

The Pentateuch

A Compilation by Redactors

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The Starting Point

There can be no literary-critical analysis without more or less consciously presuming a certain literary-historical synthesis. My own presumption is that the Hebrew Bible was by its very nature the traditional religious text of the Jewish community of the Second Temple period. Not only was it transmitted and received as the holy Scripture of Second Temple Judaism, but it in fact came into being with precisely this status. The text had its beginnings in the holdings of the royal archives in Jerusalem as texts that happened to survive the conquest of the city and the destruction of the archives of the court and the temple. These sources consisted of relatively slim collections of prophetic sayings, cult poetry, and wisdom sayings; collections of law such as the core of the Covenant Code and the core of Deuteronomy; the synchronistic excerpt from the annals of the kings of Israel and from the annals of the kings of Judah that later provided the historical scaffolding for the books of Kings; and cycles of stories, mostly about heroes and kings, that had been passed down at the court and are now found in the books of Judges, Samuel, and Kings. One may also include among these texts the stories about the fortunes of certain families that were transmitted within the patriarchal narratives in the book of Genesis.

After the downfall of the monarchy in Judah, two redactional compilations came into being as a way of coming to terms with the new situation. As Martin Noth stated: "The whole of the historical tradition in the Old Testament is contained in a few large compilations. These works have collated and systematized the extremely diverse material of traditional tales and historical reports and enclosed them in a framework, determined in each case by their own particular concerns."¹ One of these compilations, known today as the Deuteronomistic History, was the historical work that now constitutes the nucleus of the books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings. It was compiled and written

¹ M. NOTH, *The Deuteronomistic History* (trans. J. Doull et al.; JSOTSup 15; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1981), 1.

in Judah and propagandizes the return of the Davidic monarchy.² Another of these compilations was the history forming the basis of Genesis, Exodus, parts of Numbers, and the close of Deuteronomy. In the tradition of biblical studies, this work is referred to as the Yahwist's history (J). Its literary shape has been uncovered in more recent times by means of redactional criticism. It was probably written in Babylon, as it grapples with the experience of the exile and the dispersion.³

Later on, a third compilation, usually referred to as the Priestly code (P) in modern scholarship, repeated the outline of the Yahwist's history.⁴ Because it depends heavily on the books of the Prophets in their edited form, above all on the book of Ezekiel, it cannot have been written before the middle of the fifth century, probably in Jerusalem. At an unknown later date, the Priestly code was combined with the Yahwist's history in order to present one single, unified history of the early times of the people of God, beginning with the creation of the world. The compilation of P and J is what forms the subject of the Documentary Hypothesis. Ever since this hypothesis was first published by Jean Astruc in 1753, it has provided the basis of modern pentateuchal criticism.⁵ One century later, in 1853, Hermann Hupfeld concluded:

The discovery that the Pentateuch was composed of different sources or documents is indisputably not only most important for the understanding of the historical books of the Old Testament, with serious consequences for the concept of theology and history, but also one of the most secure discoveries in the whole field of critique and literary history. It shall maintain its hold and cannot be undone by anything as long as there is something like critique, that is, a sense of what is equal and what is contradicting, what is similar and what is dissimilar.⁶

² T. VEIJOLA, *Die ewige Dynastie: David und die Entstehung seiner Dynastie nach der deuteronomistischen Darstellung* (AASF 193; Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1975), rediscovered that the intention of the Deuteronomistic History was to favor the monarchy.

³ See C. LEVIN, *Der Jahwist* (FRLANT 157; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993); and in shorter form, IDEM, "The Yahwist: The Earliest Editor in the Pentateuch," *JBL* 126 (2007): 209–230; repr. in C. LEVIN, *Re-Reading the Scriptures: Essays on the Literary History of the Old Testament* (FAT 87; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 1–23.

⁴ For recent research on P, see the overview by E. OTTO, "Forschungen zur Priesterschrift," *TRu* 62 (1997), 1–50; for the "Grundschrift" of P, see esp. T. POLA, *Die ursprüngliche Priesterschrift: Beobachtungen zur Literarkritik und Traditionsgeschichte von P^e* (WMANT 70; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1995).

