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Abstract and Keywords

This article reviews Old Testament scholarship during three periods: (1) up to 1945; (2) from 1945 to 1970; and (3) from 1970. Seventy years ago, the discipline was still reacting in various ways to the theory of the history of Israelite religion and sacrifice and the theory of how and when the Old Testament had been composed, which had received classical expression fifty years earlier in J. Wellhausen's *Prolegomena* (1883). In Germany, the discipline faced the determined attempts of the 'German Christian' movement to banish the study of Hebrew and the Old Testament from universities and the use of the Old Testament from Christian worship. However, the ending of the Second World War initiated a period of consolidation with strongly marked theological interests, until the emergence, in the late 1960s, of new methodologies including structuralism, literature criticism, feminist and liberation theology, deconstruction, and canonical criticism.

Keywords: biblical scholarship, J. Wellhausen, German Christian, structuralism, literature criticism, feminist theology, liberation theology, deconstruction, canonical criticism

ALL divisions of time are arbitrary, if not conventional, and this is certainly true of any attempt to divide Old Testament scholarship into neat periods of time. Seventy years ago the discipline was still reacting in various ways to the theory of the history of Israelite religion and sacrifice and the theory of how and when the Old Testament had been composed that had received classical expression fifty years earlier in J. Wellhausen's *Prolegomena* (1883). In Germany the discipline was also having to face the determined attempts of the 'German Christian' movement to banish the study of Hebrew and the Old Testament from universities and the use of the Old Testament from Christian worship. However, the ending of the Second World War initiated a period of consolidation with strongly marked theological interests, until the emergence, in the late 1960s, of new methodologies including structuralism, literature criticism, feminist and liberation theology, deconstruction, and canonical criticism. The present essay will therefore be divided into three main sections: 1. Up to 1945; 2. From 1945 to 1970; 3. From 1970. Even so, these divisions will not provide hard and fast periods which avoid overlap and repetition.

(p. 6) 1. Up to 1945

The position stated classically by Wellhausen (although it can also be found with different emphases in Robertson Smith (1881) and Abraham Kuenen (1874–5) divided the history of Israelite religion into three periods. The first, that of the period of the Judges and the early monarchy (twelfth to eighth centuries BCE), was characterized by many local sanctuaries. There was no centrally organized priesthood or ritual, and there were family or city-based communal occasions of worship (Judg. 21: 19, 1 Sam. 9: 11–14; 20: 18–29) as well as celebrations at harvest times. These conditions were represented in the sources of the Pentateuch designated as J and E (because they *mainly* used the divine names Jahweh and Elohim respectively) as well as in Judges and the books of Samuel. Under the influence of the eighth-century prophets and their demand for exclusive loyalty to God backed by social justice, the composition of Deuteronomy (D) in the seventh century initiated a reformation in the reign of Josiah around 622, which closed the local sanctuaries and made Jerusalem the sole legitimate place of sacrifice. This second period ended with the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple by the Babylonians in 587 and the resulting period of exile. The third period was that of the restoration after 540, when the temple was eventually rebuilt (c.515) and when the Priestly (P) and ritual portions of the Pentateuch were composed. An implication of this position was that little could be known of the history of Israel before the rise of the monarchy in the late eleventh century, and that most of what was attributed to Moses was the projection back into earlier times of what were essentially the rituals of the post-exilic period.

Leaving aside the attempts that were made to vindicate the account of Israel's religion that were derived from a straightforward non-critical reading of the text (i.e. the

traditional view), scholarship reacted in several ways to the position outlined by Wellhausen. These can be characterized as literary, archaeological, and anthropological, although these categories are not exact.

(a) Literary Responses

These took two forms. On the one hand were the attempts of scholars such as Budde and Eissfeldt to extend the tracing of the Pentateuchal sources J and E into the books of Joshua, Judges, and 1 Samuel, or to refine the analysis by the discovery of new sources such as Eissfeldt's 'L' source (Eissfeldt 1922). The other approach, associated particularly with the work of Gunkel (1901–10), took the sources for granted and enquired after the form and origin of the units from which they were composed. This led to the form-critical investigation of the sources in one of its senses (see Chapter 34 below).

