A Leiden Semitist in Kampen: Honouring Professor Jan P. Lettinga

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1 Introduction

The name ‘Lettinga’ is well-known among all those who learned Biblical Hebrew in the Netherlands and Belgium during the last half a century. Already as a student of Semitic Languages in Leiden, Jan Pieter Lettinga (1921) published on the language, literature, culture, and religion of the Canaanite city of Ugarit and on the significance of its discovery for Old Testament studies.¹ His real fame, however, is due to the fact that for many decades the standard grammar of Biblical Hebrew in Dutch has been bearing his name. This grammar was originally developed by J. Nat (1896–1942), who wrote the *Hebreeuwsche grammatica* as textbook for Hebrew in the higher grades of the Gymnasium (Leiden 1936, 1939²). J.J. Koopmans (1886–1963) had published its following editions (Leiden 1945³, 1947⁴, 1951⁵). Brill Publishers asked Lettinga to take care of the sixth edition, which was published as *Grammatica van het Bijbels Hebreeuws* (Leiden 1962⁶).

Since then, Lettinga reworked the grammar time and again and was mentioned as its sole author since the eighth edition of 1976. Being the first non-classicist reworking the grammar he distanced himself from the genetic-constructive approach of Hebrew of previous generations of scholars and fruitfully used his knowledge of Ugaritic and Akkadian and the ongoing reflections by contemporary Semitists on the historical development of the Hebrew language. The book was translated into French (1980, 1999²), while the final edition reworked by Lettinga himself appeared in German (1992; enlarged ed. 2016² by H. von Siebenthal). The later Dutch editions by T. Muraoka and W.Th. van Peursen (1996¹⁰) and by W.Th. van Peursen and M.F.J. Baasten (2012¹¹) still mention Lettinga as its first author.² Accordingly, it can be safely argued

1 J.P. Lettinga, *Oegarit (rās esj-sjamrā). Een nieuwe Phoenicische stad uit de Oudheid* (Cultuurhistorische monografieën, 11), Den Haag 1948.

2 See W.Th. van Peursen, ‘Nat–Koopmans–Lettinga–Muraoka. Ontwikkelingen in de hebraïstiek van 1936 tot 1996’, *NedThT*, 51 (1997), 194–207, and the contribution of Wido van Peursen and Martin Baasten to this volume.

that Lettinga greatly influenced the teaching of Biblical Hebrew in most Departments of Theology, Religious Studies and Semitic Languages in the Netherlands and Belgium for half a century. Lettinga primarily viewed himself as a teacher in Hebrew, Aramaic and Akkadian and never received a *Festschrift*. His accomplishments, however, in the field of teaching Hebrew as well as his remarkable personality and reputation as a Semitist among colleagues and friends justify a volume honouring his legacy.

2 Life and Work in Context

Jan Pieter Lettinga was born in Haarlem on 21 March 1921. He grew up in Heemstede and Aerdenhout in the milieu of the Reformed people of the Secession (1834) and Doleantie (1886) movement. In these low and middle class circles, outside the large Dutch Reformed Church, academic training was rare, but due to the efforts of M. Noordtzij (1840–1915), the Old Testament professor at the Theological School in Kampen, there was a lively interest in the study of the Ancient Near East.³ In 1889, his son A. Noordtzij (1871–1944), later lecturer of Hebrew at Kampen (1896–1912) and professor of Old Testament in Utrecht (1912–1936), went to Leiden in order to study Semitic languages. At that time, however, the atmosphere at Leiden University was not very friendly as to in what ways Assyriology and Egyptology contributed to Old Testament research. Accordingly, the famous Old Testament scholar Abraham Kuenen greeted Arie with the words: ‘So you are the son of that man in Kampen who believes in pots and pans?’, while his professors in Hebrew, Aramaic, Syriac and Arabic did not allow him to participate in the seminars in Assyriology of C.P. Tiele, professor of the History of Religions.⁴ A few years later, Noordtzij sr. and his colleague H. Bavinck stimulated the Kampen alumnus C. van Gelderen (1872–1945) to pursue his education in Ancient Near Eastern studies in Germany. He studied with H.L. Strack and F. Delitzsch in Berlin and with G. Dalman and H. Zimmern

