

Textual, Historical, Sociological, and Ideological Cornerstones of the Formation of the Pentateuch

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Who wrote the Torah? In light of the ongoing disputes over this question in the wake of more than two hundred years of higher biblical criticism, the most precise answer to this question still is: we do not know.¹ The tradition claims it was Moses, but the Torah itself says otherwise. Only small portions within the Torah are traced back to him, such as Exod 17:14 (battle against Amalek); 24:4 (Covenant Code); 34:28 (Ten Commandments); Num 33:2 (wandering stations); Deut 31:9 (Deuteronomic law); and 31:22 (song of Moses).

On this question, no single, agreed-upon answer emerged from the proceedings of two major conferences of the research group “Convergence and Divergence in Pentateuchal Theory: Bridging the Academic Cultures of Israel, North America, and Europe,” held in Jerusalem (2012–2013) at the Israel Institute of Advanced Studies.² It is fair to say that the second volume of conference papers produced by this group documents more

1. See, e.g., Thomas Römer, “Zwischen Urkunden, Fragmenten und Ergänzungen: Zum Stand der Pentateuchforschung,” *ZAW* 125 (2013): 2–24; Römer, Jean-Daniel Macchi, and Christophe Nihan, eds., *Einleitung in das Alte Testament: Die Bücher der Hebräischen Bibel und die alttestamentlichen Schriften der katholischen, protestantischen und orthodoxen Kirchen* (Zurich: TVZ, 2013), 120–68; Römer, “Der Pentateuch,” in *Die Entstehung des Alten Testaments*, ed. Walter Dietrich et al., *Theologische Wissenschaft: Sammelwerk für Studium und Beruf 1* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2014), 52–166; Reinhard G. Kratz, “The Analysis of the Pentateuch: An Attempt to Overcome Barriers of Thinking,” *ZAW* 128 (2016): 529–61; and Thomas B. Dozeman, *The Pentateuch: Introducing the Torah*, *Introducing Israel’s Scriptures* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2017).

2. Jan C. Gertz et al., eds., *The Formation of the Pentateuch: Bridging the Academic Cultures of Europe, Israel, and North America*, *FAT* 111 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016).

divergences than convergences among the positions in the field.³ The main benefit was apparently acknowledging our differences. Upon closer inspection, however, the situation in pentateuchal research is far from desperate, and there are indeed some basic statements that can be made regarding the formation of the Torah. This is what my present contribution is about. It is structured in the following three parts: (1) “The Textual Evidence of the Pentateuch,” (2) “Sociohistorical Conditions for the Development of the Pentateuch,” and (3) “Ideologies or Theologies of the Pentateuch in Their Historical Contexts.”

1. The Textual Evidence of the Pentateuch

As with all exegetical questions, the initial questions are basic, yet crucial: What is the textual basis for the Pentateuch?⁴ What are the oldest manuscripts we have? At this point, one should mention the Codex Leningradensis.⁵ This manuscript of the Hebrew Bible dates to the year 1008 CE. It is a medieval text, but it is the oldest complete textual witness to the Pentateuch. This seems to leave us in a very awkward position: we are dealing with an allegedly 2,500-year-old text, but its earliest textual attestation is only 1,000 years old. Yet the situation is not hopeless.

First, there are ancient translations that significantly predate Codex Leningradensis. The oldest ones are the big codices of the translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek, the earliest of which is the Codex Sinaiticus.⁶ While this text is not an original, it dates to the fourth century CE and is a good witness to the Hebrew text behind it. The Greek text of the Pentateuch shows differences from the Hebrew text, particularly in Exod 35–40. This issue was noted in 1862 by Julius Popper, who was the

3. This is especially true for the dispute between so-called neo-documentarian and redaction-critical approaches to the Pentateuch. See, e.g., the discussion between Joel S. Baden, “The Continuity of the Non-Priestly Narrative from Genesis to Exodus,” *Bib* 93 (2012): 161–86; and Konrad Schmid, “Genesis and Exodus as Two Formerly Independent Traditions of Origins for Ancient Israel,” *Bib* 93 (2012): 187–208.

4. Armin Lange, “From Many to One: Some Thoughts on the Hebrew Textual History of the Torah,” in Gertz et al., *Formation of the Pentateuch*, 121–95.

5. Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Bible*, 3rd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012), 23–74.

6. David C. Parker, *Codex Sinaiticus: The Story of the World’s Oldest Bible* (London: British Library, 2010).

first to deal extensively and deliberately with post-Priestly (or [post-]P) expansions in the Pentateuch.⁷

Second, there are older, preserved portions of the Pentateuch in Hebrew. Before 1947, the oldest extant fragment of a biblical text was the Nash Papyrus, which probably dates around 100 BCE and contains both the Decalogue and the beginning of the Shema from Deut 6.⁸

Much more important were the textual discoveries from the Dead Sea that began in 1947.⁹ Remnants of about nine hundred scrolls were discovered, among them many biblical texts. They date mainly from the second and first centuries BCE. Most of the texts are fragmentary, many of them no larger than a few square centimeters. All of the biblical fragments are accessible in Eugene Ulrich's *The Biblical Qumran Scrolls*.¹⁰