(p. 7) (b) Archaeological Responses

These took various forms: cultural, religious, and historical. The cultural responses were based upon the discovery of Assyrian and Babylonian texts which resembled the biblical accounts of creation and flood and the laws of Exodus 21–4. They illuminated the cultural context of ancient Israel and disclosed the history, religion, and culture of ancient Mesopotamia as never before. One conclusion that was drawn from these discoveries was that everything that was thought to be unique to the Old Testament was, in fact, derived from Babylon (Delitzsch 1901–2). This view, as later developed by Delitzsch (1921), would provide ammunition for 'German Christian' attempts to discredit the Old Testament. In a different direction, the similarities between the religions of Mesopotamia and Israel stimulated the formation of the 'history of religions school', a group of scholars originally based in Göttingen who, without relinquishing their commitment to the Old Testament as scripture, were concerned to trace the emergence of Israel's faith within the wider cultural background (Klatt 1969). There was a similar development in New Testament scholarship (see Chapter 2 below). Particular attention was paid to the Babylonian roots of Israelite apocalyptic and eschatology, and a concrete working out of these general ideas led, in Scandinavian and British scholarship, to theories about how sacral kingship in ancient Israel had played a vital role in forming beliefs about the universal kingship of the God of Israel and of messianic expectations (Volz 1912; Mowinckel 1922; Hooke 1935). Drawing upon reconstructions of the Babylonian new year festival, biblical scholars reconstructed an annual ceremony in ancient Israel in which the king played a crucial role. He underwent ritual humiliation and death before being restored to life and participating in a sacred marriage.

These ceremonies ensured the prosperity of the community for the coming year. They were reconstructed mainly from the psalms (thus reversing the post-exilic dates to which most of them had been previously assigned by critical scholarship), but it was believed

that the creation story of Genesis 1 was also used in the rituals, rituals which ultimately looked beyond the immediate future to an eschatological consummation of God's universal rule.

The historical response took two forms. The excavation work of W. F. Albright and his students had the aim of confirming the historicity of the biblical record in opposition to negative conclusions about what could be known of Israel's history prior to the period of the Judges, conclusions that went back through Wellhausen to the early nineteenth century. Albright believed that he had found evidence for the conquest of Canaan as related in the book of Joshua, and that other discoveries confirmed the claim in Genesis that the Hebrew ancestors (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) had migrated from northern Mesopotamia some time in the first half of the second millennium. His book *From the Stone Age to Christianity* (1940) presented what was in fact a vindication of the biblical account of Israel's history, with a decisive role being attributed to Moses in founding Israel's distinctive faith. With (p. 8) some modification, Albright's position continued to be advocated by his pupils G. E. Wright (1957) and J. Bright until (in the case of Bright) the 1980s (Bright 1981). German scholars such as G. Schumacher and E. Sellin were also pioneers in Palestinian archaeology, but a distinctive contribution to biblical geography and history was made by the researches on the ground by A. Alt and M. Noth. While broadly accepting the Wellhausen synthesis, they refined it in several directions. Alt's essay 'The God of the Fathers' (1929) identified the religion of Abraham and the Ancestors with a type of religion deduced from (much later) Nabataean sources in which the phrase 'the God of X' (X being a person) indicated a loose bond between an individual and the god in whose honour that individual had founded a cult. Noth's researches into the period of the Judges (1930) led him to conclude that prior to the monarchy Israel had been an amphictyony: that is, a tribal league centred upon a specific sanctuary, whose members had a common religion, mutual obligations, and basic laws. Noth traced the material common to the presumed Pentateuchal sources J and E to the tradition held by the members of the amphictyony. The researches of Alt and Noth had the effect of providing a more positive picture of Israel before the monarchy. On another matter they were in direct opposition to Albright, holding that there had been no Israelite conquest of Canaan, but, rather, a gradual process of settlement. Noth's commentary on Joshua (1938) argued that its stories of conquest were largely aetiological: that is, folk stories generated long after the event to explain the history of particular sites. Noth's researches into the composition of the Pentateuch (1948) also led him into direct conflict with Albright, with the conclusion that virtually nothing could be known about Moses.

Anthropological responses to the Wellhausen synthesis developed the implication of his work: namely, that there had been a steady development or evolution of Israelite belief from polytheism, through henotheism, to monotheism. Using the method known as the doctrine of survivals (i.e. reference to customs thought to be 'primitive') and comparing them with features of other cultures, especially the cultures of modern so-called primitive peoples, scholars such as Oesterley and Robinson (1930) found references in the Old

Testament to animism (the worship of spirits believed to reside in trees or springs) and polytheism, in accounting for the development of Israel's faith.

(c) The German Church Struggle

The 'German Christians', a movement closely allied to the National Socialism of Adolf Hitler, expressed their anti-Semitism by targeting the Old Testament, among other things identified as Jewish (Scholder 1977–85; Weber 2000). The view that there was something distinctive and German about German Christianity had been (p. 9) argued well before the rise of Hitler by Artur Bonus (1914). It was then taken up by 'German Christians' and combined with views such as those of Delitzsch to maintain that the Old Testament had no place in Christianity or its worship. It is difficult from the vantage-point of hindsight to appreciate the pressures under which Old Testament scholars in Germany were placed, pressures that included boycotts and sit-ins by 'German Christian' students, and pressures exerted by university administrations that were required to execute government policies after 1933 (Scherffig 1989–94). While some, such as G. von Rad, became members of the Confessing Church in opposition to National Socialism, others succumbed to the pressures, while others carried on as best as they could in the circumstances. Outright theological opposition came from the Swiss scholar Vischer in his *The Witness of the Old Testament to Christ* (1934–42), which sought to identify the implicit presence of Christ in Old Testament narratives in support of his view that the Old Testament was not only indispensable to the church, but the book without which it was impossible to understand the New Testament.

