

Martin Noth's *A History of Pentateuchal Traditions**

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Claude Lévi-Strauss in his remarkable work, *The Savage Mind*, explained the myth-making faculty in man with the image of the "bricoleur," a man who builds what he has to build with whatever materials are at hand; this ingenious fellow exploits a haphazard collection of materials in a truly creative but limited way. He is constrained in what he may build by the physical limitations of the building materials at his disposal and differs in this respect from, say an engineer, in that his *matériel* is not collected from the start for specific purposes or functions but rather "builds up" through all the odds and ends of his life. Mythical thought is an intellectual form of *bricolage* and it is immensely important for Lévi-Strauss that this image be understood not only in its limiting characteristics but especially in its liberating functions. I would like to borrow this image to characterize the "bricolage" aspects of all hermeneutical quests. But more specifically, I want to explain how, in my opinion, the hermeneutics of Noth's *A History of Pentateuchal Traditions* (hereafter *Pentateuchal Traditions*) illustrates so well the aptness of this image for a large part of modern biblical studies in its overwhelming diachronic concerns.

Mythical thought for its part is imprisoned in the events and experiences which it never tires of ordering and reordering in its search to find them a meaning.¹

The building blocks of any hermeneutics are sections of the various texts one attempts to interpret. In the development of modern biblical scholarship we find a diachronic quest behind and beyond our present biblical texts. Far too often (to adapt Lévi-Strauss' statement) such a quest is itself imprisoned in those textual "events and experiences" which it never tires of diachronically ordering and reordering in its search to find in them a meaning. No attempt at explaining what this or that language product means escapes these bars, but it is this article's thesis that the diachronic

constructions of *Pentateuchal Traditions* are an apt example of the "mythical" aspects of biblical hermeneutics.

Another comparison comes to mind. When Mircea Eliade discusses myths of creation and origins,² one becomes aware of an irony in Sigmund Freud's views on myth and religion. How ironic it is that Freud, who prided himself on his rational and methodical approach to the study of his object, constantly *explains* phenomena by appealing to origins or beginnings within the human psyche, a mechanism which is at the heart of all *myth* and which is commonly held to be what largely distinguishes *mythical* explanations of the nature of things from rational or philosophic explanations. This comparison is immediately relevant to anyone who has followed the course of biblical studies over the last one hundred years. The fundamental drive that has produced the greatest insights into the biblical message so far is fueled by the quest for origins. As Eliade so often puts it when explaining an essential characteristic of myth: it is the first manifestation of a thing that is significant and valid, not its successive appearances or epiphanies. The following words of Eliade describe man in his myth-making capacity yet they apply equally well to the main concerns of modern biblical scholarship, and thus to one of its giants, Martin Noth: "Knowledge of the origin of each thing. . .confers a kind of magical mastery over it; he knows where to find it and how to make it reappear in the future."³

It would be unfair to Noth to claim he felt he obtained any definitive answers in *Pentateuchal Traditions*, for he makes it quite clear that he is interested primarily in asking the right questions. My analysis of his work will concentrate on whether he did ask the right questions and whether the methods by which he formulated these questions can be judged at least to point toward their eventual solution.⁴ It will be the contention of this study that *Pentateuchal Traditions* illustrates Noth's myth-

* It is an honor to contribute this study in memory of Dr. Wright, a beloved teacher.

¹ Lévi-Strauss (1966) 22.

² Eliade (1963) 76-79.

³ Eliade (1963) 76.

⁴ Noth (1972) xxxv; 3-4.

like quest for origins. I believe there exists in *Pentateuchal Traditions* the same kind of irony found in Freud's work which is constituted by the very myth-like qualities Freud had intended to analyze in a deliberately non-mythlike way. Noth's central *questions* are structurally similar to the questions myths attempt to answer: "Knowledge of the origin of each thing . . . confers a kind of magical mastery over it; he knows where to find it and how to make it reappear in the future." Who can fail to be impressed with the diachronic skill by which Noth carries us back from the text in its final form to its thematic beginnings over 500 years earlier? And once we attain all we can hope to know about the Pentateuch's oral stages during the period of the tribal confederacy, given the paucity of material available to us, Noth knows how to make these oral beginnings "reappear in the future" in the pentateuchal narrative as a whole. He writes at the end of his book:

