

## A Historical Approach to Source Criticism in Pentateuchal Study

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### Abstract

Traditional scholars on one hand did not want to reject this religious belief that Moses was the writer of Pentateuch and on the other hand they could not conceal the existing problems in that book. Accordingly, they claimed that they could answer these problems with interpretive approaches. In their view, these contradictions and inconsistencies are in appearance and not only haven't something to do impede the coherence and harmony of the text, but they can provide compelling answers by adopting appropriate interpretive tools. Baruch Spinoza rejected this traditional method because he believed that the choice of the virtual meaning would be depend on the interpreter's desires, and where two or more virtual meanings can be obtained, there is no standard for preference. In his opinion, Bible must be read like any other book, with a free mind and without prejudice. By adopting a critical historical method, Richard Simon tried to answer Spinoza and some other Protestants. However, Simon's idea that the biblical "scribes" compiled their narratives from the original sources provided an introduction to the formation of hypotheses about the sources /documents of Pentateuch. The history of the formation of the Documentary Hypothesis can be divided into three periods: the periods of formation, criticism and reform. In the period of formation comparative study of the Doublets, led researchers to formulate Earlier Documentary Hypothesis. Three scholars independently came to the conclusion that in the writing of Pentateuch there were two parallel sources: Henning Bernhard Witter, Jean Astruc, and Johann Gottfried Eichhorn. In the period

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Received: 21.01.2019

Accepted: 28.05.2019



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of criticism, Alexander Geddes formulated Fragmentary Hypothesis and Georg Heinrich August Ewald posited Supplementary Hypothesis in the criticism of Earlier Documentary Hypothesis. During the period of reform, the efforts of Wilhelm Martin Leberecht de Wette, Hermann Hupfeld, Édouard Reuss, Karl Heinrich Graf, and ultimately Julius Wellhausen brought Documentary Hypothesis to its zenith and completed form. This complete and articulated formulation is now known as the Grafian Hypothesis or the Later Documentary Hypothesis. Wellhausen, on the other hand, accepted the Graf's findings in determining the historical order of Pentateuch's documents, and on the other hand, he sought to adopt Johann Karl Wilhelm Vatke's approach about the progress and development of religion and cult of Israel. Wellhausen accepted this finding of Graf that Hexateuch consists of four documents: Yahwist (Y), Elohist (E), Deuteronomist (D), and Priestly Code (P). The combination of Y and E formed the yahwistic historical book (JE). Then, D was added to this collection, and JED was formed, and finally with the attachment of P Hexateuch was completed. According to Wellhausen three literary layers which constitute Hexateuch, represent three stages of religious development which corresponds to three historical periods of Israel: in the first stage, the Israelite religion is primitive and natural (9<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> BC). This period is compatible with JE of Hexateuch. In the second stage, we witness the formation of centralized religion among Israelite which is result of collapsing of Northern Monarchy and the resistant of Southern Monarchy (7<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> BC). This period is compatible with D document of Hexateuch. Judaism was formed in the third stage and was the product of the collapse of the southern Monarchy, Babylonian exile and the efforts of the returned zealot Jews to create a new Israel (5<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> BC). This period is compatible with P document of Hexateuch. Accordingly Wellhausen made a consistent and strong connection between religion, literature and history of Israel. The Later Documentary Hypothesis, like any other hypothesis, has been faced with some criticism which could be classified into two categories, i.e. internal and radical. Internal criticisms accept the framework of Later Documentary Hypothesis; their criticisms are merely addressed to the referents of the basic documents. Radical criticism challenges the basis and the reasoning behind the Hypothesis. The reasons of Later Documentary Hypothesis can be articulated in the following manner: 1) the names of the two Yahweh and Elohim. 2) Replicas and repetitions. 3) Contradictions. 4) Language and style differences. 5) The doctrinal unity of documents. 6) Combined sections. Radical criticism attempts to collapse the Hypothesis by challenging the logic and coherence of the abovementioned argument.

In short, in document/ source criticism, the disorder and impertinence of grammatical, lexical, narrative, conceptual, and literary techniques were applied as implications that represented different literary layers in Pentateuch. The adoption of this approach in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries led to different hypotheses about the nature of the

Pentateuch/ Hexateuch including: Earlier Documentary Hypothesis, Fragmentary Hypothesis, Supplementary Hypothesis and the Later Documentary Hypothesis. The underlying assumption of the aforementioned Hypothesis is that the Pentateuch does not have a literary unity, but has, over time, been lengthy and elaborate, and consists of different literary layers. This assumption is not arbitrary, but it responds to problems that the text itself poses. The classic assumption of documents begins with the complete narrative of Hexateuch and divides this narrative into layers or literary documents, but Fragmentary Hypothesis and Supplementary Hypothesis starts their works with focusing on the development and possibility of earlier stages of this narrative and seeking to determine the dates of its documents. These hypotheses are not the dogma, but are reasonable assumptions that are subject to scientific discourse. However, the results of these studies were fundamental, because, contrary to the claims of the Pentateuch and traditional doctrines, it emphasized the historical lateness of Mosaic laws over other documents. The studies, influenced by Vatke and Wellhausen, went beyond literary work, linking the stages of progress of the Israelite religion and the quality of each of these stages.

**Keywords:** Pentateuch, Earlier Documentary Hypothesis, Later Documentary Hypothesis, radical criticism

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