

# Has European Scholarship Abandoned the Documentary Hypothesis? Some Reminders on Its History and Remarks on Its Current Status

KONRAD SCHMID

The most striking difference commonly assumed between the three different academic cultures with respect to pentateuchal research in North America, Europe, and Israel is Europe's more critical stance toward the Documentary Hypothesis.

This may be true in very general terms. But it is doubtful whether it is correct to describe the difference as follows: European scholarship has completely abandoned the Documentary Hypothesis, while American and Israeli scholars still adhere to it. Even more mistaken is the statement that Europeans do not recognize any source "documents" underlying the Pentateuch and that their approach is not "documentarian," but "fragmentarian."

The goal of this paper is to show that treating the Documentary Hypothesis and the Fragmentary or Supplementary Hypotheses as *exclusive* alternatives is a shortcoming in terms of both methodology and history of research. This might seem to be more or less obvious, but there is apparently some need of clarification in the light of newer contributions like Joel Baden's monograph.<sup>1</sup> He characterizes the current situation with stark warfare terminology: Rendtorff and his students, and the students of his students, have launched an "assault" on the "Documentary Hypothesis" (1), they "hurled [challenges] against it" (4) and came to the conclusion "that the classical theory 'can no longer be maintained'" (1). In response, there were only "few who have taken up arms in defense of the classical approach" over against "the anti-documentary uproar" (1–2). Is there really a war going on between "documentarians" and "anti-documentarians"? I understand the situation somewhat differently. The newer contributions to pentateuchal research from Europe do not aim at overthrowing the Documentary Hypothesis from the outset. Rather, they strive to understand the composition of the Pentateuch in the most appropriate terms,

---

<sup>1</sup> Joel S. BADEN, *J, E, and the Redaction of the Pentateuch* (FAT 68, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009).

which – this needs to be stressed from the beginning – includes “documentary” elements as well.

## 1. The Case of P

The most obvious element in current European scholarship showing that European scholarship has not completely given up the documentarian approach is P.<sup>2</sup> Of course, there were, after an initial proposal by Karl Heinrich Graf,<sup>3</sup> especially in the 1920s and '30s<sup>4</sup> and again in the 1970s,<sup>5</sup> some attempts within European and American scholarship to define P as a redactional layer rather than as a stand-alone document. However, in the current European discussion nearly everyone considers P a source document.<sup>6</sup> One major excep-

---

<sup>2</sup> See the overview in Eckart OTTO, “Forschungen zur Priesterschrift,” TRu 62 (1997): 1–50.

<sup>3</sup> Karl Heinrich GRAF, “Die s.g. Grundschrift des Pentateuchs,” in *Archiv für wissenschaftliche Erforschung des Alten Testaments 1 (1867–1869)*: 466–77.

<sup>4</sup> Max LÖHR, *Untersuchungen zum Hexateuchproblem I: Der Priesterkodex in der Genesis* (BZAW 38; Giessen: Töpelmann, 1924); Richard H. PFEIFFER, “A Non-Israelitic Source of the Book of Genesis,” ZAW 48 (1930): 66–73; Paul VOLZ and Wilhelm RUDOLPH, *Der Elohist als Erzähler: Ein Irrweg der Pentateuchkritik? An der Genesis erläutert* (BZAW 63; Giessen: Töpelmann, 1933), 139.

<sup>5</sup> Frank Moore CROSS, “The Priestly Work,” in *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973), 293–325; John VAN SETERS, *Abraham in History and Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975); Rolf RENDTORFF, *Das überlieferungsgeschichtliche Problem des Pentateuch* (BZAW 147; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1977).

<sup>6</sup> See, e.g., Norbert LOHFINK, “Die Priesterschrift und die Geschichte,” in *Studien zum Pentateuch* (SBAB 4; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1988), 213–53, here 223–24 (see the argumentation on 224–25 n. 31); repr. from *Congress Volume*: Göttingen, 1977 (ed. J. A. Emerton; VTSup 29; Leiden: Brill, 1978); Werner H. SCHMIDT, *Exodus: 1. Teilband; Exodus 1–6* (BKAT II/1; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1988), 6:272–73; Walter GROSS, “Bundeszeichen und Bundesschluß in der Priesterschrift,” TTZ 87 (1987): 98–115, here 100 n. 12; IDEM, “Die Wolkensäule und die Feuersäule in Ex 13 + 14: Literarkritische, redaktionsgeschichtliche und quellenkritische Erwägungen,” in *Biblische Theologie und gesellschaftlicher Wandel* (ed. G. Braulik, W. Groß, and S. McEvenue; Freiburg: Herder, 1993), 142–65; Erich ZENGER, *Gottes Bogen in den Wolken: Untersuchungen zu Komposition und Theologie der priesterschriftlichen Urgeschichte* (SBS 112; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1983), 32–36; IDEM, “Priesterschrift,” TRE 27:435–46; Peter WEIMAR, “Struktur und Komposition der priesterschriftlichen Geschichtsdarstellung,” BN 23 (1984): 81–134; BN 24 (1984): 138–62, here 84, 88; Bernd JANOWSKI, *Sühne als Heilsgeschehen: Studien zur Sühnetheologie der Priesterschrift und zur Wurzel KPR im Alten Orient und im Alten Testament* (WMANT 55; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1982), 8–9 n. 51; Klaus KOCH, “P – kein Redaktor! Erinnerung an zwei Eckdaten der Quellenscheidung,” VT 37 (1987): 446–67; Odil Hannes STECK, “Aufbauprobleme in der Priesterschrift,” in *Ernten, was man sät* (ed. D. R. Daniels, U. Gleßmer, and M. Rösel; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1991), 287–

