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»War is what makes nations«, added Julius Wellhausen to the second edition of his *Israelitische und jüdische Geschichte* almost exactly between the unification of Germany (1871) and the onslaught of the First World War.¹ With this statement comes the historian of *Realpolitik* and admirer of Bismarck most clearly to the fore. Be they friends or foes, many readers of Wellhausen have long seen reflections of his own world in his work, often amid unspoken or even patent debate on its continued relevance and legitimacy. Among such streams as historicism, liberalism, and Protestantism, yet another -ism flowed throughout the torrents of his time and in the currents of his thought: namely, militarism. Public pronouncements were rare for Wellhausen, but he did engage affairs both foreign and domestic throughout his personal correspondence, which focused far more on university politics and academic interests. Such discussion arose with William Robertson Smith, Abraham Kuenen, Enno Littmann, and Wilhelm Hermann especially. Though he left few speeches and wrote no treatise, scattered political statements preserved in extant dispatches provide essential if fractured and coincidental access to Wellhausen’s non-academic ruminations. As a complement to most historiography composed in the field of biblical studies, this review seeks to unite the man and his work, fusing public proclamations with private meditations.² On the 100th anniversary of the Great War’s beginning, the essay positions Wellhausen in the context of war and war in the context of Wellhausen.


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I Wellhausen Within a World At War

Wellhausen lived through tumultuous times. Born in 1844, he saw the revolutions of 1848, the First (1848–1851) and Second (1864) Schleswig Wars, the Austro-Prussian War (1866), the North German Confederation (1867–1871), the Franco-Prussian War (1870–1871), and German unification all before starting his first academic post, at Greifswald in 1872. He died on January 7, 1918, ten months prior to the Great War’s end and the dawn of the Weimar Republic (1919–1935). Unremarkably, perhaps, he was a patriot dyed in the wool. In a lengthy necrology and his fullest biography yet, Wellhausen’s once resisted but finally befriend colleague Eduard Schwartz described a waxed political conservatism offsetting a waned religious one. »Though he never joined a party«, Schwartz set further forth, »he always retained a certain sympathy for everything on the right«.³ Wellhausen may have read the liberal Vossische Zeitung,⁴ but he had equal distaste for the National Liberals, Social Democrats, and (Catholic) Center.⁵ »Wildly conservative« he tagged himself, evoking Wilhelm von Meyer.⁶ Another obituary by Judaephobe and jingoist Hugo Willrich reported that Wellhausen longed for nothing more than to see his fatherland triumph in the war to end all wars.⁷ His confrère and confidant Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff even recalled Wellhausen’s grief for having no son to sacrifice upon the altar of war.⁸

Yet Wellhausen never suffered from the rabid hatred or fevered belligerence that characterized much of the intellectual elite preceding and persisting through the First World War. Such sentiment could reach now preposterous proportions, within the humanities especially.⁹ As Suzanne Marchand writes, »the coming of the war seemed to spell doom for Altertumswissenschaft. Both domestically and internationally, the world war figured as a kind of Existenzkampf for neo-

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³ E. Schwartz, Julius Wellhausen, repr. in: idem, Vergangene Gegenwärtigkeiten. Gesammelte Schriften 1, 1938, 337.
humanist academe as well as for the German monarchy«.¹⁰ As usual, theologians were among the first to beat the drums of war. Up to and throughout the conflict, however, Wellhausen seemingly eschewed the grand efforts of mobilization.¹¹ He could even diverge from his family. In a letter to Enno Littmann but three months into the war, he confessed, »My wife and sister-in-law rejoice over every dead Englishman; I cannot take part when I see that the young people die while I sit at my oven and read the newspapers’ sermonizing [Salbadereien] about our culture and our law«.¹² Already ill and emeritus by 1914, Wellhausen delivered no lecture and printed no book comparable to Alfred Bertholet’s Religion und Krieg and Altes Testament und Kriegsfrömmigkeit, Otto Eissfeldt’s Krieg und Bibel, Hermann Gunkel’s Israelitisches Heldentum und Kriegsfrömmigkeit im Alten Testament, or Rudolf Kittel’s Das Alte Testament und unser Krieg.¹³ His name did not appear on the »Manifesto of the Ninety-Three«, a declaration addressed »To the World of Culture« (An die Kulturwelt), signed by 93 of Germany’s foremost intellectuals, issued on October 4, 1914, and rendered into over ten languages.¹⁴ Nor did he countersign the Erklärung der Hochschullehrer des Deutschen Reiches, published on October 16 that year and translated into English, French, Italian, and Spanish.¹⁵ Both cris de coeur boasted names of respected friends and colleagues. Even more, the Erklärung was penned by Wilamowitz himself and bore at least

¹² Letter to Littmann, September 26, 1914, in: Wellhausen, Briefe, 626; Wellhausen followed the war, as one might expect: cf., e. g., letter to E. Limpricht, December 28, 1915, in ibid., 640.
3,000 signatures from across Germany’s 53 universities and research institutes, thereby encompassing almost all of higher education – which makes Wellhausen’s absence all the more puzzling.

