ARTICLES

Catholic Judaism: The Political Theology of the Nineteenth-Century Russian Jewish Enlightenment
Eliyahu Stern

Paul, Samson Occom, and the Constraints of Boasting: A Comparative Rereading of 2 Corinthians 10–13
Ryan S. Schellenberg

Jewish Traditions and Familial Roman Values in Philo’s De Abrahaamo 243–254
Atar Livneh

Augustine’s Punishments
Peter Iver Kaufman

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Waiting at Nemi: Wellhausen, Gunkel, and the World Behind Their Work*

Paul Michael Kurtz
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“The times they are a-changin’.”
–Bob Dylan

In the first edition of his now fabled *Golden Bough*, James George Frazer began with the tale of an unnamed priest-king waiting for his slayer and successor in the sacred grove at Nemi. “A candidate for the priesthood could only succeed to office by slaying the priest,” wrote the armchair anthropologist, “and having slain him he held office till he was himself slain by a stronger or a craftier.”1 Scholars of the Hebrew Bible have often cast their own history in these terms: if the established August Dillmann or Franz Delitzsch fell to a trailblazing Julius Wellhausen, Wellhausen himself succumbed to a pathfinding Hermann Gunkel.2

* This essay began as a paper delivered at the 2014 SBL Annual Meeting (San Diego), in the section titled Metacriticism of Biblical Scholarship. Thanks to a 2015 research fellowship from the Leibniz Institute of European History (Mainz), I was able to revise the presentation for proper publication. Insightful comments on earlier drafts came from Walter Brueggemann, Reed Carlson, Malika Dekkiche, Michael Legaspi, Nathan MacDonald, Dan Pioske, Harald Samuel, Hermann Spieckermann, and TJ Thames, with Paul Allen and Cathy Bronson providing me with necessary sources, and an anonymous reviewer along with the journal’s production team saving me from several solecisms: I am grateful to all of them. Responsibility is mine for all deficiency and error.


For the period after “the triumph of Wellhausen”—to use language from John Rogerson’s classic history—the scope then usually narrows, with Wellhausen and Gunkel forming legendary foils. Which of them, exactly, has rightful claim to the crown or represents the true hierarch of the Hebrew Bible muse depends upon the narrator’s own disposition. Indeed, experts in biblical studies have long juxtaposed the two as intellectual opposites. In the process, they appear, oftentimes, as almost mythic figures, largely bereft of context—historical milieu otherwise being a crucial component of biblical scholarship for well over a century.

Biblical scholars ought to contextualize their discipline as much as they contextualize their own primary sources. Like the biblical texts themselves, established methods were produced—and reproduced—in a concrete time and place. They embraced, and embrace still, specific values, concerns, and premises potentially dismissed or eschewed today. Whether, or the extent to which, such procedures—embedded as they are—may simply be extracted from historical contingency and redeployed apart from full consideration of the program they comprised merits studied rumination. Alongside these procedures, their protagonists need more evaluation, less adulation. Instead of some Manichean struggle in the air, debates on theory and method emanate from human agents, who themselves derive from distinct and local settings. Indeed, the Wellhausen–Gunkel contrast was rather symptomatic of far greater social shifts. Much more than warring minds, they were historical human beings: their divergence thus encompassed cultural, personal, and institutional elements. Furthermore, the dynamics of their disparity were neither exceptional nor extraordinary. As a brief foray into these savants’ relations, this essay hopes to demonstrate the kind of insight won when a broader lens is used. Such a “non-cognitive” (or nonconceptual) perspective complements more conventional historiography composed by Bible scholars: in a sense, it foregrounds the background. In consequence, the enabling conditions crucial for academic products, trends, and triumphs can then come into view.


Be it Germanophone or Anglophone, whether Continental, British, or American, the standard historiography told by Bible critics tends to characterize Gunkel and Wellhausen as quite different in degree and at times even in kind.5 Echoing an earlier essay by the Australian New Testament expert J. C. O’Neill, who long resided in Edinburgh, the Swiss/(German) specialist of Hebrew Bible Thomas Römer titles one section of a recent contribution “Gunkel versus Wellhausen, Tradition Criticism versus Redaction Criticism.”6 Rudolf Smend sees a fork in the road as well. This Germanic doyen of biblical scholarship states, “Far beyond the lifetimes of their bearers, the names Wellhausen and Gunkel signify the [two] directions of critical work on the Old Testament—and actually also the New—for the course of the 20th century.”7 Most palpably, perhaps, the American theologian Walter Brueggemann typifies such antithesis when he reasons,

The parameters for questions of interpretation were largely set by Wellhausen and Gunkel. Wellhausen’s approach is scientific, Gunkel’s artistic. Wellhausen is consistently analytical, Gunkel synthetic. Wellhausen aims for precision, Gunkel for suggestive nuance. Wellhausen speaks of documents whereas Gunkel treats of tradition. Wellhausen values discipline, Gunkel stresses imagination.8


In all these estimations, the contrast is largely intellectual, a difference of paradigm, procedure, or, in the very least, perspective. Yet this line of interpretation boasts an aged history. In fact, it traces back to the scholars themselves.

