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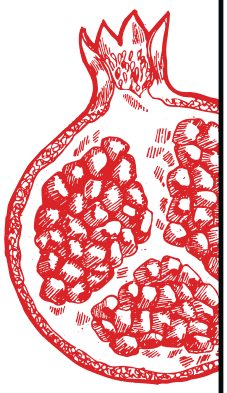
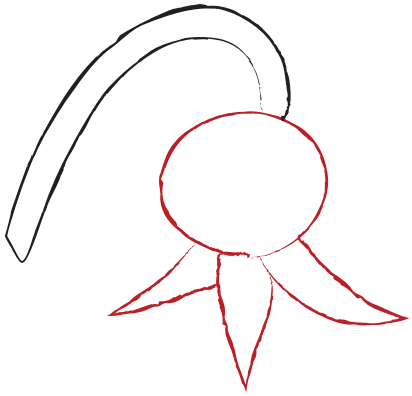
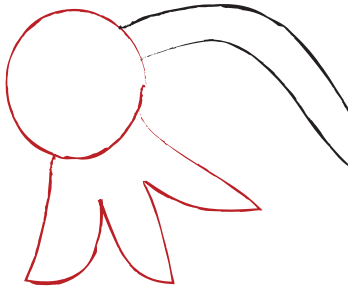


AABNER

ADVANCES IN ANCIENT BIBLICAL AND NEAR EASTERN RESEARCH





Inaugural Issue: Conceptualizing the Divine in the Levant and Mesopotamia

EBERHARD KARLS UNIVERSITÄT TÜBINGEN
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AABNER
ADVANCES IN ANCIENT BIBLICAL
AND NEAR EASTERN RESEARCH

AABNER FORUM PEER REVIEW SYSTEM

The editors-in-chief:

Izaak J. de Hulster, Valérie Nicolet,

Ronit Nikolsky, Jason M. Silverman

Source: *Advances in Ancient, Biblical, and Near Eastern Research* 1, no. 1 (Spring, 2021): 13–22

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Keywords: Peer review, forum review, academic publishing, ethics.

Abstract

The *AABNER* founding editors-in-chief describe some of the problems with traditional double-blind peer review and describe our solution for them, forum peer review, which we have developed for use within *AABNER*.

L'équipe de rédaction en chef initiale d'*AABNER* décrit quelques problèmes liés au système traditionnel de la "double-blind peer review" et propose une solution, le système "forum peer review", développé et mis en place pour la création d'*AABNER*.

Die Chefredaktion von *AABNER* beschreibt die Schwächen und Probleme des traditionellen ‚Double-Blind-Peer-Review' und bietet eine innovative Lösung: den von uns weiterentwickelten ‚Forum-Peer-Review'.

AABNER

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AABNER FORUM PEER REVIEW SYSTEM

The editors-in-chief:

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In the pursuit of a peer review system that would avoid some of the pitfalls of the traditional double-bind peer review system,[1] *AABNER* proposes (and uses) a forum peer review system. The faults of the double-blind peer review system are documented[2] and include a tendency towards conservatism in methodology and a bias against

[1] Although, it should be borne in mind that peer review as a widely accepted necessity is relatively recent, see e.g., Baldwin 2017; 2018.

[2] Though Zuckermann and Merton 1971 were relatively rosy, they already pointed to some of the flaws that would later become more apparent. E.g., Weiskittel 2015; a special issue of the journal Scientometrics (113.1 [2017]) was recently devoted to the problem (Squazzoni et al. 2017); Tennant et al. 2017; Curtin et al. 2018; Tennant and Ross-Hellauer 2020; for a list along with difficulties in assessing various kinds of bias quantifiably, see Lee et al. 2012; for the need for such studies to integrate a solid sociology of knowledge, see Bornmann 2008; Sabaj et al. 2016.

truly novel research,[3] "the reviewer 2" problem of unfair, unprofessional, or mistaken reviews,[4] sometimes significant publication delays,[5] and the fact that in small disciplines true anonymity is often not possible in reality. Therefore, scientific considerations merit a change. Ethical concerns also call for redress; the above-noted facets of the double-blind system can be disproportionately detrimental to the scholarship of junior scholars, minorities, and women.[6] We are particularly concerned to address systemic inequalities within academia, and peer review is one of the elements that requires reform and lies within a journal's scope. These are problems discussed across the range of scholarly disciplines, and a wide array of solutions have been posited for them.[7]