High moral ground seems highly unlikely, however. True, Wellhausen did resist political ends by scholarly means. He was certainly no crusader for the Protestantenverein of his pedagogue, the underestimated Heinrich Ewald; in his view, such involvement permitted politics to enter the spheres of church and state, especially a politics at odds with his own.¹⁶ Still, he ostensibly distinguished intellectual exertion from political engagement. When abstaining from a statement on fin-de-siècle education reform, he cited neither credo nor conviction to warrant his restraint.¹⁷ In affairs of the academy, he doubtless came out of the wings. Beyond the standard machinations for institutional appointments, he endorsed Max Löhr’s 1915 proposal for a chair in Jewish Studies, albeit without great success.¹⁸ Yet save for a single missive, his extant correspondence grants little insight into his thoughts on that German-made jihad,¹⁹ though he did laud, laconically, the renewed U-Boat campaigns of 1917, extolling, »Vivant die Tauchbo[ote]!«²⁰ His want on appeals in the First World War may not be all that suggestive. As Josef van Ess suggests, he was likely too old for such verve.²¹

Indeed, Wellhausen affirmed the Kaiserreich’s cause. In another letter to Littmann, he declared:

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But it is an inner miracle of God, the enthusiasm of the multitude and the revival of particular heroes, like [Paul] Hindenburg and [Otto] Weddigen. Now I myself have fallen into sermonizing, but at least not the cultural sermonizing that we have come such a glorious long way thanks to Schiller and Goethe and surpass all other nations in science and general education. It is enough that we need not be afraid to take up battle with the entire world; that is our legitimation.²²

His vital element [Lebenselement] the tempest – »similar to and yet completely different than the ancient prophets« – Hindenburg had a face that alone could bring comfort to Wellhausen.²³ Other correspondence featured analogy with Hercules and Hydra as well as St. Michael and the dragon.²⁴ Even divine invocation arose, though perhaps disingenuous. »Malice is trump«, he penned to his sister-in-law, »but God can overtrump it and strengthen our hearts«.²⁵ Rather optimistic in the first months of the war, he foretold, »But in a year we will hopefully be able truly to celebrate Christmas; glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to people of good will«.²⁶ At the time of this declaration, the Wellhausens were billeting two soldiers at their home in Göttingen, apparently on demand.²⁷

Although the war aims debate revealed fault lines among the professorate, national ambition cemented consensus. Wellhausen adhered. In a rare instance of overt political action, he aligned himself with such (relative) moderates and (somewhat misnamed) liberals as Lujo Brentano, Albert Einstein, Max Planck, Ernst Troeltsch, and Max Weber and signed a petition organized by Hans Delbrück and Adolf von Harnack on July 9, 1915, to limit annexation and call for peaceful terms.²⁸ The statement itself was a failure, accumulating only 141 signatures compared to those 1,347 gathered by »ultra-annexationists« Reinhold Seeberg and Dietrich Schäfer: armed conflict ended only in 1918, with the Armistice of Compiègne. Despite opposition to westward expansion, many program supporters promoted an easterly advance.²⁹ Wellhausen was no different. In a letter to Wilhelm Herrmann three months before the petition, he expounded:

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²⁹ See, e. g., K. Schwabe, Zur politischen Haltung der deutschen Professoren im Ersten Weltkrieg, HZ 193/3 (1961), 601–634; F. Fischer, Germany’s Aims in the First World War, 1967; cf. also
State is power, and power is originally based on violence and injustice; but it is only from power that peace and culture come, the great predators putting an end to the small. The Prussian state did not arise without violence and injustice either, and it has the ambition to expand just like the English [state], under the pretense of culture’s right over and against the barbarians and also under the pretext of mission. Now the [Prussian state] is doubtless fully justified with respect to its enemies, thank God! But even were it at fault, I would neither want nor be able to renounce it. I do not cudgel my Christian brains about it.³⁰