tion is Erhard Blum's compromise, which sees P neither as a source nor as a redaction.<sup>7</sup> However, Blum's notion of "neither ... nor" really implies an "as well as." He describes his position regarding P as follows:

... the compositional elements were not immediately added to the main text, but were drafted "on their own" (albeit knowing the tradition which was to be reworked).

... daß die kompositionellen Texte nicht sogleich in den Haupttext eingeschrieben, sondern zunächst "für sich" (freilich unter Kenntnis der zu bearbeitenden Überlieferung) konzipiert wurden.<sup>8</sup>

So, it is even possible to include Blum in the group of European scholars who consider P a formerly independent source text, that is "a document."

Regarding P, European scholars would generally agree on what Axel Graupner, one of the few German-speaking defenders of E, *mistakenly* points out as the basic argument for his conviction that E was an independent source over against newer alternative approaches in European scholarship:

With regard to methodology, the diverse redactional and composition-critical approaches are not more than a resumption of the Fragmentary or Supplementary Hypothesis,

Methodisch betrachtet, handelt es sich bei den verschiedenen redaktions- und kompositionsgeschichtlichen Ansätzen jedoch lediglich um modifizierte Wiederaufnahmen der Fragmen-

---

308, here 287; John Adney EMERTON, "The Priestly Writer in Genesis," *JTS* 39 (1988): 381–400, here 396–98; Christian STREIBERT, *Schöpfung bei Deuterocesaja und in der Priesterschrift: Eine vergleichende Untersuchung zu Inhalt und Funktion schöpfungstheologischer Aussagen in exilisch-nachexilischer Zeit* (BEATAJ 8; Frankfurt a. M.: Peter Lang, 1993), 46–47; Ludwig SCHMIDT, *Studien zur Priesterschrift* (BZAW 214; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1993), 4–10, 34, and other passages; Thomas POLA, *Die ursprüngliche Priesterschrift: Beobachtungen zur Literarkritik und Traditionsgeschichte von P<sup>s</sup>* (WMANT 70; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1995), 29–31; Eckart OTTO, "Die nachpriesterschriftliche Pentateuchredaktion im Buch Exodus," in *Studies in the Book of Exodus: Redaction – Reception – Interpretation* (ed. M. Vervenne; BETL 126; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1996), 61–111, here 66 n. 23; IDEM, "Forschungen zur Priesterschrift," 36; Thomas KRÜGER, "Erwägungen zur Redaktion der Meerwundererzählung (Exodus 13,17–14,31)," *ZAW* 108 (1996): 519–33; Konrad SCHMID, *Erzväter und Exodus: Untersuchungen zur doppelten Begründung der Ursprünge Israels in den Geschichtsbüchern des Alten Testaments* (WMANT 81; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1999), 53–54; Christian FREVEL, *Mit dem Blick auf das Land die Schöpfung erinnern: Zum Ende der Priestergrundschrift* (Herders Biblische Studien 23; Freiburg: Herder, 2000). The new proposal by Christoph Berner (*Die Exoduserzählung: Das literarische Werden einer Ursprüngerzählung Israels* [FAT 73; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010], 5, 63, 449) to consider P as a redactional layer is based only on observations in Gen 37–Exod 15 and does not take into account P's overall structure; it therefore remains implausible.

<sup>7</sup> Erhard BLUM, *Studien zur Komposition des Pentateuch* (BZAW 189; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1990), 249; see also IDEM, *Komposition der Vätergeschichte* (WMANT 57; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1984), 425–26. Another suggestion can be found in Jan Christian GERTZ, *Tradition und Redaktion in der Exoduserzählung* (FRLANT 189; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000), 391: "'P' might be explained as a redactional layer within Genesis 12–50, but as a source in Genesis 1–11 and in Exodus" (my translation).

