



**biblio.ugent.be**

The UGent Institutional Repository is the electronic archiving and dissemination platform for all UGent research publications. Ghent University has implemented a mandate stipulating that all academic publications of UGent researchers should be deposited and archived in this repository. Except for items where current copyright restrictions apply, these papers are available in Open Access.

This item is the archived peer-reviewed author-version of:

‘The Spirit of Jewish Poetry: Why Biblical Studies Has Forgotten Duhm’s Psalter Commentary’

Paul Michael Kurtz

In: *Fromme und Frevler: Studien zu Psalmen und Weisheit. Festschrift für Hermann Spieckermann*. Edited by Corinna Körting and Reinhard Kratz. 2020.

[https://www.mohrsiebeck.com/buch/fromme-und-frevler-9783161575365?no\\_cache=1](https://www.mohrsiebeck.com/buch/fromme-und-frevler-9783161575365?no_cache=1)

**To refer to or to cite this work, please use the citation to the published version:**

Kurtz, Paul Michael. 2020. ‘The Spirit of Jewish Poetry: Why Biblical Studies Has Forgotten Duhm’s Psalter Commentary’. In *Fromme und Frevler: Studien zu Psalmen und Weisheit. Festschrift für Hermann Spieckermann zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. Corinna Körting and Reinhard Gregor Kratz, 283–301. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck. ISBN 978-3-16-157536-5

## THE SPIRIT OF JEWISH POETRY:

## WHY BIBLICAL STUDIES HAS FORGOTTEN DUHM'S PSALTER COMMENTARY

*Paul Michael Kurtz*

### **Introduction**<sup>1</sup>

It was destined for success, at least by some accounts. First published in 1899, the Psalter commentary wrought by Bernhard Duhm was called by one observer “the finest work by far – work that promises to be epoch-making, and not likely to be superseded for many a day.” Another predicted, with confidence, it would become a standard, even if some time might have to pass before its substance could be fully understood. According to a third, “No interpreter of the Psalms can ignore it,” for the work was “a true Duhm”: incisive, insightful, and instinctive.<sup>2</sup>

These prophecies, however, did not come to pass. As Rudolf Smend observed already 30 years ago, Duhm's commentary on the Psalms is now all but forgotten.<sup>3</sup> In 1931, a disapproving W. Emery Barnes could still declare at least some of his theories had been widely, if not everywhere, accepted, but by 1955 the Interpreter's Bible assigned a section of its introduction to the ideas of Duhm's student Hermann Gunkel and Gunkel's student Sigmund Mowinckel without mentioning the Basel professor of Old Testament himself. So, too, the Anchor Bible, of 1965, which focused on new discoveries from Ugarit and ancient poetry from Syria-Palestine, cited Mowinckel and Gunkel in its select bibliography and yet excluded Duhm.<sup>4</sup> Apart from the interpretative weeds of troublesome texts in narrower studies or forays through *Forschungsgeschichte* obligatory for doctoral theses, this work on the Psalter has largely disappeared from disciplinary memory. Duhm finds no place for himself in *The Oxford Handbook of the Psalms* and only passing mention in *The Book of Psalms: Composition and Reception*.<sup>5</sup>

---

1. This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement No. 749628, held at the University of Cambridge in the Faculty of Divinity, between 2017 and 2019, where Nathan MacDonald served as my generous host. Additional support came from the Research Foundation–Flanders (FWO). Sonja Ammann and Catherine Bronson were kind enough to help me secure essential sources, while Rebecca Van Hove shared her time and insight as a gracious interlocutor and reader. An earlier version was presented at the Centre for the Study of the Bible in the Humanities of Oriel College, Oxford, as part of the 2019 conference Protestant Bible Scholarship: Antisemitism, Philosemitism and Anti-Judaism. Try though I might, it has proved impossible for me to express here in words my true appreciation for and deep gratitude to Hermann Spieckermann.

2. ARCHIBALD DUFF, *History of Old Testament Criticism*, London 1910, 144; HUBERT GRIMME, review of B. Duhm, *Die Psalmen übersetzt und Die Psalmen erklärt*, in: *Orientalische Literatur-Zeitung* 10 (1900), 376–80; PAUL RIESSLER, review of B. Duhm, *Die Psalmen erklärt*, 2nd ed., in: *Theologische Quartalschrift* 103, no. 3/4 (1922), 275.

3. RUDOLF SMEND, Bernhard Duhm, in: IDEM, *From Astruc to Zimmerli. Old Testament Scholarship in three Centuries*, trans. Margaret Kohl, Tübingen 2007 [1989], 103–17, at 114.

4. W. EMERY BARNES, *The Psalms: With Introduction and Notes*, vol. 1: *Introduction: Psalms i–xli* (Westminster Commentaries), London 1931, xxx; W. STEWART McCULLOUGH, “Introduction”, in: George Arthur Buttrick (ed.), *The Book of Psalms; The Book of Proverbs* (The Interpreter's Bible 4), Nashville 1955, 3–17; MITCHELL DAHOOD, *Psalms I, 1–50* (The Anchor Bible), New York 1965, xv–xlvi, cf. 109. Both the latter works, however, referred to Duhm in a few scattered comments.

5. WILLIAM P. BROWN (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Psalms*, Oxford 2014; PETER W. FLINT AND PATRICK D. MILLER (ed.), *The Book of Psalms: Composition & Reception* (Supplements to Vetus Testamentum 99 / Formation and Interpretation of Old Testament Literature 4), Leiden 2005. See, exceptionally, KLAUS SEYBOLD, Bernhard Duhms Psalmenkommentar. Eine Glosse, repr., partially translated, in: IDEM, *Studien zu Sprache und Stil der Psalmen* (Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 415), Berlin 2010, 23–28; and, modified, in: Magne Sæbø (ed.), *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation*, vol. 3/1: *The Nineteenth Century*, Göttingen 2013, 599–602; KARL-HEINZ

How could such a commentary – poised as it was to make an epoch – all but fall into oblivion? The neglect proves all the more surprising in view of Duhm's distinction otherwise. Even a critical reviewer of the volume hailed its author “perhaps the best Old Testament exegete of the day.”<sup>6</sup> Charles A. Briggs noted that Duhm seldom disappointed, which made the book an even greater disappointment.<sup>7</sup> Such criticism, on the one hand, and eventual disregard (or even disavowal), on the other, sharply contrasts Duhm's well-remembered work, on Jeremiah and Isaiah in particular.<sup>8</sup> Noting the cool reception of this commentary by comparison, Walter Baumgartner once sought to explain the discrepancy and suggested his predecessor in Basel had not only sought to interpret every psalm through the lens of the individual and assign each to an exact historical context (in the Maccabean or Hasmonean period, no less) but also considered them anemic both religiously and poetically, which then led him to severe misjudgments.<sup>9</sup> In this telling, incorrect conclusions, more than anything else, explain the blunted impact of the book. Such an argument, however, does not sufficiently explain the limited reception of Duhm's commentary on the Psalms. After all, many of its features most criticized – whether methods, results, or polemics – also characterized his as yet still celebrated analyses of other biblical books: from the assignment of dates through the reconstruction of meter to the tenor of argumentation. More fundamentally, as elsewhere in the history of science – be it natural or human – “truth” should be bracketed as an explanation for developments in biblical scholarship.<sup>10</sup>

Rather than recount a history of errors, this essay addresses the generation and perpetuation of interpretative modalities in academic communities. It tells a story of curbed reception on account of theological interference. In the end, Duhm interpreted the Psalms as a product of Jewish communities under the Seleucids, Hasmoneans, and Romans, such that one reviewer was not far off when he styled a more appropriate title for the Psalter – in line with the Basel professor – as *The Hymns of the Sadducees and Pharisees: A Composite Book*.<sup>11</sup> This inquiry argues the historicist revisionism of Duhm's commentary on the Psalms ultimately entailed moral, historical, and aesthetic conclusions unacceptable to most of his contemporaries in Christian biblical scholarship, which restricted the reach of the work. First, the investigation surveys the oeuvre of Duhm, placing his work on the Psalms against the larger landscape of his work on biblical texts: the history of books, the history of prophecy, and the history of religion. Next, the analysis assesses the criticism of his commentary. The critiques of reconstructive efforts, late chronology, interpretative peculiarity, and disciplinary trends prove insufficient as an explanation for the demise of Duhm's commentary, for the same qualities characterize the rest of his oeuvre, from the history of Israel to the composition history of

---

BASSY, *Von Herder zu Duhm. Psalmenforschung im 19. Jahrhundert – Studien Zur Forschungsgeschichte der Weisheitspsalmen*, Frankfurt 2015.