In a short, public, and mostly unilateral academic altercation, Gunkel reassured his readers, “The personal [dimension] is entirely irrelevant for me, as I believe it is also irrelevant for Wellhausen. The issue here is not a personal dispute but one of principle.” As if to reinforce the point, his subtitle plainly reads “Several Considerations of Principle.” The source of debate was the question of sources. In 1895, Gunkel had published his *Schöpfung und Chaos in Urzeit und Endzeit. Eine religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung über Gen 1 und Ap Joh 12.* Since confirmed by a letter to Adolf von Harnack, academic lore and family tradition have long preserved Wellhausen’s own assessment: more chaos than creation. He himself did not address the book, at least in any public forum, until 1899, when he issued his own essay on apocalyptic literature. Though he tempered his earlier albeit unexpressed appraisal, Wellhausen admitted that he must remain in protest. “The proton pseudos,” he concluded, “is that [Gunkel] assigns great value to the question of origins in the first place. . . . Where this material originally comes from is methodologically irrelevant altogether.” While the debate itself transpired beneath the banner of Zeitgeschichte and Traditionslehre—namely, contemporary

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10 While the title page lists 1895 as the years of publication, the foreword dates to October 1894. In fact, dissemination already began in 1894, as evident in Eduard Meyer’s review (13 December 1894), Wellhausen’s letter to Harnack (21 December 1894), and Gunkel’s own letter to Zimmern (17 November 1894); see Klatt, *Hermann Gunkel,* 52 n. 9; Hammann, *Hermann Gunkel,* 60 n. 47, 76 n. 131; Wellhausen, *Briefe* (ed. Rudolf Smend; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013) 326, 715. Earlier that year, Gunkel had intended to title the book “Schöpfung und Chaos in AT und NT,” and just before publication, he had decided to deviate from his initial plan and remove the potential series title “Religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen,” of which his *Schöpfung und Chaos* was to be the first (Klatt, *Hermann Gunkel,* 52).


history and that of tradition—the discussion actually encompassed three distinct
dimensions: synchrony versus diachrony, literacy versus orality, and interiority
versus exteriority. Wellhausen had accused Gunkel of opposing investigations
synchronic and diachronic, “as though they were mutually exclusive.”\textsuperscript{15} Gunkel, in
Wellhausen’s judgment, sought all explanation in origins and placed the peripheral
at centrum. More fundamentally, the dispute stemmed from priorities: first, whether
the immediate or distant past conveyed the most importance for textual explanation
and, second, whether proper interpretation included materials transmitted not only
across generations but also from other cultures. In the end, Wellhausen deemed
such preoccupations perhaps of “antiquarian interest” but “not the task of the
theologian and the exegete.”\textsuperscript{16}

Gunkel was incensed. He fumed over thirty pages in reply to the few from
Wellhausen. In Gunkel’s own perspective, Wellhausen may have offered some
passing statements on the antiquity of certain material, but he finally failed to
draw any real methodological consequences from this concession of his.\textsuperscript{17} Gunkel
stressed material while Wellhausen emphasized authors: trees were missed for
forests; product eclipsed production. Consequently, an argument ensued over accent
more than principle, but the root cause lay in virtue. Gunkel himself averred, “The
real point of contention is therefore whether or not the question of the material’s
pre-history is of value to the theologian and exegete.”\textsuperscript{18} His own answer being
affirmative in the extreme, he declared the origin and meaning of inherited raw
material a crucial component of the theological enterprise.\textsuperscript{19} Indeed, he considered
exploration of materials’ prehistory “an interesting, important, and truly theological
problem.”\textsuperscript{20} He opined even further, “very often the most significant conclusions for
religious history will result from such method when consistently applied.”\textsuperscript{21} Such
diffusionary inquiry was not an end in itself. For Gunkel, the question of origins
could reveal the distinctiveness of ancient Judaism and, most importantly for him,
that of Christianity as well.\textsuperscript{22} In his judgment, Wellhausen not only disregarded this

\textsuperscript{15} Wellhausen, “Zur apokalyptischen Literatur,” 234.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{17} Gunkel, “Aus Wellhausen’s neuesten apokalyptischen Forschungen,” 603–04, cf. 601–02; see
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 607.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 607–08. Gunkel did assert, however, that the value of such inquiry was by no means
a priori.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 604; cf. idem, “Ziele und Methoden der Erklärung des Alten Testamentes” repr. in idem,
\textsuperscript{21} Gunkel, “Aus Wellhausen’s neuesten apokalyptischen Forschungen,” 604.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 605, 608–09. Gunkel cites his forthcoming work on Genesis in the footnote, which
would demonstrate the pursuit of distinctiveness all the more.
line of inquiry but even placed it out of bounds for others. Gunkel’s most immediate concern may have been less interpretation than investigation, but he nonetheless wanted to understand the text.\textsuperscript{23}

