



**John S. Bergsma and Jeffrey L. Morrow, *Murmuring Against Moses: The Contentious History and Contested Future of Pentateuchal Studies* (Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Academic, 2023). Pp. 308. 39,95 USD. ISBN: 978-1-64585-149-3 (hardcover), 978-1-64585-150-9 (paperback), 978-1-64585-151-6 (e-book)**

**JANUSZ LEMAŃSKI** 

University of Szczecin, lemanski@koszalin.opoka.org.pl

Research on the Pentateuch has undergone quite a radical transformation over the last several decades. The Documentary Hypothesis (also known as Source Theory), dominant since the end of the 19th century and was mainly associated with the name of Julius Wellhausen, began to be subjected to thorough criticism starting from the late 1960s, which resulted in many new hypotheses at the turn of the 20th century about the creation of the first five books of the Hebrew Bible (Torah). Although The Documentary Hypothesis itself has not stood the test of time, many of its elements have survived in these new hypotheses. What is common to all these new theories is the belief that the Pentateuch in its current form was finally formed during the so-called Second Temple period (after the Babylonian Exile), and its oldest traditions (e.g. the laws known as the Book of the Covenant, traditions about Jacob-Israel) date back to the 8th century BC. The first compositions, combining various elements of the tradition with Moses and then perhaps also with traditions about the patriarchs (Jacob), appeared shortly before the fall of the kingdom of Judah (end of the 7th century BC), and were gradually expanded by deuteronomistic, priestly and post-priestly circles. Without ignoring the differences in the way these processes are explained, the one common element of all the new hypotheses is the belief that the Pentateuch was written in a rather late period (5th–4th century BC). This research consensus is stated in the monograph by John S. Bergsma and Jeffrey L. Morrow, *Murmuring Against Moses*. As the authors of the study under review write:

We are not going to argue that Moses is the author of Pentateuch. In fact, we are not going to come to a conclusion on who is responsible for the Pentateuch in its final form. We are not even going to come to a conclusion as to precisely when the Pentateuch was written or finalised. What our work hopes to accomplish is to challenge the hegemony of standard source-critical approaches to the composition of the Pentateuch and to highlight new evidence for the Pentateuch's antiquity, at least prior the Babylonian Exile (p. X).

Bergsma and Morrow divided their monograph into three parts. Each part consists of three chapters. In the introduction, they present not only their research goals, but also an overview of their work (pp. IX–XIII). The book includes an extensive bibliography at the end (pp. 255–308).

In part one (“Moses and the Sources: A Survey of Challenges to the Documentary Hypothesis,” pp. 3–72), they discuss various positions challenging the Documentary Hypothesis, starting with the first fifty years of literary challenges (stylistic unity indicated in the first half of the 20th century), then looking at the Pentateuch from perspective of Ancient Near Eastern Studies and Archaeology, and finally considering the wide application beyond Pentateuchal Studies in the source-critical studies of other parts of the Bible (21st century). As the authors themselves write: “The second and third chapters pick up where the first left off and continue the survey for remainder of the twentieth century into the twenty-first, primarily from the perspective of the disciplines of archaeology and ancient Near Eastern studies” (p. XII).