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 241–42.

which was already judged insufficient in the nineteenth century because it does not explain the phenomena that initiated modern critical study of the Pentateuch – the doublets, the alteration of Yhwh and Elohim, and above all the coincidence of both phenomena.

ten- oder der Ergänzungshypothese, die bereits das 19. Jh. als nicht zureichend beurteilt hat, weil sie hinter den Phänomenen zurückbleiben, die die moderne Pentateuchkritik allererst angestoßen haben: der Doppelung des Stoffes, dem Wechsel von Jahwe und Elohim und – vor allem – der Koinzidenz beider Phänomene.<sup>9</sup>

Of course, the alteration of Yhwh and Elohim and the doublets are striking observations within the Pentateuch, but – and here Graupner is wrong – they lead first and foremost not to the distinction between J and E but between P and non-P.

At the same time, this means that the opening statement of Joel Baden's book concerning the status of J, E, and P needs to be rethought:

In short, the method by which P is separated from non-P is identical to that by which E can be separated from J. Moreover, the results are virtually identical: the J and E documents are no less coherent in the continuity of their historical claims and narrative details than P.<sup>10</sup>

The last sentence seems especially bold in its claim that J and E are no less coherent than P. This is very strong rhetoric; however, there is considerable agreement in pentateuchal studies that P is a more stable hypothesis than J and E.

## 2. "Documents" in Current European Proposals for the Formation of the Pentateuch

However, the acknowledgment that P was a "source" does not yet make a "documentarian" out of an alleged "fragmentarian." In the following, I shall present three randomly chosen models from current European scholars of how the Pentateuch came about in order to show that so-called non-documentarian approaches to the Pentateuch in fact also reckon with multiple documents and not only with supplements. The details of these models are of no interest here; the only purpose in using them is to demonstrate the formerly independent literary documents they assume within the Pentateuch.

First there is Reinhard Kratz's monograph *Die Komposition der erzählenden Bücher des Alten Testaments*.<sup>11</sup> As for the beginnings of the literary histo-

<sup>9</sup> Axel GRAUPNER, *Der Elohist: Gegenwart und Wirksamkeit des transzendenten Gottes in der Geschichte* (WMANT 97; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2002), 4.

<sup>10</sup> BADEN, J, E, and the Redaction of the Pentateuch, 3.

<sup>11</sup> Reinhard Gregor KRATZ, *The Composition of the Narrative Books of the Old Testament* (trans. J. Bowden; London: T&T Clark, 2005), 326; trans. of *Die Komposition der erzählenden*

ry of the Pentateuch, Kratz assumes quite a few pre-Priestly documents, if we define “document” as a formerly stand-alone literary entity, such as an “anthropogony” in Gen 2–4; the table of nations in Gen 10; a cycle of Abraham tales – with a question mark; a Lot story in Gen 19; narrations about Isaac, Esau, Jacob, Laban, and Joseph; a Moses story; and so on. Some of the more extensive complexes even bear the same names as the traditional sources: Kratz terms the non-Priestly Genesis “J” (“Jahwistic” Genesis), and the non-Priestly exodus story reaching until Josh 12 as “E” (“Exodus”). Another example can be found in Eckart Otto’s article “Pentateuch” in *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*.<sup>12</sup> Again, it is obvious that he assumes several original “documents” having been worked into the Pentateuch, such as the primeval history, the tales about the ancestors in Gen 12–50, a Moses story, the Covenant Code and Deuteronomy, and so on. Finally, in Jan Gertz’s *Grundinformation Altes Testament*,<sup>13</sup> there is quite a comparable assumption with regard to the role of documents in the composition of the Pentateuch: as in the case of Otto, he assumes a stand-alone primeval history, the ancestors story, a Moses story, and Deuteronomy as a self-contained literary unit.

### 3. Are These “Documents” or Mere “Fragments”? An Excursion into the Early Uses of the Terms “Document” (*Urkunde*) and “Fragment” (*Fragment*)

However, a documentarian might object: these are not documents but fragments and are not comparable to the documents or sources of the Documentary Hypothesis. There is some truth to this objection; nevertheless, it needs some critical reassessment, especially in the light of the history of research.

To understand the relationship between documents and fragments, it is helpful to have a look at Johann Severin Vater’s *Commentar über den Pentateuch*. Vater inaugurated the Fragmentary Hypothesis, at least according to the usual textbook presentation. His position regarding the composition of the Pentateuch is as well-known as it is simple:

The books of the Pentateuch, from the first to the last, fall into individual pieces, in large, in small, also very small pieces, of which it

Die Bücher des Pentateuch, sie alle vom ersten bis zum letzten, zerfallen in einzelne Stücke, in große, kleinere, auch ganz kleine Stü-

---

den Bücher des Alten Testaments (UTB 2157; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000), 331.

