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Reflections on Levin's Model of *Fortschreibung*

Juha Pakkala

1. Introduction: Levin's model

Christoph Levin's model of *Fortschreibung* is a concept among biblical scholars. He is not only among the last of the Mohicans whose analysis is essentially based on conventional literary-critical methods, but his conception of how the Hebrew Bible was transmitted has a number of idiosyncratic features. Although other scholars share some of Levin's assumptions, their combined effect is a very particular model that deserves a broader methodological discussion. Especially important in this regard is documented evidence, which here refers to text-critical evidence that shows how the texts were edited and changed in the Second Temple Period.[1]

Levin is renowned for very detailed analyses, where literary criticism is the primary approach to the texts, for their prehistory is assumed to be key for using them for scientific purposes and for understanding them in the first place. For example, his classic book *Der Jahwist* begins by portraying the redaction-historical problems of the Tetrateuch, and the ensuing task is to solve them.[2] The fundamental observations (*grundlegende Beobachtungen*) are first and foremost literary critical.[3] Very similarly, in *Die Verheißung des neuen Bundes* he seeks to determine the literary history of the text (*literarhistorische Einordnung*),[4] and accordingly the analyses begin with a literary-critical reconstruction.[5] Other questions and approaches are contingent on the literary-critical analyses. For Levin the main task of biblical studies is to understand the diachronic development of texts.

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[1] For a more detailed discussion on documented evidence, see Reinhard MÜLLER, Juha PAKKALA, and Bas TER HAAR ROMENY, *Evidence of Editing: Growth and Change of Texts in the Hebrew Bible*, SBL RBS 75 (Atlanta, Ga.: SBL Press, 2014).

[2] Christoph LEVIN, *Der Jahwist*, FRLANT 157 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993), 9–35.

[3] LEVIN, *Der Jahwist*, 36–50.

[4] Christoph LEVIN, *Die Verheißung des neuen Bundes. In ihrem theologiegeschichtlichen Zusammenhang ausgelegt*, FRLANT 137 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1985), 18–21.

[5] LEVIN, *Verheißung*, 22–28.

Levin's analyses and reconstructions imply a fragmented textual development where additions are small but many. There would have been countless successive scribes who worked for some centuries before the texts froze for scribal changes. This assumption is connected to Levin's reservations about classic redactions that would have encompassed entire compositions. He compares the texts with wild, non-cultivated forests, and accordingly, he criticizes many redaction-critical models of erroneously trying to find cultivated ones, by which he refers to broader and controlled redactions of entire compositions.[6] That texts grew "without any rules"[7] would generally apply to the entire Hebrew Bible but especially to the prophetic literature. For example, he assumes that the book of Jeremiah was produced by hundreds of scribes, or as he phrases it, there were "*hundred hands in hundred years*".[8] In Kings his factual model seems more conventional, for the literary-critical reconstruction of 2 Kings 11 in *Der Sturz der Königin Atalja* is similar to the redactional layer-models found in other studies.[9] For example, he assumes a rather extensive priestly redaction (*Bearbeitung*), and somewhat less extensive but still substantial *bundestheologische* and *frühchronistische* redactions, while individual additions unconnected to the redactions would have been infrequent. His analyses in Genesis-Exodus are also more conventional in assuming broader redactions and larger blocks.[10] Regardless of whether the texts grew unattended like wild forests or through more carefully planned redactional layers, Levin assumes that nearly all texts in the Hebrew Bible are extensively multilayered after centuries of revision.[11] In this respect he is among the most radical of the literary critics.

Levin is also known for giving individual words a very careful evaluation, and accordingly their various meanings are often discussed in detail. If literary theory calls a careful analysis of a text "close reading", Levin's literary-critical analyses could easily be described as "very close reading". It is not uncommon that a specific meaning of a word has considerable impact on the way the text is analyzed and this may lead to a very particular understanding. For example, he assumes that the word חרבה (with the *he locale*) in Exod 3:1 refers to a "wasteland" or

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[6] See his discussion in LEVIN, *Verheißung*, 62–67.

[7] Christoph LEVIN, *The Old Testament: A Brief Introduction* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005), 28.

[8] LEVIN, *Verheißung*, 65: "Wer darum neben der Sprache auch auf Formen und Kompositionsverhältnisse sowie auf die inhaltlichen Nuancen sieht, wird entdecken, daß in den jeremianischen Prosareden nicht eine Hand (oder eine Schule) in einigen Jahren, sondern hundert Hände in hundert Jahren geschrieben haben müssen."