Question: The question still remains as to whether the combination of the sources. . . actually did not give rise to something new, which transcended the individual sources and their particular content and put them in a peculiar light, beyond the conscious intentions of the redactors.⁵

Answer: Partly in consequence of a common harking back to a fully developed oral narrative tradition, and partly in consequence of mutual literary dependence, the course of history was narrated so much the same in all the sources that even their combination with one another could change nothing essential in this regard.⁶

Notice how Noth's explanation of the nature of the pentateuchal narrative is based upon his explanation of its origins. It is the first manifestation of a thing that is significant and valid, not its successive appearances or epiphanies.

In the course of this discussion I shall analyze some of the guidelines used by Noth to distinguish early from late material.⁷ Before I do, however, let me register my disagreement with B. Anderson when he writes: "We have noted previously that these guidelines . . . work hand in hand and mutually reinforce one another. It is facile to point out weaknesses in any one of these clues when it is taken by itself."⁸ And "It would be unfair to regard these as principles derived from the supposed evolution of genres according laws."⁹ First,

⁵ Noth (1972) 250.

⁶ Noth (1972) 251.

⁷ For a convenient review of Noth's book, with critical reactions, see Knight (1973) 143-57 and especially 193-213.

⁸ Anderson (1972) xxv.

⁹ Anderson (1972) xxiii.

Anderson's caution on criticism of any single clue is relevant only for guidelines that *by themselves* add some weight to a multiply-corroborative argumentation. However, if an individual guideline can be shown to be not only weak but erroneous, it is not only facile but valid to reject its probative force. Thus, as we shall see, it is not the *weakness* of the "shorter is older" guideline that is the target of criticism but rather its absolute uselessness as any kind of guideline, corroborative or otherwise. It is certainly true, as Anderson points out, that "the historian of traditions perhaps may be compared to a detective who cannot rely upon a single clue, since it is ambiguous, but must weigh the total evidence and then must use creative imagination in solving the problem."¹⁰ But truly ambiguous evidence is no evidence at all, and Anderson's description of the inadequacy of the "shorter is older" guideline seems to show that he holds it, among others, to be truly inconclusive: shorter can just as easily be younger as older.¹¹ It seems as if Anderson were telling us that when a detective combines the two signs of fingerprints and of a whiff of perfume found at the scene of a crime, the evidence taken together points to a female culprit. But fingerprints may be indicative of either man *or* woman and they do not corroborate at all the feminine evidence of perfume. Fingerprints are not weak evidence of a *woman's* presence; they are simply irrelevant to the question of gender.

There is an additional reason for rejecting certain of Noth's guidelines from a methodological point of view. Noth apparently used one and the same guideline to argue for lateness on some occasions and for antiquity on others. We will point this out in detail as the relevant guidelines are discussed.

The importance of these diachronic guidelines in Noth's study can scarcely be exaggerated. Anderson points out perhaps the fundamental weakness of Noth's approach: concentration upon units rather than configurations of material: "It is not *a priori* impossible that the earliest core of the Israelite tradition was an integrated whole or configuration of material, to which various individual genres and narrative elaborations were added as the tradition was further transmitted during the historical pilgrimage of Israel."¹² Such a criticism, he points out, had earlier been levelled against Noth's approach by Frank M. Cross and has been repeated

¹⁰ Anderson (1972) xxvi.

¹¹ Anderson (1972) xxv.

