Since its very beginning, and for all its diversity and complexity, the critical study of the Torah/Pentateuch has generally taken the book of Genesis as its starting point, using source- and literary-critical observations to build general models for the book’s composition before then applying them to the rest of the Torah. In the last decade, however, the abandonment of the “classical” Documentary Hypothesis has gradually led researchers, especially Continental scholars, to take more seriously the distinctiveness of each of the five books. Much of the recent scholarly debate has given special attention to the construction and elaboration of models for the composition of the Pentateuch that would account in a more balanced way for both the unique nature of each book and its relationships to the other books. Thus, discussion has focused on issues such as the (seemingly late) origin of the connection between Genesis and Exodus (K. Schmid, J. C. Gertz et al.), the place of Leviticus (and especially of the so-called Holiness Code) in the composition of the Torah, the position of Deuteronomy between Genesis-Numbers on one hand and the Former Prophets on the other, and even the relationship of the book of Joshua to the first five books.

Yet probably the most complex and most fascinating issue in this regard concerns the origin of the book of Numbers. Earlier scholars noted the difficulties in attempting to reconstruct its formation by dividing it into the classical sources (J, E, and P) putatively
extending from Genesis down to Deuteronomy or Joshua. M. Noth, in his 1966 commentary on Numbers (Das vierte Buch Mose: Numeri [ATD 7; 3rd edition; Göttingen, 1977]), considered the classical documentary approach de facto impossible to apply to a book that resembled more “an unsystematic collection of innumerable pieces of tradition of very different content, age and character” (eine unsystematische Zusammenstellung von zahllosen Überlieferungsstücken sehr verschiedenen Inhalts, Alters und Charakters [Numeri, 8]). Significantly, Noth had also somehow recognized that in some respects Numbers functioned as a “bridge” of sorts between the major pentateuchal traditions, thus raising the problem of the book’s redactional function within the Torah as a whole. In subsequent analyses Numbers has indeed become increasingly problematic, especially as regards (1) the possibility of identifying a pre-Priestly narrative source and (2) the relationship of the so-called “Priestly” texts in Numbers with the P source in Genesis, Exodus, and Leviticus. However, apart from a few, usually conservative, commentaries, the composition of Numbers has seldom been a scholarly topic in the second half of the twentieth century. Happily, this gap in biblical research has now been filled with the remarkable monograph of R. Achenbach, in which the author discusses virtually every passage in the book of Numbers from a literary-critical perspective. Even with all the detail and methodological richness, the author has managed to produce a relatively simple and efficient model.

Achenbach’s study consists of six main sections. A general introduction (1–36) offers a survey of the scholarly discussion on the composition of Numbers since M. Noth; the survey is not only comprehensive and well informed but also clearly outlines the essential tendencies of the recent debate. A second section (37–172) deals with Num 16–18, a story regarded by the author as a key text for the composition of Numbers in that it illustrates the three main redactions of the book and their relationship. Section three (173–442) consists of a systematic study of the composition of the wilderness narrative (10:11ff. +) 11–25; the difficult though central question of the relationship between parallel narratives in Deuteronomy (Deut 1–11) and in Exodus (Exod 15:22–18:27; 32–34) is also addressed in this context. The fourth and fifth sections (443–556 and 557–628) concern themselves primarily with analyzing the redactional and editorial work of the “theocratic revision” (Theokratische Bearbeitung), which Achenbach views as the book’s latest editorial layer, composed by priestly circles from the Jerusalem temple in the first half of the fourth-century B.C.E., that is, shortly before the end of the Persian era, a time that also saw the final editing of the Pentateuch. Section six offers a brief conclusion (629–33) summarizing some of the investigation’s main findings. A detailed discussion of this meticulous study exceeds the range of this review, but a few comments will follow on its most important results and their implications.
A decisive aspect of Achenbach’s analysis lies in his attempt to demonstrate that, although the book of Numbers obviously consists of several literary strata, it is essentially the work of post-Priestly redactors, that is, redactors who already presuppose the existence of the Priestly document and seek to combine it with other, non-Priestly traditions. Although Achenbach does acknowledge the existence of some ancient, pre-Priestly traditions in Numbers (e.g., the spying out the land account [Kundshaftererzählung] in Num 13–14//Deut 1*), these traditions would not have been yet unified by a single, comprehensive redaction at a pre-Priestly stage. This hypothesis draws essentially upon two parallel developments in the critical study of Numbers.

