

Greeting for Angelika Berlejung on the occasion of her 65th birthday

Roderich Barth^{1*}

¹Leipzig University, Germany

*roderich.barth@uni-leipzig.de

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Dear ladies and gentlemen, dear guests and, of course, dear Angelika,

I have the great honour of delivering a greeting on behalf of the Faculty of Theology. Please note, however, that I will occasionally go beyond my official role as dean. From time to time, I will also include some personal remarks in my laudation. This is inevitable simply because the honouree has been working here for a long time, since before I myself was appointed to this university in 2017. On a significant birthday like today's, it is perfectly acceptable to say that Angelika Berlejung is almost the longest-serving colleague in this faculty; only our colleague Jens Herzer has been with us a little longer. For 22 years, since 2004, you, dear Angelika, have held the Chair for Old Testament Studies with a focus on the history and religious history of Ancient Israel and its environment. Through your continuous work, you have contributed significantly to the visibility of our faculty – not only within the university and its interdisciplinary networks, but also in national and international academic discourse and in Old Testament scholars' institutions. The recognition of your academic achievements is reflected not least in your admission as a full member of the Saxon Academy of Sciences and Humanities in 2017. We therefore owe you our deepest gratitude for your loyalty to our faculty since 2004. You have always been successful in obtaining third-party funding, from graduate colleges to positions as SFB Principal Investigator. But you have also made a significant contribution to teaching and promoting young talent by teaching generations of students all about Old Testament studies in its entire cultural and historical breadth, fascinating them with ancient stones and coins, and breathing life into ancient texts and inscriptions. Among students, I hear time and again, you are one of the most popular colleagues at our faculty, and this is reflected in the impressive number of fascinating students you have produced, who are now standing on their own academic feet and who have prepared this wonderful festivity for you today. As a colleague, it has often happened to me that during examinations, talented students have caught my attention, who then responded kindly to my enquiry as to whether they would be interested in an assistant position or a dissertation project in systematic theology: “Thank you very much, Professor Barth, but unfortunately you are far too late – we have already signed a contract with Professor Berlejung.”

When you experience something like this, you naturally ask yourself: what does my colleague have that I do not have?! And I have now discovered at least some facets of what is probably a complex answer. First, I was able to convince myself of your qualities as a teacher, because you were the first colleague who asked me if I would be interested in a joint seminar. In our joint seminars on topics such as gift and gratitude or the symbolism of evil, I was able to experience how you can combine basic exegetical information with a remarkably free thematic approach, thereby promoting independent thinking and the creativity of your students. For me, the joint seminars were always an instructive crash course on the current state of Old Testament debates. In addition, you have a habit of inviting guests on a regular basis: semester after semester, you have brought colleagues from Germany and abroad to Leipzig University, thereby broadening the horizons of our students. Second, I discovered another secret of your ability to connect with people. When I once complained to you about my former secretary's lack of openness, I received the following reply: “Why, I invite her to dinner once a semester and then she tells me everything!” So, there we have a second key to your remarkable gift for building relationships: I will call it, for short, *restaurant diplomacy*! Anyone among you who has not yet had the pleasure of these “working dinners”, where all the important information is exchanged, plans are made and projects are discussed, should be concerned.

But back to the recognition of your services to the Faculty of Theology of Leipzig University. I have already emphasised your loyalty to Leipzig, which is reflected in your attachment to your hometown of Heidelberg. But this could give a completely wrong impression. An old warhorse in science policy once said to me that he divides professors into *locals* and *globals*! Based on this typology, your attachment to Leipzig would be completely misunderstood if you were classified as a local. The opposite is true: you are quintessentially a global! Because, firmly rooted in your academic and private homes, you have established a global network of research and teaching activities that is breathtaking. This was evident early on in your academic career and continues with your appointment in Leipzig: your studies in Theology, Assyriology, and Semitic studies took you to Heidelberg, Berlin, and Munich, as well as Brussels and London, among other places. After completing your dissertation on the theology of images in Heidelberg, which was awarded the Ruprecht Karls Prize, you were a lecturer in Fribourg, Switzerland. In 1999, you took up your first professorship in Languages and Cultures of Syria and Palestine at the Catholic University of Leuven. Even after your change from Belgium to Leipzig, you completed numerous research stays, scholarships, and visiting professorships abroad, particularly in Israel and South Africa. Since 2009, you have been an adjunct professor at the Department of Classical Studies at Stellenbosch University in South Africa, and since 2017, you have been a visiting professor of Biblical Archaeology at Bar-Ilan University in Ramat Gan. Since 2007, when you were first co-director of the *Qubur al-Walaydah excavation project*, you have been regularly excavating, often with the support of students from Leipzig. You have received numerous grants from the German-Israeli Foundation (GIF). This international research activity culminated in 2015 in the founding of a Minerva Centre of the Max Planck Society on the topic of “Research on Israel and Aram in Biblical Times” together with your colleague Aren Maeir from Bar Ilan University. I will not mention your countless memberships on international boards and editorial committees. Finally, I would like to express my gratitude for the fact that you were responsible for the Erasmus programs and international contacts at our faculty for many years.