¹² Anderson (1972) xxx.

recently.¹³ Since the issue of individual versus connected themes is central to Noth's thesis, it is important to emphasize here that it is by means of the diachronic guidelines that Noth argues for the early existence of separate, non-connected pentateuchal themes. We can repeat what Noth writes in the last chapter of *Pentateuchal Traditions*:

"... then the further we move back in the traditio-historical analysis of the Pentateuchal narrative the more we come to separate items of information. The implications for the reconstruction and presentation of the historical beginnings of Israel are obvious. It is no longer possible for us to ascertain any *connections* between these initial stages."¹⁴

What is clear from this statement, and indeed from Noth's entire book, is that the existence of originally separate themes is not a conscious assumption on Noth's part but a *conclusion* of his diachronic analysis of the pentateuchal material. Thus Anderson's statement about the *a priori* possibility of early configurations is true but may be beside the point since Noth seems to argue, at least explicitly, not from principle but from an interpretation of fact. On the other hand, Anderson and Cross may have correctly hit upon Noth's implicit and perhaps even unconscious predisposition toward judging discrete units as *a priori* earlier than their configuration. An analysis of Noth's use of diachronic guidelines will underline this point in some detail. For the sake of uniformity I will discuss the guidelines wherever possible as articulated by Anderson.

I. Earliest traditions are formulated in small units and in concise style in contrast to later material which tends to appear in large units composed in discursive (*ausgeführt*) style.¹⁵

This indeed is an ubiquitous guideline in Noth's study. We are told, for example, that the Balaam story in Numbers 22-24 "... exhibits the later 'discursive' saga style and is doubtless one of the latest fruits to mature on the tree of the old oral Pentateuchal tradition."¹⁶ Again, the "discursive saga style" and "complicated saga composition" of the East Jordan Jacob stories show that such a narrative "... is a relatively late growth in the process of the formation of the Pentateuch."¹⁷

¹³ Cross (1973) 88.

¹⁴ Noth (1972) 258.

¹⁵ Anderson (1972) xxiii-xxiv.

¹⁶ Noth (1972) 75.

¹⁷ Noth (1972) 88.

Further on we read, "The discursive narrative in Gen 24 [J] concerning the search for a bride for Isaac is, however, a late connective piece . . .", whereas "Gen 26 [J] . . . is completely devoid of passages composed in the later discursive saga style."¹⁸ Noth tells us that the Abrahamic narratives attached to the region of Hebron appeared "... only at a relatively late stage in the formation of the tradition. In accordance with this is the fact that they exhibit the later, discursive saga style."¹⁹ A final example is the Joseph story which "... shows itself to be a traditio-historically late construction by its discursive narrative style . . ."²⁰

This "shorter is older" guideline is certainly one of the "theoretical conceptions of oral transmission presently ruling certain circles of both Old and New Testament scholars" which Cross believes has been undercut by such research as A.B. Lord's *The Singer of Tales*.²¹ Also, since this guideline is simply an application of Noth's concentration upon units rather than configurations, Anderson's remark is pertinent here: such concentration "is understandable within the context of an earlier period of research that was heavily influenced by the romanticism of Herder."²² That elements of themes are older than their combination is actually a transformation of the "shorter is older" guideline applied on the plane of content. Noth's term, "discursive saga style" emphasizes the plane of expression; Noth's priority of thematic units over configurations of themes emphasizes the plane of content. In both cases the same evolutionary principle is at work and in both cases Noth does not seem to have been sufficiently aware of how deeply this assumption was imbedded in his conclusions. But such a criticism rests upon the belief that Noth's assumption was wrong, and I repeat my opinion that it is not unfair to criticize such guidelines individually.

II. "Cultic" or "religious" traditions are earlier than comparable "secular" or "worldly" traditions.

III. Earlier traditions usually lie in the background whereas later traditions are usually more prominent in the present Pentateuchal narrative.

IV. Earliest traditions tend to be anonymous and to deal with typical figures, while later traditions are more specific and individualized."²³

¹⁸ Noth (1972) 104.

¹⁹ Noth (1972) 110.

²⁰ Noth (1972) 208.

²¹ Cross (1973) 112, n. 3.

²² Anderson (1972) xxx.

²³ Anderson (1972) xxiv.