Protestations notwithstanding, the conflict was also personal. His own reply betrayed a certain sensitivity. Beyond the tone itself, Gunkel expressed umbrage at being misunderstood at best and simply ignored at worst. He conveyed a readiness to heed the advice of such an eminent scholar but only after said savant had read him more than superficially. In Gunkel’s estimation, not only did Wellhausen distort his work, but he also embellished the space between their positions.\textsuperscript{24} Furthermore, when he did confess resemblance, Wellhausen argued the course was his alone, ostensibly taking pride in an autonomy from Gunkel.\textsuperscript{25} In an undated letter to Harnack, probably from 1899, Gunkel lodged the same complaints.\textsuperscript{26} Yet he would not leave the argument there. He alluded to Wellhausen’s judgment, about half a decade later, in at least two other venues.\textsuperscript{27} In the first volume of “Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments” (FRLANT), a series he founded with Wilhelm Bousset, Gunkel rehearsed the debate with Wellhausen and honed his own critique: “With such statements, Wellhausen falls into conflict with fundamental principles established everywhere in historical science and recognized and followed even by him in other spheres.” He continued, “Our cardinal conviction of history is that we are not in the position to understand a person, a time, or a concept apart from their prehistory but that we can only speak of a true, living understanding once we know history in its formation.”\textsuperscript{28} Both here and in a review of Max Reischle’s \textit{Theologie und Religionsgeschichte}, Gunkel showed considerable indignation at construal of his work as only antiquarian in interest.\textsuperscript{29} Accordingly, Werner Klatt concludes, “Gunkel is not affronted by Wellhausen’s position of principle; rather, he is resigned that the scholar he so esteemed simply does not

\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., 605
\textsuperscript{29} Gunkel, review of Max Reischle, \textit{Theologie und Religionsgeschichte, Deutsche Literaturzeitung} 25/18 (1904) 1100–1110, at 1101.
If Gunkel requested that his publisher, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, send *Schöpfung und Chaos* to Wellhausen in 1894, no longer did his name stand on the list for free exemplars of his Genesis commentary, published two years post the skirmish, in anno 1901.  

Gunkel admired Wellhausen. Not only did *Die Composition des Hexateuchs* represent the “standard-work” of literary criticism, but that “masterpiece” *Prolegomena zur Geschichte Israels* turned the tides of Old Testament research, its description of the Priestly Source being Wellhausen’s “immortal achievement.” In a programmatic essay, first published in 1904, he found Wellhausen’s “particular greatness. . . not only in the sharpness of his criticism but also in the positive, that is, in his splendid and persuasive total view and especially in his wondrous gift for tracking the earthy smell of portions of the Old Testament [den Erdgeruch der alttestamentlichen Stücke aufzuspüren].” Gunkel even adored his mastery of language. Elsewhere, he lauded, “No modern—it would have to be Wellhausen, whom we have to thank for an extraordinary translation of the Minor Prophets—could hope to reach the power and warmth of Luther’s locution.” If Wellhausen’s likeness hung on his wall, his presence loomed all the larger in Gunkel’s mind.

The necrology he wrote upon the death of Wellhausen Smend has rightly styled

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35 Klatt, *Hermann Gunkel*, 230 n. 9. Gunkel’s son also recalled the portraits of Wilhelm Martin Leberecht de Wette, David Friedrich Strauß, Paul de Lagarde, Ernest Renan, Adolf Lasson, Theodor Mommsen, Meyer, Harnack, and Stade and perhaps those of Leopold von Ranke and Albrecht Ritschl as well (ibid.).
In the assessment of Klatt, again, Gunkel would have wanted for no further recognition had he known that it was Wellhausen who commended him as a substitute for Paul Hinneberg’s “Die Kultur der Gegenwart.” Awareness of the endorsement penned by Karl Budde during his Gießen appointment proceedings would have boosted his confidence too. Notwithstanding his successes, a felt dearth of affirmation, let alone appreciation, inflamed his already trying personality and sizable insecurity for the duration of his life—qualities both manifest in and exacerbated by his early troubles in Göttingen, his publication conflicts with Martin Rade for Die Christliche Welt, and his own heavy redactional hand in Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart (both first and second editions) as well as “Schriften des Alten Testaments.” Wellhausen’s own gruffness did not ease the situation. In the words of Konrad Hammann, “Given the dominant academic enterprise, always characterized by factional struggles and personal rivalries, his hope for universal approval of his merits amounted clearly to an illusion.” Yet the “principle” disputation echoed once again, in the year 1906, though this time between Gunkel and Adolf Jülicher, New Testament professor and Wellhausen confidant. Almost two decades after this recurrence they finally made amends, and Gunkel confessed in a 1925 letter,

I was also so daunted by the [in part] fierce and entirely obstinate opposition of almost all the older generation that I preferred to restrain myself. For many, many years, I waited in vain for understanding and cooperation and then found [it] only among the younger generation. What profit I would have had then, if I had found an older friend to whom I could have brought my 1000 questions and who would have given me advice. Thus, for such a long time I had to go the difficult alone. Perhaps I was also to blame for this loneliness, since I, in youthful exuberance, was probably too harsh in my battle against older opinions, although I always made sure not to bring the quarrel into the personal dimension.

Gunkel still denied any personal component. However, he did admit another: that of nascency and dotage.