3 See, e.g., M. Noordtzij, *Oostersche lichtstralen over westersche schriftbeschouwingen*, Kampen 1897. For a short overview of this Dutch Neo-Calvinist tradition of Old Testament studies, see K. van Bekkum, H.G.L. Peels, ‘Revelation, History, and Religious Plurality. Old Testament Studies from the Apeldoorn / Kampen Reformed Perspective’, in: Klaas Spronk (ed.), *The Present State of Old Testament Studies in the Low Countries: A Collection of Old Testament Studies at the Occasion of the Seventy-Fifth Anniversary of the Oudtestamentisch Werkgezelschap* (OTS, 69), Leiden 2016, 31–34.

4 Letter A. Noordtzij to B.A. van Proosdij, 10 July 1942. C.M. van Driel, *Gewantrouwd gereformeerd: het omstreden leiderschap van neocalvinist Arie Noordtzij* (AD Chartas-reeks, 15), Barneveld 2010, 38–42.

in Leipzig, who also supervised his thesis *Ausgewählte babylonisch-assyrische Briefe transkribiert und übersetzt* (Leipzig 1902). After having been a minister for a few years, Van Gelderen was appointed at the Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam, first as lecturer (1904), then as professor of Semitic languages (1905–1945). Heavy teaching obligations in the Department of Theology, however, prevented him from doing research.⁵ Accordingly, academic participation in the field of Ancient Near Eastern Studies remained a desideratum in the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands.

It was in this context that Jan Lettinga as a student at the Christelijk Lyceum in Haarlem gained great interest in the languages and cultures of the Ancient Near East. Despite serious health problems and a delay of his studies due to his bronchial asthma, Lettinga's interest in this field increased and he started to consider studying Semitic languages himself. Therefore, he visited Van Gelderen in Amsterdam during the War in order to get his advice. Before offering his guidance, however, Van Gelderen told Lettinga to read a book, *Nile and Jordan* by G.A. Frank Knight.⁶ In a following meeting, a few weeks later, the professor of the Vrije Universiteit tested the abilities of the prospective student. To Lettinga's surprise, he recommended him not to come to Amsterdam, but to go to Leiden, which Van Gelderen now considered to be the centre of Oriental studies in the Netherlands. There Lettinga could be trained at a proper level.⁷ Oral history further testifies that Lettinga's parents agreed, also because their doctor had told them that they would do good to allow their son to study wherever and whatever he preferred, for he would most likely not get old.

Before the Second World War, the study of the Ancient Near East in Leiden indeed experienced thriving years. The professor of Hebrew, Ancient Israelite Antiquities and Aramaic, G.J. Thierry (1880–1962), and the Assyriologist, F.M.Th. (de Liagre) Böhl (1882–1976), had both studied in Berlin and Leipzig. Thierry was generally considered to be a gifted teacher, while Böhl, who had come from the University of Groningen and replaced Thierry as professor of Assyriology since 1927, had been a staff-member at Ernst Sellin's excavations in Tell Balata (Shechem) in 1926–1927 and was known for his enthusiasm and generous attitude towards students. Böhl also owned a famous private collection of more than two thousand cuneiform tablets and played a significant

5 C. Houtman, 'Gelderen, Cornelis van', *BLGNP*, dl. 2, 211–213.

6 G.A. Frank Knight, *Nile and Jordan, Being the Archaeological and Historical Inter-Relations between Egypt and Canaan from the Earliest Times to the Fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70*, London 1921.

7 In 1935, Van Gelderen had given the same advice to W.H. Gispen, minister of the Reformed Church in Delft. Letter Gispen to Van Gelderen, 2 february 1945. Archive C. van Gelderen, Historisch Documentatiecentrum voor het Nederlands protestantisme (1800-heden), Universiteitsbibliotheek, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam.

part in the creation of institutional support for the study of the Ancient Near East in the Netherlands.