I shall discuss these three guidelines together because they illustrate most clearly the ambiguity of Noth's diachronic criteria and therefore the uselessness of his main conclusions, *as conclusions*. I do not wish here to emphasize that they are invalid principles—even though the “cultic versus profane” guideline in my opinion is invalid—but rather that Noth often uses them *even though he uses, in other places, their mirror image to arrive at exactly the opposite conclusion*. In other words, by sometimes reasoning that the more prominent tradition is older, Noth is able to arrive at whichever diachronic conclusion his intuition tells him is correct. Moreover, by sometimes reasoning that the sacral or religious tradition is later and at other times reasoning that the sacral or religious tradition is earlier, Noth can arrive at any convenient diachronic conclusion he wishes. He works in similar fashion with the typical/specific dichotomy. I do not think that Noth did this consciously, and this is precisely the point. Noth possesses a methodological rifle that allows him to hit squarely whichever diachronic pole he aims at. A few examples will illustrate Noth's procedures in this regard.

The “religious” or “cultic” versus “secular” or “worldly” guideline is clearly operating (in conjunction with the “shorter is older” guideline) when Noth discusses the diachronic relationship of the Jacob traditions of Shechem and Bethel and the Jacob stories of East Jordan:

So it happens that the East Jordan Jacob appears to be much more “worldly” than his West Jordan prototype. That is true both with regard to the content and the manner of the stories which circulated about him. . . Obviously we have here a later kind of narrative which is distinct from the older sacral style of tersely composed narratives concerning God's revelations and promises to the “patriarchs.”²⁴

Here it is quite clear that Noth is dealing with an older “sacral” style versus a younger “worldly” (*weltlicher*) style. From his statement that the later worldly style is one in which “everyday human behaviour now comes openly into the foreground,”²⁵ we are able to infer the same kind of distinction that separates for him the “cultic” *core* material from the popularized narrative that formed its *elaboration*.²⁶ In short, this guideline is a crucial one for Noth in his attempt to separate what is original core material from that which is later

elaboration. Noth's use of this guideline to relate the Jacob material diachronically is quite clear-cut: “sacral-cultic” is early and “worldly” (*weltlicher*) or “secular” is late. Moreover, this principle is directly related to Noth's view of the *Sitz im Leben* of the core versus elaborated material of the Pentateuch. Noth makes the point that the later “worldly” elaboration of the core material does not make such material “profane” (*profan*):

Now the fact that the Pentateuchal narrative in its detailed exposition abandoned the cultic sphere, in which the origins determinative of the structure of the whole were rooted, does not mean that it thereby became “profane.” (*profan*)²⁷

We are forced therefore to infer that the diachronic sequence, cultic → worldly, does *not* include or imply the sequence, cultic → profane. Where do we place a tradition done in a “profane” style?

Noth provides us with some indications for an answer when he discusses the three variations of the “ancestress of Israel in danger” tradition found in Genesis 12, 20, and 26. Speaking about Genesis 26, Noth states:

Finally, we find in verses 7-11 the story of Isaac's apprehension about the possible consequences for himself and his beautiful wife of living in the vicinity of the pleasure-loving Canaanite inhabitants of the arable land. This story, as distinct from the two variants in the corresponding Abraham story (Gen 12:10-20 [J]; 20:1b-18 [E]), appears here in a still completely “profane” form. . . It may be that here we find ourselves relatively close to the original form of this frequently utilized narrative material.²⁸

Noth repeats his assertion: “In any case this story, as its still ‘profane’ early form shows. . .”²⁹ Now Noth allows us to make a connection with the Jacob stories we have just discussed:

On the whole, these Isaac stories give the impression of being even more original traditio-historically than the stories of the West Jordan Jacob. They stand, as a matter of fact, closer to the origin of the “patriarchal” tradition than do the latter.³⁰

Apart from the fact that it is difficult to understand how the Isaac stories are closer to the origin of the patriarchal tradition than the West Jordan Jacob stories (Noth had earlier stated that Jacob “was the only patriarch to be directly connected with the older Pentateuchal themes, while the other patriarchs were connected with the rest of the

²⁴ Noth (1972) 91.

²⁵ Noth (1972) 91.

²⁶ Noth (1972) 189-97.

²⁷ Noth (1972) 197.

²⁸ Noth (1972) 105.

²⁹ Noth (1972) 106.

³⁰ Noth (1972) 106.