On one hand, the reconstruction of a pre-Priestly layer in the (allegedly) non-Priestly texts of Numbers has gradually proven to be quite difficult, if not untenable. For instance, most if not all of the theophanies recounted in the context of Num 11–25 seem to be based either on the Priestly tradition (manifestation of the kabôd yhwh upon the tent of meeting, Num 14:10; 16:19; 17:7; 20:6; see Exod 24:15b–18aa; 40:34a; Lev 9:23–24, all texts classically assigned to P) or depend on the conception of Exod 33:7–11, which, as several authors have recently demonstrated, most certainly represents a post-P creation as well (see already A. H. J. Gunneweg, “Das Gesetz und die Propheten: Eine Auslegung von Ex 33,7–11; Num 11,4–12,8; Dtn 31,14f.; 34,10,” ZAW 102 [1990]: 169–80, esp. 171–72; for further discussion and references, see now Achenbach, Die Vollendung der Tora, 178–81, 290–98 and passim). The dependence upon P is particularly manifest in the case of the stories of Num 13–14 and 16–17. A majority of recent source- and literary-critical studies now attribute the first redaction of these chapters either to P or to a post-Priestly redactor (e.g., respecting Num 13–14, see O. Artus, C. Levin, N. Rabe, E. Otto, etc.), even if, once again, this does not preclude the existence of older traditions underlying these texts. Some recent scholarly reconstructions of a pre-Priestly layer in Numbers (J or other; see, e.g., C. Levin, R. G. Kratz) now limit it to a few verses scattered throughout the book. At any rate, and irrespective of its plausibility, this model already implies that the composition of Numbers has little or nothing to do with pre-Priestly redactors. On the contrary, it relates fundamentally to a literary stage in the formation of the Torah that took place after the inclusion of the Priestly document.

On the other hand, Achenbach’s model for the compositional development of the book also reflects substantive engagement with recent discussion on the extent of the Priestly source. In a classic study, L. Perlitt demonstrated the absence of P in Deuteronomy—and, by way of consequence, in Joshua as well; he also showed that the so-called “P” texts in Deut 1:3; 32:48ff.; 34:1*, 7a, 8 to be clearly of editorial nature and therefore not part of a source (L. Perlitt, “Priesterschrift im Deuteronomium?” ZAW 100 Supplement [1988]: 65–88 = idem, Deuteronomium-Studien [FAT 8; Tübingen, 1994], 123–43). Since then it has become increasingly obvious that initially the Priestly document must have found its
conclusion in the account of Israel’s sojourn on Mount Sinai, either in Exod 40 (construction of the tent) or—more likely in the present reviewer’s opinion—in Lev 9 (consecration of the first priests and institution of the sacrificial cult). The so-called “Priestly” texts in Numbers (especially chs. 1–10 and 26–36) actually evince a different language and a distinct theology (e.g., Israel as ecclesia militans grouped around the mobile sanctuary, or the introduction of the Levites as second-rank cultic servants subordinated to the Aaronide priests), as convincingly demonstrated by T. Pola in particular.