In 1933, the Near Eastern-Egyptian Society 'Ex Oriente Lux' had been founded in order to stimulate the interest in the Ancient Near East by organizing lectures, courses and meetings for the general public and by publishing a more scholarly *Jaarbericht*. Another goal was the establishment of a scientific institute in the Netherlands for the academic study of Ancient Near Eastern history, cultures and languages. This dream came true in Leiden in 1939, when the Netherlands Archaeological-Philological Institute was founded—known today as the Netherlands Institute of the Near East (NINO). Böhl functioned as director of the Near Eastern section of the Institute from 1939 to 1953. Its initiator and later director, A.A. Kampman (1911–1977), served as curator of the Hittite Studies section, while Brill-editor B.A. van Proosdij (1901–1990), who also presided the society 'Ex Oriente Lux' and was editor-in-chief of the *Jaarbericht van het Vooraziatisch-Egyptisch genootschap 'Ex Oriente Lux'*, was curator of the Assyriology section.⁸ Jan Lettinga became a member of 'Ex Oriente Lux' in 1935. Already during his years at the Christelijk Lyceum, he was its correspondent in Haarlem and contributed to the *Jaarbericht* with tables offering a synchronistic overview of Ancient Near Eastern history.⁹ In that light, it was no surprise that he also became involved in the 'EOL'-activities in Leiden.

In November 1940, however, the Second World War seriously affected Leiden University, when the German occupation authorities forced the resignation of the Jewish faculty members and other personnel, among whom also M. David (1898–1986), a legal historian who had left Germany because of the Nazis and had become lecturer (and later professor) of Ancient Near Eastern Law and Egyptian Papyrology in Leiden in 1934. He sometimes also taught in the Department of Semitic Languages and Literature. On 26 November, R.P. Cleveringa, professor of Commercial and Civil Law, delivered a speech in which he fiercely protested against this measure. Students copied and spread his lecture, and Cleveringa was arrested. In reaction, the students decided to strike and the German authorities closed the university.

In the following years, those who were active at the Netherlands Archaeological-Philological Institute tried to go on with their work. In 1943, the Institute started a scholarly journal, *Bibliotheca Orientalis*. In the meantime,

8 For B.A. van Proosdij, see M. Heerma van Voss, *Vijf decaden—demonen da capo. Voordracht, gehouden bij het tiende lustrum van het Vooraziatisch-Egyptisch Genootschap 'Ex Oriente Lux' op 28 mei 1983*, Leiden 1983, 5–6; idem, 'In Memoriam B.A. van Proosdij (1901–1990)', *Phoenix* 36.1 (1990), 4; S. van der Veen, *Brill: 325 Years of Scholarly Publishing*, Leiden 2008, 124, 129.

9 J.P. Lettinga, 'Synchronistisch register', in: *JEOL* 5 (1937), 481 (incl. tables).

Lettinga wrote new contributions for 'Ex Oriente Lux' by reviewing scholarly literature on Ugarit.¹⁰ The atmosphere, however, was deeply influenced by the War. This becomes evident in an anecdote that Lettinga told about a meeting of the Leiden section of 'Ex Oriente Lux' in January 1944, where the Nijmegen Old Testament scholar J.P.M. van der Ploeg would give a lecture on 'Oral tradition in the Ancient Near East and the Old Testament'. Lettinga was hiding at that time in order to escape forced employment in Germany, but he decided to go to the occasion at the library hall of the Institute at the Noordeindsplein 4a. There, he first went to the office of his older friend Van Proosdij. Shortly before the start of the meeting, a man in a religious habit, who turned out to be Van der Ploeg, entered the room. He asked whether it was true that the 'new' mayor of Leiden, R.N. de Ruijter van Steveninck, a member of the Dutch National Socialist movement, had recently decided to visit the EOL-meetings in the city. Van Proosdij confirmed that he would indeed sit in the front row. Then, Van der Ploeg delivered his lecture, but left immediately afterwards and did not join the reception, because he did not want to meet the collaborator.¹¹