(d) Other Theological Responses

If Vischer's work can be seen as a response to the situation created by the 'German Christian' movement, the remarkable number of other Old Testament theologies that appeared in German in the 1930s were more of a response to the 'dialectical theology' of the 1920s. This latter movement, associated particularly with the Swiss theologian Karl Barth, was a direct challenge to the 'liberal' theology presumed to be allied to the practice of historical criticism. It claimed that a distinction should be made between what could be gained by historical research and what was revealed to faith, and it stressed that faith was concerned centrally with life. These claims posed fundamental questions for scholars who were writing about the theology of the Old Testament. If an Old Testament theology was simply an account of the beliefs that ancient Israelites had held at different times in their history, it failed the test of enabling modern believers to gain from the Old Testament those aspects of revelation that would help them to live the life of faith. If, on the other hand, all the emphasis was placed upon the revelatory element, there was a danger that the knowledge gained from historical criticism would at best be ignored and at worst be regarded as irrelevant. Walter Eichrodt (1933–9), Ernst Sellin (1933), and Ludwig Köhler (1935) sought to bridge this divide by organizing their theological work around key institutions or ideas that described the relationship between God and his people, rather than abstract truths or doctrines that were unrelated to life. The historical-critical dimension was retained by examining how the divine-human relationship had manifested itself at different periods and in different ways. The dimension of revelation was safeguarded by the claim that it was precisely in and (p. 10) through the historical processes of Israel's existence that God's character and will were disclosed. Even so, the desired synthesis could not be achieved without an element of subjective interpretation. Eichrodt chose the institution of the covenant as the organizing principle of his investigations, while for Sellin and Köhler the guiding ideas were those of the holiness of God and the lordship of God, respectively. In Britain a distinctive contribution to the discussion was made by H. W. Robinson who, in publications from as early as 1905, had argued that the Israelite experience of reality was different from that of modern Western humans. This approach was a variation on the use of anthropology, because it drew upon studies of 'primitive' peoples and their alleged psychology, and argued that it was precisely because of an awareness of reality different from that of moderns that ancient Israelites were able to perceive the divine in the events of nature and history. Robinson was only partly able to work this out in a theology of the Old Testament before his death (Robinson 1946), but the legacy of his view of ancient Hebrew psychology lasted well into the following period.

2. 1945 to 1970

This period will be dealt with under four main headings: the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, the biblical theology movement, Old Testament theology, and the debate about the history of Israel.

(a) The Dead Sea Scrolls

The news which reached the scholarly world in the late 1940s to the effect that significant quantities of ancient Hebrew and Aramaic manuscripts had been discovered in caves near the north-west end of the Dead Sea was completely unexpected. It had the effect of diverting a considerable number of Old Testament scholars away from what they had been doing to devoting their whole attention to the new discoveries. The fact that the discoveries were to affect the study of sectarian Judaism and the New Testament rather more than the Old Testament did not prevent Old Testament specialists from entering the fray and contributing to theories about the origin and beliefs of the group generally believed to have written the sectarian documents in the hundred years or so before the beginning of the Common Era (see Cross 1958). It is noteworthy that Old Testament scholars (p. 11) from Germany became less involved in these discussions than their Anglo-Saxon or other Continental colleagues. Perhaps this was an indication of the much stronger commitment to Old Testament interpretation by German-speaking scholars than by their colleagues elsewhere. The immediate gain for Old Testament scholarship was confined to the field of textual criticism, the importance of the discoveries lying in the fact that the Hebrew fragments were about 1,000 years older than those on which scholarly editions of the Hebrew Bible were based. The seventh edition of the *Biblia Hebraica* edited by R. Kittel (1951) included variant readings from the Isaiah manuscript (IQIs^a) and the Habakkuk scroll, and some of these were reflected in the Revised Standard Version translation of the Bible (1952). However, scholars would have to wait for many years before all the biblical fragments were published. Early theories about the textual transmission of the Old Testament based upon the discoveries posited three main centres of textual production: Alexandria (the Septuagint and some Qumran manuscripts), Palestinian (the Samaritan Pentateuch and some Qumran manuscripts), and Babylonian (the Masoretic Text). However, this did not explain why more than one text type was found at Qumran, and later research modified this view.

