

## PROGRAM OF TEYLERS THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY IN HAARLEM FOR THE YEAR 2023

THE DIRECTORS OF TEYLERS STICHTING (TEYLERS FOUNDATION) AND THE MEMBERS OF TEYLERS GODGELEERD GENOOTSCHAP (TEYLERS THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY) invite submissions for their essay competition. Deadline: 1 May 2026.

Subject: **Scrolls, Scribes and the Making of the Hebrew Bible. Requested is a demonstration of the use of “Material Philology” in Old Testament/Hebrew Bible research with attention for methodological reflection.**

### *Further explanation*

“Material Philology” is in vogue again in biblical and early Christianity studies (e.g., Harry Gamble, *Books and Readers in the Early Church*, 1997; Kim Haines-Eitzen, *Guardians of Letters*, 2000; Liv Ingeborg Lied and Hugo Lundhaug, *Snapshots of Evolving Traditions*, 2017; Liv Ingeborg Lied, *Invisible Manuscripts*, 2021). This approach has various academic roots, one of which is “New Philology”. This approach began as a pushback against a certain form of text-critical approach that uses textual witnesses to reconstruct the alleged original text. Proponents of a New Philology approach, on the other hand, emphasized that the text of a specific textual witness should be studied as it is, and in its own historical context. It was an alternative to some forms of textual criticism, though it is less well suited to deal with works that are preserved in a highly fragmentary state. “Material Philology” also focuses on the physical aspects of a text carrier (codicology, paleography, etc.) that provide clues to the user context and the function of the medium of the text as an object or artifact (the book, the codex, the scroll, etc.).

Recently, there is much attention in the field for how research on the “materiality” of biblical texts can shed new light on the historical study of the Bible’s formation, reading, revision, and transmission (*AABNER* 2023 special issue: “Material and Scribal Scrolls Approaches to the Hebrew Bible”). This “material turn” very much focuses on the Dead Sea Scrolls, the oldest extant manuscripts of the Hebrew Bible (*Dead Sea Discoveries* 2023 special issue: “Materiality and Textuality in the Dead Sea Scrolls”).

On the one hand, the historical context of the Dead Sea Scrolls themselves is examined. As early as 2004, Emanuel Tov, in his book *Scribal Practices and Approaches*, brought together a large body of material and data based on the Dead Sea Scrolls about writing media (leather, papyrus), pens, ink, technical aspects (including lining, column dimensions), writing practices (including layout), corrections, spellings of the name of God), the scripts used (squared, ancient Hebrew) and special writer characteristics of groups of texts such as biblical texts and texts written on papyrus. For the material aspects, Ingo Kottsieper, “Physicality of Manuscripts and Material Culture”, 2019, provides the best overview. Researchers are examining, among other things, whether the choice for papyrus or leather was motivated by, for example, textual, cultural or economic reasons (Eibert Tigchelaar, “The Material Variance of the Dead Sea Scrolls”, 2016, George Brooke, “Choosing Between Papyrus and Skin”, 2017). There is also more attention to the diversity of the quality

and writing skills of writers in relation to different social contexts of book production, distribution and consumption (Mladen Popović, “Book Production and Circulation in Ancient Judaea”, 2023; Eibert Tigchelaar, “4Q1 (4QGen- Exod<sup>a</sup>)”, 2023). Within the Groningen ERC project *The Hands That Wrote the Bible*, Drew Longacre has drawn attention to relationships between types (so-called ornate or simple rectilinear and curvilinear) and levels of writing according to different registers of formality in relation to the function of specific manuscripts (“Disambiguating the Concept of Formality in Palaeographic Descriptions”, 2019; “Paleographic Style and the Forms and Functions of the Dead Sea Psalm Scrolls”, 2021).

On the other hand, scholars study how the materiality of the scrolls can shed light on the historically older development of the formation of books from the Hebrew Bible. Karel van der Toorn sought the comparison in his 2007 book, *Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible*, mainly in cuneiform culture. But the Dead Sea Scrolls provide more appropriate material for comparison in several cultural and material ways (Mladen Popović, “Scribal Culture of the Hebrew Bible and the Burden of the Canon”, 2017). There is of course historical overlap between the youngest books of the Hebrew Bible, such as Ecclesiastes and Daniel, and the oldest manuscripts among the Dead Sea Scrolls. Thus, the Dead Sea Scrolls can provide important insights into material aspects of the older phases of the textual history of the Old Testament. For example, David Carr has argued that prior to the Hellenistic period the sources of the Pentateuch would not have fit on a scroll, and also that until the Persian period the division into 5 books may have been the result of the maximum amount of literary text that could be written on a scroll (“Rethinking the Materiality of Biblical Texts”, 2020).