Pentateuchal themes only through Jacob")³¹, we are at least able now to set up a diachronic typology of narrative content/style as follows:

1. "still profane" : the Isaac stories, for example;
then
2. "cultic, religious" : the West Jordan Jacob stories, for example;
then
3. "worldly, secular" : the East Jordan Jacob stories, for example.

What is significant from this example is the quite ambiguous distinction between thematic and stylistic elements of a *very early* "profane tradition" and those elements of a *very late* "worldly" or "secular tradition." What precisely distinguishes an early, still profane characteristic of a tradition from an already worldly or secular characteristic? Given such ambiguity Noth is always able to point out certain characteristics of a tradition and either by calling them "still profane" judge the tradition to be more original, or else by calling them "worldly" or "secular" judge the tradition to be relatively late. Here again it is of no use to invoke Anderson's *caveat* that Noth uses this type of guideline in conjunction with other guidelines and thus corroborates his judgments. For, in reality, the other guidelines are either *invalid* (as the "shorter is older" guideline is) or equally ambiguous or irrelevant (as the "less prominent is earlier" or the "more typical is earlier" guidelines are). Since in fact at least *three* of Noth's diachronic guidelines seem to be totally ambiguous (i.e., both the guideline and its mirror image are used at various times by Noth to arrive at exactly opposite diachronic conclusions), it should be apparent why his *Pentateuchal Traditions* is a good example of the negative aspects of myth in the scholarly mode.

The second totally ambiguous (and therefore totally convenient and "efficient") guideline is that which states: "the more anonymous and typical, the earlier: the more specific and individualized, the later." This guideline is used by Noth, as Anderson points out,³² when Noth discusses Exodus 5 and concludes that the earliest stage of this tradition involved the more anonymous and typical "foremen of the people of Israel" mentioned in vs. 15-19. Again, when Noth analyzes the covenant meal tradition of Exodus 24, he finds the earliest figures

of the tradition to be the anonymous and typical representatives of the people. Later are added Nadab and Abihu, then Moses, and finally Aaron. These are clear examples of Noth's use of this guideline. However, the ambiguity of Noth's diachronic methodology becomes especially evident when he is (once again) sorting out the temporal relationship of the West versus East Jordan Jacob stories. Here we seem to find a mirror-image of the guideline under discussion:

The East Jordan Jacob is really no longer a "patriarch" at all in the original sense; nor is he a tribal personification in the sense formerly presumed in scholarly circles, for a "tribe of Jacob" is not involved. *He is, rather, a type that characterizes the whole people and their life.* (italics mine)³³

Here the diachronic scheme is exactly the opposite of the guideline under discussion; instead of typical → specific, we have specific → typical. Moreover, we have an added similarity in our two examples insofar as they both concern "figures" of a tradition. If we can go diachronically from an earlier anonymous figure to a later specific one in Exodus 5 and 24, here in the Jacob stories we go from the earlier specific "patriarch" (the West Jordan Jacob) to the later typical figure (the East Jordan Jacob). It is not helpful to object that Noth bases his diachronic judgment here squarely on his understanding of the tribal movement of the Central tribes from east to west, since, even so, one would expect some indication of surprise on Noth's part that the specific → typical diachronic pattern of this material is at odds with his usual understanding of the guideline. However, this is not the case here, and Noth gives every indication of viewing the sequence, "patriarch" → "type", as normal and expected. Given this state of affairs, it is again easy to see how Noth can go in whichever diachronic direction he chooses whenever he discusses traditions that involve an anonymous/typical versus specific/individualized dichotomy.

A third ambiguous guideline in Noth's procedure is the one that states, "earlier traditions usually lie in the background in the present pentateuchal narrative whereas later traditions are usually more prominent in the present narrative." Noth explicitly refers to this guideline³⁴ and utilizes it constantly in his diachronic judgments. Using this guideline, Noth is able to show how Abraham as a patriarchal figure belongs to a late stage in pentateuchal

³¹ Noth (1972) 56.

³² Anderson (1972) xxiv.

³³ Noth (1972) 91.