Such views, for Wellhausen, were not at all new. As early as 1882, he had found eastward expansion essential and war with Russia fated. »But we must keep our powder dry, since opportunities could otherwise pass by that will not come again«, he proclaimed, »Our drive westward is purely sentimental, the east is much more important for us practically speaking. Poland, for me, would be better than Alsace and Lorraine«.³¹ Likewise, when writing to Smith, he envisaged, »I fear that we Germans will collide with the English in Asia Minor within 100 years. We simply must expand our territory eastward; war with Russia will scarcely be long in coming after the kaiser’s death«.³² Five years onward, the future seemed all the more bleak: »[war] is definitely coming«, he forecast to Abraham Kuenen, »For a long time I did not want to believe it, [but] now I do. [...] The future looks like misery to me; in swift victory, here and there; the very few believe only in a battle for life and death – with the smiling commune [of saints] in the background«.³³ When annexation’s apple of discord fell between the two, he disclosed again to Smith, »Sorry that I accost you with all this. Prussian chauvinism is also repugnant to me; but it is pandered by nothing else as much as such sentimental foolery from foreigners«.³⁴ The same year, 1887, he continued to deem war with Russia »a fundamental necessity – for reasons of sustenance – and that with France caprice and folly«, a conviction he echoed again, in 1891.³⁵ By 1892, he considered war an imminent if disregarded threat, predicting coincidental out-

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³³ Letter to A. Kuenen, February 23, 1887, in: ibid., 204–205.
break in the east. Wellhausen showed restraint with the Province of Posen (now Poland), however. In another isolated instance of public declaration (and subsequent failure), he involved himself in the so-called »Wreschen School Strike« (Wreschener Schulstreik) of 1901 by petitioning the forced germanization of secondary education. Incidentally, linguistic nationalism touched Wellhausen himself when an 1883 review praised his elimination of »foreign words« from a second edition.

If Wellhausen had something of Anglophilia, by no means was he a Francophile. Beyond his personal friendship with William Robertson Smith, who died in 1894, he maintained professional contact with Albion through articles in Encyclopaedia Britannica and Encyclopaedia Biblica as well as translation of his own work. Moreover, he served as consultant for The Historians' History of the World in a near intellectual pantheon. He liked London more than Berlin, and visits came from abroad, from pastors and scholars alike. Even further, he was slated to receive honorary doctorates from Edinburgh in 1905/1906 and Cambridge in 1913. Though he believed Britain should overtake Egypt, he did disapprove of the Boer Wars, especially should Russia benefit.

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40 Wellhausen's name appears among the »Contributors, and Editorial Revisers« for all 25 volumes apart from numbers 3 and 16 (pace Wellhausen, Briefe, 837).
42 The Universities, The University Review 2/11 (1906), 600; cf. Personalien, ThLBl 27/8 (1906), 96; letter to M. R. James, December 11, 1913, in: Wellhausen, Briefe, 611. Arteriosclerosis and deafness precluded his travel to Cambridge and thus his receipt of degree, as physical presence was presumably required. Save approval from the academic senate, I have found no other evidence for actual conferral from Edinburgh (cf. letter to F. Justi [February 11, 1906], in: ibid., 476).
43 Letter to A. Kuenen [March 1, 1881], in: ibid., 82; letter to W. R. Smith [October 18, 1882], in: ibid., 111; letter to W. R. Smith [July 16, 1884], in: ibid., 151–152; letter to M. J. de Goeje [November 7, 1899], in ibid., 373; letter to M. J. de Goeje [November 11, 1899], in: ibid., 373; letter to T. Nöldeke,
War, he exclaimed no great aspiration for conclusive ruination of the British. As for contact with North America, he contributed to the expatriate Paul Haupt’s *Polychrome Bible*, even if he only wanted to rid himself of older work lest it fall to the hands of an editor after his own demise.⁴⁴ In 1902, he became an honorary member of the American Oriental Society,⁴⁵ and over a decade later, at the Jewish Theological Seminary of New York, Haupt nominated him for honorary membership to the Society of Biblical Literature, where he reportedly won unanimous assent.⁴⁶ Both societies even appointed trios to present him congratulatory addresses for his 70th birthday the next year, just before the Great War’s onset.⁴⁷ While Wellhausen visited Britain, he never journeyed to the States, nor did he seem all that interested in the first place. »This summer [Felix] Klein hopes to go to Chicago«, he wrote, »I would just as soon go to hell.«⁴⁸

He was less than entirely fond of France, at least since the Revolution. In channeling the Athenian statesman Solon, he confessed in the year 1880, »As much as I like individual Frenchmen: *altogether your mind is empty*.⁴⁹ No longer did he fear another war with the Republic, though the idea would later irk him.⁵⁰ »I am curious whether London has as much to offer as Paris«, he wrote Kuenen that same year, »If not, then at least the people in England are more appealing to me than [those] in France«.⁵¹ Disappointed in Prussia, Wellhausen likewise lamented, »Not the Germans but the British are the true antithesis of the French«.⁵² A decade later, in 1890, he criticized secondary-school initiatives for militance, intolerance, and orthodoxy in their attempts at uniformity, grousing, »In this respect, we are completely French and not at all ›German‹ [germa-
nisch].« Wellhausen did appreciate France before the First Republic, at least its erudition. By 1912, he could even appreciate its parliamentarians.