After the War, the university was reopened and Lettinga finally started his formal studies in 'Semitische Talen en Letteren' at Leiden University. M. David had been arrested in 1943, but returned from the concentration camp in Theresienstadt and resumed his teaching and research with unexpected strength. In the following years, Lettinga wrote reviews of scholarly literature in Ugaritic Studies, Sumerology and Assyriology and took care of the learning program in Akkadian for 'Ex Oriente Lux' for people outside academia. He also introduced his own Reformed tradition in EOL by offering a bibliographical overview of the contributions of Arie Noordtzij to the study of the Ancient Near East and published his small monograph on Ugarit.¹²

Meanwhile, Lettinga's personal life underwent important changes. Due to struggles in the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, the Kampen professors K. Schilder and S. Greijdanus were suspended and finally deposed in August 1944. Many in the Reformed community were upset that the general synod imposed certain theological views regarding covenant and baptism and

10 J.P. Lettinga, idem, *Overzichten van de geschiedenis en de opgravingen in het Nabije Oosten I: rās esj-sjāmṛā en mūnet el-beidā* (MVEOL, 6), Leiden 1942; idem, 'Ugaritica I. Grepen uit de rās esj-sjāmṛā-literatuur van 1940–1943', *JEOL* 9 (1944), 116–124.

11 J.P. Lettinga, 'Een geleerde en een man van karakter (Pater J.P.M. van der Ploeg O.P.)', *Katholieke Stemmen* 11 (1982), 330–331.

12 J.P. Lettinga, 'Lijst van geschriften van Arie Noordtzij betrekking hebbende op het Oude Naburige Oosten', *JEOL* 10 (1945–1948), 233–235; idem, (with B.A. van Proosdij) 'Sumerologie en Assyriologie', *JEOL* 10 (1945–1948), 456–460. During his Kampen years, Lettinga organized the activities of 'Ex Oriente Lux' in the section Kampen-Zwolle.

that two opponents of these views were condemned. The result was a schism and the birth of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Liberated). Lettinga supported the protests and tried to convince the council of his local church that severe injustice had been done. At 31 October 1945 (Reformation Day), this resulted in a letter by two church members and Lettinga to all other members of their congregation, in which they announced that worship services of the Reformed Church (Liberated) in Heemstede would start at Sunday 4 November.¹³ Another major change was his engagement with Ans Lanting. She had grown up in the Dutch East Indies (Indonesia) and spent the War with her family in a Japanese internment camp, which the parents of the Lanting family did not survive. After the War, she and her brothers and sisters were repatriated to the Netherlands in order to live with their Dutch relatives. The events during the War left a deep imprint on her life. After more than sixty years of marriage, however, Lettinga and his wife also still very much liked to tell how she entered church for the first time at Heemstede after having returned to the Netherlands, that he saw her, fell in love at first sight and knew that she would become his wife.

Meanwhile, Lettinga continued to work preparing for his final exams in 1951. His Master thesis was on the Sumerian Laws of Lipit-Ishtar of Isin (ca. 1930 BCE), which recently had been published.¹⁴ One of the fellow students with whom he discussed his research was Bill Hallo, who spent the academic year 1950–1951 as a Fulbright Exchange student in Leiden. Later, W.W. Hallo (1928–2015) would become Sumerologist and Assyriologist of Yale University and curator of the Yale Babylonian Collection. Looking back at his career in 2010, he offered a surprising testimony of the enjoyable ambiance in Leiden in this post-War period. Hallo highlighted the fruitful cooperation between professors and students and also between the Department, the Netherlands Archaeological-Philological Institute and ‘the venerable publishing firm of E.J. Brill, chiefly through their “antiquariaat” or second-hand bookstore located in the heart of the city’. He first and foremost underlined his indebtedness to Leiden, where he had taken courses with ‘masters of Near Eastern studies’ and ‘enjoyed the stimulating company of teaching assistants and fellow students’.¹⁵

13 J. de Ruiter, C. Tromp-De Vries, J.P. Lettinga, *Broeders en Zusters, Heden werd door een aantal belijdende leden het volgende schrijven gericht aan de Kerkeraad van de Gereformeerde Kerk te Heemstede*. “Weleerwaarde en Eerwaarde Heeren en Broeders, Ondergetekenden, overwegende, ...,” 31 October 1945.