37 Klatt, Hermann Gunkel, 263 n. 7, cf. 167 n. 4; see also Smend, “Gunkel und Wellhausen,” 33.
40 Hammann, Hermann Gunkel, 324.
41 See Rollmann, “Zwei Briefe Hermann Gunkels an Adolf Jülicher.”
42 Ibid, 281; cf. the drafted letter to Budde (Klatt, Hermann Gunkel, 179).
Beyond divergences in principle and person, Wellhausen and Gunkel showed a change in generation. While practitioners of Hebrew Bible often observe a difference in their age, rarely do they pursue the nature of this dimension: the new generation was no mere younger crop of the same variety. The divide was patent even then. In his velitation with Wellhausen, Gunkel fulminated, “An older yet esteemed man, whose word counts for much, should first orient himself quite accurately as to whether he does injustice before ridiculing a younger one, who still seeks an established position.” Voicing disappointment in an “older school” solely concerned with internal explorations of ancient Israelite history, Gunkel admitted utter surprise to hear such sentiment from “a visionary, whom we have admired as our pioneer and leader.” At the end of his rejoinder, Gunkel appealed to ultimate vindication (i.e., the “judgment of the future”) and declared he could not remain in silence when such grave misunderstandings—advanced by no less an authority than Wellhausen himself—could “smother the young seed in embryo that only wants to grow.” Up until his death, almost three decades later, Gunkel regarded Wellhausen along with Bernhard Stade as exemplars of a musty generation.


46 Ibid., 611.

passing of the old guard prompted more than lamentation. When Gunkel eulogized Stade, his predecessor and onetime professor in Gießen, he could not refrain from affirming, “our science has entered a new epoch of transmutation.”48 Deservedly or not, Wellhausen—for Gunkel and many others (then and now alike)—personified Old Testament research toward the end of the nineteenth century. He embodied the way things had been, the way things were, but not necessarily the way things ought to be. Gunkel penned the entry on Wellhausen for RGG in 1913 (revised for the second edition of 1931), listing several accusations: the Wellhausen School had ignored the ancient Near East, entrenched itself with literary criticism, launched a line of inquiry it then openly resisted, and grown old and unproductive in the end.49 That same year, in a letter to Hugo Greßmann—who himself proceeded with far more polemical flare—Gunkel recalled that he had gone to Halle “still a Wellhausian on the whole”; however, Albert Eichhorn helped him to unloose himself from Wellhausen, as well as Albrecht Ritschl.50 At least some seven years later, he would draft a letter to Budde and confess his sincere hope that the future would one day deem him “a true Wellhausian, who brought critical Old Testament scholarship into a different period and thereby saved it from decay.”51 As Hammann stresses, however, Gunkel did not see himself as any mere acolyte but rather the Wellhausen of his own generation, hardly a modest ambition.52

As for Wellhausen’s own reflections, all too little features in his extant correspondence and his public declarations. Gunkel loomed much smaller in his world than the other way around, at least in the current record. His thoughts upon this clash remain allusive and hence elusive. A dispatch sent to Harnack, dated 1891, did critique the “dreadful bustle of children’s work [Kinderarbeit]” with correspondence with Martin Rade, on 10 June 1904, during deliberations on article assignments for the first edition of RGG (in Hammann, Hermann Gunkel, 209). On Gunkel’s relationship with Duhm, see ibid., 15, 25–26, 29–30, 38–39, cf. 83.48

48 Gunkel, Reden und Aufsätze, 9–10. A year after Wellhausen’s quietus, Gunkel suggested the so-called Wellhausian School actually owed its success more to Stade than its eponym: see n. 65 below. On the relationship between Stade and Gunkel, see esp. Hammann, Hermann Gunkel, 18–20, 199–200, 204–06.


51 In Klatt, Hermann Gunkel, 179. Although the draft has no date listed, Gunkel penned it on the back of correspondence from Budde, which bore the date 15 April 1920 (cf. ibid., 178).

52 The quote comes from Gunkel’s own letter (ibid.); see Hammann, Hermann Gunkel, 81, cf. 323–34.
reference to pursuits of *Religionsgeschichte*. Though admitting the appeal was “understandable indeed,” he lacked any sort of confidence in the haste of such endeavors: “reconstruction is fun, and you need not read or learn too much [to do it]; commentaries and concordances are everywhere.”\footnote{53} Over two decades later, in the year 1915, he would reckon Gunkel to the *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule*, albeit beneath the dubious designation as a certain “Göttingen clique.” “The gentlemen proceed with a predilection for the whole,” he diagnosed to Enno Littmann, “One must let them play themselves out, the bubble will surely burst soon.”\footnote{54} Similarly, he wrote Theodor Nöldeke, in 1905,

The honor of being condemned as entirely backwards in the areas of Old Test[ament] has befallen me, just like you, on more than one occasion, from the Assyriologists and from the general religion mashers, also from the metricists and from the Duhm enthusiasts. However, I am, of course, just as pachydermal as you. It does not occur to me to protest against it in detail; I only allow myself a small parenthetical detour from time to time. The young fellows are, of course, always right against the old; I am not much younger than you.\footnote{55}

