

While the title of K. A. Kitchen's recent book, Ancient Orient and Old Testament, may give the impression of a popularized survey of ancient Near Eastern parallels to the Old Testament,¹ nothing could be more misleading. This book is, for the most part, a carefully reasoned study of those parallels and a masterpiece of organization. As is so seldom done, but is so crucially necessary, Kitchen begins with a chapter devoted to methodology (pp. 15-34). Only after his methodological principles are set forth does he allow himself to deal with ancient Near Eastern parallels to the Hebrew Bible. Chapters 2-8, which comprise the bulk of the work, may be considered a critique of modern biblical scholarship. Such problems as the date of the patriarchs, the date of the exodus, historical anachronisms, creation and flood stories, literary criticism, and Aramaisms are all discussed in considerable detail. Modern biblical scholarship's solutions are found wanting in almost every case, mainly due to methodological considerations. In chapter 9, Kitchen occupies himself with what he considers parallels that are methodologically sound and "... can further our understanding of the Old Testament by helping to clear up individual textual difficulties and by lending

¹ Compare the titles of the following popular accounts on the same subject: C. H. Gordon, The Ancient Near East (New York, 1965); J. Gray, Archaeology and the Old Testament World (New York, 1965); J. B. Pritchard, Archaeology and the Old Testament (Princeton, 1958). (Kitchen's book is hereafter abbreviated "Kitchen.")

greater vividness to what is said in the Biblical writings" (p. 153). Chapter 10 is a short conclusion which is essentially a plea for "...correlation of the Old Testament and the ancient Orient ... to be conducted on a much more fundamental and systematic basis than ever before" (p. 171) and a justification of the author's negative results in his evaluation of contemporary biblical scholarship (pp. 171-173).

The following are some of the major issues discussed and Kitchen's treatment of them.²

The Creation Stories

Kitchen claims that there is no real evidence to support the contention of many Old Testament scholars that Genesis 1 and 2 are merely a borrowed, simplified, and purged version of the Akkadian creation epic *Enūma Eliš*.³ While the main purpose of Genesis 1 and 2 is to portray the Israelite God as the sole creator of the universe, *Enūma Eliš* attempts primarily to show how Marduk achieved supremacy over the other gods of the Akkadian pantheon. Furthermore, while the subject of Genesis 1 and 2 is the creation of the universe, only about one sixth of *Enūma Eliš* deals with acts of creation. In connection with this point, Kitchen notes that one full tablet of the Akkadian epic, Tablet VII, is simply a list of Marduk's fifty names and has absolutely nothing to do with Genesis 1 and 2. The author of *Enūma Eliš*, whose purpose it was to exalt Marduk, naturally had to attribute to Marduk all those functions for which the chief god of the pantheon was responsible. One of these functions, in the past, was that of creator of the universe. Thus the story of the creation in *Enūma Eliš* is merely incidental to that politically oriented epic. Therefore, from a methodological point of view, since the purposes and the content of these two epics are almost completely different, there is no basis for assuming any cross-cultural borrowing.

The Order of the Sources in the Documentary Hypothesis

Although Kitchen completely rejects the conventional documentary hypothesis (pp. 112-138), a position with which this writer cannot entirely concur, much of his criticism is valid

² There is a substantial amount of Egyptian material in this book which the present writer is not competent to review.

³ E. A. Speiser, *Genesis*, The Anchor Bible (New York, 1964), pp. 9-13.

and must be reckoned with. One of his major arguments against this theory is the use of faulty methodology in order to place the four documents (D, E, J, and P) in a chronological sequence. This faulty methodology took the form of an evolutionary theory requiring "...a unilinear development of concepts from 'primitive' to 'advanced'" (p. 112). As a result of a general belief in the infallibility of this theory in the nineteenth century, the documents were chronologically arranged by Wellhausen and Graf in the order JEDP.⁴ Kitchen's criticism on this point is stated so well that it deserves to be quoted directly:

Unilinear evolution is a fallacy. It is valid only within a small field of reference for a limited segment of time, and not for whole cultures over long periods of time....This oscillation and mutation applies to all aspects of civilization: artistic standards, literary output and abilities, political institutions, the state of society, economics, and not least religious belief and practice. (pp. 113-114)

Kitchen supports this statement with numerous illustrations from ancient Near Eastern history. He mentions, for example, Egypt's thrice repeated rise and fall which coincides with the Old, Middle, and New Kingdoms respectively, and the Sumerian Renaissance which occurred between the Old Akkadian and the Old Babylonian periods (p. 114). He thus concludes that "...there is no reason whatever to date supposed literary fragments or sources by the imaginary level of their concepts on a scale from 'primitive' to 'advanced'" (*ibid.*). This point, which Kitchen acknowledges was made to a large extent by Y. Kaufmann more than thirty years ago,⁵ has been largely ignored by modern biblical scholars.⁶

⁴ J. Wellhausen, Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel (reprint: New York, 1957).

⁵ Y. Kaufmann, Toledot HaEmunah HaYisra'elit, I (reprint: Jerusalem, 1964), pp. xxi-xliv and *passim*.

⁶ For an attempt to analyze one specific case of the use of this faulty methodology, see M. Lichtenstein, "Dream Theophany and the E Document," JANES 1/2 (1969), pp. 45-54. For an effort to correlate Kaufmann's results with what is known concerning the composition of Akkadian texts, see C. Cohen, "Was the P Document Secret?," *ibid.*, pp. 39-44.

The Question of Aramaisms

Here, Kitchen takes to task modern biblical scholars who claim that the existence of Aramaisms in a biblical text implies an exilic or later date for the composition in question. Even if it were true that Aramaic influence could only have come about at the time of the Babylonian exile or afterwards, one must still demonstrate that the word in question could have come into the Bible only through the influence of Aramaic. Kitchen states that "...a great number of so-called Aramaisms are really just early West Semitic terms found not least in poetry and are not specifically Aramaic at all" (p. 145). As an example, he cites Eissfeldt's claim that the existence of the words qbl (Proverbs 19:20) and nht (Proverbs 17:10) in the Book of Proverbs is evidence that that book was written in the exilic or post-exilic period.⁷ As Kitchen notes quite correctly, qbl occurs in a letter from Amarna (14th century B.C.E.)⁸ and nht occurs in Ugaritic literature (not later than the 14th century B.C.E.).⁹ Thus they may just as well have been early Canaanisms, rather than late Aramaisms. Furthermore, the labeling of even true Aramaisms as late is open to serious question. From an historical point of view, the Aramaean penetration of Syria and Mesopotamia is documented as far back as the time of Tiglath-Pileser I (1100 B.C.E.).¹⁰ From a linguistic point of view, there are Old Aramaic texts which date as far back as the eighth century B.C.E.¹¹ Thus, there is absolutely no justification for treating even genuine Aramaisms as absolutely late.

More on the Documentary Hypothesis

Kitchen has a very interesting way of criticizing the documentary hypothesis. His reasoning is that if the same characteristics which have led biblical scholars to assume the existence of the JEDP documents in the Pentateuch occur together in individual ancient Near Eastern texts, then these characteristics are invalid criteria. For example, the contention has often

⁷ O. Eissfeldt, The Old Testament: An Introduction (London, 1965), p. 474.

⁸ W. F. Albright, "An Archaic Hebrew Proverb in an Amarna Letter from Central Palestine," BASOR 89 (1943), p. 31, n. 16.

⁹ C. H. Gordon, Ugaritic Textbook (Rome, 1965), Glossary, #1635.

¹⁰ ANET, p. 275a, and Kitchen, p. 146, n. 28.