14 Cf. J.P. Lettinga, ‘Het Sumerische wetboek van Lipitištar, koning van Isin’, *JEOL* 12 (1951–1952), 249–263; F.R. Steele, *The Code of Lipit-Ishtar*, Philadelphia, PA 1948.

15 W.W. Hallo, *The World Oldest Literature: Studies in Sumerian Belles-Lettres* (CHANE, 35), Leiden 2010, xx–xxi, cf. B.R. Foster, ‘William W. Hallo’, *AfO* 53 (2015), 497. As professors,

With so much talent on one square kilometre, however, it was sometimes also hard to satisfy everybody's wishes and needs. In Assyriology, for instance, four students were regarded as exceptionally gifted: two older ones, Jan J.A. van Dijk (1915–1996), a Roman-Catholic priest, and the Reformed Jan Lettinga (1921); and the younger 'patrician' Willem H.Ph. Römer (1928), and Rykle Borger (1929–2010), son of a railroader.¹⁶ When De Liagre Böhl needed a new assistant in 1950, he did not choose one of them, but a theologian from Groningen, Rintje Frankena (1925–1974), who at that time was less experienced in Cuneiform studies. Three years later, when the university entrusted a commission with the task to find a successor for De Liagre Böhl, his colleague David mainly looked for candidates in the German language area, for he had the ambition to make 'Leiden' the new 'Leipzig' from before 1935, when his Leipzig professors B. Landsberger and P. Koschecker had dominated the field. In the end, F.R. Kraus (1910–1991) was appointed, then Extraordinary Professor of Ancient Semitic Philology in Vienna. During the rest of their lives, none of the possible Leiden candidates explicitly referred to these choices, except Borger, who wrote often about it, in letters, but also in public. His suggestion was that the 1950 and 1953 choices were in part also instigated by the traditional Leiden desire to safeguard the study of the languages and cultures of the Bible from confessional, in particular Roman-Catholic, influences.¹⁷

Be that as it may, the four Leiden alumni specialized in Assyriology indeed left Leiden and always remained in touch with each other. In 1950, J.J.A. van Dijk went to Heidelberg to study with A. Falkenstein and returned three years later for defending his dissertation, with De Liagre Böhl as his *Doktorvater* and his close friend Lettinga as one of his paranymphs. He found employment in Heidelberg, Uruk-Warka, Baghdad and Copenhagen, and finally became professor in Sumerology at the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome (1968–1985).¹⁸ W.H.Ph. Römer first worked as a teacher of Hebrew in the Netherlands, then contributed in Münster to W. von Soden's *Akkadisches Handwörterbuch* (1962–

Hallo refers to F.M.Th. de Liagre Böhl (Assyriology), T. Jansma (Aramaic), J.H. Kramers (Arabic), A. de Buck (Egyptology), and P.A.H. de Boer (Ugaritic). All teaching assistants and fellow students Hallo mentions by name indeed became professors: R. Frankena (Utrecht), S.A. Bonebakker (Los Angeles), J. Hoftijzer (Leiden), R. Borger (Göttingen), and J.P. Lettinga (Kampen).

16 For this section and the characterizations of Römer and Borger, see M. Stol, 'Herdenking van Riekele Borger', 17 February 2011 (unpublished).

17 See, e.g., R. Borger, 'Jan van Dijk', *AfO* 44–45 (1997–1998), 581–582; cf. E. Frahm, 'Rykle Borger', *AfO* 53 (2015), 487–488; Stol, 'Herdenking van Riekele Borger'.