In part two (“New Evidence for the Antiquity of the Pentateuch,” pp. 81–169), both researchers prove the antiquity of the Pentateuch by referring to the example of the Samaritan Pentateuch as well as the Prophets. Pointing to the evidence in the form of quotation or allusion to all of the alleged sources (P, H, and D, composed or edited according to traditional dating after the Babylonian Exile, i.e. 587–537 BC) in the pre-exilic or exilic prophets, “as well the absence of any focus on Jerusalem in the Pentateuch, which is difficult to explain in the post-exilic period in the face of the rise of Samaritanism and the Samaritan embrace of the Pentateuch” (p. XI). Both authors argue here that the traditional point of view (“Scholars typically view Leviticus and Deuteronomy [P/H and D] as influenced by the Prophets,” p. XII) requires change and they convince readers of this by pointing out that “the evidence examined in this chapter (i.e. chapter IV) supports the view that Leviticus and Deuteronomy were written prior to the exilic prophets, mainly Ezechiel and Jeremiah” (p. XII). Then they draw attention (chapter V) to “the complete absence of Zion theology from the Torah... There is no mention of Jerusalem anywhere in the Pentateuch, nor is there any mention of the Temple, nor of the Davidic Kingdom” (p. XII), and ultimately they notice that “the Pentateuch, even the Masoretic Text, has a much more northern tone to it than is usually recognised. Such a northern focus favours the Samaritans in ways that do not make sense if much of this was the product of the southern Kingdom of Judah, or priests in Jerusalem attempting to weaponise Israelite tradition with a Southern-focuses text after Exile” (p. XII). The last chapter (VI) “focus[es] in more details on the presence of Zion theology in all the other parts of the Hebrew Bible *except* the Pentateuch” (p. XII).

Part three (“The History of Pentateuchal Source Criticism,” pp. 173–253) concludes with a history of Pentateuchal source criticism from its earliest stages in late antiquity (Gnostic and Roman anti-Christian polemics) to the medieval Muslim period, showing how these arguments denying Mosaic authorship and origin of

Pentateuch survived in the medieval Latin Christian West, the Renaissance and early Enlightenment (17th century AD). In chapter VIII, “focus is on the early modern skeptics who begin to speculate on late dating the Pentateuch to the period after Babylonian Exile...to challenge the Pentateuch’s Mosaic authorship based on stylistic criteria and on apparent anachronisms in the text” (p. XII). The final chapter (IX) examines how eighteenth- and nineteenth-century scholars build upon this skeptical textual foundation with literary theories designed to identify distinct sources underlying the Pentateuch. This process reached its zenith in Julius Wellhausen’s classic formulation of the Documentary Hypothesis at the end of the 19th century.

Looking from the perspective of this “research plan,” Bergsma and Morrow argue that the Pentateuch, at least in its essential part, was written before the Babylonian Exile in the North (Samaritan Pentateuch), and that the theories leading to the shift of its date of origin to the period after the Babylonian Exile and to Judea were the result of the tendency to deny the Mosaic authorship of this work. Are the arguments given by the two authors sufficient to undermine the existing consensus?<sup>1</sup>

The list of researchers contesting Wellhausen’s theory and arguments – e.g., the problem of the Samaritan Pentateuch (J. Iverach Munro); stylistic unity, insufficiency of the criterion for changing the divine name (Arthur H. Finn); literary unity (Umberto Cassuto); antiquity of P (Yehezkel Kaufmann); historical and archaeological arguments (William F. Albright, Cyrus H. Gordon; Moshe Weinfeld; Kenneth Kitchen; Edwin Yamauchi) – provides a good but insufficient review of the history of Pentateuch research.<sup>2</sup> It does not contain any counter-arguments that have emerged in relation to the assumptions made by the above-mentioned researchers. This review is therefore considered to be quite selective and it is structured according to the adopted thesis. It is no different for authors writing after 1980. The monograph mentions various arguments challenging the theories about the late origin of the Pentateuch, but they lack a critical assessment or at least attention to the weaknesses of many of the assumptions. As an example, one can mention the contribution by Isaac Kikawada and Arthur Quinn (pp. 61–64), who argue for the “carefully constructed unified whole (chiastic structure)” of many texts from Gen 1–11. However, this does not change the fact that there are also differences of a critical and literary nature which are not mentioned in the monograph in question.

A similar problem arises in chapter 4, in which our researchers pose the question: “the law before the prophets or the prophets before the law?” (pp. 81–124). Here, they find “the strength of arguments” mainly in the analysis of selected texts from the books of Ezekiel and Jeremiah. In the summary, they write: “Using the two books of sixth-century priest-prophets Ezechiel and Jeremiah, we have shown that

<sup>1</sup> On this topic, see Gertz et al. 2016; Krause et al. 2020; Lemański 2023b.

