

The Legends of Genesis, The Biblical Saga and History by Hermann Gunkel. Intro by Wm. F. Albright. Schocken Books. New York. First published 1901. Copyright 1964 Schocken Books, Inc. (Trans. by W.H. Carruth, first pub. 1901)

Introduction by W. F. Albright -

p. vii

The influence of Wellhausen, however, was so pervasive in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that it was left for our own day to fully appreciate the great originality of Gunkel's ~~sch~~ scholarship.

The approach of Wellhausen to Israelite literature was essentially isolationist; he refused to recognize the antiquity of oral tradition and insisted that the stories of Genesis were, in general, reflections of life and religion in the period of the Monarchy, erroneously projected backward into pre-Mosaic times. According to Wellhausen the ancient Orient, with its foci in Egypt and Mesopotamia, exerted no serious influence on early Israel, which in fact began its historical career in a phase of cultural evolution closely resembling that of the Pre-Islamic Arabs in the fourth-seventh centuries A. D. A century ago nothing was understood about the evolution of nomadism in Arabia; today we know that Pre-Islamic poetry reflects a stage of nomadic culture more than two thousands years later than the donkey nomadism of the Hebrew Patriarchs.

p. viii

Wellhausen was not at all interested in the archaeological discoveries of the nineteenth century and virtually never referred to any of them. In fact, in his famous History of Israel, published in 1894, he did not even mention such a phenomenal discovery as that of the Amarna tablets.

p. viii,

ix

While Gunkel objected strenuously to Wellhausen's view that most of the material preserved in Genesis is very late, he fully recognized the correctness of Wellhausen's sequence of documentary sources: J, E, P. He was, however, mistaken in following Wellhausen's dating of P as later than D, being misled by Wellhausen's own hyper-rigidity in dealing with legal material without adequate training in the history and development of law. Today we may confidently say that Gunkel was right in recognizing collectors instead of authors in the oldest sources. On the other hand, he was probably wrong in considering J and E as schools rather than as the work of single compilers or editors.

p. ix

Martin Noth and the present writer have independently argued that J and E are so closely related that E can be considered only as a secondary recension of J. Moreover, as already recognized by Gunkel, it may also be shown that the narratives of P are in large part - though by no means entirely - later forms of JE.

... archaeological discoveries and improved interpretations of both unwritten and written materials recovered by excavators, have revolutionized our point of view completely. Wellhausen proves to have been wrong almost throughout, whereas Gunkel was right much of the time. In cases where Gunkel was mistaken, the state of our knowledge in 1901 was far too sketchy for positive conclusions. Now we have a multitude of archaeological discoveries from Palestine itself, from Syria, Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Asia Minor, all throwing light on the history of the early and middle centuries of the second millennium.

(Albright, without going into detail, mentions the revolutionary significance of such cuneiform discoveries as: the Old Assyrian tablets from Cappadocia, the slightly later Mari tablets, ... the Nuzi tablets ... the Amarna tablets, the Hittite and Canaanite tablets, etc....)

p. x