[9] See Christoph LEVIN, *Der Sturz der Königin Atalja* (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1982), 18–19. The similarity does not apply to the actual reconstruction, but only to the basic model that there are redactional layers.

[10] See LEVIN, *Der Jahwist*, 51–79.

[11] LEVIN, *The Old Testament*, 27–28.

"wilderness" and not to Horeb as commonly assumed.[12] In the conventional reading Moses thus already went to Horeb, the Mountain of God, at the beginning of his career, but this is not the case in Levin's reconstruction. Levin implies that ancient scribes were extremely careful in their use of words. This kind of very close reading and careful appreciation of meanings leads to a number of theories where he interprets a given text in very different way from other scholars.

Very characteristic for Levin is also the assumption of a complicated web of interrelationships or cross-links between texts. For him, the scripture explains itself (*sacra scriptura sui ipsius interpres*),[13] which means that the scribes tried to understand and interpret the transmitted texts in light of other biblical passages. To a great extent they edited and shaped texts by using other parts of the Hebrew Bible, with which the scribes would have been exceedingly familiar. For Levin the Hebrew Bible is nearly a closed system, where external influences are limited or at least overshadowed by inner-biblical influences and intertextual exegesis. Obviously, Levin does not exclude societal changes, which were the ultimate reason for changing the texts, but he assumes that the scribes primarily sought for answers to the challenges facing a changing society in the sacred texts. The texts of the Hebrew Bible would have been the highest authority for the scribes.

This leads us to his further assumption that the texts of the Hebrew Bible were essentially sacred and normative for the transmitting communities; they were regarded as the Word of God. This also explains why the scribes were so careful in revising the texts: The given text could not be altered at will, but only explained and interpreted. The scribal changes are above all interpretative additions with the motive of clarifying what the Word of God was assumed to mean. There was no intention to change the texts or to introduce something new. Accordingly, the texts could therefore only be expanded. After centuries long interpretative process most texts would consist of multilayered interpretations.[14]

Despite assuming very complicated editorial processes, Levin has considerable confidence in the ability of literary criticism to attain reliable results as long as the critic works carefully.[15] He writes:

Die "unglaublichsten Konfusionen" […] sind […] handfeste Anhaltspunkte, mit deren Hilfe die literarische Tiefendimension des gewachsenen Textes sich freilegen läßt. So sehr die Hakigkeit auf den ersten Blick als Unglück erscheint, erweist sie sich für die Literarkritik als Glücksfall; denn an den Verwerfungslinien läßt eine exakte Analyse sich festmachen. Abschnitt für Abschnitt läßt der Text seine literargeschichtliche Stufung erkennen.

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[12] See L ᴇᴠɪɴ, *Der Jahwist*, 329–331.
[13] L ᴇᴠɪɴ, *The Old Testament*, 28.
[14] L ᴇᴠɪɴ, *The Old Testament*, 27–28.
[15] See L ᴇᴠɪɴ, *The Old Testament*, 29.

Unsere Analyse kann ausgehen von der Möglichkeit einer lückenlosen Stratigraphie, und das Bemühen muß nur sein, die einzelnen Fortschreibungsstufen richtig zu unterscheiden und in die richtige historische Folge zu bringen.[16]

Mostly subordinated to the analyses one can find methodological discussions here and there, but they do not evaluate or question the basic approach and method. In this respect Levin does not differ from other literary critics of his time, and he thus continues a tradition where the possibilities of this method are taken for granted.[17] Within this scholarly tradition Levin, however, may have an especially optimistic view about the possibilities of literary criticism. In addition to the completely reconstructable stratigraphy, he assumes that the oldest texts can be reached even in the prophetic literature, which many scholars regard as the most difficult texts for literary-critical analysis. His confidence in the method and its results is concretely seen in his reconstructions where the analyses are built on top of each other to form complicated theories, which lead to chains of Fortschreibung.[18] Heavy reliance on analyses in individual passages in very short texts is apparent.

A prime example of a grand theory built on individual analyses is *Die Verheißung des neuen Bundes*, where he assumes that Jer 7:22–23 is key for transforming the "late pre-exilic" prophesy of doom to covenant theology; they would also be a reaction to Deuteronomic conceptions and stand at the very beginning of Deuteronomistic theology.[19] The closely connected Jer 7:9 would have been the source for the Deuteronomistic demand that Yahweh alone is worshipped, and this is especially seen in the assumption that Jer 7:9 was a crucial source for the earliest form of the Decalogue in Exod 20:2–3, 5a, 13–17a.[20] Thus, a very significant theory concerning the history of Israelite religion is based on this textual interrelationship.[21]

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[16] LEVIN, *Verheißung*, 68–69.