Most explicitly of all, he remarked—with no little irony—on an essay by “my friend Gunkel,” in 1897, the article typifying “the rather windy scholarship” often seen in the *Preußische Jahrbücher*.\footnote{56} The same “harrumphing” figure merited comment somewhat later, owing to an essay written on the Odes of Solomon. Adapting an apothegm, the old guard Wellhausen averred, “Vanity always disfigures even the prettiest dame. In substance, I often agree with Gunkel, but I’ve never learned anything from him.”\footnote{57} In yet another missive from 1894, he alluded to the “Novissimus” of Harnack, Gunkel being slated for a new post in Berlin. He judged enthusiasm outweighed evidence in Gunkel’s new *Schöpfung und Chaos*.\footnote{58} With epithets racial and other, he then scorned Eduard Meyer, who himself had granted Gunkel a rather positive review. In fact, Wellhausen’s general disposition toward the younger generation is probably most embodied in his own exchange with Meyer, a dispute that proved far more heated—and certainly more bilateral—than what transpired with Gunkel.\footnote{59} As perhaps a foretaste of the venom yet to come,

\footnote{53}{Wellhausen to Harnack, 21 May 1891, in Wellhausen, *Briefe*, 267.}
\footnote{54}{Wellhausen to Enno Littmann, 21 December 1915, in ibid., 630.}
\footnote{55}{Wellhausen to Theodor Nöldeke, 18 October 1905, in ibid., 466–67.}
\footnote{56}{Wellhausen to Helene Justi, 15 May 1897, in ibid., 348–49.}
\footnote{57}{Wellhausen to Harnack, 13 December 1910, in ibid., 567.}
\footnote{58}{Wellhausen to Harnack, 21 December 1894, in ibid., 326; cf., as only one example, Wellhausen to Harnack, 25 December 1896, in ibid., 346–47.}
Wellhausen lambasted *Die Entstehung des Judenthums* two years before his public censure of Gunkel. Wellhausen’s adverse assessments forged a kind of bond between the two. In 1901, the dust having settled more or less, Gunkel wrote to Meyer, “I, too, have experienced that Wellhausen has no more desire to learn and that he sometimes reviews books he only reads very superficially.” If scholars like Gunkel and Meyer suffered public censure from Wellhausen, others of the younger generation sustained it in private instead. Such polemical exchanges only solidified the self-consciousness of the junior band of scholars.

The Wellhausen–Gunkel disparity featured also in institutions. Gunkel railed, in 1905, “The Wellhausian School, for instance, will never turn anyone into a full professor *[ordinarius]* who opposes Wellhausen.” He alluded to clannishness (*Cliquenwirtschaft*). In autumn of 1888, Gunkel had received his licentiate and habilitation in biblical theology along with exegesis. Having long had problems in Göttingen, he requested, in 1889, that Halle permit him to teach Old and New Testament there. Try though they might, Halle’s faculty of theology could not refuse Friedrich Althoff, a demigod in Prussia’s Ministry of Culture, who intervened on his behalf. So it was that Gunkel went to Halle as private lecturer. Five years later, in 1894, he was promoted to associate professor *[extraordinarius]*, but he left to occupy a comparable post in Berlin the following year, likely by dint of Harnack’s intervention. During his years in Berlin, misfortune befell him time and time again. Departmental politics precluded his promotion to full professor in 1898.

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64 Wellhausen to Heinrich Weinel, 10 October 1905, in Hammann, *Hermann Gunkel*, 103. In a 1919 memorandum, Gunkel declared the Wellhausen School “enjoyed a disproportionately long period in which it could develop its thoughts, establish an entire system and promote [it] in handbooks, train students, and place [them] in newly vacant positions” (see n. 71 below). Hammann rightly observes the myopia of this assertion, however, which neglected due consideration of government concerns.


66 Ibid., 49–58.

67 The faculty did avoid, however, appointing him associate professor at once (ibid., 50–52).

68 Ibid., 93–105.
despite the apparent will of some faculty members. (Wolf Wilhelm Graf Baudissin assumed the post in 1900.) Two years later, he stood first on the list for a full position in Marburg, but the Prussian Ministry of Culture passed it to Budde instead—a turn of events Johannes Weiß, a onetime colleague of Gunkel’s in Göttingen and a supporter of his in Marburg, read as Prussian attempts at atonement, since Budde’s previous home lay in the Alsace city of Strasbourg. Nor did the year 1901 see a change in his tides of fortune. Ranking him only third, Jena chose to advance an internal nominee (Bruno Baentsch). Although Berlin weighed application, in 1906, to Prussia’s Ministry of Culture for a second full position intended explicitly for Gunkel, the prospect never did come to fruition.

In 1907, he finally seized his ordinarius, as successor to Stade in Gießen, at the age of 45. Although the faculty had intended to seize a more prominent persona to replace the lauded Stade, the second round of the appointment process gave Gunkel a proper chance, and favorable assessments from Budde, along with Carl Heinrich Cornill, helped secure him primo loco and the position in the end. For nearly thirteen years, Gunkel resided there, though he did desire escape. The hope was to expand the sphere of his own influence. Indeed, he endured almost as much trouble securing an ordinarius as already full professor as he had had while still associate. Institutional obstacles continued to stand in his way. Heidelberg sought to appoint him, in the year 1909, in an attempt to raise its profile and become a second Marburg, but the government in Baden acquiesced to churchly pressures and opted instead for a conservative (Georg Beer). Only four years later, such politics would foil him once again. In 1913, Kiel placed Gunkel first; the Prussian Ministry, however, yielded to regional church demands and selected a different candidate (Ernst Sellin). The same year, Tübingen classed him second to Alfred Bertholet, who won the academic spoils. When Bertholet went on to Göttingen only one year later, Gunkel found himself then standing atop the list: a government preference for locals seems to have dashed his hopes there, too. (It was Paul Volz who profited from such priorities.) After years of disappointment, he finally had an ally. His memorandum on the state of Old Testament scholarship within the bounds of Prussia found a sympathetic reader in Carl Heinrich Becker, who rose within the Ministry of Culture at the end of the Great War.