⁵ J. ASTRUC, *Conjectures sur les mémoires originaux dont il paroît que Moÿse s'est servi pour composer le Livre de la Genèse* (Brussels: Fricx, 1753).

⁶ H. HUPFELD, *Die Quellen der Genesis und die Art ihrer Zusammensetzung* (Berlin: Wiegandt & Grieben, 1853), 1 (my translation).

The Literary-Historical Process

The compilation of the sources J and P is usually seen as the final redaction (R) of the Pentateuch. It would be more accurate, however, to designate the work as the *redaction J/P*, because it in fact formed a very early step in comparison with the literary history of the Pentateuch as a whole. The combined J/P-document was not the outcome of the Pentateuch's literary development but rather its basis.

The body of text reached its current size during the Persian period. This process of growth did not come to an end until the beginning of the Hellenistic era. The guiding concern was to relate the transmitted text, which was understood as the word of God, to the changing conditions in the ongoing history of Judaism. This concern found expression through an inner-textual interpretation that overlaid the already-existing material with commentary and increasingly expanded the text. In this regard, the Hebrew Bible is to a great extent its own interpretation – we might say, a great midrash. The hypothesis that best does justice to this literary fact is the Supplementary Hypothesis. In understanding the literary history of the Bible, the Supplementary Hypothesis is the standard hypothesis that can be applied nearly everywhere.

Generally speaking, the literary growth followed no rules. This was appropriate: a sacred text is not “made”; it is handed down from tradition and interpreted only for the needs of the present time. Redactional interventions such as organization and rearrangement of the written material were the exception.

The Conditions of the Compilation

Regarding the compilation that first provided the literary basis of what eventually became the Pentateuch, it is fundamental that the sequence of events as it is presented in the outline of the Bible was not a matter of course. The entire narrative rests on a number of individual compositions. In the non-Priestly text, six separate narrative groups can be distinguished: (1) the primeval history, which presents the origin of the world and humankind; (2) the history of the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; (3) the story of Joseph and his brothers; (4) the narrative of Moses in Exod 2–4; (5) the history of the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt and their wanderings through the desert in Exod 12–Num 20, to which the death of Moses may also have belonged (Deut 34*); and (6) the story about the seer Balaam (Num 22–24). All of these compositions are independent literary entities of individual origin and with a multiform previous history. All of them bear traces of editorial activity and literary growth.

The diversity of the material indicates that it was only at a later stage that these groups were linked to form the continuous narrative we have today. It

is clear that the material was not randomly compiled but rather intentionally selected and assembled. This is evident from the fact that the story of the Pentateuch does not pertain to history but to prehistory. As Julius Wellhausen stated: “When the subject treated is not history but legends about pre-historic times, the arrangement of the materials does not come with the materials themselves, but must arise out of the plan of a narrator. [. . .] From the mouth of the people there comes nothing but the detached narratives. [. . .] To weave them together in a connected whole is the work of the poetical or literary artist.”⁷ We must, however, replace Wellhausen’s “narrator” with “editor” or “redactor” on the basis of the literary nature of the former narrative compositions.

In pentateuchal research of the mid-twentieth century, scholars explored the possibility that the sequence followed a traditional pattern, which supposedly had its *Sitz im Leben* in the *memoria* used in the cult. To a certain degree it is obvious – as Gerhard von Rad has stated – that “a gigantic structure such as this, the whole conforming to one single plan, does not grow up naturally of its own accord. How could such heterogeneous materials as those embraced by the Yahwist have cast themselves in this form of their own accord!”⁸ The problem is identified appropriately here, but the tradition-based historical solution that von Rad proposed has proved simply to be untenable. The credal formulae, above all Deut 26:5–9, which, it was assumed, provided the original structure for this pattern, have been proved definitively to be late summaries.⁹ They do not precede the redactional compilations; they presuppose them and are inconceivable without them. The cohesion of the whole can be explained only in light of redactional history. “J should be considered the product of redactional work that elaborated on older narrative cycles.”¹⁰

As a consequence, the literary identity of the Yahwist is to be seen in a different way from that of former scholarly tradition. The Yahwist is no longer a narrator or collector of oral tradition, as Hermann Gunkel¹¹ and von Rad saw

⁷ J. WELLHAUSEN, *Prolegomena to the History of Israel* (trans. J. S. Black and A. Menzies; Edinburgh: Black, 1885), 296.