[17] For example, LEVIN, *Verheißung*, 62–67, contains a very important discussion about the nature of the transmission of Jeremiah, but it is primarily a discussion within literary critics in regard to whether the text in Jeremiah was expanded by broader redactions or less controlled by isolated explanatory expansions.

[18] See, for example, his discussion in LEVIN, *Verheißung*, 197–200, on the *Fortschreibungskette* in Jer 31:35–40.

[19] LEVIN, *Verheißung*, 79–82.

[20] Christoph LEVIN, "Der Dekalog am Sinai", *VT* 35.2 (1985): 63–65, and idem, *Verheißung*, 94–95.

[21] It is notable that Levin's theory essentially lies on the assumption that Jer 7:9b belongs to the earliest layer of the verse, for without its cult criticism, it is difficult to assume an interrelationship between the passages, especially into the direction assumed by Levin. If cult criticism was added later to Jer 7:9, it is difficult to argue that this verse was an early and key source for the Decalogue and its First Commandment. However, Levin's theory stands against a number of scholars who have argued that Jer 7:9b is a later addition; e.g., John SKINNER, *Prophecy and Religion: Studies in the Life of Jeremiah* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1926), 170–171; Winfried THIEL, *Die deuteronomistische Redaktion von Jeremia 1–25*, WMANT 41

Not untypical for German biblical scholarship, Levin's exegesis is strongly theological. The emergence and early development of theological conceptions is a clear focus in Levin's exegesis. This is illustrated in the topics of his published books and articles. He has investigated the origins of covenant theology, early monolatry, and other religious conceptions, but his interests also lies in their later interpretation, which in the Hebrew Bible is manifested in their Fortschreibung. Other theologically relevant topics, such as the poor in the Hebrew Bible, have also attracted Levin's interest.[22]

2. Appraisal

Some of the main weaknesses in Levin's approach are contingent on the lack of methodological reflection and fundamental questions about the nature of textual transmission. He does not discuss first how the text might have been transmitted, what kind of scribal changes were made, and what is the nature of the preserved textual witnesses. His monographs go directly to the issue, which for Levin are the problems in the text, its contents, and literary history.[23] Obviously, this does not mean that he would not have clear conceptions about the transmission, as we have seen, but they are largely implied and not discussed. In this respect Levin stands on the shoulders of his predecessors and continues their preconceptions, and he is also well familiar with older scholarship and its literary-critical solutions.[24] Levin does describe his model in *The Old Testament* (*Das Alte Testament*) very clearly, but it is not justified or argued. His individual studies contain some discussion about the applied method, but rather indicatively, they are largely not provided in the introductions but are found in the middle of the analyses as excurses or as part of the analysis.[25] Given the fact that his model also partly differs from those of most other literary-critical approaches and his reconstructions have been criticized as radical and extreme,[26] the meagre methodological discussion and the lack of justification for the selected approach is unfortunate.

This is especially so, because documented evidence corroborates many aspects of Levin's distinctive model as rather realistic. The conception that the texts

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(Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1973), 111 and 114; William MCKANE, *Jeremiah*, ICC (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1986), 163–165.

[22] See Christoph LEVIN, *Fortschreibungen. Gesammelte Studien zum Alten Testament*, BZAW 316 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2003).

[23] See LEVIN, *Verheißung*, 11–31; *Der Jahwist*, 9–50; *Atalja*, 11–17.

[24] See, for example, the introduction to previous scholarship in *Der Jahwist*, 9–35.

[25] This is especially the case in *Verheißung*, 63–67.

[26] See also Konrad SCHMID'S contribution in this volume, where some of the areas of criticism are discussed.

are multilayered and extensively revised is well substantiated in the variants editions that have been accidentally preserved in text-critical evidence. They confirm that most of the substance in the "final" texts has been added at some point in the transmission. An example will suffice. Gedaliah's murder is found in three different versions bearing witness to three different textual stages. The oldest one is found in 2 Kings 25:25, while the LXX and MT versions of Jer 41 (LXX 48):1–3 preserve further stages. What is important, the oldest version of 124 characters has been inflated to 308 characters in the youngest version in the MT Jer 41, so that more than half of the text was added later. These witnesses are coincidentally preserved finds that only give glimpses to the full development, which is certainly more complicated.[27] Older forms of the text could be even shorter than 124 characters. In view of this and many other similar cases (e.g., 1 Kings 8:1–3; see also below 8:41–42), it would be very difficult to deny that the Hebrew Bible consists of extremely multilayered texts where most of the "final" texts may have been added later. On the basis of documented evidence, scholarly models that assume more uniform texts by single authors stand on a weak basis, whereas Levin's "extreme" position largely appears validated.