<sup>12</sup> Eckart OTTO, “Pentateuch” in *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (ed. H. D. Betz; 8 vols; 4th ed.; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 6:1099.

<sup>13</sup> Jan Christian GERTZ, ed., *Grundinformation Altes Testament: Eine Einführung in Literatur, Religion und Geschichte des Alten Testaments* (3rd ed.; UTB 2745; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009), 216.

is not possible to demonstrate that there originally was a link between them. For most of them, the opposite is clearly the case.

cke, von welchen sich nicht zeigen läßt, daß ursprünglich zwischen ihnen ein Zusammenhang statt fand. Bey den meisten derselben fällt vielmehr das Gegentheil deutlich in die Augen.<sup>14</sup>

Vater himself proposes the name “fragments” for these pieces. He explains this terminology as follows:

If the individual pieces in this commentary are called “fragments,” this is to say that the individual pieces are without mutual links.

Wenn die einzelnen Stücke in diesem Commentare: Fragmente, überschrieben worden sind, so soll damit nur gesagt werden, daß sie einzelne Stücke ohne gegenseitigen Zusammenhang sind.<sup>15</sup>

Fragments are called “fragments” not because of their incompleteness but instead because of their character as formerly stand-alone texts. The most striking point is that Vater’s fragments are nothing other than what previous scholarship had called documents (*Urkunden*):

The different pieces were usually termed the “documents” of Genesis, a name which can lead to incorrect associations. The term “document” means a publicly authorized message, or, at least, the report of an eyewitness.

Diese einzelnen Stücke sind gewöhnlich *Urkunden* [im Original gesperrt] der Genesis genannt worden, welcher Name aber leicht unrichtige Wortvorstellungen veranlassen kann. Der Begriff einer Urkunde ist der einer öffentlich autorisirten [sic] Nachricht, oder wenigstens des Berichtes eines Augenzeugen.<sup>16</sup>

Vater rejects these connotations that, however, early on in critical scholarship seemed to be the driving force behind the terminology either of *Denkschrift*, *Urkunde*, or, as Jean Astruc put it, *mémoires originaux*.<sup>17</sup> The documents Moses used to compose the book of Genesis were closer to the events described than he himself was.

For Vater, the pieces making up the Pentateuch are at the same time both documents (*Urkunden*) – according to the traditional terminology – and fragments – according to his proposal. The association which the term “fragment” has nowadays – fragmentary in character – is not implied.

---

<sup>14</sup> Johann Severin VATER, *Commentar über den Pentateuch: Mit Einleitungen zu den einzelnen Abschnitten, der eingeschalteten Übersetzung von Dr. Alexander Geddes’s merkwürdigeren kritischen und exegetischen Anmerkungen, und einer Abhandlung über Moses und die Verfasser des Pentateuchs* (Halle: Waisenhaus-Buchhandlung, 1802–1805), 393.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 394.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Jean ASTRUC, *Conjectures sur les mémoires originaux, dont il paroît que Moÿse s’est servi pour composer le livre de la Genèse* (Brussels: de Fricx, 1753).

With Johann Gottfried Eichhorn, the author of the first *Einleitung in das Alte Testament*, published in 1780–1783 (here in the fourth edition of 1823), we find another interesting feature of the use of the term *Urkunde*.

Eichhorn is famous for being the first “documentarian,” differentiating between a J document and an Elohim document (which equals our P more than E). In the German original these documents are termed *Urkunden*.<sup>18</sup> So far, this is not surprising, but Eichhorn assumes that these documents incorporated still earlier preexisting documents:

The authors of the two works compiled in the book of Genesis probably used already written *documents* [*Documente*] for their description of the oldest world.

Aber wahrscheinlich haben die Verfasser der beyden Werke, die in der Genesis zusammengestellt sind, schon schriftliche *Documente* [im Original gesperrt] bey ihrer Beschreibung der ältesten Welt gebraucht.<sup>19</sup>

In this passage, he calls them by the German term *Documente* (“documents”), but he can also refer to them as *Urkunden*. For example, Gen 2–3 belongs neither to the J *Urkunde* nor to the Elohim *Urkunde*, but is an interpolation, which he also calls an *Urkunde*.

Some chapters of Genesis clearly exhibit the character of stand-alone documents [*Urkunden*], the authors of which had no visible share in the remaining parts. Already the second chapter, starting from the fourth verse, and the whole third chapter constitute such a stand-alone document [*Document*].