On the basis of these two parallel observations, the notion that all of Numbers was a post-Priestly composition had already been advocated by a few scholars (in particular, T. Römer and E. Otto), but Achenbach is really the first to undertake a systematic literary-critical examination of the book on such premises. Hence, the core of his work resides in the attempt to offer a comprehensive model for the composition of Numbers by post-Priestly redactors, by identifying three main layers and locating them both in a theological and sociohistorical perspective. According to Achenbach, elaborating here upon the work of Otto (see E. Otto, Das Deuteronomium im Pentateuch und Hexateuch: Studien zur Literaturgeschichte von Pentateuch und Hexateuch im Lichte des Deuteronomiumrahmens [FAT 30, Tübingen, 2000]), the book’s origin goes back to two distinct redactions, both of which seek to combine the P document with the non-Priestly portions of Genesis–Exodus on one hand and the “Deuteronomistic” Deuteronomy on the other (i.e., the book of Deuteronomy before its inclusion in the Torah and its separation from the Former Prophets), yet nevertheless with a completely different purpose and perspective.

The first redaction, which should be situated in the middle of the fifth-century B.C.E., envisons a Hexateuch (Hexateuchredaktion, or HexRed), that is, an account of Israel’s origins stretching from Genesis to Joshua, concluding with: (1) the conquest of the promised land, (2) its distribution among the tribes of Israel (Josh 14ff.*), and (3) the covenant’s final renewal in Josh 24. Like Otto, Achenbach accepts N. Lohfink’s hypothesis of a Deuteronomistic account uniting the giving of the law and the conquest in Deuteronomy–Joshua (DtrL = deuteronomistische Landnahmeerzählung), although both would date it later than Lohfink, in the period of the Neo-Babylonian exile; this account would then have been reused by the Hexateuch redactor who combined it for the first time with the Tetratauch (Genesis–Numbers). The Hexateuch redaction seems closely linked to the new political and religious situation induced by the domination of the Achaemenid Empire in Yehud. It also appears to be significantly influenced by the prophecy of restoration in the early postexilic period (at one point, Achenbach characterizes this redaction as standing “between Second and Third Isaiah” from both the perspective of its language and worldview). Such influences account for the importance of the theme of Israel’s relationship to the nations in the Hexateuch, as well as for the
distinct way in which this problem is addressed. Whereas the Hexateuch redactor is eager to emphasize Yhwh’s exclusive dominion over the creation and over Israel, at the same time it nevertheless advocates an *inclusive* perspective vis-à-vis the surrounding nations, evinced in particular by the positive role played by various foreigners, such as Caleb in Num 13–14, the prophet Balaam in the oldest layer of Num 22–24* or the character of Rahab in Josh 2. For the Hexateuch redaction, the composition of a first account of the wilderness rebellions in Num 11–25* on the basis of existing traditions, with its counterpart in Exod 15–18* and 32–34*, serves above all to underline Israel’s continuous apostasy, culminating in the criticism of the exodus and the recalcitrance in entering the promised land (Num 13–14* and the Dathan-Abiram story in Num 16). It is only through Moses’ successful intercession that Israel escapes Yhwh’s wrath and finds its covenant with God renewed; this is recounted in a programmatic way in the story of Exod 32–34. Israel’s apostasy as depicted in the Hexateuch is a warning addressed to “Israel,” that is, the postexilic generation returning from Babylon, that a secure living inside the promised land is entirely conditioned to the keeping of God’s words as preserved in the Torah. This point is further emphasized by the contrast the Hexateuch redactor crafts between a rebellious Israel and the various foreigners presented as faithful Yahwists such as Caleb who, because of his loyalty, will also gain a share in the promised land in spite of his foreign origin (Josh 14:6–15*, HexRed). In this respect, the fact that this redaction concludes in Josh 24 with the renewal of the covenant in Shechem, thus building an inclusion with the period of the patriarchs and the time of the very beginnings of the relationship between Yhwh and Israel’s ancestors in Canaan, is particularly significant.

