

The Oxford Handbook of the Pentateuch. Edited by JOEL S. BADEN and JEFFREY STACKERT. Oxford: OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2021. Pp. xvi + 572. \$145.

In line with the numerous other volumes published under the rubric *The Oxford Handbook of* . . . , in theory the volume under review should present a neutral state-of-the-art snapshot of the field. At times, this goal is achieved, with some of the essays (especially in part 1) presenting empirical facts and the like, but taken as a whole the volume reveals a distinct bias in favor of the Documentary Hypothesis (especially in part 2), often to the exclusion of alternative approaches. Given the published oeuvre of the two editors, who self-identify as Neo-Documentarians (note: I have never quite understood the “Neo-” portion of this term, but so be it), the overall flavor of the volume should come as no surprise. But the generalist reader who will turn to this book for objective information on the Pentateuch should be forewarned.

In lieu of listing the twenty-six individual chapters (including the introduction written by the coeditors), with name of author and title of essay, I direct the reader to the Table of Contents posted at the publisher’s website: <https://global.oup.com/academic/product/the-oxford-handbook-of-the-pentateuch-9780198726302>.

As intimated above, in general the five essays in part 1, “Text and Early Reception,” provide objective information on such topics as the Septuagint, the Qumran manuscripts, the Samaritan Pentateuch, and the role of the Pentateuch in Second Temple Judaism. Naturally, the authors are able to present their findings in such fashion, because in the main the sources provide empirical evidence and verifiable facts (e.g., regarding textual fluidity during the period under discussion; evocations of the Torah in Enoch, Jubilees, the Temple Scroll; and so on).

As further indicated above, the cumulative effect of the eleven essays in part 2, “The Formation of the Pentateuch,” is a firm tilt toward the Documentary Hypothesis. One would have hoped for alternative voices to be heard, in a presumed twelfth chapter, concerning the literary approach to the Bible generally and to the Torah narratives specifically. Nowhere in the entire 500+ pages of this volume does one find the names of Robert Alter, Adele Berlin, Jan Fokkelman, or Meir Sternberg (to mention the four leading lights)—all of whom are more inclined to read the Genesis and Exodus narratives as literary wholes, rather than subdivide them into (at times) microscopic parts (with one verse here, one half-verse there, etc.).

In similar fashion, both Gordon Wenham (1978) and the present author (Rendsburg 2007) have argued for the literary unity of the Flood Narrative (Genesis 6–8); while Scott Noegel (1995), Jonathan Grossman (2014), and once more the present author (Rendsburg 2016) have proposed a similar literary unity for the Plagues Narrative (Exodus 7:14–11:10)—and yet once again one looks in vain for any mention of these holistic readings. The same holds true for Mary Douglas’s brilliant analysis of Leviticus (1999), which presents a unified reading of the entire book, without regard to any possible subdivisions (P^g, P^s, H, etc.) (see also Rendsburg 2008).

Throughout the book one also detects a steady move toward the late dating of most if not all of the Pentateuch. For some authors, such as Reinhard Kratz (pp. 225–26) and Israel Finkelstein (pp. 406–7, 415–16), the late monarchic period serves as the setting for much of the Pentateuchal material. For others, such as Rainer Albertz, the main period of literary production dates to the fifth and even fourth centuries BCE (pp. 345–58). In general, these scholars ignore the linguistic evidence, which points strongly to the early monarchic period, including the tenth century BCE. We know what Late Biblical Hebrew, dated to the Persian period, looks like—and there are no such texts to be found in the Torah (see, e.g., Rendsburg 2006). The attempt by Albertz to deal with the linguistic evidence should be noted, but his proposal to simply move the transition phase of EBH [Early Biblical Hebrew] to LBH [Late Biblical Hebrew] to the fifth century BCE (p. 351) is countered by all the available evidence.

Fortunately, the volume includes an essay by Frank Polak, who demonstrates clearly that the majority of the Genesis and Exodus narratives are written in the earlier “lean, brisk style,” with only some pericopes cast in the later “intricate, elaborate style,” thereby pointing to composition in the early monarchic period (pp. 315–33, esp. pp. 325–26).