<sup>2</sup> On this topic, see Dozeman 2017, 33–199; Lemański 2020, 65–186.

both works exhibit many instances of the conflation of the distinctive diction and concepts of the Pentateuchal texts ascribed to the priestly and holiness schools on the one hand, and of Deuteronomy on the other” (p. 123). They draw the following conclusion from this: “at last from the sixth century and probably from much earlier (based on evidence of Hosea), both so called ‘P’ and so-called ‘D’ were extant and considered authoritative for the people of Israel” (p. 124). Once again, when discussing the texts, it is necessary to take into account, for the sake of balance, the critical and literary elements regarding the texts of Jeremiah and Ezekiel. In both cases, of course, it is not always necessary to agree with the conclusions drawn from this or that type of analysis (which is especially difficult in the case of Ezekiel), but pointing them out is always important because it allows us to approach the conclusions drawn by the two authors with a little more caution.

The most interesting parts of the monograph are undoubtedly chapter V: “The Elephant Not in the Room: The Implication of the Absence of Zion and the Northern Israelite Character of the Pentateuch” (pp. 125–43) and chapter VI: “Did Post-Exilic Judaism Really Abandon Zion Theology?” (pp. 145–69). The authors rightly note the problem of the absence of the so-called Zion Theology in the Pentateuch, as well as the lack of explicit mention of the “central” importance of the temple in Jerusalem. In the latter case, the authors write: “the Pentateuch mentions Jerusalem not at all, and Gerizim only twice, so one would have to conclude that neither Judean nor Samaritan interests were heavily at work in the redaction of the text of the ‘Common Pentateuch’; otherwise, one would expect more decisive interventions in the text resolving the controversy of the location of the central sanctuary – such interventions as we do, indeed, find in the Samaritan Pentateuch. Certainly Genesis, with its emphasis on the sacrality of several locations within the land – especially Bethel, but also Shechem, Hebron, Beersheba – as the potential to subvert or destabilise Deuteronomy’s insistence on a single place of worship for the whole nation” (p. 131). They further note that “Zion theology tends to be a dominant theme in most of the books of the Old Testament: certainly in the Deuteronomistic History (Deuteronomy through 2 Kings), the Chronicler, the Psalms, and the major and minor Prophets. There are even important connections to it in the wisdom literature. However, Zion theology is absent from the Pentateuch. Neither David, nor Jerusalem, nor the Temple are ever mentioned in Genesis through Deuteronomy” (pp. 145–46). Therefore, they are right to ask the question: “How can this be explained?” (p. 146). Then, they go on to argue that “several scholars have begun to abandon the notion that Deuteronomy’s ‘place that the LORD your God will choose’ is or was ever intended to be a thinly-guised cipher for Jerusalem” (p. 146). According to them, this was influenced by the discovery of “a rival candidate” for the temple in Jerusalem on Mount Gerizim (dating back to 450 BC). Its existence – according to our researchers – would have only encouraged “the Jerusalem priesthood...to be much more explicit about the divinely chosen city and sanctuary

if they wished the Pentateuch to provide religious legitimation for Jerusalem and its Temple” (p. 147).