6. BEER, review of Duhm, *Die Psalmen erklärt* and *übersetzt*, 582.

7. C.A. BRIGGS, review of B. Duhm, *Die Psalmen erklärt*, in: *The New World: A Quarterly Review of Religion, Ethics and Theology* 9 (1900), 176–79, at 176.

8. Cf. MARVIN A. SWEENEY, On the Road to Duhm: Isaiah in Nineteenth-Century Critical Scholarship, in: Claire Mathews McGinnis/Patricia K. Tull (ed.), *“As Those Who Are Taught”: The Interpretation of Isaiah from the LXX to the SBL* (SBL Symposium Series 27), Atlanta 2006, 243–61; CHARLES E. SHEPHERD, *Theological Interpretation and Isaiah 53: A Critical Comparison of Bernhard Duhm, Brevard Childs, and Alec Motyer* (Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 598), London 2014; LOUIS STULMAN, Reflections on the Prose Sermons in the Book of Jeremiah: Duhm's and Mowinckel's Contributions to Contemporary Trauma Readings, in: Elizabeth Boase/Christopher G. Frechette (ed.), *Bible through the Lens of Trauma* (Semeia Studies 86), Atlanta 2016, 125–39; JOE HENDERSON, Duhm and Skinner's Invention of Jeremiah, in: Else K. Holt/Carolyn J. Sharp (ed.), *Jeremiah Invented: Constructions and Deconstructions of Jeremiah* (Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 595), London 2015, 1–15. HENDERSON had submitted a doctoral dissertation, to Fuller Theological Seminary, entitled *Jeremiah under the Shadow of Duhm: An Argument from the History of Criticism Against the Use of Poetic Form as a Criterion of Authenticity*, although the dissertation approval sheet listed the title as *The Dramatic Nature of Jeremiah 2–20: A Challenge to the Historical-Critical Model of Bernhard Duhm* (Pasadena 2010).

9. WALTER BAUMGARTNER, Bernhard Duhm, in: Bernhard Duhm, *Das Buch Jesaja übersetzt und erklärt*, Göttingen <sup>5</sup>1968, v–xiii, at viii. The foreword first appeared in the fifth edition.

10. Cf. ARTHUR FINE, Science Made Up: Constructivist Sociology of Scientific Knowledge, in: Peter Galison/David J. Strump (ed.), *The Disunity of Science: Boundaries, Contexts, and Power* (Writing Science), Stanford 1996, 231–54.

11. BARNES, *The Psalms*, vol. 1: *Introduction*, xxix.

the Hebrew Bible. Third, the examination evaluates the moral, historical, and aesthetic problems posed by Duhm's setting of the Psalms in explicitly Jewish history, given the deep ambivalence towards Judaism in Christian theology, including in its historicist ventures. Finally, from this preceding inquiry, the essay tenders two suggestions of method, aimed at cultivating a more robust historiography of Hebrew Bible scholarship and thus a deeper understanding of the discipline itself. To comprehend the history of scholarship, the conclusion stresses, on the level of sources, the insight afforded by contemporaneous review articles and, on the level of research questions, the analytical purchase gained by the study of roads not taken as well as those abandoned. Therefore, this contribution not only provides a new explanation for the fate of Duhm's work on the Psalter but also offers historiographical guidance for further work in the field of Hebrew Bible.

### ***Histories literary, prophetic, and religious***

Though unlikely worth a full biography, Bernhard Duhm (1847–1928) represents a significant yet undervalued thinker in the history of biblical scholarship.<sup>12</sup> Born in Bium, East Frisia, he first studied theology and then lectured on the same at the University of Göttingen, before accepting the chair in Old Testament and General History of Religion at the University of Basel, where he stayed until his death – brought swiftly by a horseless carriage in an accident that caused shock and outrage in the city.<sup>13</sup> Throughout the course of his career, he cultivated three main fields of interest: textual history, the history of Israel, and the history of religion. These interests came together in his work on biblical texts, combined with the theological commitments expected of a liberal Protestant in the late 19th century. At the expense of an integrated inquiry into his critical work, interpreters have tended to analyze Duhm's corpus in much the same way he himself had scrutinized ancient texts: through atomization, in their divided assessments of his interpretative endeavors in separate books – albeit with less historical interest than he in the intellectual, political, and social production of texts. Now, synoptic analysis of an oeuvre may pose certain risks, like imposing unity or linearity on much messier developments, but such a holistic appraisal can reveal larger continuity and discontinuity across problems and solutions, operations and interlocutors. In this way, mapping the contours of his research as a whole – his histories literary, prophetic, and religious – creates a more textured matrix to understand Duhm's particular efforts in the Psalms.

Concerning the textual interests, they surfaced in his critical work on biblical books. Duhm may once have commented, “commentaries make one stupid,” but he himself composed a number of them, and instead of dulling his creativity or acuity, they consistently became starting points for subsequent discussion.<sup>14</sup> Duhm delivered interpretations and translations of Isaiah, Job, Psalms, Jeremiah, Habakuk, and The Twelve.<sup>15</sup> For several, he published the two separately, on account of the

---

12. See ALFRED BERTHOLET, Duhm, Bernhard, in: *Deutsches biographisches Jahrbuch*, vol. 10: *Das Jahr 1928*, Stuttgart 1931, 45–52; BAUMGARTNER, Bernhard Duhm; SMEND, Bernhard Duhm; IDEM, Wissende Prophetendeutung. Zum 150. Geburtstag Bernhard Duhms, in: *Theologische Zeitschrift* 54, no. 4 (1998), 289–99; HENNING GRAF REVENTLOW, *History of Biblical Interpretation*, vol. 4: *From the Enlightenment to the Twentieth Century*, trans. Leo G. Perdue (SBL Resources for Biblical Study 63), Atlanta 2010, 326–34. A list of appreciations and obituaries appears in BERTHOLET, Duhm, Bernhard, 52.

13. N.N., Professor Duhm – von einem Auto getötet, in: *Neue Wege. Beiträge zu Religion und Sozialismus* 22, no. 9 (1928), 448–50. The obituary likened modern technology to idol worship in the ancient world.

14. SMEND, Bernhard Duhm, 111. Apparently, Duhm advised his students against commentaries, other than those by his own teacher Heinrich Ewald (ibid; cf. also Paul Wernle, *Erinnerungen an Bernhard Duhm*, in: *Kirchenblatt für die reformierte Schweiz* 43, no. 40 [1928], 159–60). Incidentally, Wellhausen reportedly demurred at description of Duhm as erudite, suggesting he had only notebooks from lectures with Ewald and his own five fingers, although the best came from his fingers (BERTHOLET, Duhm, Bernhard, 46).