70 This 1919 statement, entitled “Über die gegenwärtige Lage der alttestamentlichen Wissenschaft in Preußen,” was never published, however: see Hammann, Hermann Gunkel, 312–14. I owe thanks to Konrad Hammann for kindly offering access to this missive. With respect to Becker’s role in promoting cultural history, see Marchand, German Orientalism, 361–67.
71 Greßmann benefited from Becker’s efforts the following year, receiving an open post in Berlin: cf. Klatt, Hermann Gunkel, 223–26. According to the plan, however, Greßmann was to go to Halle and Gunkel to Berlin—“to be rewarded for his merits. It was supposed to make atonement for his poor treatment earlier” (ibid., 224).
Protestant church politics, igniting debate across the churchly periodicals. Although some members of the Marburg faculty wanted Gunkel as Budde’s replacement, to be filled the following year, his would-be predecessor objected with nothing less than fury—an (alleged) academic squabble having driven the two apart. Thus, Gunkel stayed in Halle for the rest of his career, until 1932. The experience of Gunkel, a rather common story for the younger generation, provides a considerable contrast to the age of ascent for Stade, Harnack, and Wellhausen (27–28) as well as Meyer (30), Jülicher (32), and Budde (39), to name but only a few. In the end, Gunkel fell victim—though not an innocent one—to academic feuding, ecclesiastical strife, and government concerns. To overcome these obstacles, he turned to other venues. As a final field of contrast, Wellhausen and Gunkel conceptualized their efforts in radically different terms. The former’s entire oeuvre may have its clearest expression in the name he chose for a personal series of studies: “Skizzen und Vorarbeiten” (Sketches and Spadework). With a resolved dedication to more technical endeavors, Wellhausen closed his Prolegomena zur ältesten Geschichte des Islams with the simple declaration, “I hope to have hammered home that historiography floats in the air without such prolegomena.” True, he would later serve as advisor for “Quellen der Religionsgeschichte”—a project commissioned by the Königliche Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen and published jointly by J. C. Hinrichs and Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht—but this particular series centered on printing the sources themselves, and he himself only counseled for the section on Islam. Wellhausen fully endorsed the analytical enterprise, manifest in


74 Cf. Wellhausen to Reimer, 4 February 1884, in Wellhausen, Briefe, 140–41. In an earlier letter to Smith, he had considered the title “Beiträge zur Erforschung der Geschichte und Literatur der Hebraeer und Araber” (6 February 1883, in ibid., 117–18).

75 Wellhausen, Prolegomena zur ältesten Geschichte des Islams (Skizzen und Vorarbeiten 6; Berlin: Reimer, 1889), 146.

76 Program of “Quellen der Religionsgeschichte,” 1 July 1913, in Archiv der Göttinger Akademie der Wissenschaften, Unternehmungen der Akademie Phil.-Hist. Klasse, Herausgabe der “Quellen der Religionsgeschichte,” 1913–21 (Sign. Sient 167, Vol 1); see also Roland Deines, Die Pharisiener: ihr Verständnis im Spiegel der christlichen und jüdischen Forschung seit Wellhausen und Graetz (WUNT 101; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997) 406 n. 5; cf. Wellhausen, Briefe, 837. Kind thanks go to Peter Porzig for granting me access to this program. For fuller discussion on how Wellhausen conceived of his own endeavors, see Paul Michael Kurtz, “Kaiser, Christ, and Canaan: The Religion of Israel in Protestant Germany, 1871–1918” (PhD dissertation, University of Göttingen, 2016).
his full support of lexica and the like, yet he firmly believed synthetic ventures were far too premature. Furthermore, he abhorred more popular work. Hans Liebeschütz thus describes his “almost ascetic conception of scholarship.” He declined Hans Delbrück’s request to contribute, on occasion, to the *Preußische Jahrbücher*, in 1886. “I have absolutely no desire to let my practical thoughts be published,” he confessed to his publisher, Ernst Reimer. “I have already enough to do with the publication of the theoretical.” As another example of many, Wellhausen rebuffed participation at the founding of Althoff’s *Internationale Wochenschrift für Wissenschaft, Kunst und Technik* in the year 1907. “I cannot popularize,” he wrote Harnack of the affair. Wellhausen also had little need to avail himself of these organs, for he was established early on. Even more, no matter how much he might have downplayed his position, he enjoyed a privileged status within the upper echelons of the academy as well as the Prussian regime. He died a mid-century liberal historian devoted to empirical research and averse to any (overt) speculation, theorization, or generalization.