18 Cf. 'Festschrift Johannes J.A. van Dijk zum 70. Geburtstag, 28. Januar 1985', *Orientalia* 54 (1985), 1–318; W.H.Ph. Römer, 'In Memoriam J.J.A. van Dijk', *Phoenix* 42/3 (1996), 114–117; Borger, 'Jan van Dijk', 581–584.

1964), got a position at the University of Groningen (1966) and became professor in Nijmegen (1976–1993).¹⁹ R. Borger found comfort in Göttingen, also working with Von Soden, spent a few years in Vienna and then became professor in Göttingen (1962–1997).²⁰

Meanwhile, Lettinga had followed his own path. As a result of the schism within the Reformed Churches in 1944, the Theologische Hogeschool of these churches in Kampen had split up. The Seminary of the Reformed Churches (Liberated) was since 1945 located in the former hospice for students at the Broederweg. B. Holwerda (1909–1952), a minister from Amersfoort, was appointed as the new professor of Old Testament. He was a dynamic and creative biblical interpreter who was attracted and challenged by the work of J. Wellhausen and W.F. Albright and explored the possibility of writing a Ph.D. under supervision of H.H. Rowley at the University of Manchester. But delving into new areas and at the same time teaching both Hebrew and Old Testament turned out to be very hard.²¹ He complained about his heavy workload at the general synod of 1951 and asked for assistance.

Normally, creating a new position at the Theologische Hogeschool was a time-consuming enterprise. In this case, however, the Senate and the Seminary's Board acted swiftly and unanimously, also because Lettinga already had taught some of Holwerda's lectures in Hebrew before. Within a few weeks they made a report stating that a lecturer of Hebrew was needed and that the Leiden Semitist Lettinga met all the requirements for this position. He knew all about the structure and development of Hebrew and the relation between this and the other Semitic languages. 'Only Mr. Lettinga considers the study of these languages to be a lifetime calling'. In a recommendation letter, Lettinga's professor M. David added that he would be 'an adornment for every institution of Higher Education'. Accordingly, the synod appointed Lettinga as Lecturer of Hebrew on 25 August 1951 and greeted him and his fiancée a few days later. He formally started his work in with a public lecture on 16 January 1952 entitled 'The Hebrew Language and Its History'.²² This fresh start, however, turned into

19 Cf. M. Dietrich, O. Loretz (eds), *dubsar anta-men: Studien zur Altorientalistik. Festschrift für Willem H.Ph. Römer zur Vollendung seines 70. Lebensjahres* (AOAT, 253), Münster 1998.

20 Cf. S.M. Maul (ed.), *Festschrift für Rykle Borger zu seinem 65. Geburtstag am 24. Mai 1994: Tikip Santakki Mala Bašmu* (CM, 10), Leiden 1998; idem, 'Rykle Borger. 24.5.1929–27.12.2010', *ZA* 101 (2011), 161–169; Frahm, 'Rykle Borger', 487–491.

21 For Holwerda, see G. Harinck (ed.), *Holwerda herdacht. Bijdragen over het leven en werk van Benne Holwerda (1909–1952)* (AD Chartas-reeks, 10), Barneveld 2008.

22 G. Harinck, W.J. Berkelaar, *Domineesfabriek: Geschiedenis van de Theologische Universiteit Kampen*, Amsterdam 2018, 235–236; *Acta van de Generale Synode van de Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland, gehouden te Kampen van 21 Aug. tot 24 Oct. 1951*, Kampen 1952, art. 40 and 134.

great sadness a few months later, when the two flag bearers of the Seminary, the authoritative K. Schilder and the young and energetic B. Holwerda, passed away after each other within six weeks. It took almost a year before a new professor of Old Testament, H.J. Schilder (1916–1984), was appointed.²³