Einige Kapitel des ersten Buchs Moses tragen das deutliche Gepräge einzelner für sich bestehender Urkunden, deren Verfasser sonst weiter keinen jetzt noch sichtbaren Antheil an den übrigen Theilen desselben haben. Gleich das zweyte Kapitel vom vierten Vers an und das ganze dritte machen so ein eigenes abge sondertes Document aus.<sup>20</sup>

*Urkunde* is therefore the term both for the larger J and Elohim documents and for the interpolated pieces. Eichhorn admits that this usage might be irritating, but he states:

No one shall take offense at the term *document* [*Urkunde*] for a memoir [*Denkschrift*]. ... The briefness of the expression ... will justify it.

Niemand stoße sich an den Gebrauch des Wortes *Urkunde* [im Original gesperrt] von einer Denkschrift. ... Die Kürze des Ausdrucks ... wird ihn rechtfertigen.<sup>21</sup>

To sum up so far, neither Vater nor Eichhorn saw a qualitative difference between what are today termed “documents” and “fragments.” Both are *Urkunden*. If documentarians nowadays think of fragments as inferior to documents, then such an attitude is mainly idiosyncratic: of course, if one has J, E, or P in mind as documents, then smaller, formerly independent pieces do not

<sup>18</sup> Johann Gottfried EICHHORN, *Einleitung in das Alte Testament* (3 vols.; 4th ed.; Göttingen: Carl Eduard Rosenbusch, 1823), 3:57.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 3:56.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 3:39.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

seem to have the same significance and importance. However, in methodological terms, there is no reason to deny them equal status.

The close interrelationship between documents (*Urkunden*) and fragments can also be detected in de Wette's writings. In his *Beiträge zur Einleitung in das Alte Testament*,<sup>22</sup> he proposes the idea of a *Grundschrift* running through Genesis and Exodus (which basically equals P) that was secondarily expanded by additions. He is, so to speak, a "one-source documentarian."

Through Genesis and the beginning of Exodus there is an original entity, a sort of epic poem that was earlier than all remaining pieces and something like the original. It served as the basis for the collection of documents for this part of the history to which the remaining parts were attached as comments and supplements.

Durch die Genesis und den Anfang des Exodus zieht sich ein ursprüngliches Ganzes, eine Art von epischem Gedicht, das, früher als fast alle übrigen Stücke und von diesen gleichsam das Original, der Urkundensammlung über diesen Teil der Geschichte als Grundlage gedient hat, auf welche die übrigen als Erläuterungen und Supplemente aufgetragen sind.<sup>23</sup>

However, even this *Grundschrift*, which he calls the "Epic of Hebrew Theocracy,"<sup>24</sup> is composed out of stand-alone pieces that were then rearranged by the author. The *Grundschrift* document therefore consists of fragments:

The relationships of [the texts in] the Pentateuch are that of originally individual, independent pieces (articles) that were combined by the collector into a mistaken, strange connection. To understand and to appreciate them correctly, we therefore need to liberate them from this connection and to give them back their independence. Then they may appear very differently than they do in this distorted order and this interweaving.

Die Relationen des Pentateuch sind ursprünglich einzelne, von einander unabhängige Aufsätze, die der Sammler in eine falsche fremdartige Verbindung gesetzt hat. Um sie recht zu verstehen und zu würdigen, müssen wir sie also von dieser Verbindung befreien, und ihnen ihre Unabhängigkeit wiedergeben. Dann werden sie vielleicht ganz anders erscheinen, als in dieser entstellenden Aneinanderreihung und Ineinanderschiebung.<sup>25</sup>

And here we reach one of the basic convictions of classical nineteenth-century pentateuchal scholarship expressed, among others of course, by Wellhausen, Greßmann, and especially Gunkel.

---

<sup>22</sup> Wilhelm Martin Leberecht DE WETTE, *Beiträge zur Einleitung in das Alte Testament*: Band II (Halle: Schimmelpfennig, 1806).

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 31: "Epos der hebräischen Theokratie" ("Epic of Hebrew Theocracy").

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

#### 4. The Composite and Fragmentary Character of the Documents: J and E in Classic Scholarship

It was already clear for Julius Wellhausen that JE is not a unified document but quite a complex literary entity. Here are some quotes from his *Composition des Hexateuch*:

But this thread [sc. JE] ... is ... not as smooth and simple as Q, but of a more complex quality.

Aber dieser Faden [sc. JE] ... ist ... nicht so glatt und einfach wie Q, sondern von complicirter Beschaffenheit.<sup>26</sup>

Unlike Q, JE is not a work with a unified conception; it instead went through more than one phase and more than one hand before reaching its present shape.