Moreover, most of the scribal changes seen in text-critical evidence are small and isolated, which corresponds well with Levin's assumptions, especially in Jeremiah. For example, the text-critical evidence in the historical books contain repeated small additions; very typical ones can be found in the MT of the following verses: Josh 1:7 (ככל התורה, according to the Torah); 4:10 (ככל אשר צוה משה את יהושע, according to all that Moses had commanded Joshua); 1 Kings 17:14 (אלהי ישראל, God of Israel); 18:18 (מצות, commandments); 19:10, 14 (ברית, covenant).[28]

It is also apparent that the vast majority of small additions are either clarifying interpretations or harmonizations with other passages, which Levin assumes as the main reasons for scribal change. Documented evidence for these motives is abundant, and an example will suffice. When dedicating the Temple in 1 Kings 8:41–42, Solomon refers to the event that a foreigner comes to pray towards the Temple, but the MT and LXX differ substantially:[29]

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[27] For more discussion on this case, see Juha PAKKALA, "Gedaliah's Murder in 2 Kgs 25:25 and Jer 41:1–3", in *Scripture in Transition*, edited by Jutta Jokiranta and Anssi Voitila (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 401–411.

[28] In all these cases the LXX is lacking the addition and arguably preserves an earlier reading. For discussion of these and many other examples of small additions, see Juha PAKKALA and Reinhard MÜLLER, *Editorial Techniques in the Hebrew Bible*, SBL RBS (Atlanta, Ga.: SBL Press, *forthcoming* in 2020).

[29] The here presented Greek text is Codex Vaticanus, but its minuses probably go back to the Old Greek and its Hebrew *Vorlage*. Some manuscripts, especially LXX[A] does follow the MT plusses, but this is very probably due to a later harmonization towards a proto-MT type text.

1 Kings 8:41–42 MT	1 Kings 8:41–42 LXX^B

[41] וְגַם אֶל־הַנָּכְרִי	[41] καὶ τῷ ἀλλοτρίῳ,
אֲשֶׁר לֹא־מֵעַמְּךָ	ὃς οὐκ ἔστιν ἀπὸ λαοῦ σου οὗτος,
יִשְׂרָאֵל הוּא	
וּבָא מֵאֶרֶץ רְחוֹקָה לְמַעַן שְׁמֶךָ	
[42] **כִּי יִשְׁמְעוּן אֶת־שִׁמְךָ הַגָּדוֹל**	
וְאֶת־יָדְךָ הַחֲזָקָה וּזְרֹעֲךָ הַנְּטוּיָה	[42] καὶ ἥξουσιν καὶ προσεύξονται εἰς τὸν
וּבָא וְהִתְפַּלֵּל אֶל־הַבַּיִת הַזֶּה ...	τόπον τοῦτον ...

[41] When a foreigner, who is not of your people **Israel**, **comes from a distant land because of your name** [42] **– for they shall hear of your great name, your mighty hand, and your outstretched arm –** when a foreigner comes and prays toward this house, [43] then hear in heaven your dwelling place, and do according to all that the foreigner calls to you …	[41] When a foreigner, who is not of your people, [42] when a foreigner comes and prays toward this house, [43] then hear in heaven your dwelling place, and do according to all that the foreigner calls to you …

The MT plusses are secondary additions and their apparent reasons correspond with motives Levin assumes as prime reasons for additions. Verse 41b seeks to specify that the foreigner the text refers to is one from a distant land. This clarification was necessary in order to harmonize the text with the idea found in some pentateuchal texts that only *some* foreigners were allowed to take part in Yahweh's cult. While the older text, as preserved in the LXX^B, would seem to allow all foreigners to take part, this is implicitly rejected in the MT addition. Several pentateuchal laws regard very negatively to foreigners from the land (e.g., Deut 4–11 *passim*; e.g., 7:1–4), while those who come from distant lands are seen more positively (e.g., Deut 23:4, 8). Inner-biblical influence and harmonization is also apparent in the MT addition of v. 42a. It contains typical expressions, found especially in Deuteronomy (see, Deut 4:34; 5:15; 7:19; 11:2 etc.), that seek to highlight Yahweh's greatness.