What do these Qumran texts reveal about the Pentateuch in the early, postbiblical period? The most important insight is the remarkable closeness of these fragments, as far as they have been preserved, to Codex Leningradensis. In the case of Gen 1:1–5 in 4QGen^b, no differences are present at all.¹¹

Nevertheless, the various scrolls seem to display affiliations to the traditionally known, post-70 CE textual families of the Pentateuch. Armin Lange gives the following estimate: 37.5 percent are proto-Masoretic, 5.0 percent are proto-Samaritan, 5.0 percent are proto-Septuagint, and 52.5 percent are independent.¹² In these figures, there is some prevalence of the proto-Masoretic strand, although one observes a significant number of independent readings. At times the differences are quite relevant, such as the reading of “Elohim” instead of “YHWH” in Gen 22:14 or of “Mount

7. Julius Popper, *Der biblische Bericht über die Stiftshütte: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Composition und Diaskeue des Pentateuch* (Leipzig: Heinrich Hunger, 1862). See also Martha L. Wade, *Consistency of Translation Techniques in the Tabernacle Accounts of Exodus in the Old Greek*, SCS 49 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003).

8. Tov, *Textual Criticism*, 111. However, this text is more liturgical than biblical in nature.

9. Armin Lange, *Die Handschriften biblischer Bücher von Qumran und den anderen Fundorten*, vol. 1 of *Handbuch der Textfunde vom Toten Meer* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009); and Géza G. Xeravits and Peter Porzig, *Einführung in die Qumranliteratur: Die Handschriften vom Toten Meer* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2015), 23–47.

10. Eugene Ulrich, *The Biblical Qumran Scrolls: Transcriptions and Textual Variants*, VTSup 134 (Leiden: Brill, 2010), with the pentateuchal passages on 1–246.

11. Ulrich, *Biblical Qumran Scrolls*, 1–2.

12. Lange, *Die Handschriften*, 155.

Gerizim” instead of “Mount Ebal” in Deut 27:4 (although the latter fragment might be a forgery).¹³ However, Emanuel Tov has stated the following about the large portion of proto-Masoretic texts: “The differences between these texts [the proto-Masoretic texts] and L [Codex Leningradensis] are negligible, and in fact their nature resembles the internal differences between the medieval manuscripts themselves.”¹⁴ The Qumran findings thus provide an important starting point for pentateuchal exegesis and corroborate the legitimacy of critically using the Masoretic Text (MT) in pentateuchal research. On the one hand, we can have considerable confidence in the Hebrew text of the Pentateuch, as attested in the medieval manuscript of Codex Leningradensis, which is the textual basis for most modern Bible editions. On the other hand, at the time, there was apparently not a fully stable text of the Pentateuch in terms of every single letter or word being fixed as part of a fully canonized Bible, as the differences between the scrolls show.¹⁵

In terms of the composition of the Pentateuch, another insight that we can deduce from Qumran is that the Pentateuch was basically finished no later than the second century BCE. Some of its texts are certainly much older, but probably none of them are later.

One epigraphical piece relating to our concerns should be mentioned: a quasi-biblical text from biblical times. The silver amulets from Ketef Hinnom, which can be dated anywhere between the seventh and the second centuries BCE, contain a text close to Num 6:24–26. However, this quasi-biblical text is not really a witness to the Bible.¹⁶

13. On Gen 22:14, see Thomas Römer, “Le ‘sacrifice d’Abraham’, un texte élohiste? Quelques observations à partir de Gn 22,14 et d’un fragment de Qumran,” *Sem* 54 (2012): 163–72. On Deut 27:4, see Siegfried Kreuzer, *Geschichte, Sprache und Text: Studien zum Alten Testament und seiner Umwelt*, BZAW 479 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2015), 151–54.

14. Emanuel Tov, “The Text of the Hebrew/Aramaic and Greek Bible Used in the Ancient Synagogues,” in *The Ancient Synagogue from Its Origins until 200 C.E.: Papers Presented at an International Conference at Lund University, October 14–17, 2001*, ed. Birger Olsson and Magnus Zetterholm, ConBNT 39 (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 2003), 237–59.

15. Lester L. Grabbe, “The Law, the Prophets, and the Rest: The State of the Bible in Pre-Maccabean Times,” *DSD* 13 (2006): 319–38.

16. Angelika Berlejung, “Der gesegnete Mensch: Text und Kontext von Num 6,22–27 und den Silberamuletten von Ketef Hinnom,” in *Mensch und König: Studien zur Anthropologie des Alten Testaments; Rüdiger Lux zum 60. Geburtstag*, ed. Angelika

2. Sociohistorical Conditions for the Development of the Pentateuch

How should we imagine the cultural-historical background of the Pentateuch's composition? A very insightful book by Christopher Rollston brings together all of the relevant evidence regarding writing and literacy in ancient Israel.¹⁷ In addition, Matthieu Richelle and Erhard Blum have recently published important contributions that evaluate the evidence of scribal activities in early Israel and Judah.¹⁸

The first question here is: Who could actually read and write? We have different estimates for the ancient world, but they agree that probably not more than 5–10 percent of the population was literate to a degree that individuals could read and write texts of some length. Literacy was probably an elite phenomenon, and texts were circulated only within these circles, which were centered around the palace and the temple.¹⁹ In biblical times, producing literature was an enterprise mainly restricted to professional scribes, and reading literature was generally limited to the same circles that produced it.