This first redaction of Numbers is then supplemented by a second, focusing on the Torah and its observance by Israel. The motif of the promised land, so central within the Hexateuch redaction, is now entirely subordinated to the Torah. It is this layer that is responsible for the separation of the book of Joshua from Genesis–Deuteronomy and hence for the creation of a Pentateuch (*Pentateuchredaktion*, or *PentRed*). One of its central features lies in the systematic emphasis on Moses’ incomparability as unique mediator of God’s revelation, as evinced in texts such as Exod 33:7–11; Num 12:6–8; and Deut 34:10–12 in particular. Whereas the Hexateuch redactor still expressed the hope of a prophetic *successio mosaica*, in conformity with Deut 18:15, the Pentateuch redaction concludes the divine revelation with Moses’ death, which supersedes all future prophetic revelations in Israel’s history. This redaction is also responsible for the incorporation of all legal codes (Decalogue, Book of the Covenant, Holiness Code, and Deuteronomy) into a single document, encompassing the totality of the rules pertaining to Israel’s loyalty to Yhwh. With Otto, Achenbach considers the theology of the Pentateuch redaction to be characteristically defined in the so-called “Holiness Code” (Lev 17–26), with its emphasis on the observance of the Torah as the condition for Israel’s
sanctification (Lev 19:2, 36; 20:7–8, 22–26; 22:31–33; see also Exod 19:3–6), thus reversing the perspective advocated by Deut 7:6 and 14:1–2. The Pentateuch redaction also highlights the position of Aaron, the high priest, alongside Moses, as well as the importance of the temple cult (represented by the wilderness sanctuary) and its institutions. The source of this development should be sought in the growing role played by the Jerusalem temple in the second half of the fifth century B.C.E., that is, subsequent to Nehemiah’s governorship. The reworking of the rebellion stories in Numbers by the Pentateuch redactor serves principally to emphasize Moses’ outstanding character (e.g., Num 11–12*) as well as Aaron’s role as high priest (see, e.g., the account of the 250 chieftains in Num 16–17*). Yhwh’s sovereignty over Israel in spite of the people’s apostasy, and Israel’s fidelity or infidelity to God’s word as the exclusive criterion according to which not only each generation but indeed each individual—including Moses and Aaron in Num 20:1–13!—shall be judged.

The final stage in the development of the book is related to a third and last layer, corresponding more or less with the so-called “Priestly” sections in Numbers (i.e., Num 1–10; 26–36, in addition to the reworking of Num 11–25). Achenbach assigns this layer, which immediately precedes the canonization of the Torah in the late fourth-century B.C.E., to a “theocratic revision” (Theokratische Bearbeitung, or ThB). This “revision” differs from the Hexateuch and Pentateuch redactions in that it appears almost exclusively in the book of Numbers, which it fundamentally reshapes into its present, canonical form. In other words, this third and last layer is not a comprehensive redaction of the Torah, contrary to the first two (hence its designation as “Bearbeitung,” or revision), and its intervention outside of Numbers is restricted to a few interpolations such as Lev 10 (see pp. 93–110; however, Achenbach occasionally considers the possibility of other additions, e.g., in Exod 25–40). At the same time, the work of these final editors of Numbers is constantly carried with a view to the completion of the whole Torah—hence Vollendung der Tora, the title of Achenbach’s book. As its name indicates, the religious and political program of this final revision consists primarily in redefining “Israel” as a theocratic and hierocratic community governed by the high priest, who himself is characterized—especially through the figure of Eleazar, Aaron’s successor—as the sole true interpreter of God’s word (see in particular Num 27:12–23 and the subordination there of Joshua, Moses’ successor, to Eleazar), an office confirmed via the introduction of a new, eternal covenant, this time concluded with the high priest at the end of the wilderness period (Num 25:12–13, a text placed just before the census of the second generation in Num 26). In its final form, the story of Num 16–17 illustrates the unique function of the high priest as the community’s (sole) mediator before God (see the conclusion in Num 17:16–26!). Similarly, the subordination of the Levites to the priestly class (Num 3–4; 8:5–26; 18), the ideal view of a community exclusively organized
around the sanctuary and its institutions (Num 1–2; 5–6; 7; 9–10; 27ff.), the emphasis on the priests as the guardians of the sanctuary’s integrity (e.g., Num 18:1–7) as well as the assignment of central judicial functions to the priestly class (Num 35) all constitute essential aspects of the program of this layer. In an important section on “the origins of the theocracy” (130–40), Achenbach associates this final stage in the composition of Numbers with the political situation prevailing in the first half of the fourth century, at a time when, after the loss of Egypt, the growing weakness of Achaemenid rule in several regions of the empire, including Syria-Palestine, favored the development of local institutions such as the Jerusalem temple and its clergy.