All this bellicose nationalism was standard for the German mandarins, an echelon on brilliant display in Fritz Ringer’s classic monograph. As Charles McClelland affirms, »Far from feeling intimidated into following the lead of government or of the dominant social forces in imperial Germany, the universities and their members confidently joined in with a feeling of belonging«. Academics were in the pocket of the government and filled their pockets by the same. As a condition of appointment, Wellhausen swore allegiance to the kaiser in 1872. Later, in December, 1899, he joined the ranks of those most loyal to the sovereign and became privy government councilor (geheimer Regierungsrat), though he showed little ardor in private. After signing the Delbrück petition in 1915, the philhellenic Wellhausen echoed Homer and remarked, »The Berliners have not annulled me from the privy council for the signature; more terrible things I have suffered«. The following month, on January 27, 1900, he delivered a lecture for the kaiser’s birthday, even if enthusiasm wanted once again. Elation did come, however, in May, 1901, when he received acceptance into Pour le Mérite für Wissenschaften und Künste, the civilian class of Prussia’s highest order, which bestowed the title of knight (Ritter). In 1906, Wellhausen reached as high as the

56 Ringer, The Decline of the German Mandarins.
57 C. E. McClelland, State, Society, and University in Germany, 1700–1914, 1980, 326.
60 Letter to E. Littmann, September 19, 1915, in: Wellhausen, Briefe, 637. Unsurprisingly, the Homeric riff (Odyssey 20.18) is in Greek.
62 Chronik der Georg-August-Universität zu Göttingen für das Rechnungsjahr 1901, 1902, 27. Wellhausen was appointed for oriental philology and, to his great delight, history: see letter to H. Justi [March 21, 1900], in Wellhausen, Briefe, 380.
Prussian Order of the Crown, Third Class (Königlicher Kronen-Orden, III. Klasse). Despite his academic prowess, he had little political pull, in Berlin much less the Kaiserreich. Wellhausen was no Wilamowitz, certainly no Adolf von Harnack. Perhaps the remarkable thing is just how unremarkable Wellhausen really was.

II War Within the World of Wellhausen

Wellhausen was an historian drawn less to the crash of falling nations than the sound of their construction. Consumed by an interest in statecraft, he admired the Iron Chancellor. Such devotion famously cost him his relationship with the Hanoverian loyalist Ewald upon his refusal to disparage the Prussian king and chancellor as miscreants (Übeltäter) and villains (Schurken). Au contraire, he honored Thomas Carlyle and Abu Muslim with analogy to the statesman in private correspondence. Those resemblances which permeate his historiography may or may not have been conscious, however. While Marchand rightly sees, »for Wellhausen, Muhammed’s chief achievement was his statecraft, his Bismarck-like unification of the Arabs«, Arnaldo Momigliano gives voice to the unspoken: »Alas, there had obviously been no Bismarck in the Jerusalem of the fourth or third century B. C. to teach a lesson to the Persians or the Macedonians.« Comprehensive scrutiny of his religio-political nexus lies beyond the

63 Chronik der Georg-August-Universität zu Göttingen für das Rechnungsjahr 1905, 1906, 14.
64 Wellhausen could be critical of the Kaiser: see, e. g., letter to A. Harnack, February 12, 1890, in: Wellhausen, Briefe, 251–252; letter to W. R. Smith, December 12, 1890, in: ibid., 261–262.
scope of this study, and others have charted the course already. Instead, the essay at hand locates the man in a world of war and war in the work of the man. Since any proper appraisal of Wellhausen demands inspection of his drudgeries in the formative period of Islam and that of Christianity, this assessment admits a certain insufficiency from the start. Nevertheless, his efforts on ancient Israel—short-lived as they may have been—do betray much of the same theoretical apparatus and methodological operation as that which was to surface within these later endeavors. More intellectual territory is yet to be conquered.