Berlejung and Raik Heckl, HBS 53 (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2008), 37–62; Berlejung, “Ein Programm fürs Leben: Theologisches Wort und anthropologischer Ort der Silberamulette von Ketef Hinnom,” ZAW 120 (2008): 204–30.

17. Chris Rollston, *Writing and Literacy in the World of Ancient Israel*, ABS 11 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2010). See also Ron E. Tappy and P. Kyle McCarter, eds. *Literate Culture and Tenth-Century Canaan: The Tel Zayit Abecedary in Context* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2008).

18. Matthieu Richelle, “Elusive Scrolls: Could Any Hebrew Literature Have Been Written Prior to the Eighth Century BCE?,” VT 66 (2016): 556–94; and Erhard Blum, “Die altaramäischen Wandinschriften aus Tell Deir ‘Alla und ihr institutioneller Kontext,” in *Metatexte: Erzählungen von schrifttragenden Artefakten in der alttestamentlichen und mittelalterlichen Literatur*, ed. Friedrich-Emanuel Focken and Michael R. Ott, *Materiale Textkulturen* 15 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2016), 21–52.

19. See, e.g., Rollston, *Writing and Literacy*, 127–33; David M. Carr, *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart: Origins of Scripture and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 70–71, 165–66, 172–73, 187–91; Carr, *The Formation of the Hebrew Bible: A New Reconstruction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 128–29; and Catherine Hezser, *Jewish Literacy in Roman Palestine*, TSAJ 81 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001). Philip S. Alexander, “Literacy among Jews in Second Temple Palestine: Reflections on the Evidence from Qumran,” in *Hamlet on a Hill: Semitic and Greek Studies Presented to Professor T. Muraoka on the Occasion of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. Martin F. J. Baasten and W. Th. van Peursen, OLA 118 (Leuven: Peeters, 2003), 3–25, reckons with widespread literacy among members of the Qumran community.

Recently, Israel Finkelstein and others have claimed that the Lachish ostraca show at least six different hands, pointing to more widespread literacy even among soldiers in the early sixth century BCE.²⁰ But this kind of evidence remains debatable.

Othmar Keel, Richelle, and others have argued for a continuous literary tradition in Jerusalem from the Bronze Age city state to the early Iron Age.²¹ While this perspective is probably not entirely wrong, it should not be overestimated. Abdi-Hepa's Jerusalem was quite different from David or Solomon's Jerusalem, and there was obviously a cultural break between Late Bronze and early Iron Age Jerusalem. A case in point would be the new Ophel inscription from Jerusalem, which exhibits a rather rudimentary level of linguistic education.²²

A second question is: How did people write? Most of the inscriptions we have are on potsherds or stone, but this is only what has survived. For obvious reasons, texts on stone or clay last much longer than those on papyrus or leather, so we cannot simply determine what people wrote on in general from what archaeologists have found. (In fact, there is only a single papyrus sheet left from the time of the monarchy, Mur. 17).²³ In addition, we have an impressive number of seals and bullae from Jerusalem during the First Temple period with remnants of papyrus on them that prove that papyrus was a common medium for writing. Some of the bullae bear names such as Gemaryahu ben Shafan, who is mentioned in Jer 36:10, or Yehuchal ben Shelamayahu and Gedaliah ben Pashhur, whom we know from Jer 38:1.²⁴

20. Shira Faigenbaum-Golovin et al., "Algorithmic Handwriting Analysis of Judah's Military Correspondence Sheds Light on Composition of Biblical Texts," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 113 (2016): 4664–69.

21. Othmar Keel, *Die Geschichte Jerusalems und die Entstehung des Monotheismus*, 2 vols., *Orte und Landschaften der Bibel* 4.1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007), 101–32; Rollston, *Writing and Literacy*; and Tappy and McCarter, *Literate Culture*.

22. Reinhard G. Lehmann and Anna E. Zerneck, "Bemerkungen und Beobachtungen zu der neuen Ophel Pithosinschrift," in *Schrift und Sprache: Papers read at the 10th Mainz International Colloquium on Ancient Hebrew (MICAH), Mainz, 28–30 October 2011*, ed. Reinhard G. Lehmann and Anna E. Zerneck, *Kleine Untersuchungen zur Sprache des Alten Testaments und seiner Umwelt* 15 (Kamen: Spenner, 2013), 437–50.

23. Published in Pierre Benoit, J. T. Milik, and Roland de Vaux, *Les grottes des Murabba'at*, DJD 2 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1961), 93–100.

24. See the discussion in Richelle, *Elusive Scrolls*.

In all likelihood, the writing material for texts such as those in the Pentateuch was papyrus or leather. Longer books needed to be written on leather because papyrus sheets are fragile. The ink was composed of grime and metal. Scholars estimate that it took a professional scribe six months to copy a book the length of Genesis or Isaiah. If one adds the value of the sheep skins, it is evident how costly the production of such a scroll would have been.

