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# Why You Should Submit Your Manuscript or Proposal to the Online, Open-Access Ancient Near East Monograph Series

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# Why You Should Submit Your Manuscript or Proposal to the Online, Open-Access Ancient Near East Monograph Series

Alan Lenzi

Many SBL Forum readers will have heard about a new online, open-access monograph series. It is called [Ancient Near East Monographs / Monografías sobre el Antiguo Cercano Oriente](#) (ANEM/MACO). This is one of several projects that have been spearheaded by the SBL's [International Cooperation Initiative](#). This new peer-reviewed series publishes volumes on any aspect of the ancient Near East from the Neolithic to the early Hellenistic eras, including works on ancient Israel and the Hebrew Bible. The open-access nature of the series means that it is globally available. Moreover, it publishes volumes in English and Spanish and some of its English volumes will be translated into Spanish to reach an even wider readership—the series is a joint project of the SBL and the Centro de Estudios de Historia del Antiguo Oriente (CEHAO) of the Pontifical Catholic University of Argentina. The same scholarly standards that apply to any SBL series apply to ANEM/MACO and it is led by an international editorial board comprised of both senior and junior scholars. The series is currently accepting proposals. As a member of the editorial board, my purpose in writing this brief essay is to encourage members of the SBL to submit their series-appropriate manuscripts or proposals.

One may well wonder, given the title of the series, what exactly is appropriate for the series.

The words “ancient Near East” may give some readers the wrong impression about the series’ chronological and geographical purview. Biblicists often associate “ancient Near East” with the Sumerians, Hittites, Egyptians, Babylonians, Assyrians, or Persians and not the ancient Israelites and their scribal *pièce de résistance*, the Hebrew Bible. Yet ancient Israel and the scribes who produced the Hebrew Bible, as we all know quite well, were part and parcel of the ancient Near East. Distinguishing “ancient Israel” or “Hebrew Bible” from “ancient Near East” is a product of our academic specializations and religious cultures. As far as the editors of the ANEM/MACO series are concerned, such connotative distinctions are irrelevant. We will consider a monograph that treats the composition of the Book of Samuel as much as we would a monograph on the composition of the *Enuma Elish*. We are interested in a proposal that posits a Hellenistic curricular setting for the Book of Proverbs as much as a proposal that examines the El Amarna corpus for political history. The intersections of archaeology and the eighth century prophets, a new translation of the love poetry of ancient Egypt, Hittite ritual gestures and the Hebrew Bible, the poetics of Ugaritic incantations, a comparison of Qohelet and Hellenistic philosophy—all of these fall within the editorial interests of ANEM/MACO. If its topic is the material culture of ancient Israel or the Hebrew Bible in its ancient context, chances are the manuscript is appropriate for our series.

The word “Monograph” in the title may also be misleading. We are indeed looking for extended scholarly studies written by individual authors, but we are open to proposals for multi-author, edited volumes, too, including papers read at symposia, conferences, or SBL program units. We

would therefore encourage SBL program unit chairs to consider ANEM/MACO as they review their publishing options.

As mentioned earlier, the series is online, open-access, and peer-reviewed. A word may be in order about what this means and why these features commend the series to authors.

ANEM/MACO is completely electronic and will be available online as an open-access document, that is, available free of charge to readers.[1] In some cases, there will be a hard copy for sale, but in most instances there will be no physical book to hold in one's hands once a manuscript is published. Instead, the manuscript is turned into a PDF file laid out in a conventional book format with a table of contents, headers, page numbers, bibliography, etc. The [two volumes already published](#) in the series provide good examples of what one can expect. (Notice that color photographs can be accommodated quite easily and the entire text will be electronically searchable.) Each monograph's PDF file will be copyrighted and assigned an ISBN, just as a conventional book, and the text will remain as unalterable as any printed document. The PDF file will be stored indefinitely on computer servers of participating archives and libraries around the world. Thanks to the series' open-access policy, one will be able to give the book freely to as many colleagues, friends, and/or relatives as one wants. One could even link to the book from one's electronic c.v., university web page, blog, or Facebook account without sanction. In addition, we anticipate that soon our volumes will be available in Google books.[2] Authors and readers do not pay anything to share or receive the book.[3]

I admit that there is something genuinely satisfying about holding a paper book in one's hand, especially when that book is the culmination of years of one's own research. But the truth of academic publishing is that monographs are usually very expensive and rarely sell more than a couple of hundred copies. (The last book I reviewed cost almost \$100 and was less than 300 pages long!) Individuals and even most institutional libraries nowadays must be very selective about their purchases. If one is interested in getting one's work to the greatest number of people interested in reading it, an open-access, online publication like the ANEM/MACO series is the way to go.