⁸ G. VON RAD, “The Form-Critical Problem of the Hexateuch,” in *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays* (trans. E. W. Trueman Dicken; London: SCM Press, 1984 [1st ed., 1966]), 1–78, here 52.

⁹ See W. RICHTER, “Beobachtungen zur theologischen Systembildung in der alttestamentlichen Literatur anhand des ‘kleinen geschichtlichen Credo,’” in *Wahrheit und Verkündigung: Festschrift M. Schmaus* (ed. L. Scheffczyk et al.; 2 vols.; Munich: Schöningh, 1967), 1:175–212; B. S. CHILDS, “Deuteronomistic Formulae of the Exodus Traditions,” in *Hebräische Wortforschung: Festschrift W. Baumgartner* (ed. B. Hartmann; VTSup 16; Leiden: Brill, 1967), 30–39; N. LOHFINK, *Theology of the Pentateuch: Themes of the Priestly Narrative and Deuteronomy* (trans. L. M. Maloney; Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1993), 265–289.

¹⁰ J. L. SKA, *Introduction to Reading the Pentateuch* (trans. P. Dominique; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 144.

¹¹ H. GUNKEL, *Genesis* (trans. M. E. Biddle; Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1997).

him¹² and as John Van Seters still regards him.¹³ Rather, he is to be seen as an editor who dealt with written sources. We can grasp the editor's intention and his editorial technique by the selection of sources he made and by the peculiarities of his language, which enable us to clearly distinguish the editorial additions from the preeditorial literary level.¹⁴

It is more interesting here to consider the consequences for the Documentary Hypothesis, which derive from the fact that the making of the document J was a distinctive editorial step in the history of transmission. To produce documents like this depended on special preconditions. It is therefore very probable that the Priestly code took its outline from the Yahwist's history, whereas the so-called E source never existed at all, as has been shown by Wilhelm Rudolph:

The reservations against source criticism, which I could not help thinking about more and more, do not turn toward the separation of sources in general: It seems to me unshaken and unshakeable that J is the oldest and P the youngest source of the Pentateuch. In my eyes, it is rather the way of separating the sources that would not do, that is, the method of sorting out verse after verse in every section of the text and attributing the single verses or even half verses or quarter verses to different written sources.¹⁵

It should be remembered that Jean Astruc, who first proposed the Documentary Hypothesis, had only two sources for the book of Genesis and ten fragments.

The So-Called Elohist (E)

The Elohist (E) was first introduced – at least de facto – by Karl David Ilgen, who differentiated between *Eliel Harischon* and *Eliel Haschscheni* within the source that used the name *elohim*.¹⁶ The hypothesis was later elaborated by Hermann Hupfeld while he was clearing up the outline of *Grundschrift*, which we now, after the redating by Karl Heinrich Graf, Abraham Kuenen, and Julius Wellhausen, call the Priestly code (P).¹⁷ When it became evident to Hupfeld that

¹² G. VON RAD, *Genesis* (trans. J.H. Marks; rev. ed.; OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972).

¹³ J. VAN SETERS, *Prologue to History: The Yahwist as Historian in Genesis* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992); IDEM, *The Life of Moses: The Yahwist as Historian in Exodus–Numbers* (CBET 10; Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1994); IDEM, *The Edited Bible: The Curious History of the “Editor” in Biblical Criticism* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2006).

¹⁴ See LEVIN, *Der Jahwist* (see n. 3); IDEM, “The Yahwist: The Earliest Editor in the Pentateuch” (see n. 3).