In biblical times, copies of the books of the Bible were probably few in number. For the second century BCE, 2 Macc 2:13–15 provides evidence that the Jewish community in Alexandria, likely among the largest diaspora groups, did not possess a copy of every biblical book. This text quotes a letter from the Jerusalemites to the Jews in Alexandria that invites them to borrow a copy of those biblical books from Jerusalem that they do not possess. “Nehemiah... founded a library and collected the books about the kings and prophets, and the writings of David... In the same way Judas [Maccabaeus] also collected all the books that had been lost on account of the war that had come upon us, and they are in our possession. So if you have need of them, send people to get them for you” (2 Macc 2:13–15).

But when was the Pentateuch composed? It is helpful at the outset to determine a time span in which its texts were written. In biblical scholarship, the terms *terminus a quo* and *terminus ad quem* are often used to delimit such a time span. The *terminus a quo* indicates the earliest point at which a text could have been written, while the *terminus ad quem* is the latest point at which it could have been written.

For the former (*terminus a quo*), an important clarification is needed. We can only determine the beginnings of the earliest *written* versions of a text. In other words, this does not include a text’s oral prehistory. Many texts in the Bible, especially in the Pentateuch, go back to oral traditions that can be much older than their written counterparts. So the *terminus a quo* only determines the beginning of the written transmission of a text which, in turn, may have already been known as an oral tale or the like.²⁵ Unlike many prophetic texts, pentateuchal texts do not mention dates of authorship. One must therefore look for internal and external indicators in order to determine the date of their composition.

25. Odil H. Steck, *Old Testament Exegesis: A Guide to the Methodology*, trans. James D. Nogalski, RBS 33 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), 65–78. See also Harald-Martin Wahl, *Die Jakobserzählungen: Studien zu ihrer mündlichen Überlieferung, Verschriftung und Historizität*, BZAW 258 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1997).

This basic observation is relevant for determining the *beginning* of the Pentateuch's literary formation. We can safely determine a historical break in the cultural development of Israel and Judah in the ninth and eighth centuries BCE. This point holds despite Richelle and Blum, who provide sufficient evidence to include the late ninth century as the beginning of this watershed with regard to the development of scribal culture in Israel and Judah.²⁶ By this point, a certain level of statehood and literacy was being achieved, and these two elements go together. That is, the more developed a state, the more bureaucracy and education are needed, especially in the area of writing.

When one considers the number of inscriptions found in ancient Israel and Judah, the numbers clearly increase in the eighth century, and this increase should probably be interpreted as indicating a cultural development in ancient Israel and Judah. This claim can be corroborated by looking at the texts that have been found that can be dated to the tenth century BCE, such as the Gezer calendar, the potsherd from Jerusalem, the Baal inscription from Beth Shemesh, the Tel Zayit abecedary, and the Qeiyafa ostrakon.²⁷ All of them stem from or around the tenth century BCE. The modesty of their content and writing style alike are easy to discern.

If we move forward about one century to the ninth century BCE, then the evidence is much more telling, even if some of the evidence is in Aramaic and not Hebrew. The first monumental stela from the region is the Mesha stela, which is written in Moabite and which contains the first documented reference to YHWH and Israel as we know them.²⁸ Another monumental text is the Tel Dan stela in Aramaic, best known for mentioning the "Beth

26. Richelle, "Elusive Scrolls"; Blum, "Die altaramäischen Wandinschriften."

27. On the Gezer calendar, see, e.g., Dennis Pardee, "Gezer Calendar," *OANE* 2:396–400; and Daniel Sivan, "The Gezer Calendar and Northwest Semitic Linguistics," *IEJ* 48 (1998): 101–5. On the Jerusalem potsherd, see Lehmann and Zerneck, "Bemerkungen und Beobachtungen." On the Beth Shemesh inscription, see P. Kyle McCarter, Shelomoh Bunimovitz, and Zvi Lederman, "An Archaic Ba'1 Inscription from Tel Beth-Shemesh," *TA* 38 (2011): 179–93. On the Tel Zayit abecedary, see Rollston, *Writing and Literacy*; Tappy and McCarter, *Literate Culture*. And on Qeiyafa, see Silvia Schroer and Stefan Mûnger, eds., *Khirbet Qeiyafa in the Shephelah: Papers Presented at a Colloquium of the Swiss Society for Ancient Near Eastern Studies Held at the University of Bern, September 6, 2014*, OBO 282 (Fribourg: Academic Press; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2017).

28. J. Andrew Dearman, ed., *Studies in the Mesha Inscription and Moab*, ABS 2 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989).

