

Goldman, Solomon, The Book of Books: An Introduction. The Book of Human
Destiny: 1. The Jewish Publication Society of America 5708-1948

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This, in brief, is a general outline of the documentary hypothesis. In its application, critics have differed widely as much on points of major importance as on an endless number of minor details. No two of them have been quite able to agree on the number or exact contents of the sources. What one assigned to J another assigned to E, P, or D, and vice versa. That has resulted in the division and subdivision of the sources into J1 J2 J3 E1 E2 E3 P1 P2 P3 D1 D2; in other words, in a veritable return to the Fragmentenhypothese. The same thing has occurred with respect to their dates of composition, compilation, and revision. Most of Wellhausen's followers accepted the chronological sequence in which he arranged J, E, D, and P, but beyond that they shuttlecocked decades and centuries as if they were no more than a watch in the night. Cornill, for example, dated J about 850 B.C.E, E a century later, D a little before 621, and P about 500; Baentsch dated J about 800, E somewhat later, D early in the seventh century, and P about 444; Steuernagle dated J about 900, E in the first half of the eighth century, the first draft of D about 720, and P about 500; Sellin assigned the period of David and Solomon as the lower limit for J, and the division of the monarchy for E. Dillman, who is usually considered the head of an independent school, rejected Wellhausen's sequence altogether, maintaining that E is the earliest of the documents and much of P contemporary with it. His followers, however, agreed among themselves no more than did those of Wellhausen. Kittel put E near 900, the oldest parts of P in the reign of Solomon, J about 800, and D in the reign of Manasseh; Baudissin put E about the end of the ninth century, J at the beginning of the eighth, P and D in the reign of Josiah; Koenig put E in the time of the Judges, J in the reign of David, D approximately at the fall of Samaria in the year 722, and P in the sixth century. These several examples, though representative and distinguished, are only infinitesimal parts of an amazingly large kaleidoscope of critical views. . . However, despite these numerous divergences, devotees have continued to regard the hypothesis as a whole as irrefutable as a mathematical equation.

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This much, though, is certain: that in Cassuto the official literary hypothesis has come up once more against a worthy and redoubtable opponent. Whether in its present battered condition it can meet his challenge, time alone will tell. It must be admitted, as we are approaching the second centenary of the publication of Astruc's Conjectures, that it is no longer ludicrous to vary the documents or to reduce their number, or to maintain that there was only one which, to be sure, was emended and revised, or to attempt, even as Astruc set out to do, to establish the Mosaic authorship of at least parts of the Pentateuch. "In these later days of Old Testament research," Professor Meeke wrote, "the old documentary hypothesis is seriously questioned. I occasionally use the documentary symbols, JEDP, but in no instance have I used an argument that is dependent on the documentary hypothesis." Critics have begun to view as perhaps scientifically probable opinions which three or four decades ago would have been dismissed as reactionary and obscurantist.