Levin connects the tendencies to clarify and harmonize with the assumed sacredness and normativity of the text, and indeed the special features in the scribal changes are difficult to explain unless one assumes that the scribes had an exceptionally high regard for the text. Documented evidence clearly shows that the scribes seem to have avoided omitting and rewriting any part of the older text if it was somehow possible,[30] and this often resulted in very congested texts (e.g.,

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[30] See Juha PAKKALA, *God's Word Omitted: Omissions in the Transmission of the Hebrew Bible*, FRLANT 251 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013), 351–385.

1 Kings 8; 11; 2 Kings 23), obvious contradictions (e.g., MT Josh 4:10; 11:18–19; 1 Kings 8:1–3; cf. LXX), and syntactic errors (e.g., MT Josh 1:7). If the scribes had had free hands to change the texts as they pleased, the vast majority of congestions, repetitions, and tensions, apparent throughout the Hebrew Bible, would have been avoided. Moreover, unless centrally important, there would hardly be any need to explain the texts recurrently and meticulously, and this is seen in the nature of many additions (e.g., 1 Kings 8:41–42). Consequently, the conception that the texts in the Hebrew Bible were special literature – whether normative, authoritative, or sacred – needs to be taken into account in any model on their transmission. This also undermines the direct use of analogies from other literature as close parallels or analogous models for the Hebrew Bible.[31]

The documented evidence largely also corresponds with Levin's basic assumption that the texts grew like unattended forests, where countless scribes made small and isolated additions without any particular oversight. This is highlighted by the nearly complete lack of documented evidence for redactions. There is some evidence for connected revisions, but they do not resemble the theologically motivated redactions assumed in redaction-critical models. For example, the MT of Jeremiah contains a number of additions dealing with Babylonia (e.g., Jer 25:1,9; 28:3, 4; 29:1; 38:18), but it is difficult to detect any ideological/theological connection behind them.[32] The LXX of Esther contains clearer evidence for an theological and ideological revision,[33] but this may have occurred in the translation phase, and it involved extensive rewriting, where larger parts of the text were omitted or rewritten (e.g., Esth 8:11; 9:5). In this respect this evidence is not directly relevant for the question about classical redactions in the Hebrew transmission. Kristin De Troyer has shown that text-critical evidence in Joshua bears witness to interlinked and ideologically motivated revisions in the MT version.[34] Although this could be characterized as a redaction, the changes are very

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[31] See, for example, Raymond F. PERSON, "Text criticism as a Lens for Understanding the Transmission of Ancient Texts in their Oral Environments", in *Literacy, Orality, and Literary Production in the Southern Levant*, ed. Brian B. Schmidt (Atlanta, Ga.: SBL Press, 2015), 197–215.

[32] See also Hermann-Josef STIPP, "A Semi-empirical Example for the Final Touches to a Biblical Book: The Masoretic Sondergut of the Book of Jeremiah", in *Insights into Editing in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East*, ed. Reinhard Müller and Juha Pakkala, CBET 84 (Leuven: Peeters, 2017), 295–318.

[33] The two Greek versions increase God's involvement in the events and remove some of the book's most nationalistic features (cf. MT and LXX in Esth 8–9), which may have been less appropriate for the international context in Alexandria.

[34] See Kristin De TROYER, "The History of the Biblical Text: The Case of the Book of Joshua", in *Insights into Editing in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East*, ed. Reinhard Müller and Juha Pakkala, CBET 84 (Leuven: Peeters, 2017), 223–246.

subtle and extremely small (often single words) in comparison with the conventionally assumed redactions. All this documented evidence thus corroborates Levin's skepticism about classic redaction-critical reconstructions.

This leads directly to an area of criticism, for Levin is not fully consistent with his reservations about redactions. In contrast with his analysis in Jeremiah, he implies a rather conventional model in Kings and Genesis-Exodus, a development through larger redactions and blocks. This despite the fact that in *The Old Testament* and *Die Verheißung des neuen Bundes* he assumes that the entire Hebrew Bible grew like an unattended forest. The actual analysis or their results thus partly conflict with his general conceptions and assumptions. What is more, there is enough evidence to assume that in all these books the development has been as fragmentary and unattended as in Jeremiah. Joshua and Kings provide multiple documented cases,[35] but is apparent in Genesis-Exodus as well.[36] Sometimes only a single verse contains several small additions, and such cases are only coincidentally preserved, such as 1 Kings 8:5 (the plusses – all in the MT – are written in bold and are clear additions, while the LXX is largely older here):