On 21 August 1953, J.P. Lettinga and A.G. Lanting married. They moved to Kampen, where Lettinga also started to teach Hebrew at the Reformed Gymnasium in the city, a task he would fulfil until 1970. From 1955 on, the teaching obligations at the Seminary were also broadened, because the synod now gave him a permanent position and appointed him as 'Lecturer in the Semitic Languages, that is, Hebrew, Aramaic (including Syriac), Akkadian, and in the Archaeology and History of the Near East, particularly Palestine'.²⁴ In 1969, the synod appointed Lettinga as extraordinary professor in the same area 'because of his long-term service as a lecturer, his devotion and proven ability for his task'.²⁵ His inaugural address 'The Language of Canaan' highlighted the importance of historical linguistics for the understanding of Biblical Hebrew. His farewell address in 1987 on 'Psalm 82: The Living God and the Dying Idols' illustrated how his vast knowledge of the world of the Bible contributed to its interpretation.²⁶

Over the years in Kampen, Lettinga showed himself to be a dedicated teacher encouraging those students who considered Hebrew to be a very difficult language and stimulating others who showed a further interest in the languages and cultures of the Ancient Near East. One of his first students, Klaas Veenhof, pursued his studies in Leiden and finally became professor of Assyriology at the Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam (1974–1982) and in Leiden (1982–2001)—a remarkable development in the light of the fact that Lettinga had viewed both Van Gelderen and Böhl as his mentors. A year after Lettinga's retirement, Wolter Rose went to Leiden and Oxford for studying Semitic Languages and Old Testament, and returned in 1995 as Lecturer in Semitic Languages and Cultures. In between, Lettinga's successor, Gert Kwakkel, fulfilled the task of teaching Hebrew, Aramaic, Akkadian and Archaeology of Palestine since 1987,

23 Cf. R. ter Beek, 'Oudtestamenticus in het nieuwe verbond. In Memoriam prof. drs. H.J. Schilder', in: *Almanak van het Corpus Studiorum in Academia Campensi 'Fides Quadrat Intellectum'* 1983–1984, Kampen 1984, 163–186.

24 *Acta van de Generale Synode van de Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland, aangevangen te Enschede van 12 juli 1955*, Enschede 1955, art. 58 and 97.

25 *Acta van de Generale Synode van de Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland gehouden te Hoogeveen van 15 april 1969 tot 25 februari 1970*, Groningen 1970, art. 317.

26 J.P. Lettinga, *De 'tale Kanaäns'. Enkele beschouwingen over het Bijbels Hebreeuws* (Kamper Bijdragen, 8), Groningen 1971; 'Psalm 82: De levende God en de stervende afgoden', in: *Almanak van het Corpus Studiorum in Academia Campensi 'Fides Quadrat Intellectum'* 1988, Kampen 1988, 135–152.

while doing his Doctorate at the University of Groningen. In 1993, he was appointed as professor of Old Testament as a successor to H.M. Ohmann (1928–2006), who had in his turn replaced H.J. Schilder in 1981.²⁷

As his bibliography shows, Lettinga paid more and more attention to the translation of biblical passages in his Kampen period.²⁸ He also wrote an overview of the religion of the Canaanites and Arameans²⁹ and took part in the preparation and publication of Holwerda's lecture notes.³⁰ In later years, the main focus laid on the Hebrew grammar textbook and its new editions, although a specific interest in biblical poetry still betrayed Lettinga's familiarity with Ugaritic.³¹ Despite his weak health and limited labour force, he and his wife travelled along the east Mediterranean coast as passengers of a cargo ship of the Royal Dutch Steamboat Shipping (KNSM) in 1966. While the ship loaded and unloaded in the harbours of Pireaus, Alexandria and Latakia, they visited Athens, the Peloponnese, Cairo and Ugarit. Back home, Lettinga illustrated his inspiring presentations of the trip with slides. Being a gentleman and proud to be a Leiden alumnus, he was also the right person to guard the protocol in the academic meetings of the Theologische Hogeschool. Finally, Lettinga functioned as *adjutor* of the library since 1964 and was librarian himself from 1971 to 1991. As a result, the library of today's Theological University not only houses a fine collection in Ancient Near Eastern studies, but also exhibits replicas of the basalt stela of the Code of Hammurabi, the Baal Stela from Ugarit and the Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III.³²

27 Cf. G. Kwakkel, 'In Memoriam Heinrich Marinus Ohmann', *De Reformatie* 81 (2005–2006), 470–471.

28 See the Bibliography at the end of this volume.

29 J.P. Lettinga, 'De godsdiensten van Kanaänieten en Aramaeërs', in: G. van der Leeuw, C.J. Bleeker (eds), *De godsdiensten der wereld*, dl. 2 (Amsterdam 1956³), 308–342.