15. BERNHARD DUHM, *Das Buch Jesaja erklärt* (Handkommentar zum Alten Testament 3/1), Göttingen <sup>1</sup>1892, <sup>4</sup>1922; IDEM, *Das Buch Hiob erklärt* (Kurzer Hand-Kommentar zum Alten Testament 16), Freiburg i.B. 1897; IDEM, *Das Buch Hiob. In den Versmaßen der Urschrift übersetzt* (Die poetischen und prophetischen Bücher des Alten Testaments 1), Freiburg i.B. 1897; IDEM, *Die Psalmen erklärt* (Kurzer Hand-Kommentar zum Alten Testament 14), Freiburg i.B. <sup>1</sup>1899, Tübingen <sup>2</sup>1922; IDEM, *Die Psalmen. In den Versmaßen der Urschrift übersetzt* (Die poetischen und prophetischen Bücher des Alten Testaments 2), Freiburg i.B. 1899; IDEM, *Das Buch Jeremia erklärt* (Kurzer Hand-Kommentar zum Alten Testament 11), Tübingen 1901; IDEM, *Das Buch Jeremia. In den Versmaßen der Urschrift übersetzt* (Die poetischen und prophetischen Bücher des Alten Testaments 3), Leipzig <sup>1</sup>1903; IDEM, *Das Buch Habakuk. Text, Übersetzung und Erklärung*, Tübingen 1906; IDEM, *Die*

series' design. Deconstructing texts and reconstructing their histories, Duhm split books apart into their units – and later supplements – as he consolidated trends in the latest research and, not infrequently, provided their now classic formulations: Proto-, Deutero-, and Trito-Isaiah; the Words of Jeremiah, the Book of Baruch, and additions; the narrative frame, the poetry of Job, and the Elihu speeches. He also devoted much attention to the manifestation and circulation of biblical texts in their earlier forms, detecting a mass religious book behind Psalms (*religiöses Volksbuch*), a people's Bible behind Jeremiah (*Volksbibel, ein religiöses Lehr- und Erbauungsbuch*), a moral book behind the prose of Job (*Volksbuch, eine moralische Geschichte*), a law book behind the Pentateuch (*das priesterliche Gesetz- oder Religionsbuch*), and a religious book behind Genesis–Kings (*Religionsbuch*). His literary criticism was thus an historical one. One colleague commented, “Duhm strolls through the Old Testament almost like a magician who knows how to raise hidden, unknown treasures and to bring ossified portraits back to new life.”<sup>16</sup>

As for his second interest, Duhm pinned the history of Israel to the history of prophecy. He also pegged that history of prophecy to the composition history of the Old Testament literature. For nearly half a century, from his licentiate dissertation to his synthetic history, the critic wrote on his beloved prophets – and on the less beloved history of their bequest in ancient Israel.<sup>17</sup> Early on, he signaled the electrifying historical implications of the disruptive thesis *lex post prophetas*, which forced one Julius Wellhausen to publish his own work sooner than intended, in hopes of beating Duhm to the punch.<sup>18</sup> In this way, prophecy not only anchored the literary subdivisions he studied but also structured the historical narrative he retold. This occupation of his, more than textual criticism, fine translations, or poetic explications, has secured Duhm a place in disciplinary memory.<sup>19</sup> In fact, such an affinity extended beyond his academic engagements: for Baumgartner, “Even outwardly, he had something of an Oriental sage and prophet about him.”<sup>20</sup>

Thirdly, Duhm undertook the study of religion: its origins, experience, manifestation, and development. Not only did he explore the anthropology of religion in overlooked reflections like *The Mystery of Religion* and *The Consecrated in the Old Testament Religion*, but the theologian also delivered a meditation on pressing challenges to the enterprise of theology with *Cosmology and Religion*.<sup>21</sup> Here, he

---

zwölf Propheten. In den Versmassen der Urschrift, Tübingen 1910; cf. IDEM, Anmerkungen zu den zwölf Propheten, in: *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 31, nos. 1–3 (1911), 1–43, 81–110, 161–204, Gießen <sup>2</sup>1911. The first three translations volumes, *In den Versmaßen der Urschrift übersetzt*, were reprinted in 1907.

16. JOHANNES WENDLAND, Zum 80. Geburtstag von Professor Bernhard Duhm, in: *Schweizerisches Protestantenblatt* 50, no. 40 (8 October 1927), 336–38, at 336; cf. BAUMGARTNER, Duhm, vii.

17. BERNHARD DUHM, *Die Theologie der Propheten als Grundlage für die innere Entwicklungsgeschichte der israelitischen Religion*, Bonn 1875; IDEM, *Die Entstehung des Alten Testaments. Rede* (Sammlung gemeinverständlicher Vorträge und Schriften aus dem Gebiet der Theologie und Religionsgeschichte 6), Freiburg i.B. <sup>1</sup>1897, <sup>2</sup>1909; IDEM, *Israels Propheten* (Lebensfragen 10), Tübingen <sup>1</sup>1916, <sup>2</sup>1922; cf. IDEM, *Pauli apostoli de judaeorum religione judicia exposita et dijudicata*, Göttingen 1873.

18. PAUL MICHAEL KURTZ, *Kaiser, Christ, and Canaan: The Religion of Israel in Protestant Germany, 1871–1918* (Forschungen zum Alten Testament I/122), Tübingen 2018, 80–81.

19. See THILO ALEXANDER RUDNIG, Bernhard Duhm (1847–1928) – “Die Propheten sind das Fundament von Israels Religion”, in: Bernd Schröder/Heiko Wojtkowiak (ed.), *Stiftsgeschichte(n). 250 Jahre Theologisches Stift der Universität Göttingen (1765–2015)*, Göttingen 2015, 117–26; MARVIN A. SWEENEY, The Prophets and the Prophetic Books, Prophetic Circles and Traditions – New Trends, Including Religio-psychological Aspects, in: Magne Sæbø (ed.), *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation*, vol. 3/2: *The Twentieth Century*, Göttingen 2015, 500–30; SMEND, Wissende Prophetendeutung; HENNING GRAF REVENTLOW, Die Prophetie im Urteil Bernhard Duhms, in: *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 85 (1988), 259–74; RONALD E. CLEMENTS, *One Hundred Years of Old Testament Interpretation*, Philadelphia 1976, 51–57, cf. 76–79; HANS-JOACHIM KRAUS, *Geschichte der historisch-kritischen Erforschung des Alten Testaments*, Neukirchen-Vluyn <sup>2</sup>1969, 275–83, cf. WALTER BAUMGARTNER, Eine alttestamentliche Forschungsgeschichte, in: *Theologische Rundschau* n.s. 25 (1959), 93–110, at 100–01.

20. WALTER BAUMGARTNER, Bernhard Duhm, 1847–1928, in: Andreas Staehelin (ed.), *Professoren der Universität Basel aus fünf Jahrhunderten. Bildnisse und Würdigungen. Zur Fünfhundertjahrfeier der Universität Basel im Auftrag der Universität und unter Mitarbeit zahlreicher Gelehrter*, Basel 1960, 232–33; cf. Carl Albrecht Bernoulli, Dem Senior der Basler Universität Professor Bernhard Duhm zu seinem 80. Geburtstage, in: (*Schweizerische*) *National-Zeitung*, Supplement 470 (Sunday, 9 October 1927).

21. BERNHARD DUHM, *Kosmologie und Religion*, Basel 1892; IDEM, *Das Geheimnis in der Religion. Vortrag* (Sammlung gemeinverständlicher Vorträge und Schriften aus dem Gebiet der Theologie und Religionsgeschichte 1), Freiburg i.B. <sup>1</sup>1896, <sup>2</sup>1927; IDEM, *Die Gottgeweihten in der alttestamentlichen Religion. Vortrag*, Tübingen 1905; cf. IDEM, *Das kommende Reich*

showed his affinity with science, further evident in his penchant for mathematics and his capacity to co-invent such instruments as the Lambrecht Polymeter.<sup>22</sup> Now, Duhm deemed Christianity to be the apogee of religion, but against those who claimed the Christian faith alone would elucidate the nature of things religious, he believed analysis should center on the primitive, the earliest stages of religious life prior to any outside influence or syncretism, which warranted his call for both historical and comparative analysis.<sup>23</sup> The biblical scholar contended, “Familiarity with the Old Testament religion is at least as crucial for deep insight into the development of humanity as the knowledge of what the Greeks, Romans, and Indians have done for it”; indeed, he even argued ancient Israel provided the epitomic case study for pure religion.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, writing on “the holy madness of the seer and the poet,” Duhm passionately countered the rationalization of prophecy: the tendency for Protestants to construct the ancient prophets in their image.<sup>25</sup> Such attunement to psychology marked much of his biblical scholarship. One reviewer called his commentary on Job “really a masterpiece of psychological analysis...a new witness to the deep understanding of the author for the innermost essence of religion and the religious soul, with its needs and its battles and wrestling in this world of contradiction,” while his work on Jeremiah attracted similar praise.<sup>26</sup> If students credited Duhm with drawing their attention to these dimensions of religion – the experiential and ecstatic, the primal and irrational – a colleague called him the progenitor of the Göttinger *Religions-geschichtliche Schule*.<sup>27</sup> No few commentators traced this interest back to his heritage in East Frisia, with locals rumoring he himself had encountered the occult and even spoke with his deceased wife at the hearth.<sup>28</sup>

Despite his breakdown of ancient texts, breakthrough with novel ideas, and breakup of old consensus, Duhm did not rise to the heights of stardom that elevated some others in his day – the Abraham Kuenens, Ernest Renans, or William Robertson Smiths of Old Testament scholarship. True, some of his work entered into English translation, and his lectures – alongside those of his university more broadly – did capture international attention for their openness to women.<sup>29</sup> Nevertheless, one former student could bemoan, in a commemorative piece for Duhm’s 80th birthday, the limited traction his teacher had gained in the field.<sup>30</sup> So, too, a friend observed early on that Duhm lacked career ambitions.<sup>31</sup> In the end, Bernhard Duhm may not (or no longer) be a name that echoes throughout the larger village of Hebrew Bible scholarship, but his still does continue to resound at least within the exegetical industry of certain cottages – save for research on the Psalms.