The current “material turn” very much benefits from the high-quality digital images of the Dead Sea Scrolls that are easily accessible for all students of the scrolls via the Leon Levy Dead Sea Scrolls Digital Library of the Israel Antiquities Authority ([www.deadseascrolls.org.il](http://www.deadseascrolls.org.il)). This digital data enables, for example, new material reconstructions of the manuscript remains (Jonathan Ben-Dov, Asaf Gayer, and Eshbal Ratzon, *Material and Digital Reconstruction of Fragmentary Dead Sea Scrolls*, 2022), or, with the use of Artificial Intelligence new approaches to palaeography and fundamental questions concerning, for example, writer identification (Mladen Popović, Maruf Dhali, and Lambert Schomaker, “Artificial intelligence based writer identification generates new evidence for the unknown scribes of the Dead Sea Scrolls exemplified by the Great Isaiah Scroll, 1QIsa<sup>a</sup>”, 2021). The top quality of the digital images of the scrolls made by the IAA enables cutting-edge applications that put the field at the forefront of the broader digital humanities movement.

Moreover, the focus on the materiality of biblical texts and manuscripts cannot be isolated from attention to the content of the texts. Attention to material characteristics of manuscripts goes hand in hand with a reading of the texts’ contents to understand the context in which they may have functioned, such as liturgical or scribal contexts (Hila Dayfani, “4Q37 and Excerpted Texts of Deuteronomy from Qumran,” 2023; Ayhan Aksu, “The Qumran Opisthographic Papyri as a Scribal Cluster of Manuscripts”, 2023).

This essay competition calls for entries that use concrete data and specific examples to elaborate on the importance of “Material Philology” for Old Testament/Hebrew Bible research and to further the state of the art. Entries may also give attention to the possibilities of illustrating and engaging this “material turn” to the Hebrew Bible in a museum context or an exhibition.

*Entries should consist of either one extended study, in the form of a text prepared for publication, or of several publications, most of which should have appeared in the three years prior to May 1, 2026. In the latter case, entrants should also submit a hitherto unpublished text, written especially for the competition, in which the earlier publications are placed in a broader academic context.*

### *General Information*

Pieter Teyler van der Hulst (Haarlem, 1702-1778) was a Dutch merchant. In his will, he stipulated the founding of Teylers Stichting (Teyler’s Foundation). Part of this Foundation are two learned societies, each of which presents a yearly essay competition. Teylers Godgeleerd Genootschap (Teyler’s Theological Society) is one of these societies. It organizes essay competitions in the field of theology, philosophy of religion, and religious studies.

### *Procedures*

- In order to qualify for the competition, candidates should submit four copies of their entry to the Directors of Teylers Stichting, Spaarne 16, 2011 CH Haarlem, The Netherlands, before May 1, 2026. Entries received after that date will not be taken into consideration.
- The essays must be in English, French, German, or Dutch. Because of the stipulations of Pieter Teyler’s will, the essays may not mention the author’s name but should be identified only by a motto. The entry should be accompanied by a sealed envelope containing the author’s name and address, with the motto on the outside.
- To avoid a long wait before hearing the result of the evaluation, in case an award has not been made, authors are requested to send together with the sealed envelope an open envelope containing the name and full address of a person with whom the Directors of Teylers Stichting may enter into correspondence confidentially.

### *Evaluation*

- The evaluation will be carried out by the members of Teylers Godgeleerd Genootschap (Professor M. Barnard, Professor E. Jorink, Professor C.R. Lange, Professor A.B. Merz, Professor H.L. Murre-van den Berg, Professor M. Popović, Professor E.P. Schaafsma).
- The evaluation will be communicated within seven months from the final date of submission in the form of a recommendation to the Directors of Teylers Stichting, who will decide within one month whether or not to give an award. This decision is final.
- All candidates will be notified by the directors as soon as a decision has been made.

### *Award*

- The award consists of a gold medal struck from the seal of the Godgeleerd Genootschap.
- In addition, the Doopsgezind Predikfonds in Haarlem will grant the sum of €4,500 to the author or authors of the winning entries to use as they see fit.
- The medal will be awarded to the winner(s) at a special ceremony in the Teylers Museum in Haarlem.
- Representatives of professional journals, members of the press, and other interested persons and institutions will be informed of the award ceremony well in advance.

### *Publication*

The authors themselves will arrange for publication of their work, mentioning that it has received an award from Teylers Stichting. If desired, Teylers Stichting and its theological society may consider lending assistance.

Editors of websites, scientific journals, and other bodies wishing to draw the attention of their readers to the essay competition are urged to advise interested candidates to consult the program for full details.

The program of Teylers Godgeleerd Genootschap is available free of charge on request from the Directors of Teylers Stichting, Spaarne 16, 2011 CH Haarlem, The Netherlands, or can be accessed at [www.teylersmuseum.nl/en](http://www.teylersmuseum.nl/en) en [www.teylersstichting.nl](http://www.teylersstichting.nl)