30 Cf. B. Holwerda, *Dictaten*, dl. 1, *Historia revelationis Veteris Testamenti*, Kampen 1954, 4; idem, *Oudtestamentische voordrachten*, dl. 2, *Bijzondere Canoniek*, Kampen 1972, 3.

31 J.P. Lettinga, 'Davids rouwklacht over Saul en Jonathan. Een geannoteerde vertaling van 2 Sam. 1 17–27', in: *Almanak van het Corpus Studiorum in Academia Campensi 'Fides Quadrat Intellectum' 1977*, Kampen 1977, 76–81; 'Hanna's Magnificat', in: *Almanak van het Corpus Studiorum in Academia Campensi 'Fides Quadrat Intellectum' 1980*, Kampen 1980, 89–95.

32 Cf. J.P. Lettinga, 'Hammoerapi in Kampen', in: *Almanak van het Corpus Studiorum in Academia Campensi 'Fides Quadrat Intellectum' 1968–1969*, Kampen 1969, 59–65; G.D. Harmanny, 'De bibliotheek van de Broederweg', in: *Kamper Almanak 2004*, Kampen 2004, 238–240.

3 Biblical Hebrew in Context

Lettinga became emeritus in 1987. As mentioned above, he never received a *Festschrift*. His disciples and friends, however, are glad to honour him because of his standing as a Semitist, his academic attitude, and his stimulating contacts with colleagues, friends and disciples, which largely remained intact in the decades following his retirement.

The theme of the volume is determined by the linguistic and historical perspectives Lettinga chose in his study of Hebrew and of texts from the Ancient Near East. His question was always how a historical approach of language, literature and culture contributes to understanding them, and how this understanding illuminates the exegesis of the Old Testament. This theme has become increasingly relevant, now that the historical approach of language has gained new ground after decades of a mainly synchronical approach of language and culture.

As a result, this volume honouring Lettinga's legacy represents examples of the full breadth of his interests. It addresses the deep rootedness of biblical law in the Ancient Near Eastern legal tradition (Klaas R. Veenhof), offers a new translation of five letters from Ugarit (Willem H.Ph. Römer), and reflects on the syntax of Biblical Aramaic (Takamitsu Muraoka). With regard to Hebrew as a language, contributions discuss the new elements in the latest edition of Lettinga's Hebrew grammar (Wido van Peursen and Martin Baasten), the challenges of teaching of Hebrew in a Theology curriculum (Wolter H. Rose), and the link between historical-linguistic descriptions of the origins of Hebrew and ancient Israel's history (Koert van Bakkum). The intimate relation between Hebrew philology and Old Testament interpretation is laid out in detail in essays on texts from the books of Samuel (Willem A.M. Beuken), Isaiah (Jaap Dekker), Jeremiah (Eric Peels), and Hosea (Gert Kwakkel). Finally, Lettinga's interest in expressions denoting heavenly beings is addressed in a contribution on the 'sons of God' in the non-Biblical texts in the Dead Sea Scrolls (Jaap Doedens).

The Dutch tradition of the study of the Semitic languages and the Old Testament represents a wide variety of methods and scholarly traditions. In order to do justice to this diversity, the editors have refrained from offering a complete harmonization of the transcriptions of Semitic languages and its grammatical terms. They thank Marten Stol for his thoughtful advice and his willingness to respond to Römer's request to proofread his contribution. And last but not least, they express thanks to the editorial board of Oudtestamentische Studiën and to Marjolein van Zuylen and Maaïke Langerak of Brill for their help in publishing this volume in dedication to a memorable teacher and friend.