### ***Contemporaries’ comments on the commentary***

---

*Gottes. Vortrag*, Tübingen 1910; see further BAUMGARTNER, Bernhard Duhm, ix.

22. BAUMGARTNER, Bernhard Duhm, xi n. 4; SMEND, Bernhard Duhm, 106.

23. DUHM, *Kosmologie und Religion*, esp. 13–18.

24. DUHM, *Israels Propheten*, v; cf. IDEM, *Kosmologie und Religion*, 23–24.

25. DUHM, *Das Geheimnis in der Religion*, 30–31. He credited Ewald with attentiveness (idem, *Die Theologie der Propheten*, 34).

26. B.B., review of B. Duhm, *Das Buch Hiob*, inter alia, in: *Literarisches Centrblatt für Deutschland* no. 20 (1899), 681–85, at 683; C.H. CORNILL, Die prophetische Literatur (review of B. Duhm, *Das Buch Jesaja*, 2nd ed, *Das Buch Jeremia erklärt*, and *Das Buch Jeremia übersetzt*, inter alia), in: *Theologische Rundschau* 6, no. 7 (1903), 277–94, at 287.

27. Cf. KURTZ, *Kaiser, Christ, and Canaan*, 177, 183, 300.

28. Cf. SMEND, *Wissende Prophetendeutung*, 294.

29. BERNHARD DUHM, The Book of Job, in: *The New World: A Quarterly Review of Religion, Ethics and Theology* 3 (1894), 328–44; IDEM, *The Ever-Coming Kingdom of God: A Discussion on Religious Progress*, trans. Archibald Duff, London 1911; IDEM, *The Twelve Prophets: A Version in the Various Poetical Measures of the Original Writings*, trans. Archibald Duff, London 1912. On his courses, see ISABEL MADDISON, *Handbook of Courses Open to Women in British, Continental and Canadian Universities, Compiled for the Graduate Club of Bryn Mawr College*, New York 1896, 146; cf. also P.W. SNYDER, Theological Instruction in Switzerland, in: *The Biblical World* 1, no. 2 (1893), 109–18.

30. ARNOLD BÜCHLI, Kultur- und Zeitfragen: Zu Bernhard Duhms Achtzigstem, in: *Schweizerische Monatshefte für Politik und Kultur* 7, no. 8 (1927–28), 466–67.

31. Julius Wellhausen to William Robertson Smith, 10 November 1882, in: JULIUS WELLHAUSEN, *Briefe*, ed. Rudolf Smend, Peter Porzig, and Reinhard Müller, Tübingen, 2013, 111–12.

The most distinctive interpretative features of Duhm's commentary on the Psalter may appear to be the cause of its ultimate abandonment. *Prima facie*, the criticism leveled at this volume accounts for such discrepancy between one of the discipline's greatest commentators and his worst performance in commentary: his textual reconstructions as a philologist, his contextualizations as an historian, his idiosyncrasy as an interpreter, and his obsolescence as a member of the old guard. However, none of these critiques provides an adequate account: the exegetical procedures, the intellectual framework, the historical conclusions, and the textual objects of Duhm remained more or less consistent across his oeuvre, including works foundational to subsequent research in biblical studies. Rather, the implications of his work on the Psalms proved unpalatable for much of liberal Protestant theology and the values it held dear – especially for such an important resource as the poetry of an ancient chosen people.<sup>32</sup>

With respect to *Werkgeschichte*, Duhm first published his Psalter commentary as part of the *Kurzer Hand-Commentar zum Alten Testament*.<sup>33</sup> Since the series did not allow running translations, he launched his own to accommodate them – “in the meter of the original” – entitled *Die poetischen und prophetischen Bücher des Alten Testaments*. The initial explication and rendition, both published by Mohr in 1899, were united in the second edition, of 1922, produced by the same publisher. Little changed between the two, however: so little that one reviewer noted it hardly counted as the “improved edition” advertized, especially since it ignored the intervening decades of research.<sup>34</sup>

As for the negative assessment sustained by Duhm's work on the Psalms, the first line of disapproval aimed at his textual criticism. Much of this endeavor hinged on metrical analysis. One opponent, the Hulsean Professor of Divinity in Cambridge, asserted, “If justification is needed for a new book on the Psalms, it is surely to be found in the devastating textual criticism of recent years. The reader who considers the re-writing of Psalms in the *International Critical Commentary* and in the commentary of the late Dr Duhm of Basel may well cry, ‘O Metre, what violence is committed in thy name!’”<sup>35</sup> Yet meter proved remarkably fashionable as an approach to Hebrew poesy, even if many proponents continued to counsel care with the method or caution with the results. Furthermore, the same line of analysis drove Duhm's interpretation of other books as well. In fact, Carl Heinrich Cornill ascribed the success of the author's Isaiah commentary precisely to its treatment of meter.<sup>36</sup> His work on Jeremiah, so Cornill, was the best thing written on “Hebrew poesy” since Johann Gottfried Herder.<sup>37</sup> Hoping to recover the *ipsissima verba* of the ancient prophets themselves – an effort that presupposed a correlation of the poetic and the prophetic – Duhm identified in the book of Jeremiah about 60 short poems attributable to the figure himself. His former student and colleague noted there was more poet than prophet once Duhm had finished with him.<sup>38</sup> This kind of textual stratigraphy – excavating prophetic books to their poetic bedrock – operated in his other

---

32. For an inventory of (now oft-forgotten) work in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see CHARLES AUGUSTUS BRIGGS and EMILIE GRACE BRIGGS, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, 2 vols. (International Critical Commentary), Edinburgh 1907, cviii–cix; HANS SCHMIDT, *Die Psalmen* (Handbuch zum Alten Testament I/15), Tübingen 1934, x–xii.

33. Carl Siegfried noted the difficulty in distinguishing between the series of Mohr (*Kurzer Hand-Commentar zum Alten Testament*, edited by Karl Marti) and Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht (*Göttinger Handkommentar zum Alten Testament*, edited by Wilhelm Nowack) given the overlap in approach and even authors.: C. SIEGFRIED, review of B. Duhm, *Das Buch Hiob erklärt* and G. Wildeboer, *Die Sprüche erklärt*, in: *Deutsche Literaturzeitung* 19, no. 41 (1898), 1545–1549.

34. WILLY STAERK, review of B. Duhm, *Die Psalmen erklärt*, 2nd ed., in: *Theologische Literaturzeitung* 47, no. 24 (1922), 519–20.

35. BARNES, *The Psalms*, vol. 1: *Introduction*, vii, cf. xxvi–xxx.

36. CORNILL, *Die prophetische Literatur*, 284; cf. IDEM, *Die prophetische Litteratur* (review of K. Mari, *Das Buch Jesaja*, inter alia), in: *Theologische Rundschau* 4, no. 10 (1901), 405–17, at 409–10; cp. FRIEDRICH GIESEBRECHT, review of C.H. Cornill, *Die metrischen Stücke des Buches Jeremia rekonstruiert*, and B. Duhm, *Das Buch Jeremia erklärt*, in: *Theologische Literaturzeitung* 27, no. 10 (1902), 289–92.

37. CORNILL, *Die prophetische Literatur*, 285.

38. ALFRED BERTHOLET, review of B. Duhm, *Das Buch Jeremia übersetzt*, in: *Theologische Literaturzeitung* 29, no. 2 (1904), 36–38, at 36.

work as well. Contemporaries, at least those in the mainstream of “biblical science,” thus spent far more time debating specific conjectures, emendations, and reconstructions than the enterprise itself.

