



Schmitt, Hans-Christoph

Arbeitsbuch zum Alten Testament: Grundzüge der Geschichte Israels und der alttestamentlichen Schriften

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Shortly before his retirement, the long-time editor of *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* presented a summary of his experiences as teacher at the University of Erlangen in the form of a manual for use in refresher courses. Conceived as a companion to the main lectures and as an aid in preparing for examinations, it covers the main sectors of the field: the history of Israel as well as the literary history and theology of the Old Testament. The last of these subjects is treated in a number of basic chapters, as well as in the context of accounts of the individual biblical books. Four excursuses are devoted to sectors that can be recognized as favorite examination subjects: covenant theology; the messianic promises; Zion theology; and the understanding of death. Of the major teaching areas, only exegetical method has been omitted.

The manual aims to present in summary form the most important findings in the historical sector and in literary history. In view of the state of research, which makes an overall survey difficult, the book is intended to meet the need for clear outlines. Schmitt wishes above all to make accessible the theology of the Old Testament, which tends to recede into the background in the specialist debate.

A selective bibliography is appended to each of the sections (fifty-six in all). Taken together, these bibliographies run to about ninety pages, more than a fifth of the book.

They offer the key to further and more specialized work. As additional aids, the sections are accompanied by revision questions (which from the examiner's standpoint can often look like examination questions) as well as a number of maps and tables.

Schmitt's position in present-day research may be described as "moderately progressive." He adheres firmly to essential parts of the hypothesis structure built up mainly by Martin Noth, but without closing his mind to more recent debate. It is in the nature of things that an outline that originates with these presuppositions cannot be characterized in every respect by consistency. The main question—whether Israel's special character was the premise for its historical development or the result of that development—remains open.

The account of the history begins, as it does in Noth, with a definition of the term "Israel" (13–19). But Schmitt no longer sees this as being in the first instance the name of God's people but as the name of the northern kingdom. In his view, it was only after 722 that the term was claimed by Judah as well, then finally becoming the name that the community of the Second Temple gave itself. "Israel" as God's people is no longer the historical premise. But at the same time—indeed all the more—this religious "Israel" remains for Schmitt the presupposition and subject of the history: "In line with this religious interpretation of 'Israel,' in what follows the main features of a history of 'Israel' will be presented as a history of 'Israel' and 'Judah'" (13–14). This succeeds with the help of the arrangement. Schmitt begins with the period of the monarchy, which he traces from the formation of the state down to Josiah (25–81), only afterward treating the premises that for Noth belonged to the beginnings of Israel's history. These are now seen as "the traditions of the period of the monarchy, which determine 'Israel's' identity" (82–118). They are considered to have assumed their biblical form in the seventh century.

However, Schmitt remains convinced of the historical basis of these traditions, as providing the foundation for the historical account in the books of Genesis to Judges and which in the tradition about the patriarchs goes back to the fourteenth to thirteenth century. He also traces back the traditions about the exodus and the settlement to reliable recollections. Only the system of the twelve tribes, he believes, developed in the seventh century itself, as a way of expressing the unity of Israel and Judah after the fall of the northern kingdom (116–17). Only a few pages are left for the period of the Second Temple (119–43). The outline ends with the Maccabean revolt, the latest event to have left traces in the writings of the Hebrew canon.

Schmitt's presentation of the history of canon and text (149–72) is determined by theological premises. It is a question of the compass and textual form of "the canonical biblical text that is binding for synagogue and church." Schmitt is a decided supporter of the Hebrew canon and the Masoretic Text. The Reformers' decision in favor of the

Hebrew text in the sixteenth century is given theological significance. I myself doubt whether a formal principle of this kind is suited to free biblical scholarship from its alleged “crisis” and to provide a foundation for the binding nature of the Old Testament, theologically speaking.

The treatment of the individual books follows the structure of the Hebrew canon: Pentateuch and the historical books, including the historical books in the Ketubim (173–302); Prophets (303–413); Psalms, together with Lamentations and the Song of Solomon (414–38); and the wisdom literature (439–58). Daniel, as the apocalyptic book, concludes the presentation (459–70). Each biblical book is furnished with a tabular overview of its structure as well as an outline of the literary history, including important research positions held at the present day. In a third step, Schmitt indicates the theological significance of each book. There are separate sections on Pentateuch research, on the transmission and redaction history of the prophetic books, and on prophecy and psalms as genres.

The brief space available seldom permits a more extensive presentation, but among the prophets fuller treatment is given to Proto- and Deutero-Isaiah, Jeremiah, Hosea, and Amos. Here Schmitt takes up a moderate position in each case. For Jeremiah he follows the redaction criticism of Winfried Thiel (347). In the case of Hosea he assumes that it was already in the eighth century that the prophet quoted the First Commandment (371). Amos is not only a prophet of disaster (8:2) but also (5:4) a prophet of conversion (383).

With regard to the historical books, Schmitt adheres firmly to the hypothesis of a Deuteronomistic History that begins with Deuteronomy, but he modifies this thesis along the lines of the Göttingen “strata” model, although here he dispenses with the prophetic redactor DtrP and instead of the nomistic redactor DtrN prefers to talk about a “late Deuteronomist,” DtrS (251). The characteristics of DtrP (and of DtrN) partly devolve upon the first redactor Dtr, who thus again becomes to a great extent the DtrG whom Noth assumed: the redactor tries to discover a reason for the catastrophe of 587 and, casting back to prophecy, finds it in the infringement of the First Commandment (261). This strata model as modified by Schmitt has no longer essential consequences for the history of Old Testament theology, compared with the Göttingen scheme with its late dating of the First Commandment at the end of the sixth century.

In the Pentateuch, Schmitt adheres to the Documentary Hypothesis. The Priestly Code keeps the character of an originally separate source (even though it is curiously called “the Priestly *stratum*”). For Schmitt, P was written in the exilic period, in the Babylonian *golah* (195), and ends in Deut 34. Regarding the Yahwist, Schmitt adopts the late date that has recently been proposed. However, he presupposes that the late Yahwist used as a source

an “Elohistic history,” which for its part rested on “early Yahwistic” traditions. This Elohist, he assumes, originated soon after the fall of the northern kingdom and is characterized by the motif of the fear of God—that is, the morality founded on the relationship to God (230). It is surprising that in this way a text such as Gen 22 is dated as belonging to the end of the eighth century. The “late Yahwist,” who integrates the Elohist, replaces the Yahwist of the Documentary Hypothesis and is given more or less the same literary compass. Theologically, the Yahwist is determined by a distinct hamartiology (218–20), which is in curious tension to the fact that this source is supposed to be at the same time a “history of blessing” (209).

An important hypothesis that Schmitt himself contributed to Pentateuch research is “the late Deuteronomistic Pentateuch redaction.” It is this that is supposed to have linked the late Yahwist with the Priestly Code and at the same time to have forged the link between the Tetrateuch and the Deuteronomistic History, including Deuteronomy. The essential observations on which this thesis rests can be found in summary form on pages 242–46.

The author will hardly have intended this manual to be used as a textbook. In all three sectors—history, literary history, and theology—it claims to be no more than a guideline for refresher courses. Its limited compass does not permit the genesis of the Old Testament to be presented as the fruit of a consistent tradition-history development that reacted to historical circumstances and to the theological question that these circumstances prompted. The facts and positions could only be listed and briefly assessed. That is not enough for the understanding perception that is didactically required. The book’s usefulness is therefore confined to its service in accompanying the revision of lectures and refresher classes. A printed tutor cannot replace the teacher’s living voice!