Overall, Achenbach’s work achieves a rare synthesis between, on the one hand, a detailed analysis of the texts and extensive knowledge of the scholarly discussion on Numbers in German, English, and even French (a remarkable accomplishment in and of itself), and, on the other hand, a comprehensive view of the formation not only of the book but indeed of the Torah as a whole. Moreover, the analysis often integrates a significant amount of comparative material (especially Mesopotamian and Persian sources). A considerable effort has gone into correlating exegetical findings with specific historical developments in Persian period Yehud, such as the relationship to Arabian tribes, Achaemenid policy, or the internal organization of the temple community in Jerusalem. Several of these matters find judicious, thorough treatment in numerous excurses. Whether or not one agrees at every point with the author’s textual exegeses, the careful attention paid to detail coupled with remarkably perceptive awareness of the intertextual dialogue between ancient traditions will frequently open up new horizons for readers.

Among the most compelling dimensions of his demonstration, the author convincingly establishes the post-Priestly origin of the main layers making up the biblical book under discussion. As observed above, it is almost impossible to sort out a coherent redaction that would be entirely free from any Priestly influence, and Achenbach has no difficulty in showing that all three of his redactions betray dependence upon P. From a more general, methodological perspective, his study also demonstrates the importance of taking seriously the difference between “Ps” and post-Priestly elements within the Pentateuch, that is, between additions made to a still independent Priestly document and supplements going back to a stage in the formation of the Torah in which P was already combined with non-Priestly traditions. Furthermore, he makes a strong case for the view that the alternative between Pentateuch and Hexateuch among scribal circles in fifth-century Jerusalem is a key element in the formation of the book. Last but not least, his assignment of the so-called “Priestly” sections in Numbers to a theocratic revision responsible for the editing of the whole book is particularly insightful. It offers a simple but compelling alternative both to the naive assignment of these chapters to “P,” which overlooks the distinct linguistic and theological profile of these texts vis-à-vis the Priestly tradition in...
Genesis–Leviticus, as well as to their fragmentation into innumerable late additions to P in German scholarship subsequent to Noth’s commentary on Numbers, usually carried out at the expense their profound thematic coherence.

With regard to a work of such magnitude and ambitious undertaking, some aspects of the investigation no doubt prompt disagreement. A few such points may be briefly mentioned here. First, the distinction between the layers identified by Achenbach in Numbers does not always present itself as clearly as the author would claim. In some cases, the distinction between Hexateuch and Pentateuch layers proves indeed convincing. As a case in point, Achenbach’s introductory analysis of Num 16–18 (pp. 37ff.) successfully identifies his three post-P redactions with the three layers traditionally perceived in chapter 16 since A. Kuenen (i.e., Dathan-Abiram, the 250 chieftains, and the Korah rebellion). In Num 13–14, the hypothesis of a debate between Hexateuch and Pentateuch is also quite attractive (see already on this point Otto, *Das Deuteronomium im Pentateuch und Hexateuch*, 12–109). *En passant*, one may probably regret that the author chose to publish separately his analysis of chapters 13–14 (“Die Erzählung von der gescheiterten Landnahme von Kadesch Barnea (Num 13–14) als Schlüsseltext der Redaktionsgeschichte des Pentateuchs,” *ZAR* 9 [2003]: 56–123), as it is actually a central component of his entire demonstration.