¹⁵ W. RUDOLPH, “Die Josefs Geschichte,” in *Der Elohist als Erzähler: Ein Irrweg der Pentateuchkritik?* (ed. W. RUDOLPH and P. VOLZ; BZAW 63; Gießen: Töpelmann, 1933), 143–183, here 145 (my translation).

¹⁶ K. D. ILGEN, *Die Urkunden des ersten Buchs von Moses in ihrer Urgestalt: Zum bessern Verständnis und richtigem Gebrauch derselben* (Halle: Hemmerde & Schwetschke, 1798).

¹⁷ HUPFELD, *Die Quellen der Genesis* (see n. 6).

a remarkable quantity of the *elohim* texts did not belong to this older Elohist, it seemed only a matter of course to attribute it to a source of its own, the younger (and later, after the redating, older) Elohist. Paul Volz and Wilhelm Rudolph, however, rightly declared that the conjectured Elohist was an error in Pentateuchal criticism.¹⁸ The existence of this source has been supposed only because the division of the sources worked so perfectly in the case of the documents J and P, particularly in the primeval history, that scholars were inclined to regard the Documentary Hypothesis as a general rule. As an example, I quote Rudolf Smend Sr.: “In the history of the Hexateuch this remarkable process (i.e., the joining of sources) was continually repeated.”¹⁹ But the truth is that the combination of formerly independent sources has been an absolute exception within the literary history of the Bible. It can only have taken place under very special conditions. If it is applied several times or to more than two sources, the Documentary Hypothesis becomes absurd.

Some texts formerly attributed to E in fact prove to be pre-editorial sources of the Yahwist’s history. This is true of the stories of the founding of the cult sites related in Gen 28 and Exod 3. In these cases, the Yahwistic part that can easily be identified by its use of the divine name יהוה does not form an independent parallel version but an editorial addition to the older literary tradition that uses the term אלהים.²⁰ The Abraham stories in Gen 20–22, in contrast, are fragments of a Genesis midrash comparable to the Genesis Apocryphon from Qumran. These three chapters relate to J and P as well. They were inserted into the text of what is now the book of Genesis after the two sources had already been unified for a long time.²¹ Other E texts are late additions mostly focusing on the piety and behavior of the patriarchs. This is true of large parts of the Joseph story, for example. They unite to form an edition with a distinct theological profile, which I propose to call the *righteousness edition*.²² Additions of this purpose are to be found in most narratives of the Tanak. They serve to bring fate and behavior into accord with the Jewish belief in the unwavering righteousness of God. The story of Joseph and his brothers was an especially suitable subject for this purpose, because righteousness was already a distinguishing feature of the

¹⁸ RUDOLPH and VOLZ, *Der Elohist als Erzähler* (see n. 15).

¹⁹ R. SMEND, *Die Erzählung des Hexateuchs* (Berlin: Reimer, 1912), 343 (my translation).

²⁰ For Gen 28, see LEVIN, *Der Jahwist* (see n. 3), 216–220; for Exod 3 see IDEM, “The Yahwist and the Redactional Link between Genesis and Exodus,” in *A Farewell to the Yahwist? The Composition of the Pentateuch in Recent European Interpretation* (ed. T.B. Dozeman and K. Schmid; SBLSymS 34; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006), 131–141; repr. in IDEM, *Re-Reading the Scriptures* (see n. 3), 83–93.

²¹ See LEVIN, *Der Jahwist* (see n. 3), 172–180.

²² See C. LEVIN, “Righteousness in the Joseph Story: Joseph Resists Seduction (Genesis 39),” in *The Pentateuch: International Perspectives on Current Research* (ed. T.B. Dozeman et al.; FAT 78; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 223–240; repr. in IDEM, *Re-Reading the Scriptures* (see n. 3), 65–82.

original narrative. It provided the perfect matrix to show how God was guiding human fate according to his purpose to perform righteousness under each and every circumstance.