JE ist nicht wie Q ein Werk einheitlicher Conception, sondern durch mehr als eine Phase und eine Hand gegangen, ehe es seine gegenwärtige Gestalt erlangte.<sup>27</sup>

The end result is that JE has a multistaged history behind it and is the product of a longer written process.

Das Endergebnis ist: JE hat eine in mehreren Stadien verlaufene Geschichte hinter sich und ist das Product eines längeren schriftlichen Processes.<sup>28</sup>

For reasons of simplicity, I prescind in most cases from the fact that the literary process in fact was more complex and the so-called supplementation hypothesis in a subordinate way can indeed be used. J and E were probably edited and augmented several times (J<sup>1</sup> J<sup>2</sup> J<sup>3</sup>, E<sup>1</sup> E<sup>2</sup> E<sup>3</sup>), and they were combined not as J<sup>1</sup> and E<sup>1</sup> but as J<sup>3</sup> and E<sup>3</sup>. A similar process took place for JE, Dt, and Q before they were combined with the relevant unities.

Der Einfachheit wegen abstrahire ich meistens davon, dass der literarische Process in Wirksamkeit compliciter gewesen ist und die sogenannte Ergänzungshypothese in untergeordneter Weise doch ihre Anwendung findet. J und E haben wol erst mehrere vermehrte Ausgaben (J<sup>1</sup> J<sup>2</sup> J<sup>3</sup>, E<sup>1</sup> E<sup>2</sup> E<sup>3</sup>) erlebt und sind nicht als J<sup>1</sup> und E<sup>1</sup>, sondern als J<sup>3</sup> und E<sup>3</sup> zusammengearbeitet. Ähnliches gilt von JE, Dt und Q, bevor sie mit den betreffenden grösseren Ganzen vereinigt wurden.<sup>29</sup>

Hugo Greßmann followed Wellhausen on this point and wrote:

The only satisfying explanation is to consider JE as redactors or *collectors*.

Zu einer befriedigenden Erklärung wird man nur kommen, wenn man JE für Redaktoren oder *Sammler* hält.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Julius WELLHAUSEN, *Die Composition des Hexateuchs und der historischen Bücher des Alten Testaments* (3rd ed.; Berlin: Reimer, 1899), 2.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 13–14.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 207.

<sup>30</sup> Hugo GRESSMANN, *Mose und seine Zeit: Ein Kommentar zu den Mose-Sagen* (FRLANT I/18; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1913), 372. See also *ibid.*, 368: "In vielen Fällen sind JE weiter nichts als Etiketten, die man beliebig vertauschen darf." ("In many cases, JE are not more than tags which can be arbitrarily exchanged.")

Even more accented was Hermann Gunkel. He stated in his commentary on the book of Genesis:

The literary collection of the tales does not emanate from one hand or one era but was achieved by some or even many hands in a very long process. We distinguish two eras in this process: the older era, in which the Yahwist (J) and the Elohist (E) were written, then a later, thoroughgoing transformation by the so-called Priestly Codex (P).

Die schriftliche Sammlung der Sagen ist nicht von einer Hand und in derselben Zeit geschehen, sondern von mehreren oder gar vielen in einem ganz langen Prozeß. Wir unterscheiden in diesem Prozeß zwei Zeitalter: das ältere, dem wir die Sammlungen des Jahwisten (J) und Elohisten (E) verdanken, dann eine spätere, durchgreifende Umarbeitung durch den sogenannten Priesterkodex (P).<sup>31</sup>

How is the literary quality of the “sources” J and E and their subsources to be evaluated? One must begin by admitting that these writings are based on oral tradition, that they are collections.

Wie ist nun die literarische Art der “Quellen” J und E und ihrer Unterquellen zu beurteilen? Zunächst ist allgemein zuzugeben, daß diese Schriften auf mündlicher Überlieferung beruhen, daß sie Sammlungen sind.<sup>32</sup>

“J” and “E” are not individual writers but schools of narrators.

“J” und “E” sind also nicht Einzelschriftsteller, sondern Erzählerschulen.<sup>33</sup>

This was the state of the discipline until the 1920s and 1930s in German Protestant scholarship. Much emphasis was given to the fragments, out of which the documents were composed. Gunkel stated:

These collectors [i.e., J and E] are not masters but servants of their material.

Diese Sammler sind also nicht Herren, sondern Diener ihrer Stoffe.<sup>34</sup>

In other words, for Gunkel, the traditions in Genesis are more important than their redaction and composition.

Still, of course, Wellhausen, Gunkel, and Greßmann were decided documentarians. But I doubt that we would have such a divergence in current scholarship if their notion of the compositeness of the sources, especially as expressed by Gunkel, had prevailed.