³⁴ Noth (1972) 81 and 101, n. 299.

development. Similarly, the extensive space given to the theme "revelation at Sinai" in the present form of the Pentateuch is due to "the fact that here in the final, already advanced, literary stage of the growth of the Pentateuch, a tremendous amount of material has accumulated."³⁵ Not only figures or themes but also other elements of a narrative that stand out in the present text have every right to be regarded as later.³⁶ Noth points this out in criticizing Gunkel's position concerning prominent features in the Jacob tradition.

It is at this point that one can ask of Noth a crucial question: Why does he argue that Moses is, with the possible exception of Jacob, the oldest figure of the pentateuchal narrative, and offer this as an explanation of why Moses became, in the end, the most prominent human figure of the present pentateuchal narrative? Noth writes:

Indeed, with the possible exception of Jacob, who belongs to the "patriarchal" theme which stands by itself, Moses traditio-historically would have been absolutely the oldest Israelite figure of the Pentateuchal narrative. It is no wonder, then, that as the Pentateuchal narrative evolved he constantly grew in importance and finally came to be *the* overwhelmingly prominent figure of the Pentateuchal narrative.³⁷

Noth's position on the place of Moses in the pentateuchal narrative is certainly not an insignificant part of his thematic study, so that this question goes to the heart of the matter with regard to the guideline under discussion. What precisely is it about a prominent theme, figure, or element of a tradition that *sometimes* leads Noth to judge it, *because of its very prominence*, to be relatively early (Moses), and at other times leads him to judge it, *because of its very prominence*, to be relatively late (Abraham)? Here again I do not feel it is useful to appeal to corroborative guidelines leading Noth to make his varied judgments, for in the specific examples I have chosen (the *late* prominent features of the Abraham stories and the *early* prominent figure of Moses) Noth explicitly and primarily bases his diachronic judgment on precisely the guideline under discussion.

If there is ambiguity surrounding this guideline when applied to figures and features of the pentateuchal narratives, there seems to be equal ambiguity concerning Noth's understanding of this

guideline when applied to major themes themselves. For if prominence is usually a sign of lateness, why is it that Noth bases his opinion concerning the theme "guidance out of Egypt" as "*the kernel of the whole subsequent Pentateuchal tradition*"³⁸ upon the prominence of the fixed formula, "Yahweh who brought Israel out of Egypt," not only in the Pentateuch but also in the rest of the Old Testament? This, in fact, is the major thrust of his treatment of this theme on pages 48-51 of *Pentateuchal Traditions*, and his analysis of this theme is the kernel of his subsequent analyses of the major remaining themes. We again ask the question: what in Noth's methodology distinguishes an *early* prominent element from a *late* prominent element when analyzing narratives? Why did not the prominence of the "guidance out of Egypt" theme lead Noth to conclude that it was the *latest* of the major themes? Or why at least did not Noth confront this prominence as an objection to be explained away if in fact he felt *for other reasons* this theme to be the original core of the pentateuchal narrative? I therefore am led to the same conclusion on this guideline as on the two preceding ones: by using both it and its mirror image, Noth is able to draw either early or late assessments of similar if not identical elements of the narratives he is so insistent on ordering diachronically.

Another aspect of Noth's methodology worth mentioning here is the relationship between his diachronic analysis of texts and his historical reconstruction of events in Israel's early history. The former is influenced to a great extent by the latter. As Anderson points out, "His judgments about the relative age of materials are heavily influenced by historical considerations such as the presumed existence of a six-tribe league at Hebron which was immediately exposed to the conditions of the southern wilderness, or the ascendancy of the central Palestinian tribes in the early period of the twelve-tribe covenant league, or the activities of central Palestinian tribes in colonizing East Jordan."³⁹ Such a procedure does not appear to be bothersome until one realizes what Anderson immediately points out about it: "Of course, Noth's historical understanding of the early period is based primarily upon a study of the primary evidence of Old Testament traditions themselves."⁴⁰ Perhaps

³⁵ Noth (1972) 141.

³⁶ Noth (1972) 101, n. 299.

³⁷ Noth (1972) 174.

³⁸ Noth (1972) 49.

³⁹ Anderson (1972) xxvii-xxviii.

