Baden, Joel S.

*J, E, and the Redaction of the Pentateuch*

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This is a slightly revised Harvard dissertation (2007) guided in large part by Baruch Schwartz, who spent a year as a visiting scholar during Baden’s tenure there and who served as an outside reader and a primary advisor for the work. Following models advanced by Schwartz and Schwartz’s mentor, Menahem Haran, the book advances a version of the Documentary Hypothesis that sees the four postulated sources as largely independent of each other prior to their being joined at one time by a final redactor. Most prior documentarians have argued that the hypothesized J and E documents were first joined by a “Jehovist” redactor at some point in the preexilic period before that JE work was presupposed by some layers of Deuteronomy and later (perhaps) by the P source. Baden’s book aims to disprove the hypothesis of the existence of this prior JE, Jehovistic, work.

Ironically he makes this argument in an international scholarly environment where many, if not most, scholars active in study of the formation of the Pentateuch (especially in Europe), have discarded the idea of any preexilic J or E sources spanning the Pentateuch as a whole. The demise of the source-critical consensus probably is the primary prompt for Baden’s inclusion of a chapter purporting to describe the current state of pentateuchal scholarship by way of the work of Rendtorff “et.al.” (with “et.al.” including the rest of European scholarship: Konrad Schmid, Jan Gertz, Erhard Blum, Reinhard Achenbach,
Christoph Levin, the current author, and Jean Louis Ska, among others), Brevard Childs, John Van Seters, and Richard E. Friedman. Sadly, although the author includes general citations of a few works not written in English, the only such works that he engages in detail are decades-old and preliminary-programmatic works, especially Rolf Rendtorff’s 1977 *Das überlieferungsgeschichtliche Problem des Pentateuch* [BZAW; Berlin: de Gruyter]). Meanwhile, Baden cites but does not engage in a detailed way with the mass of European pentateuchal scholarship, from a variety of schools, that has offered additional critiques and pursued alternatives to the source-critical paradigm. Even the structure of the chapter as a whole, starting with Gunkel and continuing with von Rad and Noth, is parallel to the way Rendtorff built much of his argument on the history of scholarship thirty-five years ago. The main new element (vis-à-vis Rendtorff) is Baden’s incorporation of some of Van Seters’s critique of the idea of a redactor (see esp. *The Edited Bible* [Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2006]), which Baden accepts as a critique of the hypothesis of various redactors (see also later on pp. 248–53), Jehovahist and otherwise, but curiously rejects when applied to the final redactor responsible for putting together the present Pentateuch out of the four sources.

The core of Baden’s argument comes in chapter 3, where he aims to demonstrate that D (by which he seems to mean Deuteronomy) is never dependent on a combined version of the J and E documents but instead is dependent on either one or the other source in turn. This is a slight variant of the argument by M. Haran (מהפכת המקראות, vol. 2 [Jerusalem: Magnes, 2004]; see also תקופת המקראות [Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1972]) that D was dependent on E alone. Baden disagrees slightly with Haran, arguing that some passages on which D is dependent, especially the non-P spy story (Num 13:17b–20, 22–24, 26–31, 33; 14:1b, 11–25, 39–45), derive from J (particularly because of the reference to Exod 34:6–7 in Num 14:17–18). Nevertheless, for the most part, Baden argues that the rest of the non-P tetratachual passages possibly reflected by Deuteronomy derive completely from an Elohistic document, not from a mix of J and E. Thus the story of delegation of Moses’ judicial authority in Deut 1:9–18 is dependent on stories about a similar such delegation in both Exod 18:13–27 and Num 11:11–12, 14–17, 24b–30, both of which are assigned by Baden to E. Contrary to the bulk of past documentary scholarship, Baden assigns all of the stories of engagement with Transjordanian kings in Num 20:14–21:35 to E, thus maintaining that Deut 2:2–3:11 is dependent on E and E alone. Though past scholars have never achieved consensus on whether Num 32 was a mix of J, E, P, or some non-source identified layers of composition and redaction, Baden confidently divides that chapter between portions on which Deut 3:12–20 seems to depend, which he assigns to E, and the rest, which he assigns to P. The same method characterizes his approach to the non-P Sinai materials. The highly complex mix of seams and earlier traditions in Exod 19–24, 32–34 have led to an complex plurality of source-critical divisions among
documentarians. Baden, following Schwartz, confidently divides between a strand of the non-P material seemingly presupposed in Deut 4–5 and 9:8–10:5, which he assigns to E, and a J strand composed of the other material. Notably, although Baden sees these as completely independent and separate sources, he does not explain the multiple ways in which his posited J Sinai narrative itself builds on and links back to issues and wording seen in his E source (e.g., the issue of who brought Israel out of Egypt in Exod 32:1, 4, 7 [Baden’s E] as unfolded in Exod 33:1, 13 and following).