Gunkel spent substantial time and effort in promoting his own work—as with that of his contingent. Apart from academic journals, he distributed his diverse material in churchly periodicals, culture magazines, and even daily papers—albeit with varying regularity—from *Die Christliche Welt*, *Kirchliche Gegenwart*, and *Deutsch-evangelisch. Monatsblätter für den gesamten deutschen Protestantismus* through *Preußische Jahrbücher*, *Internationale Monatsschrift für Wissenschaft, Kunst und Technik*, *Theologische Literaturzeitung*, and *Deutsche Literaturzeitung*


78. Wellhausen to Ernst Reimer, ca. January 1886, in idem, *Briefe*, 190–91; [italics in original].


für Kritik der Internationalen Wissenschaft to Frankfurter Zeitung, Deutsche Rundschau, and Tägliche Rundschau, to enumerate some but not all. Such attempts to popularize proceeded from at least three basic causes, all closely interwoven.

First, he needed the funds. Coinciding with his years spent in Berlin, much of this engagement came before his full position. Gunkel’s correspondence, especially with his publisher, reveals his (in the very least perceived) dire circumstances even after his full position. Reprints and revisions had pecuniary force. Reciprocally, he avoided certain organs with low honoraria. Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft hence hosted few of his essays. He once reflected to Harnack, “Certainly, I could have accomplished more by far if a German government had given me an adequate salary and I did not have to work my whole life for daily bread.” Yet beyond the stick of funding, Gunkel also had some carrots: namely, effect and influence.

Second, Gunkel and his cohort sought to maximize their impact. Some entrepreneurial publishers proved quite happy to oblige. In fact, many channels for the popular work of Gunkel had not been open long. Previously called Evangelisch-Lutherisches Gemeindeblatt für die gebildeten Glieder der evangelischen Kirche (1886), Die Christliche Welt changed its name in 1888—the organ later acquired by Mohr in 1897, which would then reestablish a residence in Tübingen in 1899. Side by side with Mohr, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht was an early advocate of the Religionsgeschichtliche Schule, and both profited quite handsomely from their interest and investment. Thus, Mohr launched the journal Theologische Rundschau (1897), issued the sequence “Sammlung gemeinverständlicher Vorträge und Schriften aus dem Gebiet der Theologie und Religionsgeschichte” (1896), and secured the series “Religionsgeschichtliche Volksbücher für die deutsche christliche Gegenwart” (1906)—previously published by Gebauer-Schwetschke (1904), which Bousset’s brother had helmed as general manager—to say nothing of RGG (1908). Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht started the circular Monatsblätter für den Evangelischen


83 Hammann, Hermann Gunkel, 150–51. Throughout his private correspondence, Wellhausen persistently bemoaned his own income, as well. His contributions to Encyclopedia Britannica had financial motives, too: see, e.g., Wellhausen to Charlotte Limpricht, 12 January 1883, in idem, Briefe, 113–14; Wellhausen to Theodor Mommsen, 12 January 1881, in ibid., 80.

84 Gunkel to Harnack, 17 May 1917, in Hammann, Hermann Gunkel, 150.


86 Though sharing editors and authors, these publishers—and others—often worked in competition rather than in tandem: see Conrad, Lexikonpolitik, esp. 213 n. 124, 224–28, cf. subsequent dynamics at 436–43; see also Janssen, “Popularisierung der theologischen Forschung,” 125.
Religionsunterricht (1908) and printed the series “FRLANT,” (1903), “Schriften des Neuen Testaments” (1904), and “Schriften des Alten Testaments” (1911) too. Gunkel’s work appeared in many of these channels, which flowed to students, women, school teachers, and the moyenne bourgeoisie more broadly. Not only academic slight but also positive ambition drove Gunkel to these outlets: he was convinced he had something to say the public sorely needed to hear.

Third, popularization came with the theological territory, at least in the eyes of Gunkel and his ilk. “This activity I consider part of my occupation,” he penned to Ruprecht in 1910.87 When engaging Gunkel’s writings, many a Bible scholar ignores his audience and aim, a public and objective shown in publication choices. Much of his work aspired to a wider reading public, whether RGG (for which he served as editor and author), “Religionsgeschichtliche Volksbücher” (which held Das Märchen im Alten Testament), or “SAT”—also know as, tellingly, “Gegenwartsbibel,” “Göttinger Bibel,” “Laienbibel,” or “Lehrerbibel”—(in which Die Urgeschichte und die Patriarchen [Das erste Buch Mosis] materialized and several studies of his introduced Hans Schmidt’s Die großen Propheten). Initially, Ausgewählte Psalmen came in mainstream papers, too. All these media aimed at a general yet very specific public: namely, Bildungsbürgertum, the educated middle classes. They bloomed from an overt theological project rooted in Kulturprotestantismus, especially in its manifestation at the end of the long nineteenth century.88 Gunkel began a book on Genesis—and thus the series “SAT”—with the following panegyric:

Bible, wonderful Bible, Teacher of humanity, Bedrock of our spiritual being! You are like that glorified city divine upon the towering world mountain, which lies near to the heavens! The nations behold you and drink from the living water of your streams! Entire generations may turn away from you and disdain you because they do not know you; humanity always come back to you.89

Beyond bringing biblical scholarship to the broader public, he wanted to recalibrate such scholarship to the very nature of religion. As but one example, Gunkel once declared, “Our people thirst for your words about religion and its history! Do not be so timid and do not believe that you must conceal from the laity what you have discerned! How do you expect to have trust when you avoid the ultimate question?