In other cases, the distinction between Hexateuch and Pentateuch redactions appears to be more questionable. One problem has to do with the nature of these layers; since both redactions already combine Priestly and Deuteronomistic language and conceptions, overall the terminology is of little help. Thus, the literary-critical division tends in the main to be based on *Tendenzkritik* evidence, as already in Otto’s work, even if, more than Otto, Achenbach does attempt to identify some terms or expressions specific to each layer. In several cases, nevertheless, it seems difficult to make a strict division between Hexateuch and Pentateuch redactions on the basis of the (alleged) tendency of a given passage, and it is not unique for Otto and Achenbach to come to quite different conclusions in this respect. For instance, Otto typically assigns Deut 31:9ff. (recounting how Moses wrote the Torah and gave it to “the priests, sons of Levi” and to the elders with instructions for reading it to the people every seven years) to the Pentateuch redaction and regarded this passage as a central piece of the “writing down” theory (*Verschriftungstheorie*) composed by the redactor of the Pentateuch (see Otto, *Das Deuteronomium im Pentateuch und Hexateuch*, 175ff., esp. 180ff.). In contrast, Achenbach assigns an early version of 31:9–13* to the Hexateuch redaction (see 142 with n. 6, 254 and *passim*) mainly on the basis of the (otherwise correct) observation that the Levites as bearers of the ark are also significantly present in the book of Joshua (but not in the following books, if one excepts the very late interpolation in 1 Kgs 8:3ff.) and are therefore a hallmark of the Hexateuch redaction. Similar examples could be added.
suggesting, from a methodological perspective, that the criteria used may not always be sufficient to distinguish between the two redactions.

A further difficulty has to do with the fact that in not a few cases Achenbach finds it problematic, on literary-critical grounds, to dissociate the two layers within a given text. As a result, in several instances the reconstructed text of the Hexateuch redaction in Numbers is very fragmentary, especially in Num 11–12 and also in chapter 14. A specific problem, for instance, is the theophanies in Numbers. On one hand, Achenbach presumes that his Hexateuch redaction should have followed immediately the episode of the golden calf in Exod 32–34 with the report of Israel’s departure from Sinai (see Num 10:29ff.*). If so, there is no place for the P report on the building of the tent in Exod 35–40, and the author must admit that the place of the Priestly sanctuary in the Hexateuch redaction cannot be decided with certainty (191). On the other hand, he assigns the non-Priestly account of Exod 33:7–11 to his Pentateuch redaction (178ff., 290ff. and passim) on grounds that this (post-P) account serves to emphasize Moses’ unique role in the mediation of the divine word (how this obviously anti-Priestly passage can be reconciled with the emphasis on the high priest’s role characteristic elsewhere of the Pentateuch redaction remains somewhat unclear). Logically, therefore, Achenbach is forced to consider all the references to the tent of meeting in Numbers, whether P’s tent or the non-Priestly tent of Exod 33:7–11, as being later than the Hexateuch redaction. This makes it indeed difficult to reconstruct a coherent narrative for this layer in Num 11–25, the various rebellion stories being almost systematically characterized by the manifestation of the kabôd yhwh upon the portable sanctuary. To a certain extent the author’s exclusive assignment of the kabôd motif to his Pentateuch redaction poses, as regards the reconstruction of his post-Priestly Hexateuch redaction, the same kind of difficulty facing any attempt to reconstruct a pre-Priestly version of the wilderness narrative in Numbers, as discussed above. Admittedly, there are one or two passages in the wilderness account that could be taken to allude to a theophany not yet connected with the tent of meeting, such as Num 11:10 or 16:23(ff.), if read immediately after verse 15. But whether this is characteristic of the Hexateuch redaction or whether it is a trace of earlier traditions used by the authors of Numbers is difficult to decide. In any case, the assumption of a post-Priestly Hexateuch that would not have included P’s account of the tent’s building in Exod 25ff., as proposed by the author, is somewhat difficult to accept.

