars are convinced. John Barton, for instance, is sceptical as to whether the Twelve were ever designed to be read as a whole, since ancient evidence is rather for an atomistic reading of biblical texts.³² At Qumran, although there seem to have been scrolls containing all twelve books, all the exegetical *pesharim* concern verses from individual books, while New Testament quotations and allusions are similarly fragmentary.³³ This is a cogent

²⁸ Coggins, ‘One Book or Twelve,’ p. 65.

²⁹ Collins, *Mantle of Elijah*, p. 29, of the internal arrangement of prophetic books, but applicable to the wider assemblage; E. Conrad, *Reading the Latter Prophets: Towards a New Canonical Criticism* (London/New York: T & T Clark, 2003), p. 91.

³⁰ Ben Zvi, ‘Twelve Prophetic Books’ p. 155.

³¹ cf. already R.E. Clements, ‘Patterns in the Prophetic Corpus,’ in G.W. Coats & B.O. Long (eds.), *Canon and Authority* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), pp. 42-55; reprinted in R.E. Clements, *Old Testament Prophecy: From Oracles to Canon* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), pp. 191-202.

³² J. Barton, *Oracles of God*, p. 150.

³³ For the Twelve at Qumran, see G.J. Brooke, ‘The Twelve Minor Prophets and the Dead Sea Scrolls,’ in A. Lemaire (ed.), *Congress Volume Leiden 2004* (VTSup. 109; Leiden: Brill, 2006), pp. 19-43; for the NT, see H. Utzschneider, ‘Flourishing Bones – The Minor Prophets in the New Testament,’ in W. Kraus & R.G. Wooden (eds.), *Septuagint Research: Issues and Challenges in the Study of the Greek Jewish Scriptures* (Atlanta: SBL, 2006), pp. 273-92.

question, which needs to be kept in mind. Some indication that the Twelve were, however, designed to be read and understood as a whole may be suggested by the intricate network of verbal and thematic repetitions and echoes, many of them clearly not accidental. These would surely have been pointless if the readers were not expected to recognise them as they went along (a similar phenomenon can be observed across the whole book of Isaiah³⁴).

Ben Zvi's sceptical position has already been noted.³⁵ He further questions the cohesion of the Twelve by pointing out the many connections with other prophetic corpora, especially Isaiah and Jeremiah. He also underlines the individual identity of each book through its superscription, suggesting that each is intended to be read separately and pointing out that the Twelve as a whole has no introduction, unlike the other prophetic collections which are all ascribed to one prophet (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel). Catchwords are largely accidental and thematic links often the natural result of similar subject matter. These criticisms are to be taken seriously: the Twelve should not be treated apart from the formation of the rest of the prophetic corpus, and connections across the Twelve should not be exaggerated. I wonder, however, how significant the presence or absence of superscriptions really is. We have, after all, blown the cover of the additional prophets concealed in the Book of Isaiah, despite the lack of superscriptions at 40:1 and perhaps 56:1, and yet still read fruitfully across the 'seams'.³⁶ But maybe our perceptions would have been affected by actually being told that different prophets were now speaking. And supposing the only prophet to be named in the Twelve had been Hosea at the very beginning, so that the entire scroll was attributed to him? Would we have detected the existence of twelve different books, while still finding a unity analogous to that of Isaiah? And where would we have marked the divisions (between Zech. 14: 21 and Mal. 1:2, for instance, as well as between Zech. 8:23 and 9:1)? Perhaps Isaiah and the Twelve simply reflect different editorial strategies for achieving rather similar ends. Ben Zvi concludes that the collection does have its unity: it represents 'the common repertoire of a relatively small social group consisting of educated writers and readers within which and for which prophetic – and other "biblical" – books were written'. This, he suggests, is enough to account for 'shared discourse, a common linguistic heritage, implied "intertextuality" and shared literary/ideological tendencies'.³⁷ But once you have allowed for 'educated' writers and readers of this kind, it seems contradictory to deny them the intelligence and motivation to produce and understand a more sophisticated literary whole. Despite the salutary cautions of Barton, Ben Zvi and some

³⁴ J.F.A. Sawyer, 'A Change of Emphasis in the Study of the Prophets,' in R. Coggins et al (eds.), *Israel's Prophetic Tradition: Essays in Honour of Peter Ackroyd* (Cambridge: University Press, 1982), pp. 233-49, here p. 240.

³⁵ Above, p. 6.

³⁶ cf. Coggins, 'One Book or Twelve,' p.63.

³⁷ Ben Zvi, 'Twelve Prophetic Books' p. 155.

others, I still find the case for meaningful, but many-faceted, shaping across the Twelve to be convincing, although I am agnostic as to how the finished product was ‘intended’ to be read theologically. Here, comparison with LXX can at least sharpen the questions.

Reading with the Septuagint

Reading according to the Greek order obviously makes a difference, as Sweeney has demonstrated for the broad lines.³⁸ Looking at some of the detail, we can ask about the effect, for instance, of passing from Amos to Micah instead of Obadiah, or encountering Joel between Micah and Obadiah instead of between Hosea and Amos, or of Jonah being juxtaposed to Nahum. In MT, the Day of the Lord appears first in Joel, as the eschatological day of victory over the nations (Joel 3:14), as well as, earlier, of judgement for Israel (Joel 2:1-2), but in LXX it appears first in Amos, exclusively as judgement on Israel (Amos 5:18-20). What effect does this have on the movement of the whole? Again, there is a shift of emphasis when, in MT, ploughshares are to be turned into spears in Joel 3:10 before spears are to be turned into ploughshares in Mic. 4:3, whereas in LXX it is the other way round. There is a divergence in the final verses of Malachi (not mentioned by Sweeney): MT ends with the coming of Elijah (Mal. 4:4-5), an open-ended finale where the possibility of curse as well as blessing is the last word, while LXX ends with the injunction to follow the Law of Moses (Mal. 3: 22-24). The same elements produce a different impact, with different implications, when they are read sequentially, whether this was intended or not.

Conclusion

This survey has been able to touch on only a few aspects of the exciting developments in the study of the Twelve as a series of prophetic books which also constitute, however loosely, one prophetic collection. Constraints of space have meant that I have had to pass over in silence a great number of interesting articles, dissertations and monographs on either the Twelve as a whole or on one or other of the component parts, and have had to omit most of the textual illustration that would have added clarity to the discussion.

What emerges from these all too sketchy reflections is a need for more convergence, if possible, on the historical, redactional side, so that reconstructions are done according to generally agreed criteria or, at least, that

³⁸ See above, pp. 5-6.

presuppositions are set out more clearly. Where the literary approaches are concerned, the different kinds of reading need to be more carefully distinguished: rhetorical, canonical, inter-textual, reader-response, and so on (although they inevitably overlap to some degree); and again, presuppositions and points of departure must be clearly identified. In all cases, it goes without saying that findings need to be grounded in the most thorough study of the text, whether MT or LXX – and more work on LXX Twelve is a real desideratum.

Even if ‘our understanding of the Twelve as a whole is merely in its infancy,’³⁹ one thing at least is clear: from now on, no single book of the Twelve can be fully appreciated without some awareness of the implications of its relationship to its eleven companions.

³⁹ R.L. Hubbard Jr, Review of Nogalski and Sweeney, *Reading and Hearing*, in *Journal of Semitic Studies* 49 (2004) 153-55, here p. 155.