By the time of the authorship of the essays in *Oxford Handbook* (and certainly by the time of their publication), all contributors should have been familiar with Ronald Hendel and Jan Joosten, *How Old is the Hebrew Bible?* (2018) (see my review in *JAOS* 114 [2021]: 704–6)—with its major argument based on the linguistic evidence in favor of an earlier rather than later dating of the Torah—and yet tellingly only Polak cites the work.

At times, the language used in the posited reconstruction of particular texts is dizzying, for example, as follows, from the pen of Kratz (references have been omitted): “However, in Gen 50 we cannot find a convincing conclusion to an autonomous patriarchal narrative; furthermore, in the pre-priestly text of Exod 1 we would have to reckon with breaks in the text. This means that the thesis is based on a postulated gap in the text, which was created by a bold literary-critical operation. However, the (secondary) connection of the two origin legends can indeed be shown at the transition from Gen 50 to Exod 1 in the preserved non- and pre-priestly text” (p. 226). Perhaps I am not able to follow the argumentation here because I am not a devotee of the author’s approach (see Rendsburg 2019: 443–90), though I suspect that most readers would have equal difficulty.

At other times, the proposed reconstruction simply stretches credulity. Consider the following statement by Albertz: “Therefore, no less than eight redactional layers of the Pentateuch/Hexateuch can be distinguished, all of which belong to the Persian period. Listed in their probable chronological order they are: PB¹ from the last third of the sixth century, PB² from the first half of the fifth century, D from the middle of the fifth century, PB³ from the time of Nehemiah (445–433 BCE), MalR still from the time of this governor, HexR from the second half of the fifth century (430–410 BCE), PB⁴ from the last decade of the fifth century, and PentR (PB⁵) at the beginning of the fourth century BCE” (p. 358). Does anyone truly believe that one can date individual passages with such specificity? For example, earlier in the chapter Albertz posits that Gen. 17:9–14, 23–27, Exod. 12:43–51 (and several other passages) are creations of his so-called PB² (p. 354). Even if one were to accede to a Persian-period dating of the Torah, can one seriously know that a particular passage dates to, say, 475 BCE rather than 510 BCE or 440 BCE, as Albertz would have us believe?

As I read excerpts such as the two just cited, my mind keeps asking: would anyone in, say, *Gilgamesh* studies or *Beowulf* studies, approach their texts in such fashion? And would their colleagues actually allow such remarks to float about in the scholarly world?

Part 3, “The Pentateuch in Its Social World,” is comprised of eight essays, some of which occasionally enter into the enterprise of attempting to date the texts, though in general these essays speak more generally on such issues as ancient Near Eastern ritual and literature, with special attention to echoes thereof in the Pentateuch.

Here I must mention the comment by Israel Finkelstein, “Regarding Jerusalem, the core of the ancient city was probably located under the Temple Mount” (p. 403), a proposal that seeks to explain “the lack of evidence for activity in the ‘City of David’ ridge in periods for which habitation in Jerusalem is securely attested in textual evidence, such as the Late Bronze Age” (p. 404). Naturally, Finkelstein’s idiosyncratic hypothesis can neither be proved nor disproved, and in any case the issue takes us beyond the scope of Pentateuchal studies *per se*. One wonders, accordingly, why the issue is raised and how it is relevant.

More importantly, though, there have been LB finds in the “City of David” ridge (see the fine summary in Uziel, Baruch, and Szanton 2019), though once again this study, which counters Finkelstein’s view, goes unmentioned. Besides, can one really countenance the notion that Temple Mount “was the only inhabited part of Jerusalem of the Bronze Age and early phases of the Iron Age” (p. 404)? Such a scenario would have one believe that the city’s earliest settlers established their domiciles at some distance from one of the largest springs in the land, to wit, the Gihon Spring.

Finally, nowhere in the book does anyone address the ideological underpinnings of the Documentary Hypothesis, created by mainly nineteenth-century Protestant theologians, who sought to antedate the Prophets (= the true religious spirit) to the law of Deuteronomy (= Jewish legalism) and the cultic material in Leviticus (= Catholic ritualism). The point is mentioned in passing by Baruch Schwartz (p. 182), but the thought is not developed.

In sum, for those readers who would like scholarly justification for their views concerning the Documentary Hypothesis (in whichever garb) and the late dating of the Pentateuch (exilic or post-exilic), this volume offers much fodder. But for those readers who seek a more balanced approach, *caveat lector*.

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