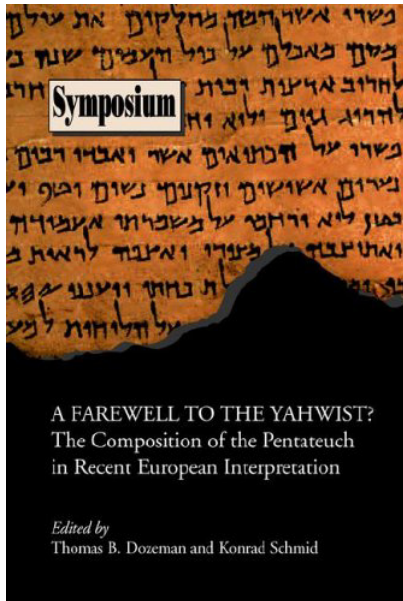


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Dozeman, Thomas B., and Konrad Schmid, eds.

*A Farewell to the Yahwist? The Composition of the Pentateuch in Recent European Interpretation*

Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series 34

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A recent *RBL* carried Eckart Otto's review of a book by John Van Seters that calls into question the long-established but now variously challenged hypothesis that the canonical form of the Hebrew Bible was shaped by editors and redactors rather than simply by creative and imaginative authors. The fact that such a book is just now reviewed focuses again the most prominent and perplexing issues of Old Testament studies. The issue has been raised and debated for two decades, particularly with regard to the Deuteronomic and Deuteronomistic literature, challenging the theories of Wellhausen, von Rad, Martin Noth, and subsequent scholars pertaining to the Pentateuch, Hexateuch, Tetrateuch, and Enneateuch. The problem has increasingly centered upon the difficulties inherent in the Documentary Hypothesis and hence upon the nature and function of the Yahwist.

It is, therefore, a most welcome and fortuitous event that Dozeman and Schmid should offer us their good and timely volume in the SBL Symposium Series, treating the problem of the Yahwist and of the composition of the Pentateuch, particularly as that problem has been debated by European and North American scholars in the Pentateuch Seminar of the SBL for the last quarter century. That seminar was established in the early 1980s by John Van Seters, Rolf Knierim, George Coats, Simon John De Vries, and John Gammie. "These scholars were drawn together by a growing uneasiness over the lack of direction in

pentateuchal studies, in the wake of the influential synthesis of Martin Noth and Gerhard von Rad” (1). Over the last twenty-five years, many scholars contributed to the discourse on its crucial theme. In *A Farewell to the Yahwist*, Dozeman and Schmid have presented us with the essence of the “enormous creativity” that that seminar produced.

This attractive and erudite volume has ten chapters in three sections. After an introductory essay by the editors, we have six main papers and three responses. The text is followed by a bibliography with one hundred select entries, a six-page index of biblical and related literature, and a general index of two hundred referenced authors. This is a substantive volume, attractively packaged and highly readable.

The contribution of the nine analytic chapters is launched by an essay that is as intriguing as its title. Thomas Christian Römer, of the University of Lausanne, wrote “The Elusive Yahwist: A Short History of Research.” His work is followed by “The So-Called Yahwist and the Literary Gap between Genesis and Exodus,” by Konrad Schmid of the University of Zurich. Chapter 3 is Albert de Pury’s (Geneva) work on “The Jacob Story and the Beginning of the Formation of the Pentateuch.” Jan Christian Gertz picks up the theme initiated by his colleagues, offering “The Transition between the Books of Genesis and Exodus.” The two final papers in the main section of the book are by Erhard Blum (Tübingen), “The Literary Connection between the Books of Genesis and Exodus and the End of the Book of Joshua,” and by Thomas B. Dozeman (United Theological Seminary, Dayton), “The Commission of Moses and the Book of Genesis.”

To these substantive statements there are three responses. Christoph Levin, University of Munich, wrote “The Yahwist and the Redactional Link between Genesis and Exodus,” while John Van Seters (Waterloo) argues that “The Report of the Yahwist’s Demise Has Been Greatly Exaggerated,” and David M. Carr (Union, N.Y.) has a long concluding chapter with nearly as long a title, “What is Required to Identify Pre-Priestly Narrative Connections between Genesis and Exodus? Some General Reflections and Specific Cases.”

The established erudition and prowess of the contributing scholars and particularly of the two editors of this volume hardly need to be underlined. Their many sophisticated publications are well known in the general academy of learned societies. Schmid’s major work on redaction and reception criticism, *Buchgestalten des Jeremiabuches* and *Erzvater und Exodus* (Neukirchener) and Dozeman’s *Exodus* (Eerdmans), *God at War: Power in the Exodus Tradition* (Oxford), and *God on the Mountain* (SBL/Scholars Press) are particularly notable.