In a similar fashion, the delimitation of the respective Hexateuch and Pentateuch redactions from the final layer responsible for the book’s canonical shape—the theocratic revision—does not always persuade. On some central issues, such as the high priest’s role, the Pentateuch redaction appears to anticipate the theocratic outlook of the final editors of Numbers, as indicated in the previous summary. From the literary-critical perspective, moreover, the division between the two layers is not entirely conclusive. For
example, the core of the narrative of Moses’ and Aaron’s sin in Num 20:1–13 is assigned to the Pentateuch redaction, yet this story presupposes in turn the account of Aaron’s death in Num 20:22–29, which was designed to introduce the theme of Eleazar’s succession, a motif itself characteristic of the theocratic revision. Achenbach is then forced to eliminate all references to Eleazar in Num 20:22–29 as later interpolations (see 318–34), even though this solution is not really supported by the text. The separation between the work of the Hexateuch redactor and that of the theocratic editors of Numbers appears also to be problematic as regards texts pertaining to the division of the promised land among Israel’s tribes (see especially Num 32, and on this chapter the analysis on pp. 369ff.) and in Joshua. According to Achenbach, the account of the division of the land in Josh 13–22 in its present form has been massively edited by the theocratic revision; apart from Josh 14:6–15* (corresponding to the earliest layer in the spying out the land account of Num 13–14) and possibly also 15:13ff.*, the scope of the Hexateuch redaction in these chapters remains somewhat elusive. While the model of a post-Priestly Hexateuch redaction opens many important perspectives for the study of the second part of Joshua, this question would deserve a further investigation of its own.

On the whole, the above observations do not necessarily question the relevance of the overall model advocated by Achenbach for the composition of Numbers. That much was composed at a post-Priestly stage in the context of an alternative between Hexateuch and Pentateuch and that these two redactions were eventually completed by a late priestly, “theocratic” layer is convincingly shown in his study. Whether these three layers can always be recovered in Numbers without ambiguity and, more important, whether the whole book can be divided into these three layers remains a matter of debate.

This raises a broader issue, namely, the model’s capacity to account satisfactorily for the totality of the texts contained in this book. The story recounted in Num 11, for example, does not seek to legitimize simply the postexilic institution of a seventy-elders counsel (see 11:24–30 with v. 25) but rather the ideal of a “people of prophets,” a recurring theme in postexilic prophecy (see Isa 44:3; Ezek 36:27; 39:29; Joel 3:1–2) by referring it to Moses himself (Num 11:29). Such a motif hardly reflects the perspective of the Pentateuch redactor, for whom the divine revelation ceases more or less with Moses’ death, but rather appears to be pointedly directed against it. (Note in this respect Joshua’s indignant reaction in 11:28, which actually conforms more closely to the conception of the Torah’s editors but which receives sharp censure by Moses himself in v. 29.) Here, it seems instead that we have an interpolation by charismatic circles of the (late) Persian period, probably represented in the story by the figures of Eldad and Medad (Num 11:26ff.), as argued in particular by T. Römer in a series of articles on Num 11–12. Chapter 12, with its strong emphasis on Moses’ unique role as mediator of the divine will (see vv. 6–8), can be viewed for its part as a critical response to the charismatic and even eschatological
perspective opened by the insertion of Num 11, reasserting the “orthodox” perspective of the Pentateuch editors and denying any possibility of a *successio mosaica*. Similarly, in the Balaam story (Num 22–24), Achenbach himself must acknowledge that the strong eschatological, almost apocalyptic, perspective characteristic of the final layer (see Num 24:14b–24, possibly also 23:10b, 23b–24) cannot be assigned to any of his three layers and represent instead “late prophetic additions” (*späte prophetische Nachträge*; see on pp. 422–24). In this case, one should perhaps reckon the possibility that, at some stage of the transmission of the book, other, more marginal circles had access to it in the library of the Second Temple in Jerusalem, where they would have been able to insert their own traditions. This conclusion calls in turn for a partial revision of the overall model advocated by Achenbach, suggesting that the discussion that led to the formation of the book of Numbers in the fifth century was not necessarily restricted to the debate between Pentateuch and Hexateuch, however instrumental it may have been.