Wellhausen’s work on ancient Israel came in several iterations. After earlier studies in biblical text and composition, he published the first tome of an anticipated two-volume Geschichte Israels in 1878, with its second edition appearing five years later, in 1883, as the more modestly-titled Prolegomena zur Geschichte Israels. Between these two editions, he wrote an article planned as »Jewish History« but printed as »Israel« for the ninth edition of Encyclopedia Britannica in 1881, which was affixed to the 1885 English translation of Prolegomena and impressed separately as Sketch of the History of Israel and Judah in 1891. Wellhausen produced portions of this essay in a select German version of 1880 again entitled Geschichte Israels, subsequently revised and published in 1884 as Abriss der Geschichte Israels und Juda’s in the first volume of his series Skizzen und Vorarbeiten, whereby the latter’s final section, »Judaism and Christianity«, was added to the reprints of »Israel«. Only in 1894 did Wellhausen issue his long-awaited Israelitische und jüdische Geschichte and circulated in Paul Hinnieberg’s 1905 Die Christliche Religion mit einem Einschluss der israelitisch-jüdischen Religion. Despite long and hard

in this regard as well: Israelitische und jüdische Geschichte, 62–63, 310–311. Marchand further suggests contemporary circumstances of ethnic Germans within the Habsburg Empire may have shaped Wellhausen’s portrayal of early Islamic history (op. cit.). Incidentally, Wellhausen was no great lover of Austrians: see, e.g., letter to W. R. Smith, August 24, 1882, in: Wellhausen, Briefe, 108–109; letter to W. R. Smith [October 18, 1882], in: ibid., 111; letter to A. Kuenen, February 23, 1887, in: ibid., 204–205.


resistance, Wellhausen finally conceded (somewhat) the importance of compara-
tive ventures, and yet such accessions hardly affected his now well-worn path of historiography.⁷⁰ If no dramatic and little substantial change came between any of these explorations, earlier expressions do have the advantage of immediacy to his premises and thought while later ones show a terser prose.⁷¹

In perhaps the most stimulating of ruminations on Wellhausen’s historical endeavors, Friedemann Boschwitz unveils the conceptual machinery at work in all his academic pursuits, from textual transmission through literary tradition and on to cultural reconstruction. Beyond that idealist or sub-Hegelian concep-
tual apparatus which underlay his empiricism and permitted not only reference to »the god of wishes« vis-à-vis »the god of historical necessity« but also such statements as »[Amos] considers the fate of the entire people and, in doing so, discerns between just and unjust as little as history does«, »History does not take into account good will, certainly not persons, but deeds«, and »Most of all, I must believe ... that God stands behind the mechanism of the world, that he can act upon my soul to pull it up to himself and help it provide for its own self, that he is the cord of an invisible and eternal community of the spirits«, Wellhausen favored simplicity.⁷² For philological undertakings, he recognized »one must have a preconception [Vorbegriff] of the truth in order to find it«, and he certainly had one for his reconstructive efforts as well: primitivity underwrote much of his intellectual enterprise, whether operation or evaluation.⁷³ The man who praised Goethe and Herder and pined for a life among pastures was a Bildungsbürger moth drawn to the flame of simpler times.⁷⁴ Even more fundamentally, his historiography »championed the liberal ideas of his era: individual liberty, freedom of


⁷¹ Cf. also Boschwitz, Wellhausen, 16.

⁷² Wellhausen, Die kleinen Propheten. Skizzen und Vorarbeiten 5, 2nd ed. 1893, 94, 93; idem, Israeliitische und jüdische Geschichte, 110, 371.

⁷³ Wellhausen, Der Text der Bücher Samuelis, 1871, 7, n. 1.

conscience, and the virtues of national, political autonomy«. Ancient Israel, for Wellhausen, embodied all »the Jews« did not.⁷⁶

Like his intellectual ancestors, Wellhausen periodized Hebrews, Israelites, and Jews.⁷⁷ While his attention to the first was rather meager (corresponding to his estimation of sources), his devotion to the dyad was as fervent as it was conflicted. Ancient Israel was Wellhausen’s true object of inquiry, betrayed quantitatively in pages written and qualitatively in language employed, and he severed Israelite and Jewish history even as he fused the former with all that went before. The foil for him was early and late, and exile was the rupture. Echoing Wilhelm Vatke (and Paul’s missive to the Romans), Wellhausen could not only declare, »The law came in between«, but also emulate Hesiod in judging, »the half is greater than the whole«.⁷⁸ Those »two wholly distinct worlds« he saw in the text Wellhausen wanted to order sequentially for »a genuine [wirkliche], i.e., genetic history of Israelite religion«.⁷⁹ In the work subsequently reduced to a prolegomena, he plotted the path ahead: »There are in the Pentateuch three strata of law and three strata of tradition, and the problem is to place them in their true historical order«.⁸⁰ Wellhausen would expend considerable time and effort formulating – though not originating – the thesis of lex post prophetas. Yet his interest and inspiration lay long before the law, in that much preferred first half.