(b) Biblical Theology

The term 'biblical theology' is ambiguous (it can mean either the theology contained in the Bible or a theology in accordance with what the Bible contains; see Ebeling 1963); it has been applied to various movements within biblical scholarship from the late eighteenth century; and it presupposes the unity of the Old and New Testaments (see, generally, Barr 1999). In the present section the term will be used to describe the Old Testament aspect of a movement that was prominent especially, although not exclusively, in English-speaking scholarship in roughly the period 1945 to 1960, although it had its roots in earlier scholarship (for the New Testament aspect see Chapter 2 below). It was an attempt to harness the results of historical-critical study of the Bible to the theological and social needs of the churches in the immediate post-war period, and it did so by claiming that Hebrew psychology and the Hebrew language possessed certain unique features that made them suitable vehicles for divine revelation. At the level of psychology (in a very broad sense), the Hebrews possessed an awareness of history and historical processes not shared by their neighbours, for whom reality was more closely perceived in relation to the recurring cycles of nature. With regard to language, Hebrew was said to be a dynamic, verb and action-orientated language, in opposition to Greek, which was characterized as more static and noun-orientated. Biblical theology could thus accommodate the results of the history-of-religions approach by using the latter as a foil to the Old Testament. These results demonstrated the uniqueness of (p. 12) the Hebrew conception of reality. Historical criticism was important precisely because it investigated and corroborated the historical events through which God had acted to reveal himself. The roots of the claims made about the distinctive Hebrew way of perceiving reality went back to works such as those of Pederson (1926–40) and H. W. Robinson (1936), but they were given classical expression in two books by G. E. Wright, *The Old Testament against its Environment* (1950) and *God who Acts: Biblical Theology as Recital* (1952). In Britain the movement found expression in studies of the biblical view of man (*sic*) and of work (Ryder Smith 1951) and in *A Theological Word Book of the Bible* (1950) edited by A. Richardson. The assumption behind these exercises was that the impact of divine revelation upon Hebrew experience left thought forms and linguistic features which could be systematized by means of word studies. It was taken for granted that because Hebrew thought and language had been uniquely formed by contact with the divine, the results gained from the studies of the thought forms and language would be normative for Christian attempts to understand the world and to shape its future.

The biblical theology movement failed because of its dependence upon flawed linguistic methods (Barr 1961) and outdated theories of social anthropology (see Rogerson 1974 and 1978). Its view that Israelites perceived history in ways different from their neighbours was also challenged (Albrektson 1967). The fundamental concern that inspired the movement, however, that of how to harness historical criticism to the needs

of theology and of faith communities, would be taken up later by one of its critics, B. S. Childs.

(c) Old Testament Theology

The years 1957–60 saw the publication of one of the most important and influential Old Testament theologies of the twentieth century, that of Gerhard von Rad. It was both a masterly synthesis of much research by many scholars that had preceded it and possessed an originality that anticipated later developments, even if those developments went off in different directions than those indicated by von Rad. To the question ‘What is the subject-matter of an Old Testament theology?’, the answer was simple. It was Israel's confessions of its belief that God had chosen and sustained the people, as contained in the literary traditions of the Old Testament. How had God chosen and made himself known to Israel? Initially, in many ways, in various places, and at different times to individuals and to groups. These encounters had been recorded in various ways: in cult legends, aetiologies, poems, songs, and sagas. The encounters continued by units being combined into greater literary wholes. This was not merely a literary exercise. It had its setting in cultic celebrations at which the stories of God's dealings with Israel were recounted, and at (p. 13) which this history and thus the divine encounter were experienced anew, as something present and actual. In time, the literary traditions became the Pentateuchal sources J and E, and the period between their completion and the composition of Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic History beginning in the late seventh century was bridged by the prophets. These did not generally retell the histories of God's dealings with Israel, but rather looked forward to what God was about to do, for judgement or salvation. The Babylonian exile in the sixth century caused a major disruption, which was interpreted by the Deuteronomistic Historians in terms of reluctance of the people to obey God's commandments. Von Rad was uncertain about the origins of the Priestly traditions, noting their lack of reference to the house of David. This suggested that while, after the exile, they came to represent the practice of ritual and priesthood in the Jerusalem sanctuary, they did not necessarily originate in Jerusalem.

Two matters central to von Rad's position were his view of what could be known about the history of Israel prior to the period of the Judges, and how Israel's view of its history, as expressed in the Old Testament, was to be related to a scholarly, ‘objective’ reconstruction of that history. Von Rad accepted the researches of Alt and Noth, especially the latter's view that the principal themes of the story of God's dealings with Israel—the promise of land to the Ancestors (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob), the exodus from Egypt, the law giving at Sinai, and the occupation of Canaan—had been developed separately and were not originally connected with each other. Their fusion was part of the creative process of building the tradition, assisted by cultic celebrations. The fact that stories about Moses were present in several of the themes—for example, the exodus and the Sinai law giving—suggested to Noth that the presence of Moses in the traditions was a later development in the process of tradition building, a conclusion that von Rad seemed to accept. At any rate, his view was that the events in which God had disclosed himself were beyond recovery by historians, which also meant that nothing could be known historically about personages such as Abraham. One reason for this, according to von Rad, was that until the sixth century when the Deuteronomistic History was

composed, the only way in which occurrences could be described in Israel was by means of *Dichtung*—a German word normally translated ‘fiction’, but which in von Rad's usage seems to have indicated not falsification, but a poetic, creative, and imaginative account of happenings that expressed their inner meanings. Another reason was that personages such as Abraham were personifications of groups and their experiences, as well as being individuals whose names had been remembered.