Finally, one central issue that has not been solved satisfactorily would be the nature of the traditions used by the post-Priestly authors of Numbers. Achenbach does acknowledge that these authors made use of numerous older (pre-Priestly and even pre-Deuteronomistic) traditions that already recounted some of the major episodes of Israel’s sojourn in the wilderness: the account of the spying out the land, the Balaam tradition, various stories of Israel’s confrontation with peoples living west of the Jordan (Edom, Sihon, Moab), as well as fragments of an itinerary in Num 11* and even a tradition of the departure from the mountain of God in Num 10:29–32*. Yet—at least in the study under review—Achenbach does not address at length the problem raised by the relationship between these traditions. For so many wilderness traditions to coexist, we must necessarily presuppose the existence of some kind of broader narrative framework, at least at the level of oral culture if not in written form. The problem proves equally challenging when the author remarks that the tradition reporting the departure from the mountain in Num 10:29ff.* probably connects to the pre-Dtr tradition preserved in Exod 18. There are indeed some unmistakable parallels, such as the role played by Moses’ father-in-law, in these two texts (even though he is named differently), or the designation “mountain of God,” which does not occur anywhere else in the Hebrew Bible for Mount Sinai (181ff.). The connection between these two texts suggests that the ancient legend about Moses preserved in Exodus was already linked at a pre-Deuteronomistic stage with a tradition recounting Israel’s sojourns in the wilderness and the people’s rebellions; this account would then have formed the basis for the Deuteronomistic version in Deut 1–3 (note the overall correspondence between the traditions identified by Achenbach in Numbers and those reported in Deut 1–3), whose work was eventually reinterpreted by the post-Dtr and post-Priestly authors of Num 11–25. This model is indeed attractive, but the whole question of the traditions underlying the Numbers account probably warrants a more
comprehensive and more systematic treatment. In particular, the very origin of the wilderness traditions constitutes a problem in its own right (see on this, e.g., T. Dozeman, “Hosea and the Wilderness Wandering Tradition,” Rethinking the Foundations. Historiography in the Ancient World and in the Bible: Essays in Honour of John Van Seters [ed. T. Römer and S. L. McKenzie; BZAW 294; Berlin, 2000], 55–70). This is all the more true for the rebellion motif, which is seldom found in preexilic prophecy and usually only in passages whose original character is rather dubious (see, e.g., Hos 9:10b). Another matter that remains unresolved in this context concerns the departure motif in Exod 32–34 (32:34; 31:1ff.), which similarly seems to presuppose a continuation in Num 10:29ff. As noted above, Achenbach’s solution on this point—he attributes the connection to his Hexateuch redactor yet must postulate that the Priestly account of the building of the tabernacle was not fully integrated at this time—is not entirely compelling. Here the traditional view postulating the motif in Exod 32–34 as initially comprising part of a broader pre-Priestly narrative complex including the exodus, the sojourn at Mount Sinai, a first version of the wilderness traditions, and the conquest of the land remains attractive. That the wilderness traditions in Numbers have undergone such massive editing by the post-Priestly redactors of the Torah that they can no longer be reconstructed is convincingly demonstrated by Achenbach through his detailed and thorough examination of chapters 11–25. It is not exactly the same, however, as to say that these redactors have freely arranged a handful of traditions on Israel’s sojourn in the wilderness that happened to be at their disposal.

All the previous remarks do not alter in any way the worth and importance of Achenbach’s monograph but testify on the contrary to the fecundity of his work for scholarly discussion. For anyone working on the book of Numbers or even on the Torah, it is simply impossible to ignore. It will certainly prove to be a decisive contribution to Pentateuch scholarship in the following decades. It is this reviewer’s conviction that the unique combination of profound coherence and relative simplicity in the compositional model Achenbach advocates for the study of Numbers should enable his seminal work to be received and discussed outside Germany as well.