The argument of this symposium volume is illuminating. While scholars in the humanities and social sciences are seldom able to produce certitude in their conclusions, the authors of this work have achieved a surprising level of consensus regarding a very knotty quandary. A recent wave of European biblical research has produced a rich new analysis of the foundation literature of ancient Israelite religion, thus illumining many facets of the later traditions of both Judaism (Hebrew Bible studies) and Christianity (New Testament studies). Rolf Rendtorff and others have advanced innovative views of the compositional history of the Pentateuch, and this is carefully examined in *A Farewell to the Yahwist*.

A European consensus argues that the larger blocks of pentateuchal tradition, especially the stories of the patriarchs and Moses, were not redactionally linked before the Priestly Code, as the J hypothesis suggests, but existed side by side as two independent rival myths of Israel's origins. This volume fosters dialogue between that European hypothesis and North American interpreters who raise a critical discussion of that claim. In the end, the consensus suggests that the traditions of the ancestors and the exodus tradition may have been united in a significant degree in a pre-Priestly document that might be called the Proto-Pentateuch (P), but some difference of opinion persists regarding whether that was an early or late pre-Priestly redaction. Gertz, nonetheless, holds out for a post-Priestly *Endredaktion* for much of the integration of the narratives related to the patriarchs and those championing Moses. Blum appears to have some sympathy for this notion.

Rendtorff argued for a theory of "complexes of tradition" in the growth of the Pentateuch. However, he challenged Noth and von Rad in their claims about tradition history and source criticism. They judged that the *integration and unification* of the various complexes of tradition, such as those about the ancestors, exodus, Sinai, wilderness wandering, and conquest of the land, *had been achieved* already in the oral formation of the historic Israelite belief system. So Noth and von Rad were primarily interested in the conjoining of the narrative contents of the Israelite memory rather than the issues of *literary* unity. Noth and von Rad absorbed the subunits of tradition into the larger narrative fabric, while Rendtorff found this a one-sided focus, raising a methodological problem for which there was not enough research data to support the Noth-von Rad conclusion of a "theory of continuous and unified literary sources" (2).

Rendtorff undertook to fill the methodological gap between the development of oral and literary traditions. He proceeded by analyzing the Genesis ancestor-narratives organized around claims of divine promise. He wished to assess the development and transmission of the literary record of divine promises to discern whether a new methodological model was needed to replace standard source criticism. Then he sought out the theme of promise in other pentateuchal tradition complexes, other than the narratives of Exodus

through Sinai, convinced that the distribution of those occurrences of the promise theme “would provide insight into the organic relationship of the distinct tradition complexes” (3).

On this basis, Rendtorff rejected the adequacy of standard source criticism to establish the development of the literary traditions at issue here. He noted (1) that the promise theme reflected a multilayered process of development and composition, (2) that the promise theme was absent from the Exodus–Numbers literature, (3) that the Moses story and ancestor stories were reworked from very different points of view, and (4) that this argued against a source criticism that presupposed a Yahwistic source for literature from Genesis through Numbers or Joshua.

Schmid raised the question of how discarding the hypothesis of a pre-Priestly Yahwist would alter the way the historiography of Israelite religion is done. He proposed that this would link it more integrally to the influences of the cultures around it. Carr argued, however, that taking such cultural issues into consideration would not obviate the likelihood of a “relatively late combination of ancestral and exodus traditions in a pre-Priestly Pentateuch. Whether one agrees with Schmid, Gertz, and Römer that P was the first to join ancestors and Moses in a literary whole or agrees with” Carr and others “that a late pre-Priestly author-editor created the first proto-Pentateuch, there is agreement that the joining of the ancestral and the Moses traditions came relatively late and—outside the Abraham story—is reflected primarily in insertions such as Gen 46:1–5 or Exod 3:1–4:18.” Thus the authors of this volume largely “agree that the interpretation of the history of the literature and the religion of ancient Israel should presuppose that the ancestral and the exodus traditions were separate most of the preexilic period, if not also through much of the exilic period as well” (179–80).

So it is the case that, while the ten chapters presented here vigorously debate the existence of a pre-Priestly Pentateuch, one gets the distinct impression of a strong consensus emerging among pentateuchal scholars of widely varying methodological backgrounds, specifically regarding the development of the relevant foundational literature of ancient Israelite religion.

The symposium character of this book, the dialogic vigor of its approach to its vital subject, and the international scope of perspectives shared make this a remarkably intriguing, articulate, readable, and gratifying work of profound scholarship. Here is nearly the whole story in a nutshell, with really nothing in it to criticize. This book is absolutely necessary for any undergraduate or seminary student working in the field of biblical studies or theology. It is on the cutting edge of its field and thus immensely informative for the established professional. It will bless a delightful summer’s day for

anyone anywhere in the world. We are greatly indebted to Professors Dozeman and Schmid.