David.”²⁹ Still another piece of evidence is the eighth-century Aramaic wall inscription from Tell Deir ‘Alla, which mentions the prophet Balaam who appears in Num 22–24.³⁰ Balaam’s story in the inscription is completely different from the narrative about him in the Bible, yet it remains one of the earliest pieces of evidence for a literary text in the vicinity of ancient Israel. Along with others, Blum has recently argued convincingly for interpreting the site of Tell Deir ‘Alla as a school, based on a late Hellenistic parallel to the building architecture that was found at Trimithis in Egypt (ca. fourth century CE).³¹ This interpretation as a school might also be true for Kuntillet ‘Ajrud, where we also have writing on the wall.³²

The landmark set in the ninth and eighth centuries BCE by the large number and high quality of written texts in ancient Israel and Judah corresponds to another relevant feature. At this time, Israel begins to be perceived by its neighbors as a state. That is, not only internal changes in the development of writing, but also external, contemporaneous perceptions hint at Israel and Judah having reached a level of cultural development in the ninth and eighth centuries that enabled literary text production. Good examples are the mid-ninth century inscriptions from Assyria that mention Jehu, the man of Bit-Humri, which means Jehu of the house of Omri. The Black Obelisk even displays Jehu in a picture, bowing in front of the Assyrian king—the oldest extant image of an Israelite.³³

29. George Athas, *The Tel Dan Inscription: A Reappraisal and a New Interpretation* (London: Continuum, 2005).

30. Helga Weippert and Manfred Weippert, “Die ‘Bileam’-Inscription von Tel Deir ‘Alla,” *ZDPV* 98 (1982): 77–103; Erhard Blum, “Verstehst du dich nicht auf die Schreibkunst...? Ein weisheitlicher Dialog über Vergänglichkeit und Verantwortung: Kombination II der Wandinschrift vom Tell Deir ‘Alla,” in *Was ist der Mensch, dass du seiner gedenkst? (Psalm 8,5): Aspekte einer theologischen Anthropologie; Festschrift für Bernd Janowski zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Michaela Bauks, Kathrin Liess, and Peter Riede (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2008), 33–53; and Blum, “Die Kombination I der Wandinschrift vom Tell Deir ‘Alla: Vorschläge zur Rekonstruktion mit historisch-kritischen Anmerkungen,” in *Berührungspunkte: Studien zur Sozial- und Religionsgeschichte Israels und seiner Umwelt; Festschrift für Rainer Albertz zu seinem 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Ingo Kottsieper, Rüdiger Schmitt, and Jakob Wöhrle, AOAT 350 (Münster: Ugarit, 2008), 573–601.

31. Blum, “Die altaramäischen Wandinschriften.”

32. Zeev Meshel, ed., *Kuntillet ‘Ajrud (Horvat Teman): An Iron Age II Religious Site on the Judah-Sinai Border* (Jerusalem: Israel Antiquities Authority, 2012).

33. Othmar Keel and Christoph Uehlinger, “Der Assyrikerkönig Salmanassar III. und Jehu von Israel auf dem Schwarzen Obelisk,” *ZKT* 116 (1994): 391–420.

Based on these observations about the development of scribal culture in ancient Israel, we can assume that the earliest texts in the Pentateuch may have originated as literary pieces as early as the ninth and eighth centuries BCE. But, to repeat, this chronological claim pertains only to their literary shape, whereas the oral traditions behind them could be much older, perhaps at times reaching back into the second millennium BCE.

When was the Pentateuch finished? On this matter, three areas of evidence should be named. First, there is the translation into Greek, the Septuagint, which can be dated to the mid-second century BCE.³⁴ There are some differences, especially in the second account of the construction of the tabernacle in Exod 35–40, but the Septuagint basically points to a completed Pentateuch.³⁵ Second, the books of Chronicles and Ezra–Nehemiah, which probably date to the fourth century BCE, refer to a textual

34. See, e.g., Folker Siegert, *Zwischen Hebräischer Bibel und Altem Testament: Eine Einführung in die Septuaginta*, Münsteraner judaistische Studien 9 (Münster: Lit, 2001), 42–43; Manfred Görg, “Die Septuaginta im Kontext spätägyptischer Kultur: Beispiele lokaler Inspiration bei der Übersetzungsarbeit am Pentateuch,” in *Im Brennpunkt: Die Septuaginta: Studien zur Entstehung und Bedeutung der Griechischen Bibel*, ed. Heinz-Josef Fabry and Ulrich Offerhaus, BWANT 153 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2001), 115–30; Siegfried Kreuzer, “Entstehung und Entwicklung der Septuaginta im Kontext alexandrinischer und frühjüdischer Kultur und Bildung,” in *Septuaginta Deutsch: Erläuterungen und Kommentare zum griechischen Alten Testament*, ed. Martin Karrer and Wolfgang Kraus, 2 vols. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2011), 1:3–39; Stefan Krauter, “Die Pentateuch-Septuaginta als Übersetzung in der Literaturgeschichte der Antike,” in *Die Septuaginta und das frühe Christentum; The Septuagint and Christian Origins*, ed. Thomas S. Cauley and Hermann Lichtenberger, WUNT 277 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 26–46; and Felix Albrecht, “Die alexandrinische Bibelübersetzung: Einsichten zur Entstehungs-, Überlieferungs- und Wirkungsgeschichte der Septuaginta,” in *Alexandria*, ed. Tobias Georges, Felix Albrecht, and Reinhard Feldmeier, *Civitatium orbis Mediterranei studia* 1 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 209–43. The oldest manuscript of the Greek Pentateuch is P. Rylands 458, dating to the mid-second century BCE; see John W. Wevers, “The Earliest Witness to the LXX Deuteronomy,” *CBQ* 39 (1977): 240–44; Kristin De Troyer, “When Did the Pentateuch Come into Existence? An Uncomfortable Perspective,” in *Die Septuaginta: Texte, Kontexte, Lebenswelten, Internationale Fachtagung veranstaltet von Septuaginta Deutsch (LXX.D), Wuppertal 20.–23. Juli 2006*, ed. Martin Karrer and Wolfgang Kraus, WUNT 219 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 277; and Gilles Dorival, “Les origines de la Septante: La traduction en grec des cinq livres de la Torah,” in *La Bible grecque de Septante*, ed. Gilles Dorival, Marguerite Harl, and Olivier Munich (Paris: Cerf, 1988), 39–82.