Thus, *AABNER* is developing a review process first pioneered in the hard sciences: *forum peer review*.[8] This method offers a compromise between fully blind review systems and fully open review systems.[9] In this partially open system, instead of the editors-in-chief sending articles to a handful of scholars for their individual replies and making a decision based thereon (i.e., the traditional double-blind peer review),

Fitzpatrick 2011, 15–49, takes a wider view that sees the entire system out of sync with modern technology.

[3] Siler et al. 2015. Cf. the somewhat aggrieved polemic in Godfrey 2013 in the context of Early Christianity studies.

[4] E.g., Smith 2006; Gerwing et al. 2020.

[5] For a site attempting to collate average response times, see https://scirev.org/statistics/first-round/. According to their current data set, only 71% of articles in the humanities process in less than 6 months (https://scirev.org/statistics/total-duration/).

[6] Helmer et al. 2017. This has been contested (Lee et al. 2012; Mutz et al. 2012).

[7] E.g., Rice 2011; Weiskittel 2015; Esary 2017; Chua et al. 2018.

[8] Cf. the debates overviewed by Rice 2011; Ross-Hellauer and Görögh 2019: especially option J1.

[9] Cf. the discussion of various types of open review systems in Hames 2007, 42–43, 277–81; Tenant et al. 2017; Ross-Hellauer and Görögh 2019; Besançon et al. 2020; Carraro and Jongen 2018. Discussions of "openness" within other aspects of Biblical Studies have been ongoing for quite some time, e.g., Bulkeley 2005. For an example of an open system of review in archaeology, see https://archaeo.peercommunityin.org.

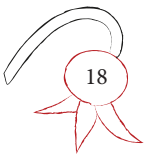
field editors shepherd articles through a forum review process. To our knowledge, this solution has not been previously applied to the fields covered by *AABNER*.

What is the forum review process *AABNER* is using? Once the editors-in-chief receive an article, they first assess its basic suitability for the journal, and then assign it to a field editor with appropriate expertise – for interdisciplinary manuscripts the field editor may collaborate with another colleague. The field editor then shepherds it through the *AABNER* forum, which comprises multiple experts. Anonymized articles are presented within this forum for the reviewers' comments and critiques. Every forum reviewer is able to see the identity of the other reviewers, can read their comments, and offer their own comments on other reviewers' comments. The field editor is responsible for assessing when sufficient feedback has been received. Usually, the discussion between forum reviewers will last for about a month and involve a few threads of discussion. The field editor then collates and anonymizes the results. On this basis, acceptance, revision, or rejection is passed along to the author(s), along with the anonymized commentary. This means that while the identity of the author remains unknown to the reviewers, the identities of all of the reviewers are known to each other and to the author—although the author only receives a review that reflects the forum's *opinio communis* not attributable to single reviewers. In general, it is expected that most manuscripts will receive a number of revisions for improvement rather than outright acceptance or rejection. The entire process involves a consensus opinion among a variety of reviewers; it does not depend on the opinion of any single reviewer nor require an editor to arbitrate between opposing opinions by themselves (for a visual diagram of the workflow, see Fig. 1).

This method has several benefits. First, reviews will not be held up by a single scholar too busy to respond or to return their review. Second, it means that since reviewer comments are visible to their peers, reviewers have an incentive to ensure their comments are valid and constructive: the communal approach encourages constructive criticism over criticism for its own sake. Thus, the system functions as a peer review of peer reviewing itself. Third, it makes it easier to evaluate multi-disciplinary papers, as experts in one area are able to

see the comments of experts outside their own expertise. This collective process encourages colleagues to comment on parts of the manuscript (sometimes just details) within their expertise and ought to produce more relevant and constructive comments for the authors than double-blind systems sometimes do. Our experience of the process so far for the papers published in this first issue has been promising. For the authors themselves, the larger feedback received through the forum review process also means that their work on an article is less solitary and benefits from its insertion in a scholarly community. Instead of individuals critiquing or incensing each other, there is an academic community contributing to the betterment of scholarship.[10]