The Documentary Hypothesis and the Other Hypotheses

The Documentary Hypothesis is by no means sufficient for uncovering the literary history of the Pentateuch. Its weaknesses were observed soon after its development in the eighteenth century. The Documentary Hypothesis can only be maintained if it is combined with the Supplementary Hypothesis. This was emphatically underlined by Abraham Kuenen: “The redaction of the Hexateuch assumes the form of a continuous *diaskeue* or *diorthosis*, and the redactor becomes a collective body headed by the scribe who united the two works [. . .] into a single whole, but also including the whole series of his more or less independent followers.”²³ Also in the Pentateuch, not differently from anywhere else in the Old Testament, the Supplementary Hypothesis is the most appropriate way to understand the process of literary growth.

Of special importance is the fact that the two sources J and P were joined at an early stage in comparison with the process of textual growth of the Pentateuch as a whole and that their compass was restricted. In the primeval history, where the Documentary Hypothesis works best, I found that about seventy of 299 masoretic verses – about one quarter of the present text – had been added after the combination of the two sources.²⁴ In the patriarchal narratives, the extent of late textual additions is much greater. Many texts are not part of one of the documents but were added later, such as Gen 12:10–20;²⁵ 14; 15;²⁶ 20–22; 23;²⁷

²³ A. KUENEN, *An Historico-Critical Inquiry into the Origin and Composition of the Hexateuch* (trans. P.H. Wicksteed; London: Macmillan, 1886), 315.

²⁴ See C. LEVIN, “Die Redaktion R^JP in der Urgeschichte,” in *Auf dem Weg zur Endgestalt von Genesis bis II Regum: Festschrift H.-C. Schmitt* (ed. M. Beck and U. Schorn; BZAW 370; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2006), 15–34; repr. in C. LEVIN, *Verheißung und Rechtfertigung: Gesammelte Studien zum Alten Testament II* (BZAW 431; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2013), 59–79.

²⁵ See C. LEVIN, “Abraham in Ägypten (Gen 12,10–20),” in “*Vom Leben umfassen*”: *Ägypten, das Alte Testament und das Gespräch der Religionen; Gedenkschrift M. Görg* (ed. S. Wimmer and G. Gafus; ÄAT 80; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2014), 109–121.

²⁶ See C. LEVIN, “Jahwe und Abraham im Dialog: Genesis 15,” in *Gott und Mensch im Dialog: Festschrift für O. Kaiser* (ed. M. Witte; BZAW 345/1; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2004), 237–257; repr. in IDEM, *Verheißung und Rechtfertigung* (see n. 24), 80–102.

²⁷ See C. LEVIN, “Abraham erwirbt seine Grablege (Genesis 23),” in “*Gerechtigkeit und Recht zu üben*” (Gen 18,19): *Festschrift für E. Otto* (ed. R. Achenbach and M. Arneth; BZABR 13; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2010), 96–113; repr. in IDEM, *Verheißung und Rechtfertigung* (see n. 24), 103–123.

34,²⁸ 38,²⁹ 48; 49; and most of the promises to the patriarchs,³⁰ some of the genealogies, and many additions and comments in nearly every part of the present text. In the books of Exodus through Numbers, the late texts are so predominant that, from at least Exod 19 onward, it becomes difficult to identify the narrative strands of the two sources at all – which, nevertheless, do exist.

One reason for present doubts about the Documentary Hypothesis is that the size of the two sources J and P has been greatly overestimated in previous scholarship. Moreover, the formerly separate documents did not remain unscathed when copied into the framework of the combined J/P document. There are a number of gaps. The Priestly code was preserved in the primeval history, but in the patriarchal narratives most of its text is lost. In the text of the Yahwistic history, there are also a number of gaps, even if they are smaller. As a result, none of the two documents is suited to serve as *the* one and only basic document (*Grundschrift*) of the whole composition. The Pentateuch does not hang on a single thread but on a cord plaited together from two strands. This cord makes it possible for the work as a whole to avoid falling apart when one of the two threads is torn or missing. Seen in this way, the fact that the former documents cannot be fully reconstructed does not shake the Documentary Hypothesis. On the contrary, it makes it even more probable.