⁷⁷ Already in 1875, de Lagarde could describe such division as standard (idem, Über die gegenwärtige Lage des deutschen Reichs. Ein Bericht, 1876, 84).


⁷⁹ Ibid., 3; Israelitisch-jüdische Religion, 7.

⁸⁰ This quotation first appears in the second edition, however (Prolegomena to the History of Israel, 366).
Those were heroic days indeed. As the eminently quotable Wellhausen once wrote, »The foundation upon which, at all periods, Israel’s sense of its national unity rested was religious in its character. It was the faith which may be summed up in the formula, Jehovah is the God of Israel, and Israel is the people of Jehovah«.⁸¹ This unity of deity and coterie found its fullest expression in war. If battle united the tribes, it soon became a business as holy as it was national. In fact, the »martial confederation« not only named itself for the deity – Israel meaning »El contends« and Yahweh being that El – but even correlated its relationship to other peoples with his relationship to other gods. Thus, Israel’s triumph meant Yahweh’s triumph. The god gave his nation victory over Egyptians, Canaanites, and Philistines.⁸²

Yahweh may have been in the nation’s midst, but his presence was no less holy. »The war camp, the nation’s cradle«, so averred the historian, »was also the oldest sanctuary«.⁸³ Even further, Israel’s ark bore the deity’s presence, a standard for the nation and movable martial shrine with a presence both sanctified and sanctifying, for those cities which hosted the ark remained consecrated thereafter. The ban also showed a fusion of war and religion. Conceived as offerings to Yahweh, cities, kings, or plunder displayed a do ut des exchange – sacrifices vowed for the promise of victory. Identification of deity and nation meant the two marched forth in tandem. In times of peril, Israel united and Yahweh awoke; in times of peace, they slumbered. According to Wellhausen, though, battle’s hard-won glories shone in tranquil times as well, for people and god alike: warlords became judges, and the war god imposed justice. This integration of juridical and martial affairs warranted his claim, »The true meaning of theocracy is there-

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⁸¹ Wellhausen, Israel, repr. in: idem, Prolegomena to the History of Israel, 433; cf. Israelitische und jüdische Geschichte, esp. 23–25 and 37–38, where the Song of Deborah, »the oldest monument of Hebrew literature«, becomes a primary source for early history. Writing on the formative period of Islam, Wellhausen states, »The founding of a religion and the forming of a state were not connected in so merely external a way as is usually supposed; on the contrary, the one was the natural and necessary consequence of the other« (idem, Mohammedanism, Part I: Mohammed and the First Four Caliphs, in: Encyclopaedia Britannica, Vol. 16, 9th ed., 1883, 545–565, 561, cf. 552).

⁸² Here, and elsewhere, however, emic and etic fuse within Wellhausen’s work. While such conflation might only reflect his reading of his object’s own abstraction, such ambiguous statements do raise certain questions concerning the historian’s assumptions of history. As but one example, and a rather mild one compared to others in his discussions of early Christianity, Wellhausen comments, »The men Yahweh inspired and filled with his spirit were thus primarily war heroes in antiquity, like the judges«. Immediate reference to subsequent »description« and »painting« as well as the broader context of poetic analysis provide further foil to these potential betrayals of certain historical beliefs (Israelitische und jüdische Geschichte, 24).

⁸³ Ibid.
fore that war and justice were religion before they became compulsion and civil order«. In language resonant of Émile Durkheim’s »collective effervescence«, Wellhausen concluded, »From the religious sense of community (religiöses Gemeingefühl) first sprang the state, and not a particularly holy state but rather the state as such. […] Israel became a political unity only over time, through the preliminary work of religion, as the people of Yahweh«. Religion was patriotism.

If warfare joined the tribes, it also welded them together. »War is what makes nations (Völker)«, proclaimed the fan of Bismarck. As an historian of Realpolitik, Wellhausen maintained, »War was at once the business and the resource of the new kingdom«, »the fire in which the Israelite kingdom was forged«. His greatest deed the final defeat of the Philistines, David completed what Saul had begun. Having routed his enemies in Cisjordan, David conveyed his campaigns to Transjordan, where he trounced Moab, Ammon, and Edom. This »ancient king in barbaric times« led a »true pantheon of heroes«, unsurpassed anywhere in the Old Testament – and »Old Testament« it was for Wellhausen. Although the first kings Saul and David »first made out of the Hebrew tribes a real people in the political sense« and endowed it with »historical self-consciousness«, »[d]ecay set in even at the separation, and when once the Assyrians were heard at the door, it advanced with steps not to be arrested«. »Partisan wars« would plague the northern kingdom and prove to be its undoing, no king powerful enough to rein in the forces of centrifuge. Only demise would follow the death of David.