Another line of criticism targeted a “radical exegesis,” namely his late dating of the Psalms.<sup>39</sup> As one reviewer noted, “Duhm informs us that the question is not whether there are pre-exilic but rather pre-Maccabean psalms.”<sup>40</sup> On publication of the second edition, twenty years onward, a different writer rightly forecast that such a chronological framework would (continue to) find small acceptance in the field.<sup>41</sup> However, Duhm was not alone in this contextualization, with its westward orientation, towards hellenophones and latinophones, as opposed to the still more ancient powers of the East. Esteemed scholars such as Justus Olshausen, Ferdinand Hitzig, Eduard Reuss, and Wellhausen likewise argued for this later setting of psalms.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, as with metrical analysis, Duhm interpreted other biblical texts through this chronological scheme. Indeed, in Duhm’s analysis, book history ran long: for Isaiah ca. 750–100 BCE, for Jeremiah ca. 600–100 BCE, for The Twelve ca. 800–150 BCE, and for Job ca. 850–250 BCE. In contrast to these works, bound as they were to personages, the Psalter (ca. 200–80 BCE) carried no imperative for its core to be anchored in such a deep chronology, given the quick rejection of David and Solomon as plausible authors.

A third constellation of critique centered on his idiosyncrasy as an exegete. Whatever one thought of Duhm – and many thoughts were thunk – he proved a highly original thinker. Despite recurrent censure for “subjectivity,” one writer noted the exegete was interesting even when unconvincing.<sup>43</sup> Another registered, “Since his Isaiah commentary, which was a record-breaker, one expects the extraordinary in every new exegetical work by Duhm – in the good as in the bad sense.”<sup>44</sup> Further still, the faulted qualities included his stance towards other scholars. On the one hand, he eschewed engagement with others’ work, which even led to some insinuation of plagiarism. One fellow commentator explicitly refused to discuss Duhm’s commentary on the Psalms at any length since he had refused to consider that of others.<sup>45</sup> A second confrère in commentary, who leveled the grave accusation of unscientificity, declared that those merciless to traditional interpretations, like the Basel professor, would be shown no mercy either.<sup>46</sup> On the other hand, when he did involve interlocutors, Duhm could write with scathing polemic. A minor scandal erupted when he castigated Karl Budde for a difference of opinion on the book of Job, which both prompted Budde to contemplate ceasing any further cooperation in the commentary series and moved Budde’s teacher, Adolf

---

39. MARKO MARTTILA, *Collective Reinterpretation in the Psalms: A Study of the Redaction History of the Psalter* (Forschungen zum Alten Testament 2/13), Tübingen 2006, 5 n. 14. A former student and colleague later hailed Duhm’s study of Jeremiah, published after his work on Psalms, “the most radical” performed on the book yet, while another hailed the figure “the most revolutionary” brought to life by Duhm (BERTHOLET, review of B. Duhm, *Das Buch Jeremia übersetzt*, 36; CORNILL, *Die prophetische Literatur*, 285).

40. JULIUS BOEHMER, review of B. Duhm, *Die Psalmen erklärt*, in: *Theologisches Literaturblatt* 21, no. 30 (1900), 345–48, at 346. Most interpreters seemed to give a different answer to Duhm’s rhetorical question, “The value of the Psalms do not depend on their age, do they?” (DUHM, *Die Psalmen erklärt*, 2nd ed., xxi).

41. JOHANNES HERRMANN, review of B. Duhm, *Die Psalmen erklärt*, 2nd ed., in: *Theologisches Literaturblatt* 44, no. 8 (1923), 120.

42. JUSTUS OLSHAUSEN, *Die Psalmen erklärt* (Kurzgefasstes exegetisches Handbuch zum Alten Testament 14), Leipzig 1853; FERDINAND HITZIG, *Die Psalmen uebersetzt und ausgelegt*, 2 vols., Leipzig 1863–65; HITZIG, *Die Geschichte der Heiligen Schriften Alten Testaments entworfen*, Braunschweig <sup>1</sup>1881, <sup>2</sup>1890; JULIUS WELLHAUSEN, *Bemerkungen zu den Psalmen*, in: IDEM, *Skizzen und Vorarbeiten* 6, Berlin 1899, 163–87; cf. IDEM, *The Book of Psalms: Critical Edition of the Hebrew Text Printed in Colors with Notes*, trans. J.D. Prince (The Sacred books of the Old Testament 14), Baltimore 1895. In the foreword to his commentary, Olshausen emphasized his distinctive approach as a philologist, as opposed to most other interpreters, who were theologians. Elsewhere, Wellhausen claimed, “The Psalms would not have been written without Jeremiah” (IDEM, *Israelitische und jüdische Geschichte*, Berlin <sup>1</sup>1894, 106).

43. Cf. JOHN TAYLOR, *Recent Foreign Theology: Duhm’s “Die Psalmen”*, in: *The Expository Times* 10, no. 12 (1899), 557–59, 558. T.K. Cheyne argued the charge of subjectivity came from critics’ own subjectiveness: CHEYNE, review of F. Baethgen, *Die Psalmen*, and B. Duhm, *Das Buch Jesaia*, in: *The Academy* 1077 (Dec 24, 1892), 583–85.

44. GEORG BEER, review of B. Duhm, *Die Psalmen erklärt* and *übersetzt*, in: *Theologische Literaturzeitung* 25, no. 21 (1900), 577–83, at 577.

45. RUDOLF KITTEL, review of B. Duhm, *Die Psalmen erklärt*, in: *Literarisches Centralblatt für Deutschland* 51, no. 48 (1900), 1961–63, at 1962.

46. BRIGGS, review of Duhm, *Die Psalmen erklärt*, 177.



Kamphausen, to enter the fray and proclaim such behavior unworthy of a gentleman and Christian.<sup>47</sup> Bizarrely, some writers not only drew attention to these quirks but even ventured to suggest a cause: his heritage. One attributed the alleged “propensity to bullheadedness and eccentricity” (*Starrköpfigkeit und Verschrobenheit*) to his Frisian extraction.<sup>48</sup> Yet here, too, the features of his efforts in the Psalms surfaced in Duhm’s other works as well.

Finally, judgment fell upon his Psalter commentary for being antiquated. Already upon its publication, the second edition suffered criticism for failing to be “up to day” (*sic*) with interests and innovations from the last two decades of research: from style and genre to dating and the lyric of cult and of subjective feeling to liturgical compositions.<sup>49</sup> Sigmund Mowinckel later described a previous generation of scholars, embodied by interpreters like Duhm, who had searched through Hebrew poetry for references to contemporaneous historical events and sought the background, date, and even individual behind a given psalm.<sup>50</sup> Commenting on the 1931 commentary by Eduard König, Mowinckel deemed the latter volume backwards-looking – “strangely *passé*” – given its focus on the Maccabean dating of the Frisian scholar, on the one hand, and the proper referent of I in the psalms, on the other.<sup>51</sup> The future, at least the near one, ostensibly belonged to the study of form, cult, and liturgy, as represented by Hermann Gunkel, Emil Balla, and Mowinckel himself. Undoubtedly, an eclipse had fallen over strictly internalist concerns with the biblical texts alone – the sun of scholarship shining, instead, on the thrills of new comparative material, social and cultural contexts, and literary forms. This account does indeed provide a plausible, if only partial, explanation for the near oblivion that has swallowed Duhm’s work on the Psalter. The usual narrative, however, tends to imply claims of truth or teleology, absent any attempt to historicize the developments and circumstances of scholarship itself, offering small elucidation as to why former questions lost their urgency, why new ones seemed so pressing, why old answers no longer sufficed, and why different models and methods suggested great promise – that is, why scholarly fashion changed. In any case, if a stability in concepts and concerns, in models and methods marked the oeuvre of Duhm, then fashionability alone seems insufficient to explain the fate of his commentary on the Psalms: the shifty sands of scholarly trends have not, in the same way, dislodged the memory (or putative relevance) in the discipline of his inquiries into other biblical books.