35. E.g., John W. Wevers, “The Building of the Tabernacle,” *JNSL* 19 (1993): 123–31.

body called either the “Torah of YHWH” or the “Torah of Moses.” It is not clear whether this denotes an already-completed Pentateuch, but it at least points in this direction.³⁶ Third, the Pentateuch has no clear allusion to the fall of the Persian Empire in the wake of Alexander the Great’s conquests.³⁷ The Persian Empire lasted from 539 to 333 BCE, a period perceived in ancient Israel as one of political stability, in some texts even marking the end of history. The loss of this political order was accompanied by numerous questions. Especially in prophetic literature, this event was interpreted as a cosmic judgment. But no text in the Pentateuch seems to allude to the event, either directly or indirectly. Therefore, the Pentateuch seems *basically* to be a pre-Hellenistic text, predating Alexander the Great and the Hellenization of the East.

However, there are a few exceptions to the pre-Hellenistic origins of the Pentateuch. The best candidate for a post-Persian, Hellenistic text in the Pentateuch seems to be the so-called small apocalypse in Num 24:14–24, which in verse 24 mentions the victory of the ships of the Kittim over Ashur and Eber. This text seems to allude to the battles between Alexander and the Persians, as some scholars have suggested.³⁸ Other post-Persian elements might be the specific numbers in the genealogies of Gen 5 and

36. Félix García López, “תורה,” *ThWAT* 8:597–637, esp. 627–30; and Georg Steins, “Torabindung und Kanonabschluss: Zur Entstehung und kanonischen Funktion der Chronikbücher,” in *Die Tora als Kanon für Juden und Christen*, ed. Erich Zenger, HBS 10 (Freiburg: Herder, 1996), 213–56.

37. Odil H. Steck, *Bereitete Heimkehr: Jesaja 35 als redaktionelle Brücke zwischen dem Ersten und dem Zweiten Jesaja*, SBS 121 (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1985), 52–54; Willem A. M. Beuken, *Jesaja 28–39*, HThKAT (Freiburg: Herder, 2010), 300–327; and Konrad Schmid, “Das kosmische Weltgericht in den Prophetenbüchern und seine historischen Kontexte,” in *Nächstenliebe und Gottesfurcht: Beiträge aus alttestamentlicher, semitistischer und altorientalischer Wissenschaft für Hans-Peter Mathys zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Hanna Jenni and Markus Saur, AOAT 439 (Münster: Ugarit, 2016), 409–34.

38. See Hedwige Rouillard, *La péricope de Balaam (Nombres 22–24)*, EBib 2/4 (Paris: Gabalda, 1985), 467; Frank Crüsemann, *Die Tora: Theologie und Sozialgeschichte des alttestamentlichen Gesetzes* (Munich: Kaiser, 1992), 403; and Hans-Christoph Schmitt, “Der heidnische Mantiker als eschatologischer Jahweprophet: Zum Verständnis Bileams in der Endgestalt von Num 22–24,” in “*Wer ist wie du, Herr, unter den Göttern?*”: *Studien zur Theologie und Religionsgeschichte Israels; für Otto Kaiser zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. Ingo Kottsieper (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1994), 185.

11.³⁹ These numbers build the overall chronology of the Pentateuch and differ significantly from one version to another. But these exceptions are minor. The substance of the Pentateuch seems to be pre-Hellenistic.

3. Ideologies or Theologies of the Pentateuch in Their Historical Contexts

If we can assume with some probability that the Pentateuch was written between the ninth and the fourth centuries BCE, how can we reconstruct its literary genesis in greater detail? We should begin by making a very general observation. Ancient Israel is part of the ancient Near East. Ancient Israel was a small political entity surrounded by greater, and much older, empires in Egypt and Mesopotamia. It is therefore more than likely that Israel's literature was deeply influenced by its neighbors and their ideologies and theologies.⁴⁰ An extraordinary piece of evidence of cultural transfer is a fragment of the Gilgamesh Epic (dating to the fourteenth century BCE) found in Megiddo in northern Israel. The fragment proves that Mesopotamian literature was known and read in the Levant. Also noteworthy is the text of Darius's late-sixth-century Bisitun inscription both in Persia and in Egypt, where it existed as an Aramaic translation.