Bergsma and Morrow discuss two theories on this topic (pp. 147–49). The first one (Gary Knoppers, Christophe Nihan), assumes that “The Pentateuch is a collaborative document between the Jerusalem and Gerizim priesthods designed to provide a common foundational religious text that allowed latitude in the interpretation of the exact location of the one central sanctuary. Judean took it to be Jerusalem, Samaritans Gerizim, but otherwise both could accept the Torah” (p. 147). The second one (Jean-Louis Ska) “argues that cities destroyed by foreigners in the ancient Near East were considered accursed, and this in part explains why post-exilic Judeans omitted Jerusalem from their sacred history as recorded in the Pentateuch” (p. 148). The validity of both proposals is questioned by the authors of the discussed monography. Firstly, because there is “no literary evidence whatsoever that any group or sect within Palestinian post-exilic Judaism responded to the trauma of Jerusalem to their faith, seeking refuge instead in a purely religion focused on the mosaic Torah” (p. 148). Secondly, because “majority of religious texts that are commonly thought to be composed or redacted in Judah during the Persian Period represent a heightened focus on the great triad of Zion Theology (Davide, Jerusalem, Temple) over against older texts” (p. 162; arguments cf. pp. 149–62). Summarizing the analysis, the two researchers came to the following conclusion:

We need to acknowledge that the ‘common Pentateuch,’ with its (1) absence of Zion, (2) valorization of northern religious sites (esp. Shechem and Gerizim), and (3) subjugation of (southern) Judah to (northern) Joseph (Deut 33,7 vs. Deut 33,13–17) look like an outlier when placed among all the post-exilic sacred documents of Judaism. Therefore, it must either be a product of the northern Samaritans that was then adopted by the Judeans, or else the common patrimony of the Judeans and Samaritans reaching back into the pre-exilic period to a time when the Pentateuchal vision of Israelite unity under Josephite leadership (Gen 37,5–11; 49, 26; Deut 33,17) could have been acceptable even to the Judeans (p. 167–68).

The absence of Zion Theology (but cf. Exod 15:17) and no mention of the importance of temple in Jerusalem (apart from uncertain allusions in Gen 2:13: Gihon, cf. 1 Kgs 1:33; Gen 14:18, cf. Ps 76:2 uncertain; Gen 22:2: Moriah, cf. 2 Chr 3:1; *Jubilees* 18:13: Salomon’s Temple) is in fact an interesting and important problem that needs to be solved. Bergsma and Morrow’s proposal is one of the possible theories attempting to unravel the mystery. However, it must be remembered that in this study they are contesting the prevailing findings on the creation of the Pentateuch. Due to what they propose (the pre-exilic dating of the Pentateuch), they do not address the issue of Moses, who is the dominant figure in the Pentateuch but almost absent elsewhere in pre-exilic texts (outside Judean Deuteronomy and Deuteronomistic

History) (Lemański 2022). Apparently, there is no mention of Abraham or prehistory in the texts from this period (but cf. Ezekiel).<sup>3</sup> These and many other issues would also need to be resolved in order to accept the tentative thesis put forward by the two authors at the end of their monograph.

The lack of emphasis on the central importance of the sanctuary in Jerusalem may also be the result of a change in theological awareness after the Babylonian Exile. This process is visible (1) in Ezekiel, for whom the sphere of the sacred no longer belongs only to the sanctuary, but to the entire city of Jerusalem (Ezek 43:12), and God's presence is not limited to Jerusalem (Ezek 10:18–22; 11:22–25), (2) in the statement of Jeremiah questioning the inviolability of the temple in Jerusalem (Jer 7) and (3) then also in priestly texts, in which the sanctuary is located where the chosen people are present (Exod 25–31; 35–40; portable Temple), which reaches its apogee in the extending the spheres of the sacred to the entire nation and to all aspects of its everyday life (cf. Leviticus: Theology of Holiness) (Lemański 2023a).

Admittedly, the monograph in question is an interesting voice in the discussion on the creation of the Pentateuch, but as a whole it is not entirely convincing, because it combines only a certain sequence of important arguments, while ignoring other issues raised and resolved in more “classical” studies on the origins of the Pentateuch. Nevertheless, this voice in the discussion is worth noting and the doubts raised in it should be analysed, which is what the authors themselves indicate, admitting at the beginning – as already mentioned – that they do not propose a comprehensive and definitive solution to the issue of the creation of the Pentateuch.

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<sup>3</sup> On this topic, see Chrostowski 1996.

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