

The Death of the Deuteronomist: Time for a Paradigm Shift

An abstract of my article “The Rise and Demise of the Deuteronomistic History” in: Klaas Spronk, (Ed.), **The present State of Old Testament Studies in the Low Countries, OTS 69 (2016) 122-144.**

The theme of the article occurred to me after the completion of my quantitative structural analysis of the first nine books of the Hebrew Bible, during the writing of a comprehensive overview of the results and their implications. That research project enabled me to get a bird’s eye view not only of the structure of the individual books, but also of the architecture of the nine books as a whole. Moreover, my investigations of the structure of numerous texts the past thirty-five years – the books of the Hebrew Bible in its entirety – yielded exciting new insights regarding the compositional techniques and literary strategies used by the scribes to shape their texts.

The first insight is the profuse use in the Hebrew Bible of compositional models consisting of seven, nine, or eleven components with the most important element in pride of place at the mathematical centre, which makes it the focal point of attention.

The second insight is the unexpected discovery of the scribal technique for highlighting, finalizing, and sealing/canonizing a given text by means of a specific number of verses, and/or words, and/or letters. Such numbers are 17 and 26 and their multiples, which represent the numerical value of the name YHWH. Unless it can be disproved, I assume that this highlighting and sealing go back to biblical antiquity, because it occurs in a very high frequency from Genesis-Kings and in other books as well. A statistical inquiry has brought to light that 71% of the verses and 67% of the words in Genesis-Kings are governed by 17 and 26 and their multiples. Having said this, I want to emphasize that I shall not burden the reader with arithmetic details, because I shall utilize the numerical features of the texts only as supplementary evidence, despite the fact that I obtained my perception of the texts exactly through studying their numerical features. My arguments and line of reasoning will be primarily based on other considerations.

Taking Samuel and Kings as single books, we count nine books – 1 Samuel and 1 Kings lack the customary colophon indicating the end of a book. This is in accordance with their presentation in the Hebrew Bible and as reflected in Jewish tradition in the Talmud, contrary to the Alexandrian tradition to be found in the Septuagint, which counts eleven books, taking Samuel-Kings as four distinct works. I shall adduce evidence showing that the Story of Ancient Israel in Genesis-Kings, is a well-designed, coherent literary entity, which has come into being in three stages: first, the Tetrateuch (Genesis-Numbers), second, Deuteronomy, and third, another Tetrateuch (Joshua-Kings), resulting in a ninefold model, an Enneateuch, with Deuteronomy in pride of place at the centre.



The authors/redactors are unknown, but I shall refer to them as ‘the Scribe and his team’, but there is evidence strongly suggesting that the Scribe is the Levitical priest Ezra.

I shall argue that neither the Tetrateuch (Genesis-Numbers), nor the Pentateuch (Genesis-Deuteronomy), nor the so-called Former Prophets (Joshua-Kings), nor Martin Noth’s Deuteronomistic History (Deuteronomy-Kings – hereafter DH) were ever intended to be separate, independent literary works. Moreover, the bipartite division of the historical books into Torah/Pentateuch and Former Prophets is a late construct dating from the Hellenistic Era, when the Jews in Palestine and the Greek speaking Jews in Alexandria created different canons. This may not seem relevant, but this bipartite division was mistakenly taken for granted when critical biblical scholarship emerged (and BHK and BHS), with the result that Bible students were from the outset caught up in this particular division

and became fixated on the idea that the nine books were from the very beginning divided into Pentateuch and Former Prophets as separate literary works.

The present reassessment of the structure and the coming into existence of the nine historical books inevitably entails coming to grips with the conflicting ideas of a Pentateuch (Genesis-Deuteronomy) and Noth's concept of a 'Deuteronomistic History' (Deuteronomy-Kings). Since this is not the place to discuss in detail the enormous impact these concepts had on O.T. scholarship, I shall limit myself to discussing the significance and shortcomings of Martin Noth's DH and to shedding new light on the coming into existence of the Enneateuch as a well-planned compositional unity.

Let me conclude on a more personal note: Whoever will read my article in OTS 69 will be left with fundamental questions with regard to the numerical features which appear to have played a crucial role in the composition, finalizing, and sealing/canonizing of the text. I can assure my colleagues that such burning questions are mine too, but it is not for me to provide them with the answers, because it is a matter that concerns all of us:

1. Is it imaginable that the present text attained its final form only as late as the last two centuries BCE?
2. If so, is it reasonable to assume that a deliberately finalized and sealed MT text was substantially manipulated such a long time after its composition so as to fashion it into the present manifest numerical composition?
3. Is it feasible to hypothesize that this text was finalized, sealed, and canonized, at the time of its composition and that it therefore constitutes an archetype of MT? If so, doesn't this imply that all other texts must be regarded as para-Masoretic instead of pre-Masoretic texts?
4. Doesn't this entail that we have to reassess the discipline called textual criticism in a most fundamental way, envisaging a canonizing process that began at the time of the composition of a text?
5. Why is it so difficult for modern critical biblical scholars to overcome the deep-rooted aversion against numbers and the counting of verses and words?
6. Why do biblical scholars, in contrast to classical scholars, exhibit such an irrational fear for symbolism, and more specifically for number symbolism, while symbolism plays such an important role in the Bible?
7. On what grounds do scholars base the allegation that quantitative structural analysis amounts to manipulative kabbalistic speculation, while it is basically a strict rational (computer-assisted!) scholarly discipline in which number symbolism has its rightful place?

Biblical scholars must realize that they cannot continue turning a blind eye to the manifest numerical features of the Hebrew Bible brought to light by my quantitative structural analyses, as they have done, save for a few exceptions, the past thirty-five years. It is high time to reassess the traditional approaches to the biblical texts, to overcome prejudices, and to attain a fundamental paradigm shift.