Of course, there are independent traditions in ancient Israel that are not paralleled in other ancient Near Eastern material. But some of the most prominent texts in the Pentateuch creatively adapt the ancient world's knowledge, and it is important to discern this background in order to understand the biblical texts and their own emphases properly.

Addressing this topic exhaustively is not possible at the moment. Instead, I will pick out two well-known examples to demonstrate how prominent biblical texts arose as receptions and adaptations of ancient Near Eastern imperial ideologies. That does not mean that the Bible is not an

39. See Jeremy Hughes, *Secrets of the Times: Myth and History in Biblical Chronology*, JSOTSup 66 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990). See the reservations of Ronald Hendel, "A Hasmonean Edition of MT Genesis? The Implications of the Editions of the Chronology in Genesis 5," *HBAI* 1 (2012): 448–64, against dating the numbers in MT to the second century BCE.

40. Konrad Schmid, "Anfänge politikförmiger Religion: Die Theologisierung politisch-imperialier Begriffe in der Religionsgeschichte des antiken Israel als Grundlage autoritärer und toleranter Strukturmomente monotheistischer Religionen," in *Religion–Wirtschaft–Politik: Forschungszugänge zu einem aktuellen transdisziplinären Feld*, ed. Antonius Liedhegener, Andreas Tunger-Zanetti, and Stephan Wirz (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2011), 161–77.

original text. What it does mean is that the Bible's originality and creativity are to be found not necessarily in the materials it contains but in its interpretive adaptations of these materials.

The first example of how the ancient Near East shaped the Pentateuch has to do with the Neo-Assyrian Empire, the preeminent power in the ancient world of the ninth and seventh centuries BCE.⁴¹ Its ideology was based on the strict submission of the Assyrian king's subordinates as portrayed in this image: here, the Assyrian king is the master, and all other kings are to serve him.

The Assyrians secured their power through treaties with their vassals. These treaties usually have a three-part structure: an introduction, a corpus of stipulations, and a concluding section with blessings and curses. It is noteworthy that the book of Deuteronomy exhibits this same structure, apparently having been shaped according to the model of an Assyrian vassal treaty. But there is one big difference: The function of Assyrian vassal treaties was to oblige subdued people *to the Assyrian king* in terms of absolute loyalty. The book of Deuteronomy likewise demands absolute loyalty from the people of Israel, but *to God*, not the Assyrian king. So the book of Deuteronomy seems to take up both the structure and the basic concept of an Assyrian vassal treaty, which it reinterprets at the same time.⁴² With Eckart Otto, Thomas Römer, Nathan MacDonald, and others, we therefore can maintain that at least a core of Deuteronomy originated in the late Neo-Assyrian period in an anti-Assyrian milieu of scribes.⁴³

41. Angelika Berlejung, "The Assyrians in the West: Assyrianization, Colonialism, Indifference, or Development Policy?," in *Congress Volume Helsinki 2010*, ed. Martti Nissinen, VTSup 148 (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 21–60; and Eckart Otto, "Assyria and Judean Identity: Beyond the Religionsgeschichtliche Schule," in *Literature as Politics, Politics as Literature: Essays in Honor of Peter Machinist*, ed. David S. Vanderhooff and Abraham Winitzer (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013), 339–47.

42. See, e.g., Eckart Otto, *Das Deuteronomium: Politische Theologie und Rechtsreform in Juda und Assyrien*, BZAW 284 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1999). For a more differentiated view, see Christoph Koch, *Vertrag, Treueid und Bund: Studien zur Rezeption des altorientalischen Vertragsrechts im Deuteronomium und zur Ausbildung der Bundes-theologie im Alten Testament*, BZAW 383 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008); and, differently, Carly L. Crouch, *Israel and the Assyrians: Deuteronomy, the Succession Treaty of Esarhaddon, and the Nature of Subversion*, ANEM 8 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014).

43. Nathan MacDonald, "Issues in the Dating of Deuteronomy: A Response to Juha Pakkala," *ZAW* 122 (2010): 431–35. For a different view, see Reinhard G. Kratz, "Der literarische Ort des Deuteronomiums," in *Liebe und Gebot: Studien zum Deuteronomium*;

A second example of how the ancient Near East shaped the Pentateuch has to do with the Persian Empire. In 539 BCE, the Babylonian Empire was overthrown by the Persians, after which the Persians ruled the entire ancient world, as it was known in that part of the globe, for the next two hundred years. Persian rule was perceived by many people in the Levant as peaceful, with the era being seen as a quiet one, during which various peoples could live according to their own culture, language, and religion. In the Hebrew Bible, nearly every foreign nation is addressed with very harsh curses except for the Persians, probably due to their tolerant policy toward those whom they subdued.