Toward the Present Shape of the Pentateuch

Even in the case of the Torah, it would seem reasonable that a work that evolved from one single redaction would, as a literary unit, have constituted one single scroll. “The fact that the biblical books, and even the smallest of them, were kept from the outset on separate scrolls is [. . .] a conclusive proof of the basic rule, that each complete work was to be written on its own scroll.”³¹ The extent of today’s text of the Pentateuch, however, exceeds by far the compass of any scroll known to us. The Isaiah scroll from Qumran could accommodate no

²⁸ See C. LEVIN, “Dina: Wenn die Schrift wider sich selbst lautet,” in *Schriftauslegung in der Schrift: Festschrift für O. H. Steck* (ed. R. G. Kratz et al.; BZAW 300; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2000), 61–72; repr. in C. LEVIN, *Fortschreibungen: Gesammelte Studien zum Alten Testament* (BZAW 316; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2003), 49–59.

²⁹ See C. LEVIN, “Tamar erhält ihr Recht (Genesis 38),” in *Diasynchron: W. Dietrich* (ed. T. Naumann and R. Hunziker-Rodewald; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2009), 279–298; repr. in IDEM, *Verheißung und Rechtfertigung* (see n. 24), 124–143.

³⁰ See C. LEVIN, “Die Väterverheißungen: Eine Bestandsaufnahme,” in *The Post-Priestly Pentateuch: New Perspectives on its Redactional Development and Theological Profiles* (ed. F. Giuntoli and K. Schmid; FAT 101; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015), 125–143.

³¹ M. HARAN, “Book-Size and the Thematic Cycles in the Pentateuch,” in *Die Hebräische Bibel und ihre zweifache Nachgeschichte: Festschrift für R. Rendtorff* (ed. E. Blum et al.; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1990), 165–176, esp. 166.

more than a quarter of today's Torah. From this we must conclude that the first redactional form of the combined J/P document was considerably shorter than the present text. This again is a strong argument in favor of the Supplementary Hypothesis. Without gradual literary growth, the compass of the Pentateuch as we have it would be inconceivable.

This pertains to the shaping of the books of the Pentateuch as well. It is highly unlikely that the overall historiographical concept came into being only through the subsequent linking of books to one another, which were for the most part already independent. The individual books did not precede the literary growth; they are its outcome. Scrolls that had become too large were split up. Thus the separation of the Pentateuch into single books is secondary, with the probable exception of the division between Numbers and Deuteronomy. The "cross-referencing at the seams of the books reflects the division of the material into books. Therefore, it is clear that the book subdivisions [. . .] must be older than the last redactional shaping of the text."³²

Again, in relation to the literary process as a whole, the division of the Pentateuch into five books had already been made early on and was presumably not made for all books at the same time. The separated books presented the matrix for further growth. This provided the opportunity to add new sheets and to enlarge the separated single scrolls. In this way, the individual books came to have their individual shapes, at least to a certain degree.³³ This is most obvious in the case of the book of Genesis.

The literary growth eventually came to an end. From the Hellenistic period onward, the text gradually crystallized into fixed form. It is evident from the Septuagint that the Pentateuch took the shape it has today at the time of its translation into Greek. According to the Letter of Aristeas, this took place in the middle of the third century BCE. From then on, the process of interpreting and actualizing the religious tradition moved from the canonical books to writings outside of the collection that eventually became the Hebrew Bible. Regarding the shape of the Pentateuch that has come down to us, the statement of Erhard Blum proves to be true: "There is no final redaction."³⁴

³² K. SCHMID, *Genesis and the Moses Story: Israel's Dual Origins in the Hebrew Bible* (trans. J.D. Nogalski; Siphrut 3; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2010), 27.

³³ See C. LEVIN, "On the Cohesion and Separation of Books within the Enneateuch," in *Pentateuch, Hexateuch, or Enneateuch: Identifying Literary Works in Genesis through Kings* (ed. T.B. Dozeman et al.; Ancient Israel and Its Literature 8; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011), 127–154; repr. in IDEM, *Re-Reading the Scriptures* (see n. 3), 115–141.

³⁴ E. BLUM, *Studien zur Komposition des Pentateuch* (BZAW 189; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1990), 380 (my translation).