Important for von Rad's view of how the traditions had coalesced into the connected stories of the sources J and E was the tribal league or amphictyony, proposed by Noth (1930). This association of Israelite tribes in the period of the Judges was the melting-pot which enabled the isolated experiences of different groups to become the property of the whole people. What God had done for one (p. 14) group or individual he had done for all. Von Rad's view of Israel's history from the period of the monarchy was less controversial, except that he believed that a new spirit, a kind of enlightenment, had emerged in the reign of Solomon. This affected the way in which the older traditions were now read, and resulted in there being no new perceptions of God's dealings with the people until the rise of the eighth-century prophets. In the post-exilic period Israel withdrew from its confession of God's dealings with the people in its history, to a position dominated by obedience to the law.

What was the place within an Old Testament theology of Israel's history as reconstructed by scholarly research? The answer was none. This did not mean that von Rad ignored it; it contributed vitally to his view of how and when the historical traditions had been formed. But it was the way in which Israel had chosen to link together the disparate accounts of God's workings that was of prime theological importance. No less important were the ways in which the tradition contradicted itself: for example, in the attitudes to monarchy expressed in 1 Samuel 8–10. What this amounted to was a rehabilitation, for theological purposes, of the Old Testament's own picture of its history, a picture which critical scholarship in the previous 150 years had so painstakingly taken apart and reassembled in a totally different form. Space considerations preclude any further description of von Rad's consequent treatment of the themes and institutions central to Israel's understanding of God's dealings with the people.

The achievement of von Rad lay in the way in which he was able to combine the results of historical research and literary, form-critical, and redaction studies of Old Testament texts to produce a theology centred upon divine-human encounter. This meant that it was not an intellectual account of what Israelites had believed, but a portrayal of dynamic and changing processes in which encounter with God was renewed, as received traditions were interpreted and reinterpreted in the face of concrete situations. In at least two ways von Rad anticipated things to come, although they would take forms of which he would hardly have approved. On the one hand, his insistence on the priority of Israel's own ways of constructing its traditions anticipated at the later canonical criticism, while his rehabilitation of the Old Testament's own picture of its history was not far from ‘final form’ approaches to the biblical text.

(d) Histories of Israel

The publication of the histories of Israel by Noth (1950) and Bright (1960) summed up and brought into direct conflict the tendencies noted above in German and American scholarship. While Bright accepted some of Noth's positions—for example, that Israel was a tribal confederacy in the period of the Judges—and took (p. 15) full account of developments in source and literary criticism, his history was essentially a nuanced and sensitive treatment of the picture presented in the Bible itself, from the time of the Patriarchs to the Maccabean Revolt. For Bright, the Patriarchs were recognizable historical personages; the exodus from Egypt could be dated to the thirteenth century; all the major lines of Israel's religion could be traced back to Moses, 'the great founder of Israel' (Bright 1960: 132); and while the conquest of Canaan under Joshua was not unequivocally endorsed by archaeological discoveries, it could 'be regarded as certain that a violent irruption into the land took place late in the thirteenth century' (Bright 1960: 120). Noth's history began, not with the Patriarchs, but with the origins of the tribes and their existence in Canaan as a tribal confederacy. The Old Testament accounts of the Patriarchs, the exodus, and the Sinai law giving were treated as traditions of the tribal league, whose main value was the information they provided about the beliefs of the tribes. The events that they presupposed were not easily accessible, and in any case were anachronistically ascribed to all Israel, whereas 'Israel' had come into being as a tribal league only in Canaan. In the case of the occupation of Canaan, this was a complex process of peaceful settlement, probably bound up with larger migrations of peoples such as the Aramean wanderings. The destruction of cities identified by Albright and Bright as evidence for the biblical account of the conquest were to be ascribed to the inter-city feuds known from the Amarna Letters of the thirteenth century and to the upheavals consequent upon the invasion of the Sea Peoples around 1200 BCE (Noth 1950: 79–80). From the time of Saul onwards, there was little for the two histories to disagree on, except that Noth's history went as far as the Bar Kochba Revolt in the early second century CE.