¹¹ ANET, p. 655.

been made by proponents of the documentary hypothesis that Genesis 1 and 2 are two completely independent creation narratives.¹² This contention is based on the assumptions that each of these narrative portions in itself is sufficient for a creation story and that both stories are independent of each other. However, says Kitchen, these two accounts simply complement each other. "Genesis 1 mentions the creation of man as the last of a series, and without any details, whereas in Genesis 2 man is the center of interest and more specific details are given about him and his setting" (pp. 116-117). Thus, Genesis 1 may be considered an outline of the creation in general, while Genesis 2 concentrates on the creation of man. This relationship of an outline and a more detailed account of one or more major aspects is commonplace in ancient Near Eastern texts. Kitchen mentions the Karnak Poetical Stela¹³ and the Gebel Barkal Stela¹⁴ as examples. He then mockingly divides these texts up into sources to illustrate the absurdity of this kind of scholarship. "What is absurd when applied to monumental Near Eastern texts that had no pre-history of hands and redactors should not be imposed on Genesis 1 and 2..." (p. 117). This reviewer does not feel that the complex problem of the relationship between Genesis 1 and Genesis 2 can be solved solely on the basis of the above consideration. There are other factors¹⁵ which must be taken into account before a final decision can be made. However,

¹² See the references in Kitchen, p. 116, n. 12.

¹³ A. Erman and A. M. Blackman, Literature of the Ancient Egyptians (London, 1927), pp. 254-258. Kitchen compares lines 1-12 (general expression of supremacy) with lines 13-22 (more precise expression of supremacy).

¹⁴ G. A. and M. B. Reisner, "Inscribed Monuments from Gebel Barkal," ZÄS 69 (1933), pp. 24-39. Kitchen compares lines 3-9 (general expression of royal supremacy) with lines 9-27 (narrative of specific triumphs in Syria-Palestine).

¹⁵ For example, Speiser notes in Genesis, p. 19, that the creation episodes in both Genesis 1 and 2 and the Akkadian epic of creation Enūma Eliš begin in the same way:

Gen. 1:1 When God began to create heaven and earth...

Gen. 2:4b At the time when God created heaven and earth...

En. El. I:1-2 When above, heaven had not been created,

[and] below, the earth had not been brought into existence.

He observes quite correctly that in each of the above cases, "the temporal clause leads up to a parenthetic description, and is then resumed with the proper sequel." If Gen. 2 is not a separate creation story, then why does it begin in the identical way that ancient Near Eastern creation stories open?

what Kitchen has very convincingly demonstrated is that the above criterion, which has been used by scholars past and present as evidence that Genesis 1 and 2 are unrelated, must now be considered completely invalid.

There is very little in this book which needs correction or modification as far as this reviewer is concerned. Occasionally, methodological rules stated by the author are not sufficiently grounded in textual evidence. For example, in order to negate the assumption that the Hebrew account of creation in Genesis 1 is simply a purged and simplified version of Enūma Eliš, Kitchen postulates this rule: "In the Ancient Near East, simple accounts or traditions may give rise (by accretion and embellishment) to elaborate legends but not vice versa" (p. 89). His evidence for this statement comes from both Egypt and Mesopotamia (p. 89, n. 7). However, he does not deal with cross-cultural influence, which is precisely upon what the assumption about Genesis 1 is based. One can not use a methodological rule to disprove a cross-cultural influence if the methodological rule has been demonstrated to work only within certain cultures individually. A second shortcoming is the author's reliance upon his own wishful thinking as regards future archaeological finds. There are too many general statements like the following in this book:

There is thus a tension between the basic theories and procedures of much Old Testament scholarship and the frequent and increasing agreement of ancient Oriental data with the existing Old Testament written traditions. As yet, this tension has barely begun to emerge, but it will inevitably do so increasingly. (p. 27)

On the basis of what Kitchen has achieved in this book, based on extant ancient Near Eastern texts, it is this reviewer's opinion that he has absolutely no need to appeal to the future for further confirmation of his methods. As he himself states, and as is so true, most Old Testament scholars cannot accept the ancient Near Eastern evidence at face value, "...because they are...largely limited to Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek and languages of early biblical versions (Latin, Syriac, Ethiopic, Coptic, etc) and are not in a position to utilize, unaided and at first hand, the raw materials collected by ancient Oriental research" (p. 24). This is the main problem of biblical scholarship today, and Kitchen is to be highly commended for exposing it in such an instructive manner. Anyone interested in the Hebrew Bible should make it his business to read this book quite carefully.