### ***The psalms in Jewish history***

Beyond specific reconstructions, unconventional chronology, interpretative idiosyncrasy, or disciplinary fashion, the theological implications of his Psalter commentary obstructed its absorption into the dominant structures of biblical scholarship. The exegetical framework threatened to dispossess Christian theology of a resource held most dear. In the end, Duhm made the Psalms too Jewish for his confrères. This explanation of his commentary’s fate not only supplements those accounts that explain its decline through scholarly fashion – which nonetheless avoid a statement on the reasons

---

47. SMEND, Bernhard Duhm, 114; see also KARL BUDDÉ, *Das Buch der Richter erklärt* (Kurzer Hand-Commentar zum Alten Testament 7), Freiburg i.B. 1897, foreword.

48. GEORG BEER, review of B. Duhm, *Die Psalmen erklärt* and *übersetzt*, in: *Theologische Literaturzeitung* 25, no. 21 (1900), 577–83, at 577. Even more recent commentary has explained his scholarly disposition – an alleged obstinacy and an interest in the irrational dimensions of religion – through such ancestry: cf. SMEND, *Wissende Prophetendeutung*, 289, 294, 296.

49. WILLY STAERK, review of B. Duhm, *Die Psalmen erklärt*, 2nd ed., in: *Theologische Literaturzeitung* 47, no. 24 (1922), 519–20. In fact, a review in the same journal had already criticized the first edition on the same grounds for its textual criticism: cf. BEER, review of B. Duhm, *Die Psalmen erklärt* and *übersetzt*.

50. SIGMUND MOWINCKEL, *The Psalms in Israel’s Worship*, trans. D. R. Ap-Thomas, 2 vols., Oxford 1962 [1951], 1:12; see further SIGMUND MOWINCKEL, Psalm Criticism Between 1900 and 1935 (Ugarit and Psalm Exegesis), in: *Vetus Testamentum* 5/1 (1955), 13–33. Shortly after König’s volume, Hans Schmidt prognosticated Gunkel’s work “will be for a long time irreplaceable and unsurpassable” (HANS SCHMIDT, *Die Psalmen* [Handbuch zum Alten Testament I/15], Tübingen 1934, vi).

51. MOWINCKEL, *The Psalms in Israel’s Worship*, 2:220–21; cf. MOWINCKEL, *Psalmstudien*, vol. 2, *Das Thronbesteigungsfest Jahwās und der Ursprung der Eschatologie* (Skripter utgit av Videnskapsselskapet i Kristiania, 1921; II, Historisk-Filosofisk Klasse 2/6), Kristiania 1922, 1–347, at 10–13.

for such shifts in the appeal of different questions, sources, and practices – but also contrasts those that rely on assumptions, if not overt claims, of scientific progress. Rather than the poetic patrimony of an ancient chosen people in a heroic, primeval age, the psalms – in Duhm’s account – had come from intra-Jewish strife of a much later period, betraying disputes between Sadducees and Pharisees especially. As one perspicacious writer discerned, “...it is his view of the date and origin of the psalms that, if accepted, will have serious consequences for the religious worth of the psalms. His view reduces them in a great measure to party squibs, the authors of which, while no doubt occasionally blessing God, are mostly occupied in cursing each other.”<sup>52</sup> This demotion of noble Hebrew poetry to partisan Jewish lines therefore posed a problem for Christian theology on two distinguishable fronts: the moral and the historical.

Concerning the moral dimension, Duhm’s interpretation imperiled the value of Hebrew poetry as a source for Christian life and culture. On one level, the Protestant theologian drew a contrast between the more general religious qualities on display in the Psalter and those idealized by his Christian faith. He once referred, albeit elsewhere, to “the great distance of our own concept of religion and of the Old Testament religion. We can learn a lot from it, but it is not our religion anymore.”<sup>53</sup> Writing on the Psalms specifically, he alluded to “subchristian” ideas of suffering, sin, and fortune (though ones “at home in some Christian circles”) as well as “unchristian” curses (despite their interpretation as the word of God and as messianic for two millennia).<sup>54</sup> The interpreter carved the gap all the deeper when he stated, “It is comfortable to imagine that religion is there to bring us fortune, to assure us, and to restore us quickly after injury and the misfortunate are the unrepentant godless; but that is not Christianity.”<sup>55</sup> Duhm could strike a still more provocative tone of moral dissonance, calling a vaunted assault on enemies entirely foreign to “Christian sensibility,” regarding the grasp of Sheol inappropriate for the sickbed of a Christian, and asking whether Christian communities sang the call for divine vengeance against foes.<sup>56</sup> For a set of lines on conquest of the nations and dominion over the earth, he even declared, “This psalm, too, Christianity could appropriate only with drastic alterations.”<sup>57</sup> On another level, Duhm could draw a contradistinction between the Christian and specifically the Jewish. As he introduced the first edition of his translation, “The great impact of the book of Psalms has come and comes by no means simply from what can actually be read in it but much more from what one reads into it. One may not overlook that the psalms are a product of late Judaism and were put together by those scribes who, in their great majority, proved themselves soon thereafter to be obstinate opponents of Christianity.”<sup>58</sup> He juxtaposed a “self-conscious, correct legalism” with a “higher, pure ethic”: “the Psalter knows no love of enemies, and the humility so often praised has absolutely none of the character of Christian humility.”<sup>59</sup> So, too, the Protestant Doctor of Theology discussed the happy disposition of a Hasid – with “his naive joy in external prosperity and his confident faith in its inventory” – one that did not fully reconcile with the Christian understanding of life.<sup>60</sup> These cleavages in the bond of Holy Writ and Christian faith did not escape the notice of his contemporaries. While one recognized, more gener-

---

52. A.B. DAVIDSON, Duhm’s *Die Psalmen erklärt*, in: *The Critical Review of Theological & Philosophical Literature* 10 (1900), 446–49, at 449.

53. DUHM, *Die Gottgeweihten in der alttestamentlichen Religion*, 7.

54. DUHM, *Die Psalmen erklärt*, 2nd ed., 133 (Ps 32), 398 (Ps 109).

55. *Ibid.*, 133 (Ps 32).

56. *Ibid.*, 16 (Ps 3), 28 (Ps 6) [cf. 203 (Ps 49)], 218 (Ps 54).

57. *Ibid.*, 10 (Ps 2).

58. DUHM, *Die Psalmen übersetzt*, xix.

59. DUHM, *Die Psalmen erklärt*, 2nd ed., xxxi. Fuming further, Duhm contended, “In any case, this ‘psalm’ is the most contentless product that has ever blackened paper. [...] From a literary perspective too, it will be difficult to furnish a piece of writing that could compete with this opus in ineptitude and dullness. [...] He [*sc.* the author] seems to me more like a private scholar who knows nothing of the world other than his Torah scrolls. The only thing of any value are his remarks about himself...; they at least acquaint us with a type of scribe – by whom, of course, not all the others may be judged – and grant a certain insight into the psychology of the book religions, for such a narrow horizon, such an enthusiasm for the entirely insignificant, such an ignorance of anything existing outside one’s own dark cell, such an absence of a drive for higher truth appear not only in Jewish legalism” (*ibid.*, 427–28 [Ps 119]).

60. *Ibid.*, 62 (Ps 16). He then asked how this person might fare in a trial of Jobian proportions.

ally, an interest in religious history and aesthetics had eclipsed a concern for biblical theology, another noted Duhm had reopened an interpretative wound: his argument for an individual signification of I within the Psalter undermined the collective reading of the pronoun, which had otherwise alleviated ethical problems entailed in elevating the words of a lone author who simply wished ill upon his foes, as opposed to those of an oppressed ancient people.<sup>61</sup> In a soft necrological critique, Bertholet painted a portrait of Duhm simply striving after truth, “which allowed him to confront energetically all false Christianizing of the Psalter.”<sup>62</sup> Indeed, Duhm had Judaized the Psalms.