3. From 1970

Introduction

The most striking feature of the past thirty-five years has been the way in which Old Testament studies have embraced new disciplines. Until the 1960s the historical-critical method was the only 'respectable' academic way of approaching the text, even if 'conservative' scholars disputed its results by arguing, for example, that they were based upon too superficial a knowledge of the ancient Near East. Beginning in the 1960s, methods influenced by linguistic and anthropological structuralism began to be applied to

the Old Testament, not least by experts in those fields such as Barthes (in Barthes et al. 1971) and Leach (1966). Around the same time Old (p. 16) Testament scholars influenced by literary 'New Criticism' began to look at texts as pieces of literature. A further development was that liberation theologians and feminist scholars began to produce important studies of Old Testament texts, and as all these approaches begin to make headway in the discipline, they were enlarged to include such things as reader-response criticism, deconstruction, and psychological ways of reading texts influenced by theorists such as Foucault and Lacan. 'Post-modernism' became a further factor, with its insistence on the lack of master narratives by which to understand and characterize reality. Amid all this, historical criticism developed new insights and techniques, sometimes in dialogue with the newer methodologies. There was a new awareness of the importance of the history of the discipline (see Smend 1989). The study of social anthropology led to a questioning of many of the older assumptions about Hebrew mentality (Rogerson 1978), while the application of sociology to biblical narratives—in fact, an extension and refinement of form-critical work begun by Gunkel and Gressmann—yielded new information about Israelite society. A revival of interest in Old Testament ethics and in the contribution of biblical texts to understanding contemporary problems produced notable studies by Walter Brueggemann (1977). A significant development in the area of theology was initiated by Childs's canonical criticism, while in the area of the history of Israel new techniques and developments in archaeology produced a sharp polarization between scholars described as maximalist or minimalist in regard to what could be known about ancient Israel's history. In the field of traditional literary criticism of the Old Testament, as opposed to the newer literature criticism, there was a marked tendency to date everything a good deal later than had previously been the case. The formative period, ironically that about which scholarship was less well informed than some earlier periods, was seen to be the Persian period of the late sixth to the late fourth centuries BCE. Also within more traditional Old Testament studies the rise of the so-called Richter school called for a new level of technical expertise in the handling of ancient Hebrew texts based upon modern linguistics (see Chapter 34 below). The ground that needs to be covered in the remainder of this chapter is immense and will necessitate treatment that is highly selective and brief. The sections that follow will deal with literary approaches, anthropology and sociology, feminist and liberation interpretations, ethics, theology, archaeology and history, and traditional literary criticism.

(a) Literary Approaches

Although the first essays in literary interpretation of the Old Testament were published in the 1970s, the impetus for the approach has been taken to be (p. 17) E. Auerbach's *Mimesis*, published in German in 1946 and in English translation in 1968. *Mimesis* is, to quote the book's subtitle, about 'the representation of reality in Western literature', and Auerbach illustrated this on the basis of European literature extending over many centuries, but also including, in the first chapter, Homer and the Bible. *Mimesis* showed that the Bible could be treated 'like any other book' when it came to asking how its

stories sought to represent reality, and this opened the way to pioneering studies such as that by Good on irony in the Old Testament (1965), Licht on story-telling in the Bible (1978), and Bar-Efrat on narrative art in the Bible (1979 in Hebrew, 1989 in English). Also in the 1970s Gros Louis, Ackerman, and Warshaw edited a two-volume work on *Literary Interpretations of Biblical Narratives* (1974), and Robert Alter published some of the essays that would form the basis for his influential *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (1981). The 1980s saw the appearance of Adele Berlin's *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* (1983) and *The Literary Guide to the Bible* edited by Alter and Kermode (1987). Many of the contributors to the latter would make distinguished contributions to the field in their own right. Through these and other works, Old Testament studies became familiar with chiasmic structures, the formal structuring of plots and narratives, and concepts such as 'point of view' and implied author. Where these studies differed from what had gone before was in taking the final form of the text to be a literary whole. Whereas source criticism would look to apparent contradictions in a text to indicate the work of redactors who had combined disparate sources, literature criticism would accommodate these features to literary devices that contributed dramatic or other effects. There was, indeed, a tendency in literature criticism to regard the possibility of accommodating apparent discrepancies in the text to literary explanations, as proof against the older source criticism. Reader-response criticism, strongly influenced by the work of Fish (1980), focused attention upon reading and readers, and the interests and assumptions that they brought to the text, while deconstruction, influenced by Derrida (1967), looked for contradictions in texts, not in order to identify sources but to show how texts can often undermine themselves by contradictory statements. Acceptance of the view that interpretation is profoundly affected by the assumptions brought by readers to texts (a point clearly proved by work on the history of biblical interpretation) can also be turned back upon texts themselves. If readers have interests, so do texts (and their authors if they can be identified), and this leads to ideological criticism, to the attempt to identify class, gender, and power interests that have affected the production of texts (see Barr 2000). The many 'readings' of Old Testament texts that have been produced by attention to the interests of the texts and their interpreters, as well as to their literary structures and devices, have greatly enriched the discipline. They have also often disregarded attempts to make literature criticism 'scientific' (see below, section g).