87 Gunkel to Ruprecht, 15 April 1910, in Klatt, Hermann Gunkel, 84. The quote continued, “for one may not, of course, leave the field alone to charlatans.”


89 Gunkel, Die Urgeschichte und die Patriarchen (Das erste Book Mosis) (SAT I/1; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1911) v, cf. esp. vii.
Now there is still time. Soon it will be too late. But if you keep silent, then the blatherers will speak."\(^{90}\) This “outcry” for religious restoration was but one of many tokens of the larger sense of crisis that pervaded the professorate towards the end of the nineteenth century.

Apart from any individual, intellectual, or institutional opposition, the Wellhausen–Gunkel variance involved much broader social forces. The tremors quaking biblical research accorded with the powerful earthquake rocking society in general and humanities in particular at the *fin de siècle*. Indeed, cultural historians have long recognized a distinguishable 1880s generation—a phenomenon Suzanne Marchand has explored in rather dazzling detail.\(^{91}\) As she herself contends, “these clashes were neither simply personal, nor exclusively ideological, but were also the product of the rapidly changing public sphere and scholarly scene of the 1880s to 1920s.”\(^{92}\) In terms of academia, texts were pouring in from the East and being deciphered back at home. Within the public province, these rumblings thundered all the more. This rather boisterous timeframe witnessed urban centers bustle and industry loudly boom. It saw social democrats rise in politics while women and workers and Catholics and Jews all entered the public arena. It watched churches lose their influence and schools sustain reform. It observed an outbreak of über-nationalism and gaped as war demolished Europe. Amidst the blur of bicycles, the swell of coffeehouses, and the wave of periodicals, German mandarins saw their once tight grip on culture quickly slip between their fingers. Thus came the cries for renewal resounding throughout academia’s halls—with jeremiads against the sins of a previous epoch. Regardless of their accuracy, accusations of positivism and materialism lambasted the efforts of mid-century research. Fathoming these deeply troubled waters, Fritz K. Ringer writes, “In history as in other disciplines, the widespread sense of social and cultural crisis produced a reorientation in the methods and purposes of learning. Thus from 1890 on, the substantive concerns of German scholarship were inextricably intertwined with the mandarins’ passionate interest in a revival of ‘Idealism.’”\(^{93}\)


\(^{92}\) Idem, “From Liberalism to Neoromanticism,” 130.

therefore symptomatic of an endemic diagnosed in German culture at the turn of the twentieth century—only one of many manifestations across the human sciences. Accordingly, their friction corresponded to the broader shift from liberalism to neo-romanticism and all this upheaval brought with it.

Rather than train their focus upon royal-priestly scholars waging war with mental blades, practitioners of Hebrew Bible would do well to compose their histories with an eye on the grove itself. For the long nineteenth century in Germanophone lands, specifically, such a setting would include, in the very least, shifts in academic culture, effects of professional politics, affairs of appointment procedures, policies of administrative structures (stately and churchly alike), impacts of personal rivalries, choices in publication, and—to move from the non-cognitive to the non-disciplinary, more properly—changes in theory and method across the human sciences. The same skills Bible scholars hone to read their texts in context should also be applied to write the history of their field. As with the scholars themselves, the problems they saw and methods they used were shaped in time and space, with interests and assumptions built into their core: protagonists, priorities, and projects were not detached from circumstance. Scrutinizing historiographic discord, Robert Oden apprehends the cardinal conviction of Gunkel: “[the] failure to go backward far enough behind the historical sources meant that Wellhausen was, in the end, not a true historian.”

Debate over proper method ultimately expressed a time-bound discrepancy in historical understanding, from object to objective—a perceived disparity at minimum. Methodological selection still implies such premises. Semblance notwithstanding, the world of modus operandi is not one “in which grins [hang] about without the cat.”

Beyond the pursuits of modern history—and apart from any antiquarian interest—critical interrogation of foundational research exposes why biblical scholars do what they do in the manner they do and which presumptions may remain inbuilt. This line of inquiry moves from descriptive questions of who, what, when, and where to analytical assessments of the more difficult how and why: how and why, for instance, theories, methods, and figures attained the dominance they now enjoy. Like the biblical texts themselves, any academic orthodoxy did not arise from nowhere. Production, from this perspective, is even more important than product—“principle” but one of many dimensions.

volume, Ringer writes, “the mandarins were never content to cultivate their own gardens. They thought of themselves as a priestly caste, and they meant to legislate ultimate values to a peasant population. That was their model; it has to be assumed, if any of their fin de siècle anxieties are to be understood” (ibid., 268); cf. Graf, “Rettung der Persönlichkeit”; see also Georg G. Iggers’ classic *The German Conception of History: The National Tradition of Historical Thought from Herder to the Present* (rev. ed.; Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1983).