Now I would like to share a few personal memories. Anyone who has ever had the pleasure of accompanying Angelika on one of her trips abroad has not only gotten to know an outstanding scientific organizer and internationally renowned expert. As a companion, you are also rewarded with a cultural and culinary program that is simply unforgettable. With her husband Volker, an excellent cook who was trained to the highest standards, as your travel companion, you will be taken to spectacular wineries and fabulous gourmet temples and feel like you are in a fairy tale from *One Thousand and One Nights*! Against this background, the fall is of course all the greater when you play tour guide yourself – I will never forget the look on Angelika's face when I once dragged her to a South Tyrolean castle that was decorated from top to bottom with hunting trophies and was also rather dusty in other respects! But after a lesson in animal welfare and a little telling-off for the hunters present – the honouree occasionally reveals traces of a radical non-conformist – it turned into an incredibly fun and convivial week. Despite her fondness for international haute cuisine, Angelika is by no means demanding – you can have a great time with her, especially in South Tyrol! In any case, with a colleague like Angelika, there is no need to worry about a puritanical decline in Protestant theology – in any situation!

But back to her academic achievements: in addition to her impressive CV as a university professor and international researcher, who, incidentally, never misses a performance at the leading opera houses when travelling, Angelika Berlejung also has an impressive list of publications to her name. As my colleagues will undoubtedly return to this topic and are much better placed than I am to appreciate her scientific contribution, I would simply like to point out that her work demonstrates her broad cultural anthropological approach to the Ancient Near East, with a particular focus on material culture and archaeology, including numerous publications on topics such as text amulets, votive offerings and anthropomorphic masks. In addition, she has also produced many edited volumes, numerous fundamental textbooks and handbooks. Given all of this, it is hardly surprising that such a multifaceted researcher as Angelika Berlejung received the Volkswagen Foundation's Opus Magnum grant in 2020.

Dear Angelika, I have to come to an end now, even though I still have so much more to tell. The diversity of your interests, talents and passions knows no bounds. Who among you knows the goldsmith or stonemason? But we can save that for the social part. Just as a little teaser: Angelika Berlejung is, incidentally, the only colleague in the entire field of Protestant theology with whom I can have a qualified conversation about classic cars. So, there is no problem at all in moving seamlessly from a stimulating discussion about the dogmatic dialectic of Hebrew imagery to the question of cavity sealing or the viscosity of different types of motor oil and their suitability for classic boxer engines – I love it!

Of course, the Pilates exercises are also unforgettable, when Angelika disappeared with my wife and daughter into an adjoining room during dinner, leaving her bewildered colleague alone at the table.

I will conclude by summarising the gift of this overflowing creativity with which our honouree – always accompanied by her warm laughter – enriches the life of this faculty in one image: At the risk of embarrassing myself here in front of the assembled Old Testament exegetes, I will draw on a systematic theologian colleague, more precisely, on the creation theology of Klaas Huizing. He is known to be a great admirer of the wisdom traditions of the First Testament. Therefore, in his dogmatic cosmology, he discards the mythological-patriarchal heritage of classical creation narratives and, with the Lady Wisdom dancing before God in Proverbs 8, places the moment of playful creativity at the centre of his teaching about life. For me, this image sums up everything I have said about you – I quote verse 30: “I was always beside him, and I was joy day after day, rejoicing before him all the time; rejoicing on the mainland of his earth, and my joy was with the people!”

Dear Angelika, on behalf of the faculty, and also on behalf of my colleagues who are unable to be here today, I would like to congratulate you wholeheartedly on your special day and express my sincere gratitude for every day that you enrich the life of our faculty with your creativity, wisdom and joy. I wish you all the best for the years to come, especially success in your current research projects, good health, and serenity in all circumstances. With this in mind: *ad multos annos!*