(p. 18) (b) Anthropology and Sociology

As noted above, anthropology and sociology in the forms of investigation of the social settings of units of tradition were well established in Old Testament studies. From the late 1960s scholars using these methods were influenced, among other things, by the descriptions of contemporary tribal peoples by Evans-Pritchard and his associates (Evans-Pritchard 1937, 1956, 1965; Lienhardt 1961), by American cultural anthropologists such as Service (1962), and by the structural anthropology of Lévi-Strauss, whose monumental volumes on myth stimulated new thinking in this area (Lévi-Strauss 1964–71; Kirk 1970). This led to a re-evaluation of many ideas about Hebrew mentality (Rogerson 1974, 1978)

and to a work on Israelite history and religion that made a great impact, Gottwald's *The Tribes of Yahweh* (1978). Gottwald developed an idea first proposed by Mendenhall (1962), that the Israelite occupation of Canaan had been an internal revolt of peasants against the city-states. Gottwald proposed that the revolt produced an egalitarian society, which in turn engendered belief in YHWH as a God of liberation. Subsequent history, with the rise of the monarchy, represented a failure to maintain this ideal. Based upon extensive anthropological and sociological research, Gottwald's book owed something to the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s in America. In Germany, the student unrest and demonstrations of 1968–9 also influenced a generation of scholars, who determined to see Israelite history in terms of social attempts to achieve justice. An influential anthropological book was Sigrist's *Regulierte Anarchie* (1967), an attempt to describe segmentary societies which lacked a central governing authority. Crüsemann's *Der Widerstand gegen das Königtum* (1978) drew upon Sigrist to describe Israelite history as a struggle between egalitarian and power-based centralizing principles. The fact that a concern for civil rights and social justice affected these developments did not invalidate them. These concerns merely shifted attention to a study of 'class' and other conflicts that existed in ancient Israelite society. In the work of Brueggemann a series of studies and commentaries created a link between social concerns and problems as presented in the Old Testament, and the similar problems facing today's world, thus providing insights for theology and ethics. Among social problems dealt with by this newer sociological research was the impact of the exile upon those who experienced it (D. L. Smith 1989) and the development of social 'classes' in the post-exilic period (Kippenberg 1982).

(c) Feminist and Liberation Interpretations

Already in the work of Gottwald and Crüsemann there was a strong element of liberation, and this was both anticipated and developed in works stemming from (p. 19) the liberation theologians of Latin America, most notably Gutiérrez's *A Theology of Liberation* (1974). Liberation theologians questioned the right of Western-based academics in secure employment to be the sole guardians of biblical interpretation, and claimed that they, too, working among the oppressed peoples of their continent, had a right to be heard. Feminist theologians made a similar point, noting that biblical interpretation had been an almost entirely male preserve, and claiming the right to expose the patriarchal biases of the Old Testament, its silencing of women's voices, and the way in which the interpretation of the Bible over the centuries had contributed to the oppression of women. Both approaches drew upon a variety of methods. Historical-critical and sociological methods illuminated the social position of women and of oppressed groups in ancient Israel, while the newer literary methods, especially in feminist interpretation, made 'readings' from a feminist perspective possible. Liberationists paid particular attention to the story of the Exodus and to the preaching of social justice by the prophets. Feminists concentrated upon texts which had been used to justify the subordination of women, such as Genesis 1–3. They also concentrated upon notable women in the Old Testament and the Apocrypha. Attention to the history of interpretation from a feminist

angle led to a history of cultural studies, and especially to the way in which male artists had represented women in portrayals of incidents in the Old Testament and the Apocrypha. For some liberationists and feminists the Old Testament was 'irredeemable' so much did it represent class and male interests (Mosala 1989 and Daly 1973). The purpose of research was to remedy these deficiencies. Others found ways of using the Old Testament in the interests of women and the church (Trible 1978). The accusation by Jewish feminists that to condemn the Old Testament as irredeemably patriarchal was a form of anti-Judaism was taken particular seriously in Germany, and attempts were made to develop a form of feminist interpretation that was sensitive to this issue (Schottroff and Wacker 1995).

(d) Ethics

Having been something of a Cinderella subject in Old Testament studies, ethics has assumed a more central position, especially through the work of Barton in Britain and Otto in Germany. The latter's *Theologische Ethik* (1994) concentrated upon the legal traditions of the Old Testament, comparing them with other legal texts from the ancient Near East in order to show their distinctiveness, a distinctiveness stemming from Israelite belief in God as being in solidarity with his people, and especially with the oppressed and disadvantaged. Barton (2003) has studied prophetic texts, especially Amos, and has suggested ways of handling narrative texts. The work of Birch (1991) is also essentially a narrative approach, while, from a conservative angle, W. C. Kaiser (1983) has adopted a more propositional and apologetic (p. 20) stance. Old Testament ethical teaching can, according to Kaiser, be defended as revelations of God's will. C. J. H. Wright's approach from a conservative angle (1995) is more subtle, and seeks to present Israelite society by contrast with the society of Israel's neighbours, as containing examples to be emulated.