---

<sup>31</sup> Hermann GUNKEL, *Genesis* (6th ed.; HKAT I/1; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1964); repr. from the 3rd ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1910), lxxx.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, lxxxii.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, lxxxv.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

## 5. The Simplification of the Documentary Hypothesis in the Twentieth Century

It was notably von Rad's influence that covered over, or even buried, the insights into the fragmentary prehistory – in the sense suggested by Johann Severin Vater – of the sources. Von Rad's theory of the great age of the so-called short historical creed with the entire storyline of the Hexateuch as a blueprint was so successful that many scholars forgot the classical shape of the Documentary Hypothesis from Wellhausen to Gunkel, especially for J and E. The traditional notion of J and E as collectors fundamentally changed with von Rad. J especially became a "theologian" who grouped the material at his hands according to a certain ancient and traditional idea – the "short historical creed."

Von Rad's theory was very successful. However, the well-known passage arguing for the great age of the historical creed is a wonderful example of scientific rhetoric, but in fact, it is a very poorly supported hypothesis:

The deuteronomic phraseology of the latter half of this prayer [sc. the short historical creed in Deut 26:5b–9] in particular is quite unmistakable, and there can be no doubt that it is a liturgical formula. Such prayers really were used, and they were certainly not new in the time of the deuteronomist. All the evidence points to the fact that this prayer is much older, both in form and content, than the literary context into which it has been inserted.

Unverkennbar ist besonders in der zweiten Hälfte die deuteronomische Phraseologie, und doch kann kein Zweifel bestehen: das ist ein agendarisches Formular, so hat man wirklich gebetet und gewiß nicht erst in den Zeiten des Deuteronomikers. Es spricht alles dafür, daß dieses Gebet nach Form und Inhalt sehr viel älter ist als der literarische Zusammenhang, in den es jetzt eingeordnet ist.<sup>35</sup>

It is easy to see that von Rad's language is rather loaded: "quite unmistakable"; "there can be no doubt"; "really were used"; "certainly"; "all the evidence points to the fact." But if somebody is stating "there can be no doubt" or "all the evidence points to the fact," then there usually *is* doubt, and *not* all the evidence points in the same direction. In von Rad's case very little evidence is provided for the antiquity of the historical creed except for his historical imagination. Furthermore, current scholarship generally holds this text to be a later summary that belongs to the end of the literary history of the Pentateuch – the text is probably even influenced by P passages.<sup>36</sup> But in his day

<sup>35</sup> Gerhard VON RAD, *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays* (trans. E. W. Trueman Dicken; Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1966), 4; trans. of *Gesammelte Studien zum Alten Testament* (Munich: Kaiser Verlag, 1938), 12.

<sup>36</sup> See the discussion and bibliography in Jan Christian GERTZ, "Die Stellung des kleinen geschichtlichen Credo in der Redaktionsgeschichte von Deuteronomium und Pentateuch," in *Liebe und Gebot: Studien zum Deuteronomium* (ed. R. G. Kratz and H. Spieckermann; FRLANT 190; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000), 30–45.

the mainstream of scholarship was convinced. An almost-tragic example can be found on the second page of Martin Noth's *History of Pentateuchal Traditions*, where Noth chose to rely on von Rad's shaky theory instead of on his own observations that pointed to the existence of different, independent themes within the Pentateuch:

This basic form [sc. of the Pentateuch] did not finally emerge as the later consequence of a substantive combination and arrangement of individual traditions and individual complexes of traditions. Rather, this form was already given in the beginning of the history of traditions in a small series of themes essential for the faith of the Israelite tribes. ... This has been clearly shown by Gerhard von Rad in his important study on the "Hexateuch."

Diese grundlegende Gestalt ist überhaupt nicht aus der sachlichen Zusammenordnung und Aneinanderreihung von *Einzelüberlieferungen* und einzelnen Überlieferungskomplexen als deren nachträgliches Ergebnis abschließend erwachsen, sonder war bereits im Anfang der Überlieferungsgeschichte in einer kleinen Reihe für den Glauben der israelitischen Stämme wesentlicher Themen gegeben. ... Das hat G. v.Rad in seiner wichtigen Studie über den "Hexateuch" einleuchtend gezeigt.<sup>37</sup>

The shape of the Documentary Hypothesis that is today seen as the "classical theory" was established by von Rad, and by Noth's surrender to von Rad. The texts of the Pentateuch are mainly interpreted within the context of their assumed source contexts; their prehistory and their possible former independence spark only marginal interest.