As regards historiography, Duhm placed this Hebrew poetry in a deeply ambivalent position for Protestant theology – formative Judaism being wedged between ancient Israel and early Christianity.<sup>63</sup> On the one side, historical work on the relationship between Judaism and Christianity was more than slightly vexed, highlighting, by turns, their similarity or difference. The more scholars sought to disentangle their pasts, the more undone their own theological convictions could become. Already with *The Theology of the Prophets*, Duhm argued the prophet Jeremiah had not only stressed the subjectivity and independence of the individual in a way otherwise represented in only a few late psalms but had also launched a new period in subjective piety – a personal communion with the deity – that cultivated an incipient idea of immortality evidenced in the Psalms and later developed by Christianity.<sup>64</sup> While one reviewer registered Duhm’s attempt to separate the Christian from the subchristian in the Psalter, another praised his historical efforts in religion, especially Judaism, insofar as setting the Psalms (and Isaiah) in the first centuries BCE documented “the intimate and exclusive contact between the two Testaments.”<sup>65</sup> On the other side, biblical criticism, of the liberal Protestant variety in particular, increasingly asserted a discontinuity between Israel and Judaism yet affirmed a continuity between Israel and Christianity, thereby relegating Jewish history to a largely dormant (if not devolved) period in spiritual historiography. Duhm himself had helped this process of severing and splicing the past, especially with his history of Israel as structured by the prophets. Perhaps most symptomatically, in writing on sacrifice in the Psalms, he juxtaposed the views of “late” Judaism (usually a derogatory modifier) with those of old prophecy and Christianity.<sup>66</sup> In consequence, a tension strained in such historiography, where the increasing disciplinary divide between Old and New Testament cast formative Judaism either as an afterword to the history of Israel or a preface to that of Christianity. Theological commitments and historicist principles clashed inasmuch as historical studies required a Judaism of continuity to fill gaps in chronology and supply links in ideas but a Judaism of discontinuity to contrast and elevate Christianity. The ambivalence towards this structural position became all the more apparent in a value-laden framework that defined the highest form of religion through the interiority of the individual: a progressive model of development portrayed Judaism as an intermediate yet deficient manifestation of religion on a trajectory that culminated in the inward fervor of a Protestant pietism. Duhm therefore set the psalms in a fraught period for Christian genealogy.

Adding insult to these injuries moral and historical, the critic thought rather little of that poesy itself. At least in terms of the psalms, Duhm would doubtless disagree with Herder, who, in *The Spirit of Hebrew Poetry*, had spoken through the figure of Euthyphron in the dialogue: “I am con-

---

61. JULIUS BOEHMER, review of B. Duhm, *Die Psalmen erklärt*, in: *Theologisches Literaturblatt* 21, no. 30 (1900), 345–48, at 348; JOHN TAYLOR, Recent Foreign Theology: Duhm’s “Die Psalmen”, in: *The Expository Times* 10, no. 12 (1899), 557–59, at 558. Discussion on the individual *vis-à-vis* collective reading of the proper referent for the first person singular pronoun had broken out among Rudolf Smend, Sr., Felix Coblentz, Duhm, Gunkel, Mowinckel, and Balla in particular.

62. BERTHOLET, Duhm, Bernhard, 48–49. Siegfried saw the same attempt to combat modern, Christian assumptions that had skewed interpretation of the prophets: C. SIEGFRIED, review of B. Duhm, *Das Buch Jesaja übersetzt und erklärt*, in: *Deutsche Literaturzeitung* 14, no. 7 (1893), 194–97, at 195.

63. On the inconsistency of criteria in constructing these genealogies, see PAUL MICHAEL KURTZ, The Silence on the Land: Ancient Israel versus Modern Palestine in Scientific Theology, in: Rebekka Habermas (ed.), *Negotiating the Secular and the Religious in the German Empire: Transnational Approaches*, New York 2019, 56–97, esp. 64–65.

64. DUHM, *Die Theologie der Propheten als Grundlage für die innere Entwicklungsgeschichte der israelitischen Religion*, 237, 247.

65. BEER, review of Duhm, *Die Psalmen erklärt und übersetzt*, 581–82; LUDWIG KÖHLER, Neue Wege der neutestamentlichen Forschung, in: *Schweizerische Theologische Zeitschrift* 22 (1905), 116–28, at 123.

66. DUHM, *Die Psalmen erklärt*, 2nd ed, 215 (Ps 52).

fidant, that not only boys but old men, would hold their Bible as dear, as their Homer or Ossian, if they knew what was in it.”<sup>67</sup> Duhm sought to scrape away a varnish laid thick by inspired German translation. In the process, he argued as follows:

Laymen who know only the best poems in Luther’s fresh, natural, poetically vivid language and mostly have a false conception of their originality usually consider the Psalter the classic model of sublime oriental poetry; however, the one who reads the collection in their original (*Urtext*), [who] perceives the dominance of the conventional and the extensive dependency of most poems upon older models, must be brought forcefully to earth.<sup>68</sup>

He delivered merciless judgments on the Psalms as poetry and even proffered a theory to account for their deficiency. In a sequence of logic standard at the time, he pinned cultural productions to the “spirit” of a people and believed the aesthetic poverty of the Psalter betrayed the intellectual poverty of the people who had produced it, which resulted from their national and political fate in history. Duhm believed this very lack in literary quality explained why the Psalms had not only become so popular but done so with such rapidity as well. He asserted, “The great majority of the people [i.e. the Jews] has everywhere and at all times a natural disposition for the customary, the simple, the mediocre, even for the shallow (*das Platte*) and trivial, only as it corresponds to their own views and needs....”<sup>69</sup> Historical (and political) fate, according to Duhm, had determined the spiritual capacity of formative Judaism, which produced inferior literary productions, which then gained popular traction with a people no longer capable of higher abilities and ambitions. Yet the same kind of aesthetic deficiency Duhm had seen in the Psalter several contemporaries then saw in his own translations of the poetry. Although reviews were generally mixed, usually with Luther as the benchmark, one reviewer spoke of his “fatal impression” of a certain resonance with translations from the pre-romantic period – a fatal impression indeed for this age of philological positivism.<sup>70</sup> Another was still more cutting. Turning Duhm’s own words against him, the critic saw an explicit focus on the history of religion and apathy towards edification or aesthetic pleasure before proceeding to recommend that readers only pick up the translation if they wanted to be put off the Psalter altogether.<sup>71</sup> Nevertheless, Duhm argued forcefully for a severe deficiency not only in the content but also in the form of the Psalms, which threatened their value as a source for Christian theology.

## Conclusions

This essay has contended the thesis proffered by Duhm in his work on the Psalter faced theological resistance from his contemporaries in Christian biblical scholarship. His assignment of this Hebrew poetry to specifically “Jewish” history caused moral, historical, and aesthetic difficulties for such interpreters, which accounts, in large part, for the work’s curtailed reception and its demise in disciplinary memory. Indeed, the argument set forth here contrasts previous accounts that stress specific reconstructions, chronologies, idiosyncrasies, or trends alone – which prove inadequate precisely because these same elements characterize his other, still defining work on biblical texts, especially Isaiah and Jeremiah – and those that depend on dubious claims of truth or scientific progress, an insufficient line of reasoning to explain historical developments in academic communities. This new explanation in the hidden stakes of interpretative modalities offers a more compelling reason for the fate of Duhm’s commentary on the Psalms. His proposed historical framework posed a threat to these biblical texts: a cherished resource of Christian theology. As Uriel Tal observed long ago, liberal Protestant scholarship ultimately told a story of priestly law rewriting – or rather corrupting – authentic prophecy, whereby “the upshot of these conclusions was that the literature of prophecy and

---

67. J.G. HERDER, *The Spirit of Hebrew Poetry*, trans. James Marsh, 2 vols., Burlington 1833 [1782], 1:45; see further Kristin Gjesdal, *Herder’s Hermeneutics: History, Poetry, Enlightenment*, Cambridge 2017.

68. DUHM, *Die Psalmen erklärt*, 2nd ed, xxvii.

69. *Ibid.*, xxviii.