⁴⁰ Anderson (1972) xxvii-xxviii.

one might object that this type of approach is too often vulnerable to the formulation of diachronic analyses of texts which are *petitiones principii* in which Noth simply begs the question. Thus Noth will base his reconstruction of certain phases of Israel's early history on a detailed investigation of "layers of traditions" in various *specific* parts of the Hebrew Bible, e.g., Joshua 1-11 or the patriarchal traditions. But then he will use these historical reconstructions as a basis for his judgments concerning various "layers of tradition" in the Hebrew Bible. In other words, hypotheses concerning various layers of tradition in the Hebrew Bible lead him toward other hypotheses concerning Israel's early history. These latter hypotheses then lead him toward further hypotheses concerning various layers of tradition in the Hebrew Bible. These further hypotheses then lead him toward more hypotheses concerning Israel's early history...and so on *ad infinitum*. Concerning *Pentateuchal Traditions*, there is some question about which comes first in Noth's deductive argumentation: does he reconstruct his history of the tribal confederacy period and then dissect his pentateuchal traditions diachronically, or vice-versa? In either case he must *first* dissect (at least part of) his pentateuchal traditions diachronically. But then his judgments about the relative age of materials are not really based on methodologically prior historical reconstructions. So the criticism might go. However, there is some validity to the point that all historical reconstruction operates in a kind of reciprocal "groping" such as we have just described. There is actually a great deal of this in most problem-solving situations, as the work of Michael Polanyi has so admirably shown.

What is important here is Noth's degree of self-awareness. He consistently employs his tradition-historical method in a manner that is ironically similar to procedures he has criticized when assessing certain historical reconstructions. For example, Noth has criticized the American School for correlating certain biblical texts with archeological investigations to obtain a historical reconstruction of the conquest. He tells us that "one must be very cautious in explaining a situation ascertained by means of archeology as applying to a definite historical event without relevant written evidence."⁴¹ What Noth is specifically objecting to, for example, is the interpretation of destruction

layers of Hazor, Lachish, Debir, and Eglon *as caused by the "Israelites"* even though there is no *archeologically-derived* textual evidence.⁴² Now, taken by itself, this criticism carries some weight since, as Kathleen Kenyon has also recognized⁴³, the possibility that such destruction layers might be related to the punitive raids of Merneptah or to the advance of the Sea Peoples in the area at this time can not be ruled out as competing interpretations of the archeological evidence. However what is relevant here is that Noth does something remarkably similar to what the American School does when he bases his history of early Israel on the detailed investigation of "layers of traditions" in various parts of the Hebrew Bible. The degree of "historical hypothesis" that is necessary to construct a framework into which and by which to interpret the biblical traditions is as hypothetical in Noth's *textual* reconstruction as it is in many examples of *archeological* reconstruction. And in a certain sense those he has criticized can be said to have the better of the argument here since the two sources they correlate are dissimilar and objectively unconnected, i.e., textual biblical evidence and non-textual archeological remains. The degree, therefore, that one hypothesis can methodologically *control* the other hypothesis is often far greater than in Noth's procedure, in which he relies principally on the reciprocal interaction of textual reconstruction and the historical reconstruction based primarily on it.

Noth's desire to provide us with an adequate thematic analysis of the Pentateuch has resulted primarily in a diachronic orientation of his major thematic categories. Insofar as this is clearly what Noth intended to do, his categories are clear, concise, and stimulating. Insofar, however, as an exploitation of the major themes of the present pentateuchal narrative is concerned, it must be said that a truly synchronic thematics of the Pentateuch has yet to be accomplished. Moreover, it is doubtful whether such a thematics will be accomplished as long as it is accepted among biblical scholars that Noth's *diachronic* thematics, or attempts similar to it, are after all "the fundamental presupposition for correct solutions" on the synchronic level as well. For, in reality, diachronic and synchronic analysis are complementary and co-equal. Neither provides the exclusive basis for the other. This is perhaps the

⁴¹ Noth (1966) 144.

⁴² For example, Wright (1957) 69-84.

⁴³ Kenyon (1960) 219-20.

most important area for reconciliation today between the established biblical methodologies and new currents of interest such as biblical structuralism.

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