

Konrad SCHMID. *The Old Testament: A Literary History*, translated by Linda M. Maloney. Minneapolis, MN, Fortress, 2012. (16×23,5), xiv-321 p. ISBN 978-0-8006-9775-4. \$49.00.

As an English translation of Schmid's *Literaturgeschichte des Alten Testaments* (2008) with an updated bibliography, this volume intends to foster dialogue between German and Anglo-Saxon scholarship by making recent developments within German exegesis accessible for a wider scholarly audience. Painting with broad strokes, it offers its readers a synthesis of current views on the main lines of intellectual and textual development behind the writings that would eventually constitute the Old Testament. More specifically, the individual chapters are devoted to successive periods in the history of Ancient Israel, as defined in light of the subsequent empires that dominated the Ancient Near East, viz. the pre-Assyrian, (neo-)Assyrian, (neo-)Babylonian, Persian, Ptolemaic and Seleucid era, thus covering the tenth to the second century BCE. For each of these epochs, Schmid provides a brief sketch of the wider historical background and a succinct characterization of Israel's theological responses, before embarking on a more elaborate overview of the different "spheres of tradition" in which individual pieces of literature and larger complexes developed, viz. cultic and wisdom traditions, narrative traditions, prophetic traditions and legal traditions. The relatively brief final chapter drives these centuries-long literary-historical processes to their conclusion by surveying the rise of the concept of Sacred Scripture and the emergence of a canon. The very first chapter, for its part, tackles a number of introductory issues on different aspects of writing a literary history, on the canon and text of the Old Testament, on language and book-writing in Ancient Israel and the scribal culture that produced the Old Testament, on recent trends within literary-historical scholarship, and on the different methodological aspects undergirding Schmid's approach.

For those familiar with Schmid's earlier work, it comes as no surprise that he develops a rather complicated redaction-critical perspective on the growth of the Old Testament. As such, his book may be considered representative of recent trends in European scholarship, or more correctly reflects one particular strand within European scholarship at specific points. For example, he considers the non-Priestly sections of the "Primeval History" in Genesis 2–11 as post-Priestly augmentations of the Priestly text; ascribes the first linkage of the patriarchal traditions with the Moses-Exodus story to the Priestly writer (thus echoing the debate on the "farewell to the Yahwist"); locates the original ending of "P" somewhere in the Sinai pericope, presumably \*Exodus 40; regards the book of Judges in its present form as a relatively late creation around an older core now found in Judges 3–9; and reconstructs a multiplicity of redactional layers for each of the prophetic books. Particularly with respect to the earliest layers, his reconstruction inevitably involves a certain amount of speculation.

Although one may disagree with some of the details of his analysis, Schmid is certainly to be congratulated for his attempt to give an all-encompassing overview of the Old Testament's supposed literary history, which has become a rare and daring endeavour after the collapse of the Newer Documentary Hypothesis and other longstanding theories in European scholarship. His work stands out for its emphasis on the influence of the political reality of the time: time and again, he presents the different strata of the Old Testament writings as a response to the theological challenges posed by the surrounding cultures that politically dominated Israel. Doing so, he exemplifies the basic tenet of the historical-critical method, which aims to understand texts in relation to the contexts in which they developed. On a scholarly landscape where attempts are being made to push the historical-critical approach to the fringes, this well-written, methodologically sound and surprisingly rich picture of the Old Testament's literary growth is most welcome.

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