This chapter, unfortunately, is fundamentally flawed as an argument against the JE hypothesis, for Baden can only make his argument for exclusive D dependence on either J or E work by redefining J and E so that they fit his hypothesis. If, after two centuries of source-critical work, Baden could point back at commonly agreed upon identifications of sources and say that Deuteronomy is never dependent on them in combination, that would be one thing. But instead, Baden must first identify J and E in ways no previous scholar has, ways that support the very hypothesis he set out to prove in the first place. To be sure, he does not explicitly use parallels in Deuteronomy to make his case. On the contrary, he first presents a source-critical analysis, only then progressing to comparison with Deuteronomy. But a closer look reveals that his source-critical arguments are extremely brief, often disregarding indicators such as divine name and separating verses seen by past source critics as connected. For example, in his analysis of Num 32 and the Sinai narrative (in the latter case largely following Schwartz), Baden produces unprecedented and complicated source-critical pictures whose primary justification can only be a preceding hypothesis that Deuteronomy can be used as a key to the identification of E in Num 32 (the seams in the text and terminological indicators noted by Baden are insufficient to produce his source identification). The result is a problem of circularity in Baden’s argument. Like the farmer who painted bull’s-eyes around arrows he already had shot into the side of his barn in order to prove his proficiency in archery, Baden paints sources that either correspond or do not correspond to Deuteronomy and then takes that division of sources (implicitly on the basis of Deuteronomy) as a demonstration that Deuteronomy never depended on mixed sources.

Throughout Baden shows little awareness of or engagement with the last three decades of European scholarship on the passages discussed, while repeatedly citing the small segment of past source-critical scholarship either written in English or translated (e.g., Kuenen, Carpenter and Harford-Battersby, Driver, Noth, Gray, and Friedman). Nontranslated major European works on the same level, even central source-critical treatments (e.g., Wellhausen’s Komposition, Baentsch, Knöbel), are rarely cited (especially by page) nor engaged in detail. To be sure, earlier in his review of literature he does cite specific pages of classical source-critical treatments along with Volz and Rudolph and Blum, and this review (compared to the dissertation, 91–92) contains a handful of pages
on other European scholars (70–76). Nevertheless, by the time he gets to specific analysis of passages in chapters 3 and following, he builds almost exclusively on scholarship translated into English (sometimes seemingly dumping citations into notes, e.g., his citation in 162 n. 156 of Benjamin Sommer’s study of LXX translation technique [“Translation as Commentary: The Case of the Septuagint to Exodus 32–33,” Textus 20 (2000): 43–60] in a list of studies purportedly examining literary-critical problems in Exod 32:7–14). For some areas of biblical scholarship, such limitations might be tolerated, but for this sort of enterprise, especially an academic monograph aiming to address specific questions on the formation of the Pentateuch, such lack of attention to and detailed engagement with (nontranslated) European scholarship borders on incompetence. Though he includes extensive (and untranslated) citations of several passages (especially from Blum) and has supplemented his discussion (vis-à-vis the dissertation) with a few general citations of source-critical studies by Seebass and Schmidt (e.g., 118 n. 61; 142 n. 113, and 246 n. 115; cf. the dissertation 147, 169, and 300), he appears to have fundamentally misunderstood crucial readings when he gets to specifics. Just to take one example, it is difficult to know how one who read Erhard Blum’s detailed discussion of multiple layers of diachronic stratification in Exod 19–24, 32–34 (45–75 in Blum’s Studien zur Komposition des Pentateuch [BZAW 189; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1990]) could come to the conclusion that Blum thought these chapters “were the work of a single hand” (Baden, 251).