The olden days quickly lost their luster. With the prophets and ethico-monothéism came a new stage in Israelite history. The prophetic, pastoral, and anti-clerical Amos – a triple win for Wellhausen – sparked that movement which »destroyed the national character of the old religion«, severing the »natural bond« between the nation and god and beginning »the general diffusion and the individualisation of religion«. The priests and their law exacerbated this trend, much to his dismay. If war could found a nation, then war could also be its undoing. Assyria and Babylon drove an irreparable wedge into the history of

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84 Ibid., 27, cf. 270.
85 Ibid., 27–28.
86 Ibid., 51; cf. also, e.g., 242–243, 265, 278, 281, 294, 330–332; see his letter to W. Herrmann, April 14, 1915, in: Wellhausen, Briefe, 633.
87 Israel, 450–451; Israelitische und jüdische Geschichte, 59.
88 Ibid., 63.
89 Prolegomena to the History of Israel, 413–414.
90 Israel, 475.
91 Ibid., 473–474.
Israel’s inhabitants. 92 Not even later Jewish revolts could secure the historian’s favor, even if he did express a certain fascination in his private correspondence. 93 Though absolutely ignorant of military matters and undisciplined through and through, the »old Jews« triumphed over the Romans in a certain sense, unlike the Spartans and Athenians. »No more acutely have national individuality and cosmopolitan empire ever crashed«, he assessed. 94 With a few substitutions, however, what he said of Islam was equally true for Israel and Judaism: »Arabic antiquity ends with Islam. Allah triumphs over the plurality of deities, the community of faith over the diversity of blood, the unity of the theocratic state over the anarchy of houses«. 95

The poetic age was past. Language and literature declined. In fact, Jewish historiography even masked the once great glories of old. »See what Chronicles has made out of David!«, Wellhausen lamented, »The founder of the kingdom has become the founder of the temple and the public worship, the king and hero at the head of his companions in arms has become the singer and master of ceremonies at the head of a swarm of priests and Levites«. 96 A once bellicose ruler has now become a priest. The historian’s horror continued when the wars of a lionheart David prevent his construction of the temple: »that he had waged the wars of Jehovah, that Jehovah had given victory by his hand, would in the older warlike time have seemed no reason against but rather an argument establishing his fitness for such a work«. 97 While the Chronicler’s historiography – »this plan of writing history, as it is euphemistically called« – disparages such endeavors, it extols the deeds of Yahweh. 98 Fortresses go unbuilt, armies unmustered, and battles unfought. Should a (righteous) king even have a military, it ultimately proves superfluous, as priests and deity seize the victory on their own. 99 Likewise, in his evaluation of Numbers, Wellhausen discerned, »the views taken of war by the Jews of the later time who had grown quite unaccustomed to it. The occasion of the war is also noticeable; it is undertaken not for the acquisition of territory, nor with any other practical object, but only to take vengeance on

92 See, e. g., Israel, 494; Israeliitische und jüdische Geschichte, 142, 197–198.
93 Cf., e. g., Israeliitische und jüdische Geschichte, 24, 243–245, 347–348, 354; e. g., letter to Smend [January 27, 1892], in: Wellhausen, Briefe, 275–276; letter to F. Justi, June 2, 1894, in: ibid., 315.
95 Wellhausen, Reste Arabischen Heidentumes. Skizzen und Vorarbeiten 3, 2nd ed. 1897, 234.
96 Prolegomena to the History of Israel, 182.
97 Ibid., 181.
98 Ibid., 207.
99 Ibid., 209.
the Midianites for having seduced some of the Israelites to uncleanness«.¹⁰⁰ His appraisal of earlier literature places such judgments in stark relief. Discussing the »Jehovist«, he expressed surprise at the patriarchs’ pastoral passivity, »scarcely a true reflection of the character of the Israelites«.¹⁰¹ Condemnation did not befall these narratives, however. Rather, he justified them:

Yet it is not difficult to understand that a people which found itself incessantly driven into war, not only dreamed of an eternal peace in the future, but also embodied the wishes of its heart in these peaceful forms of the golden age in the past. We have also to consider that the peaceful shepherd life of the patriarchs is necessary to the idyllic form in which the early history of the people is cast ....¹⁰²