Some scholars may hesitate to submit a proposal to ANEM/MACO for fear that the series will be short lived or simply part of an electronic publishing fad. The series is certainly a new venture, and it is understandable that one would be careful about where one's work appears. Our intention as an editorial board, however, is to work very hard over the next two years to find and publish a number of exceptionally strong manuscripts by both senior and junior scholars. With the backing of the Society of Biblical Literature, it is our goal that this series occupy an important place in the international field of biblical studies in the very near future.

As for open-access, electronic publishing, given the dominance of the paper-printed word for more than a half millennium, it is understandable that some colleagues have qualms about submitting their work to ANEM/MACO. But similar undertakings within our field, e.g., [Journal of Hebrew Scriptures](#) and [Biblica](#), [4] and the general trend toward electronic publishing—ever heard of Kindle?—suggest that open-access, electronic publishing is not a fad. It is the most

economically viable solution to making scholarship quickly and readily available to everyone interested in reading it—including scholars and students without the financial means to purchase books.[5] Learned societies and especially universities, who pay scholars to produce scholarship and then turn around to buy it back from the scholars' publishers, both have a vested interest in working for its success as do authors. What better way to insure your work is cited by others in the field than to make it easily and freely available to them?

Junior scholars working on their first major monograph may worry that the online, open-access publication of ANEM/MACO could work against them when it comes to their prospects for tenure. This concern is also understandable, but, based on my experience at the University of the Pacific, without real warrant. The best thing to do if one is concerned about anything tenure-related is, of course, to ask the decision makers. When I was considering open-access publication during the first few years of my current job, I attended one of the pre-tenure faculty meetings hosted by our Provost's office and the Promotion and Tenure Committee and, during the Q & A time, specifically asked about online, open-access publications—both periodicals and monographs. Everyone on the committee, older and younger scholars alike, said the same thing: as long as my work was peer-reviewed and published in a reputable venue within my field, it did not matter what physical form the work took or how much it cost. The scientists were quick to add that open-access, electronic publications are quite the norm in their fields. I also talked this issue over with my department head with very encouraging results. Every school's tenure review guidelines are different and not every department head will be as open-minded as mine. I would, therefore, advise junior colleagues to explore what their school's policy is on open-access, online publications through the appropriate channels. I suspect they will find the same answer as I did.

As for the issue of peer review, the ANEM/MACO series practices a double-blind peer review process for all proposals deemed worthy of review. We use both the expertise of the editorial board, which includes senior scholars such as Ehud Ben Zvi, Erhard Gerstenberger, and Martti Nissinen, as well as external reviewers to assess submitted proposals. The editorial board is intent on maintaining a very high scholarly standard. As with other academic series, therefore, not every proposal is accepted.

As an example of the proposal process, I offer a sketch of my own experience.

I queried the general editors about an idea I had for a book in early spring 2009. Ehud suggested I submit a full, polished proposal (see here for the [SBL guidelines](#)). About a month later, I did. Despite the fact that I am on the editorial board, my proposal was subjected to the standard double-blind review process. In just a couple of months I received comments from the anonymous reviewers, who offered several helpful suggestions and requested specific revisions to my proposal. After I revised the proposal in light of their suggestions and requests, I returned it to the general editors. By the summer of 2009, the proposal was accepted. Because my submission was only a proposal and not a manuscript, a full draft of the manuscript will have to be returned to reviewers to make sure the manuscript has lived up to the proposal's promise. If it does, only then will the manuscript be published in the series.

This brief essay cannot answer all of the questions one might have about this new series, but I hope I have cleared away any initial misunderstandings or misgivings about publishing in our peer-reviewed, online, open-access series. I encourage you to query the general editors, Ehud Ben Zvi and Roxana Flammini, about your initial ideas or submit a formal proposal. The Ancient Near East Monograph series may be the right home for your next project, particularly if you want your work to be widely read and available to those who might find it helpful irrespective of their (financial) resources.

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[1] For a general introduction to the concept of “open-access,” see [here](#) (I thank Chuck Jones, Librarian at the Institute for the Study of the Ancient World at New York University, for this reference).

[2] This approach is consistent with the idea that knowledge is a "social good."

[3] Because of the open-access policy, there are no royalties paid to authors. Of course, most monographs do not sell enough copies to earn royalties, so this is not really a liability for authors who publish an open-access book.

[4] There is a plethora of open-access initiatives in academia. See [Abzu](#) and [Ancient World Online](#), both maintained by Chuck Jones, for examples in fields related to Biblical Studies.

[5] Making scholarship available to scholars and students in underresourced countries is a major impetus of the International Cooperation Initiative.