I think it is crucial to keep this history of scholarship in mind in order to understand what Rendtorff and his students, and the students of his students, actually have in mind when arguing against this "classical" shape of the Documentary Hypothesis. One of the main problems Rendtorff pointed out was that the twentieth-century German documentarians were decidedly bound to the notion of sources, especially J, as *theological* texts, but they never really asked what this theology was nor whether this theology was identical in the different sections of the assumed sources.

For example, Noth's statement on the theology of J with regard to Gen 12:1–3 is quite suspicious:

All the weight of J's theology lies on the beginning of his narration. In that which follows he [the Yahwist] stayed almost exclusively with the transmitted material of the pentateuchal narrative without intervening to change or expand its substance. It was enough for him to have said clearly in the

So liegt das ganze Gewicht der Theologie von J am Anfang seiner Erzählung. Im folgenden hat er sich dann fast ausschließlich an das überkommene Gut der Pentateucherzählung gehalten, ohne ändernd oder erweiternd in dessen Substanz einzugreifen. Es genügte ihm, im Eingang eindeutig gesagt zu haben,

---

<sup>37</sup> Martin Noth, *A History of Pentateuchal Traditions* (trans. with an introduction by B. W. Anderson; Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1981), 2; trans. of *Überlieferungsgeschichte des Pentateuch* (2nd ed.; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1948), 2–3.

opening portion how he wanted all the remaining material to be understood.

wie er alles Weitere verstanden wissen wollte.<sup>38</sup>

In other words, Noth claims there is actually no way to identify J portions within the Pentateuch on the basis of theological criteria because J only formulated *one* theological text – Gen 12:1–3. While this is not really a maintainable position, even within the framework of the Documentary Hypothesis, it shows Noth’s awkwardness with regard to the theological unity of J.

In contrast, Rendtorff quite rightly criticized:

Up to now, there is no convincing evidence in favor of the assumption that the recognizable reworking of the traditions in the different parts of the Pentateuch stems from one and the same redactor or author.

[B]isher [ist] kein überzeugender Nachweis dafür erbracht worden, daß die erkennbare Bearbeitung der Überlieferungen in in verschiedenen Teilen des Pentateuch tatsächlich auf denselben Bearbeiter oder Autor zurückgeht.<sup>39</sup>

What Rendtorff and his students, and the students of his students, had in mind was to investigate the main compositional questions of the Pentateuch more on the basis of *material* than solely on *formal* criteria, like doublets or the alternation of Yhwh and Elohim. This investigation led more to the rediscovery of some very fundamental observations on the Pentateuch that were crucial for scholarship in the era from Vater and de Wette to Wellhausen, Greßmann and Gunkel, than to a mere abandonment of the Documentary Hypothesis.

## 6. Evaluation

In order to present some conclusions, the following points seem to be worth mentioning:

Firstly, the “anti-documentary uproar”<sup>40</sup> in European pentateuchal scholarship was mainly directed against a specific neglect of the prehistory of the alleged sources and against an uncritically assumed literary or material unity of the alleged sources that arose in the wake of von Rad.

Secondly, documents still are an indispensable assumption for describing the composition of the Pentateuch. This is especially obvious in the case of P, but the term “document” should be kept open to refer to any formerly stand-alone literary source text in the Pentateuch.

Thirdly, from the outset there is therefore no reason to privilege documents over against fragments in Vater’s sense.

---

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 238.

<sup>39</sup> RENDTORFF, Problem, 28.

<sup>40</sup> See n. 1.

Fourthly, the movement with regard to theories concerning the composition of the Pentateuch should go from the texts to the theories and not the other way round. Joel Baden writes in his study on the Pentateuch: "It is the classical model which remains the focus of the analysis below, with the aim of reasserting its basic structure but reassessing those aspects that have been criticized."<sup>41</sup> A "focus" is a metaphor stemming from optical geometry and signifies the point where different beams are bundled within a parabolic reflector. When applied to pentateuchal theory, this metaphor seems to suggest that we have different textual observations that can be bundled and explained within the classical model. I find this formulation open to misunderstanding, to say the least. I don't think we should have any theoretical focus when discussing the composition of the Pentateuch. There is no need and no sense in restricting the possibilities of literary genesis to one model or another from the outset. It is more-or-less obvious that the Pentateuch includes documents, fragments, and supplements, and nearly all documentarians, up to the end of the twentieth century, and nearly all fragmentarians in the twenty-first century, acknowledge this.

If someone argues that we should strive for a simpler model,<sup>42</sup> then I would follow Albert Einstein in arguing that yes, the explanation of the Pentateuch indeed has to be as simple as possible, but not simpler.

---

<sup>41</sup> BADEN, J, E, and the Redaction of the Pentateuch, 8.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 4: "... the Documentary Hypothesis remains the simplest, most complete explanation for the literary problems of the canonical text of the Pentateuch."