Rarely, Baden notes a disagreeing perspective in a non-English work, yet fails to actually deal with the argumentation. For example, in his final discussion of the doubled commissioning of Joshua as Moses’ successor in Deut 31:14–15, 23, he insists in a footnote (186 n. 231) that these verses should be interpreted in accordance with the perspective of the rest of the chapter as earlier E elements on which D depends rather than as later insertions to D (as argued by Blum, Studien, 85–88). But Baden gives no grounds for this view, other than the fact that the rest of his chapter has argued for the relative earliness of “E” passages (such as Deut 31:14–15, 23) vis-à-vis D passages. Blum points out that these verses (especially Deut 31:23) not only parallel but expand upon Deuteronomistic language found in prior texts in Deuteronomy (Deut 31:7–8, which is the fulfillment of the command reported in Deut 3:28), but this textual argument is never engaged by Baden. For Baden, the dependence of D on “E” here in 31:14–15, 23 is established by his other arguments for D dependence on E in the chapter. Detailed arguments to the contrary by Blum (or even Haran, הָעַדַּר, 72–73; cf. Baden, 187 n. 234) inspire no specific response from Baden other than that they disagree with his theory (186 n. 231; added vis-à-vis the dissertation, 219).

But even if one were to disregard the lack of detailed engagement of the last few decades of European pentateuchal scholarship and the circularity of Baden’s central argument, the
very process that he posits for dependence of D on sources is strange and, I would argue, anachronistic. According to Baden, the author of D (which he treats as a unified composition) knew both J and E but was careful never to rely on them in mixed form. The picture I get is of a scribe writing a text (Deuteronomy), consulting one scroll (e.g., a “J” source, with its spy story) and carefully putting it away before taking up and semi-copying another (e.g., “E,” with its story of Transjordanian encounters). Baden’s D scribe knows J and E documents, both of which feature stories of mountain theophanies and lawgiving. Nevertheless, according to him, the D scribe carefully blocked the J Sinai account from his mind as he dutifully reviewed the events as narrated in his E source (and vice versa). This seems a strange process, especially given the growing body of comparative and textual data that suggests scribes creating new documents accessed prior sources in memorized form, mixing and/or coordinating as need be. Why would a D scribe so carefully reflect one account, in this case Schwartz/Baden’s identification of an E source at Sinai, while avoiding any reflection of the Schwartz/Baden J source otherwise demonstrably known (so Baden) in the case of the spy story? Baden never explains what sort of process or rationale would produce this temporary mental occlusion.

The next two chapters of the book represent Baden’s arguments against the identification of a distinctive RJE redactional layer. This starts with an argument against assignment of several passages to RJE (ch. 4) and continues with an argument that those passages or parts of passages that do appear to be redactional coordinations of J with E and other sources (e.g., 31:18; 34:4) are of the same type and thus, prima facie, derived from the one final redactor who combined all four sources at the same time. In some cases, for example, his observation that the three non-P wife-sister stories are not actually narrative doublets (213–18) or his critique of arguments from mixed language (225–36), he points to well-established weaknesses in the source-critical theory. In other cases, he seems to plead against the grain of the text in attempting to support his theory, such as his argument on 211–13 that the interaction leading to the command for Hagar to return to Abram’s household in Gen 16:8–9 was not meant to coordinate the story in Gen 16* with the following Hagar tradition in Gen 21:9–21. Often Baden merely reasserts the validity of his prior source analysis (e.g., assignment of Exod 34:1, 4 to E rather than a mix of J and RJE by others [221–23]) or critiques the methodological modesty of prior scholars such as Wellhausen (223–25).

In the end, I very much hope this book is not an indicator of the direction of future pentateuchal scholarship, especially scholarship conducted in North American contexts. The problem, of course, is not Baden’s pursuit of a theoretical framework (in this case a somewhat idiosyncratic version of the four source theory) at odds with that of a large number of contemporary specialists (whether one judges them the majority or not is, in the end, immaterial). There is always room for a new argument and set of observations.
Nor does Baden lack worthwhile things to say. His (implicit) use of texts in Deuteronomy as a key to unlocking some of the problems of the Sinai pericope and other texts (following on work along similar lines by Schwartz, Haran, and many others) are evocative extensions of older work and worthy of further attention. Aside from my issues in detail with the multitude of textual analyses presented as givens across the book, the main problem I see is the extent to which this book as a whole is a triumph of system over detailed textual observation, caricature of opposition in place of detailed engagement, and a sad example in North American research of ignorance of and lack of specific engagement with recent European scholarship (particularly untranslated German pentateuchal scholarship).