In the Pentateuch, we can locate some indications of Persian imperial ideology. A very telling piece is the table of nations in Gen 10. This text explains the order of the world after the flood, and it structures the seventy people of the globe according to the offspring of Shem, Ham, and Japheth, including three, nearly identical refrains:⁴⁴

בני יפת ... בארצתם איש ללשנו למשפחתם בגויהם

The sons of Japheth ... in their lands, with their own language, by their families, by their nations. (Gen 10:2, 5)

אלה בני־חם למשפחתם ללשנתם בארצתם בגויהם

These are the sons of Ham, by their families, by their languages, in their lands, and by their nations. (Gen 10:20)

אלה בני־שם למשפחתם ללשנתם בארצתם לגויהם

These are the sons of Shem, by their families, by their languages, in their lands, and by their nations. (Gen 10:31)

Festschrift zum 70. Geburtstag von Lothar Perlitt, ed. Reinhard G. Kratz and Hermann Spieckermann, FRLANT 190 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000), 101–20; Juha Pakkala, “The Date of the Oldest Edition of Deuteronomy,” *ZAW* 121 (2009): 388–401; and Pakkala, “The Dating of Deuteronomy: A Response to Nathan MacDonald,” *ZAW* 123 (2011): 431–36.

44. J. G. Vink, “The Date and the Origin of the Priestly Code in the Old Testament,” in *The Priestly Code and Seven Other Studies*, OtSt 15 (Leiden: Brill, 1969), 61; Ernst A. Knauf, “Die Priesterschrift und die Geschichten der Deuteronomisten,” in *The Future of the Deuteronomistic History*, ed. Thomas Römer, BETL 147 (Leuven: Peeters, 2000), 104–5; and Christophe Nihan, *From Priestly Torah to Pentateuch: A Study in the Composition of the Book of Leviticus*, FAT 2/25 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 383. See also Jacques Vermeylen, “La ‘table des nations’ (Gn 10): Yaphet figure-t-il l’Empire perse?,” *Transeu* 5 (1992): 113–32.

At first glance, these texts may not look very interesting. But they are quite revolutionary insofar as they tell us that the world is ordered in a pluralistic way. After the flood, God intended humanity to live in different nations, with different lands and different languages. Genesis 10 is probably a Persian-period text reflecting this basic conviction of Persian imperial ideology. The same ideology is also attested, for example, in the Bisitun inscription, which was disseminated widely throughout the Persian Empire.⁴⁵ The Persian imperial inscriptions declare that every nation belongs to their specific region and has its specific cultural identities (see DNa 30–38; XPh 28–35; DB I 61–71). This structure results from the will of the creator deity, as Klaus Koch pointed out in his *Reichsidee und Reichsorganisation im Perserreich*, where he identifies this structure as *Nationalitätenstaat als Schöpfungsgegebenheit*.⁴⁶ Every people should live according to its own tradition and in its own place. This is a radically different political view when compared to the Assyrians and Babylonians, both of whom strove to destroy other national identities, especially by means of deportation. The Persians deported no one, and they allowed people to rebuild their own sanctuaries, such as the temple in Jerusalem that the Babylonians had destroyed.

Once again, though, Gen 10 is not merely a piece of Persian imperial propaganda. It also includes important interpretive changes. Specifically, it is not the Persian king who determines the world order; rather, the God of Israel allots every nation its specific place and language. Of course, the Pentateuch eventually makes clear that Israel has a specific function in the

45. Rüdiger Schmitt, *The Bisitun Inscriptions of Darius the Great: Old Persian Texts*, vol. 1 of *The Old Persian Inscriptions*, Corpus Inscriptionum Iranicarum (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, 1991); and Schmitt, *Die altpersischen Inschriften der Achämeniden: Editio minor mit deutscher Übersetzung* (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2009).

46. Klaus Koch, “Weltordnung und Reichsidee im alten Iran und ihre Auswirkungen auf die Provinz Jehud,” in *Reichsidee und Reichsorganisation im Perserreich*, 2nd ed., OBO 55 (Fribourg: Academic Press; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996), 197–201; see 150–51: “Das Zurückführen von Göttern und Menschen an ihren, mit Städte- und Tempelnamen gekennzeichneten Ort (*ašru*) rühmen auch akkadische Königsinschriften, vom Prolog des Codex Hammurabi (Ia 65: ‘restore’ ANET 164; TUAT I 41) bis hin zum Kyros-Zylinder (Z. 32; ANET 316; TUAT I, 409). Doch gibt es dabei, soweit ich sehe, nirgends einen Hinweis auf Völker und Länder. Mit Dareios I. setzt also ein neuer, an der Nationenvielfalt ausgerichteter Schöpfungs- und Herrschaftsgedanke durch.”

world, but it is important to see that the Bible acknowledges and allows cultural and religious variety in its world.

These examples highlight how the Bible interacts with imperial ideologies from the ancient Near East, a point that is crucial to see if we are to reconstruct its formation. But how do such different ideologies and theologies go together in the Bible? It is important to see that the Pentateuch in particular and the Bible in general are not uniform pieces of literature. They instead resemble a large cathedral that has grown over centuries. Its content is the result not of one but of many voices. And these different voices establish the overall beauty and richness of the Pentateuch.⁴⁷

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47. Konrad Schmid, “Der Pentateuch und seine Theologiegeschichte,” *ZTK* 111 (2014): 239–71.

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