70. GRIMME, review of B. Duhm, *Die Psalmen übersetzt* and *Die Psalmen erklärt*, 377.

71. FRIEDRICH GIESEBRECHT, review of B. Duhm, *Die Psalmen übersetzt*, in: *Deutsche Literaturzeitung* 21, no. 39 (1900), 2517–18; cf. JULIUS BOEHMER, review of B. Duhm, *Die Psalmen erklärt*, in: *Theologisches Literaturblatt* 21, no. 30 (1900), 345–48. Davidson, however, had less concern with Duhm’s aesthetic judgments: DAVIDSON, Duhm’s *Die Psalmen erklärt*, 449.

the psalms is not Jewish but Israelite; hence its theological essence is Christian and its historical teaching pre-Christian.”<sup>72</sup> Unlike Duhm’s interpretation of the prophets, which maintained at least some threads of genuine connection to grand personalities of old in even threadbare texts, his endeavors in the Psalms not only severed historical ties to the favored period in the history of Israel but also detached those texts from individual authors. While Duhm identified the prophetic and poetic in an idealized age of Israel, he had little prophecy to preserve in the poesy of the Psalms. Cut loose from such a golden period, this apophetic poetry then fell into a deeply ambivalent part of the past for Protestant theology. Therein lay the problem for his fellow biblical scholars.

To substantiate this argument, the essay has availed itself of valuable yet understudied sources: namely, review literature. Analyzed as a corpus, these reviews grant ready insight into the longer history of interpretation, the contestation of ideas and operations, and the expectations of academic genres. This type of literature reveals the ways in which contemporaries mapped the latest research: from what they deemed traditional or novel, vapid or inspired, out of date or urgent, to the empirical, methodical, and theoretical connections they drew between new and prior industry – often with a multicentennial vista on the history of biblical learning. In the case of Duhm, observers set his labors in the Psalms against a textured background of interpretation, tracing contours with Wellhausen and Reuss for periodization, with Emil Kautzsch and Franz Hermann as well as Luther and Moses Mendelssohn for translation, and with Friedrich Delitzsch and Friedrich Rückert for transalphabetization of acrostics. One reviewer thus wrote of his work, albeit less than favorably, “It maccabeizes like Olshausen ..., historicizes like Hitzig ..., denobilizes the Psalms like [Heinrich] Grätz ..., and finally generalizes what ought to be individualized.”<sup>73</sup> In addition, as sites of contestation in the field, these reviews bear witness to the unstable, non-linear development of respectable questions, legitimate methods, acceptable conclusions, and unavoidable interlocutors. Not only does this literature help trace academic networks and the competition for various kinds of capital amongst scholars, projects, and publishers, but it also tracks the struggle between organs, editors, and critics to claim an authoritative position for lending prestige, validating ideas, and patrolling practices. Furthermore, these sources document the formation of scholarly genres. The academic commentariat discussed the suitability of Duhm’s work for its series, debating whether unconventional theories, disputed methods, or sparse bibliography belonged in such a commentary and whether the publishing house had chosen rightly for its particular format of interpretation and translation in the series itself. Reviews record similar construction, confrontation, and transformation in other genres as well, from the introduction and the handbook to the encyclopedia and the dictionary. In consequence, these sources offer a window into the deeper, complex history of erudition, granting light in the present dark age of internal historiography of the field, which so frequently mistakes ca. 1850 as some bedrock of scholarly investigation, rather than a moment of transformation in perennial – or protean – questions, answers, and practices in biblical learning.

Investigating a forgotten moment in the discipline of Hebrew Bible, this essay has provided a new explanation for the fate of Duhm’s commentary on the Psalms. As with roads not taken in the history of scholarship, those long since abandoned can afford real analytical purchase on the historical embeddedness and contingent nature of the discipline, exposing why research questions gain and lose their urgency, why ideas dissatisfy and satisfy by turns, and why approaches lead alternately to new vistas and dead ends. This kind of historicist inquiry – as against a presentist one – thus interrogates the conditions of possibility for scholarly developments, from the establishment of disciplinary logic to the generation of specific kinds of knowledge to the attraction of particular modalities. Such scrutiny further targets how some ideas are born, others die, and still others return from the dead. To take but one example, the sun seems to be rising on the so-called neo-documentary hypothesis; like the sun, however, this theory of composition history has not ascended for the

---

72. URIEL TAL, *Christians and Jews in Germany: Religion, Politics, and Ideology in the Second Reich, 1870–1914*, trans. Noah Jonathan Jacobs, Ithaca, 1975 [1969], 199.

73. AUGUST KLOSTERMANN, Duhm’s Psalmenübersetzung, in: *Theologisches Literaturblatt* 22, no. 11–13 (1901), 121–24, 137–40, 145–49, at 148; cf. ADOLF KAMPHAUSEN, Die Hagiographen: Psalmen, Sprüche, Hiob (review of B. Duhm, *Die Psalmen erklärt und übersetzt*, inter alia), in: *Theologische Rundschau* 3, no. 3 (1900), 90–108.

first time, the problem of the Pentateuch being what one writer has called “a classic field for cycles in hypotheses.”<sup>74</sup> Indeed, the history of scholarship has witnessed documentarians (Jean Astruc, David Ilgen), neo-documentarians (Hermann Hupfeld, Heinrich Ewald), forgotten neo-neo-documentarians (Rudolf Smend, Sr., Otto Eißfeldt), and now, strictly speaking, neo-neo-neo-documentarians (Menahem Haran, Baruch Schwartz), whereby the latter admit this history while nonetheless erasing it graphically – through neo-s – and hence memorially for some signficatory convenience, if not claims of novelty.<sup>75</sup> As Max Planck knew, old ideas don’t die: old scholars do.<sup>76</sup>

The essay at hand challenges a powerful yet problematic mode of explanation in the field of biblical studies, one that accounts for its history through an inexorable – if not some foreordained – march of scientific progress. Such teleological narratives often rest on unarticulated concepts of truth, whether identified with fixed belief and predicated on the overinterpretation of consensus (i.e., a social, local, and temporal phenomenon) or dependent on unconsidered metaphysical attachments (e.g., a realist theory of correspondence between representation and the mind-external world). Furthermore, this essay has unveiled some crucial means by which disciplines create these narratives: in forgetting moments of difference, in disavowing error, and in silencing the more embarrassing parts of the past. An incisive study of the past asks less who had the same opinion or who was right and wrong than how and why certain forms of knowledge were produced and circulated, accepted and rejected as well as when, where, by whom, and under which circumstances. To promote a rigorous, historicist understanding for the history of scholarship, critical inquiry should therefore track the roads less traveled by as well as those abandoned – which may well make all the difference.

---

PAUL MICHAEL KURTZ is a Postdoctoral Fellow of the Research Foundation – Flanders, at Ghent University. His work centers on the history of biblical, classical, and orientalist scholarship in 19th- and 20th-century Germany. In pursuit of his research, Kurtz has won support from the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions, German Academic Exchange Service, and Fulbright Program. His first book, *Kaiser, Christ, and Canaan: The Religion of Israel in Protestant Germany, 1871–1918*, was recently published by Mohr Siebeck.

---

74. NORBERT LOHFINK, Deuteronomium und Pentateuch. Zum Stand der Forschung, repr. in: idem, *Studien zum Deuteronomium und zur deuteronomischen Literatur*, vol. 3 (Stuttgarter Biblische Aufsatzbände 20), Stuttgart 1995, 13–38, at 13. Gainsaying a distinction between the neos and neo-neos, Lohfink asked, predictively, “When will the ‘third documentary hypothesis’ come around? Only new facts could stop the cycle” (ibid.).

75. Cf. FRIEDRICH BLEEK, *Einleitung in das Alte Testament*, ed. Johannes Bleek and Adolf Kamphausen, Berlin <sup>3</sup>1870, 231–33 n; OTTO EISSFELDT, *Einleitung in das Alte Testament unter Einschluß der Apokryphen und Pseudepigraphen sowie der apokryphen- und pseudepigraphenartigen Qumran-Schriften* (Neue theologische Grundrisse), Tübingen <sup>3</sup>1964, 223–26; THOMAS RÖMER, Zwischen Urkunden, Fragmenten und Ergänzungen: Zum Stand der Pentateuchforschung, in: *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 125, no. 1 (2013), 2–24. Apparently, no one wants to be an old documentarian.

76. MAX PLANCK, Ursprung und Auswirkung wissenschaftlicher Ideen. Vortrag, gehalten am 17. February 1933 im Verein Deutscher Ingenieure, repr. in: Verband Deutscher Physikalischer Gesellschaften and Max-Planck-Gesellschaft für Förderung der Wissenschaften (ed.), *Physikalische Abhandlungen und Vorträge. Aus Anlaß seines 100. Geburtstages (23. April 1958)*, Braunschweig 1958, 240–54, at 245.