These writings, along with his favored Judges, Samuel, Kings, and earliest prophets, constituted »the golden age of Hebrew literature«, so their aversion to war was venial.¹⁰³ They shared his pleasure in the sylvan and suffered none of the rigid formality or theological rule he found so loathsome in any society. Keen on the days of old and himself with »a sense for the energy of the wicked«, he judged the later literature all the more harshly.¹⁰⁴ Wellhausen may have been predisposed to a certain assessment of sources, yet their »distaste to war and to records of war« certainly did not aid their outcome in the end.¹⁰⁵

The real issue in Wellhausian historiography lay in that nexus of mid-century liberalism, Bismarckian nationalism, and cultural Protestantism. Still within that long (and living) tradition which Mario Liverani correctly characterizes as »a sort of paraphrase of the Biblical text«, Wellhausen’s was the story of a nation’s rise and fall, with a special fondness for the former.¹⁰⁶ As Albert Hourani perceives, »it is typical of the age in which Wellhausen lived, of its belief in the metaphysical importance of the state and in the nation-state as its highest form, that his special attention should have been given to one of the three elements [i. e., state, statecraft trumped individual ethics, as reflected in his description – or defense – of David, Herod, and Al-Ḥajjāj (cf. idem, Israelitische und jüdische Geschichte, 43, 62–63, 325–326; Israel, 439–440; Das arabische Reich und sein Sturz, 1902, 158–160).

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 356; see further van Ess, From Wellhausen to Becker, 41–43.
¹⁰¹ Prolegomena to the History of Israel, 321.
¹⁰² Ibid.
¹⁰³ Ibid., 9.
¹⁰⁵ Prolegomena to the History of Israel, 358.
prophecy, and law], the Arabian nation-state«.¹⁰⁷ Such description is equally apt for his work on ancient Israel. As he himself wrote in words quite far from minced:

The Mosaic theocracy, the residuum of a ruined state, is itself not a state at all, but an unpolitical artificial product created in spite of unfavourable circumstances by the impulse of an ever-memorable energy: and foreign rule is its necessary counterpart. In its nature it is intimately allied to the old Catholic church, which was in fact its child.¹⁰⁸

Beyond external affairs, inner strife figured prominently in Wellhausen’s histories, arguably more so than war. Much of this historiography reflected contemporary concerns of a Catholic Church in an increasingly Protestant empire.¹⁰⁹ Yet the subject of statehood and the convictions that shaped its description also played an important if less-credited role within his historical ventures. Not only in his work but also in his world, warfare and militarism often stood at the forefront, which now proves important background. Perhaps continuing the legacy of Wellhausen may lie less in searching his sources as he did than taking his own histories as a legitimate object of inquiry: to see, like him, how concerns of the present made their way into portrayals of the past.

**Zusammenfassung:** »Der Krieg ist es, was die Völker macht«, fügte der Bismarck-Bewunderer Julius Wellhausen der zweiten Ausgabe seiner Israelitischen und jüdischen Geschichte zwischen der deutschen Einigung und dem Beginn des Ersten Weltkriegs hinzu. Öffentliche Stellungnahmen kamen nur selten von Wellhausen, doch in seinen Briefen setzte er sich durchaus mit in- und ausländischen politischen Angelegenheiten auseinander. Als eine Ergänzung zur im Fach Bibelwissenschaft üblichen Historiographie verbindet dieser Beitrag den Menschen Wellhausen mit seinem Werk. Anlässlich der hundertjährigen Wiederkehr des

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¹⁰⁸ Prolegomena to the History of Israel, 422; cf. also Israelitische und jüdische Geschichte, 218–219, 278–282, 330–332, 356; Israel, 524, 530; see also Marchand, German Orientalism, 184–185.

¹⁰⁹ Cf., e. g., Boschwitz, Wellhausen, 34, 36, n. 5.

Abstract: »War is what makes nations,« added the Bismarckian Julius Wellhausen to the second edition of his Israelitische und jüdische Geschichte between the unification of Germany and the onslaught of the First World War. Public pronouncements were rare for Wellhausen, but he did discuss both foreign and national affairs throughout his personal correspondence. Complementing most historiography written in the field of biblical studies, this essay unites the man and his work. On the 100th anniversary of the Great War’s beginning, the essay positions Wellhausen in the context of war and war in the context of Wellhausen. Through this topic in particular, it brings into view his more implicit assumptions about religion and the state more generally, the two being closely connected with each other.


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