The system as we have devised it involves both field editors and forum editors, all of whom are known to each other, while the authors' identities remain anonymous. The names of the editors can be seen on the website, and the list will be kept updated. In the near future, the members of the forum who are not also field editors will also be visible on the website. When any editor (whether advisory board member, editor-in-chief, field editor, or forum editor) submits a manuscript to the journal, they recuse themselves from the process for their submission, and they must engage with the resulting commentary like any other author. In the terms of Ross-Hellauer and Görögh (2019), *AABNER*'s forum review has partial open identities and open interaction between reviewers.



For the first several journal issues, we are using a temporary freeware software solution for the editorial forum. We are hopeful that new software specifically designed for forum review (that makes editorial self-recusal easier, for instance) will be developed and available to us in the near future. Thus, while the first issue has taken some time to organize, we hope that once the new software system is up and running, it will prove to be faster as well as a more efficient and effective method of ensuring rigor than traditional systems.

It is our earnest hope that using forum peer review will prove to be one step towards fostering the publication of truly innovative research,

[10] In the context of interdisciplinary panels, see Huutoniemi 2012; for a perspective relating this to both epistemology and ethics, see Bezuidenhout et al. 2019.

widen the scope of scholarly dialogue from traditional methodologies and topics towards a much richer dialogue of perspectives, and help to address systemic inequalities in the fields *AABNER* covers.

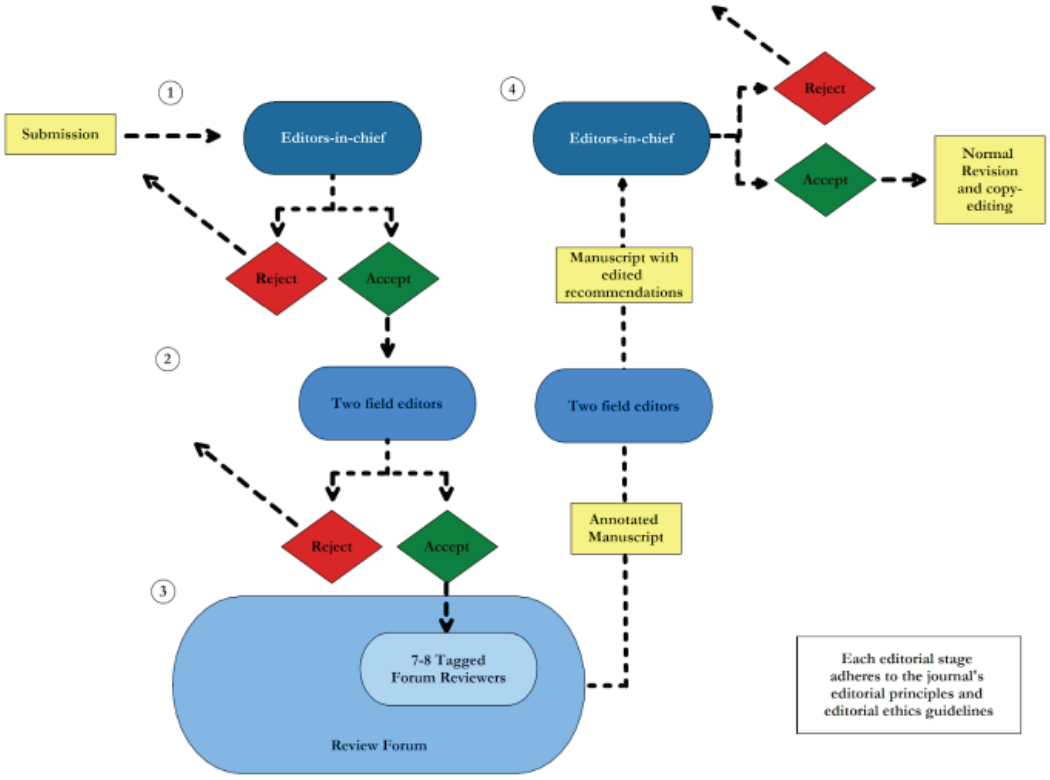


Fig. 1: Forum Review Process

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