(e) Theology

A main point of contention has been whether it is possible to write a theology of the Old Testament, as opposed to a history of Israelite religion (Albertz 1992) or a description of *theologies* contained in the Old Testament (Gerstenberger 2001). This has not prevented Westermann (1978), Preuß (1991–2), O. Kaiser (1993–2003), Brueggemann (1997), and Rendtorff (1999–2001) from producing theologies, and the discussion has repeated some of the issues aired in the 1920s in the famous article by Eissfeldt (1926). The matter is complicated, of course, by the much greater diversity of possible methodical approaches to Old Testament interpretation, and it becomes imperative for authors to identify the interests in terms of which they attempt a theology. The main development to be mentioned here is that of the canonical approach announced by Childs in 1977 and developed in other works (Childs 1979). Canonical criticism is an attempt to harness historical criticism to the interests of faith communities by claiming that a canonical process can be discerned in the way in which Old Testament traditions were shaped into their final form in order to become scripture. The discernment of this process enables priorities to be established which can then be used by modern scholars to undertake theological interpretation of biblical texts in accordance with the intentions of the redactors who deliberately and consciously produced sacred texts, i.e. scripture. While Childs's approach has aroused opposition, defence, and modification, it has raised fundamental questions about how and why the Old Testament reached its present form, and whether the answers to these questions are in any way mandatory for interpreters, especially those who belong to communities for whom the Old Testament is 'scripture'.

(f) Archaeology and History

The refinement of archaeological methods over the past forty years has produced a new picture of the history of ancient Israel that has major implications for the story of the Old Testament. Large-scale surveys of whole areas and the plotting of settlements have largely replaced the old practice of excavating individual prominent sites. It has become clear that the areas of Trans-Jordan known as Ammon, (p. 21) Moab, and Edom did not become small 'states' until the ninth century BCE (Bienkowski 1992), and that the same is probably true of the area occupied by the northern kingdom, Israel. Judah lagged behind and did not become a 'state' until the eighth century (Jamieson-Drake 1991). The implications of these findings for the picture of the reigns of David and Solomon have divided scholars sharply into 'maximalists' and 'minimalists'. The former maintain that it is still possible to use archaeology to support the biblical picture of an occupation of Canaan by Israelites in the late thirteenth century (albeit a more peaceful one than is implied by the book of Joshua), followed by the gradual emergence of a nation ruled by David and Solomon and their successors in the divided kingdoms (Mazar 1990). The 'minimalists' argue that the archaeological picture should have priority, and that the biblical picture of the 'empires' of David and Solomon has no basis in fact (see Davies 1992). There seems to be general agreement that the Israelite settlement in Canaan was largely peaceful, and not even the 'maximalists' attempt to recover the periods of the Patriarchs and Moses and the exodus. There is general agreement that the main outlines of the narratives of the divided monarchy in the books of Kings are to a greater extent in accordance with what can be checked from extra-biblical—i.e. Egyptian, Assyrian, Babylonian, and Persian—records. The debate is currently in full flight, and only time will tell how it is resolved. A major development in archaeology has been the work of Keel and his associates in collecting and classifying the artistic representations on seals, amulets, and other items (Keel and Uehlinger 1992). This has shed enormous light upon the popular religion of ancient Israel, and has provided rich material for any history of religion(s) in the area.

(g) Literary Criticism

Two trends can be noted here. The first is a tendency to date Old Testament sources much later than was previously done, with the J source being assigned to the post-exilic period (van Seters 1975, 1983), the composition of parts of Isaiah 1–39 being placed in Hellenistic times (O. Kaiser 1973), and the psalms being dated to post-exilic times (Gerstenberger 1988). Studies of the prophetic books have emphasized the role of prophetic 'schools' in the transmission and redaction of the works, while the composition of the narrative parts of the Pentateuch and former prophets (Joshua to 2 Kings) have indicated continuous processes of supplementation and redaction (Kratz 2000). The other trend, discussed more fully in Chapter 34 below, has been the attempt by Richter (1971) and his associates to introduce precision and rigour into literary criticism by generating

morphemic transcriptions of the Hebrew and Aramaic of the Old Testament, and by applying linguistic analyses of a highly technical nature.

(p. 22) Conclusion

Much has changed since 1970. Looking back to the work of Noth and von Rad, few would agree today that there was an Israelite amphictyony or tribal league in the period of the Judges which was the catalyst for the fusion of disparate elements of tradition into a coherent story. Whereas Noth and von Rad saw the reign of Solomon as the likely period in which Israel's literature began to flourish, the more likely period is now thought to be that of Hezekiah at the end of the eighth century. New ways of viewing the history, sociology, and religion of ancient Israel have had to compete with the arrival of new methods, as well as the investigation of the Old Testament from new standpoints, such as feminism and liberation theology. At the same time there has been a renewed interest in Old Testament ethics, and in how Old Testament texts can speak to today's world. The resultant picture is that of a discipline full of vigour, offering many new challenges and possibilities.

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