MT	LXX
והמלך **שלמה** וכל **עדת** ישראל **הנועדים עליו אתו**	καὶ ὁ βασιλεὺς καὶ πᾶς Ἰσραὴλ
לפני הארון מזבחים צאן ובקר אשר לא יספרו ולא ימנו **מרב**	ἔμπροσθεν τῆς κιβωτοῦ θύοντες πρόβατα καὶ βόας ἀναρίθμητα.
King **Solomon**, and all **the congregation of** Israel, **that were assembled unto him**,	The king, and all Israel
were before the ark, sacrificing sheep and oxen *that could not be counted nor numbered* **for multitude**.	were before the ark, sacrificing sheep and oxen *without number*.

This leads us to another weakness related to text-critical evidence. It is apparent that the MT is repeatedly given priority over all other textual witnesses. Although Levis does consider readings especially in the LXX, the text-critical evaluation is mostly very brief and subordinated to the literary-critical analysis of the Hebrew text. In *Die Verheißung des neuen Bundes* Levin provides a 3½ page discussion of the LXX of Jeremiah, but it is revealing that it only appears as an excursus *after* the analysis of Jer 31:27–34.[37] He argues that the LXX is largely

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[35] For Joshua, see DE TROYER, "The History of the Biblical Text", and Ville MÄKIPELTO, A*ncient Editing: Documented Evidence of Changes in Joshua 24 and Related Texts*, BZAW 513 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018).

[36] In Genesis-Exodus the Samaritan Pentateuch and the LXX contain repeated small additions (most of the LXX additions go back to the Hebrew *Vorlage*), while the MT often preserves the oldest version, but this is merely a matter of historical coincidence. All three witnesses are part of the same scribal milieu and bear witness to the same scribal processes.

[37] LEVIN, *Verheißung*, 69–72.

secondary, but this is highly unlikely and contradicts conclusions by leading text-critics working with Jeremiah.[38] One easily receives the impression that the LXX is regarded secondary in order to justify the primary analysis of the MT. Paradoxically, the LXX would confirm Levin's general model as very relevant.

The preference of the MT undermines Levin's analyses in Jeremiah, and on the basis of increasing evidence, it appears that in the historical books the picture may not be much different. The Old Greek of Joshua to Kings contains repeated cases where it preserves an older stage of the text, while the MT includes a later addition. As has been shown by many recent studies, the Old Greek translation often has to be retrieved from the comparison of different LXX manuscripts and from the daughter translations (especially the Old Latin), and only when this has been done, is it possible to evaluate the Old Greek with the MT, which is a *condicio sine qua non* for literary-critical analysis. Levin's methodological sequence of action and partial neglect of text-critical evidence is thus hazardous especially in the historical books and Jeremiah.

Although not always communicated in a reader-friendly way,[39] Levin's literary-critical argumentation is consistent and careful to even the smallest detail in the text. Nevertheless, Levin also assumes additions when the text offers no typical literary-critical criteria, such as inconsistency and syntactic problems. The reader is assumed to adopt Levin's broader conceptions how a given texts developed and what is more logical in this respect. A level of intuition and deep understanding of the text is thus involved, which is difficult to communicate to other scholars but it also involves the risk of subjectivity.

In his reconstruction of the pre-Yahwistic source, Levin assumes in Exod 3:1 the following development: The MT reads: וּמֹשֶׁה הָיָה רֹעֶה אֶת־צֹאן יִתְרוֹ חֹתְנוֹ כֹּהֵן מִדְיָן וַיִּנְהַג אֶת־הַצֹּאן אַחַר הַמִּדְבָּר וַיָּבֹא אֶל־הַר הָאֱלֹהִים חֹרֵבָה׃ "Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to the wasteland", but Levin assumes two additions. The priest of Midian, כֹּהֵן מִדְיָן, and אֶל־הַר הָאֱלֹהִים.[40] Classic literary-critical criteria for assuming these additions are lacking or meagre at most, and both essentially derive from Levin's

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[38] See, especially Emanuel Tov, "Some Aspects of the Textual and Literary History of the Book of Jeremiah", in *Le livre de Jérémie*, ed. Pierre-Maurice Bogaert, BETL 54 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1981), 145–67; Hermann-Josef Stipp, *Das masoretische und alexandrinische Sondergut des Jeremiabuches*, OBO 136 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1994).

[39] His argumentation is often very condensed and one needs to pay utter attention to all detail. Clearly, this is a matter of presentation and not substance, but it has not made Levin's theories more accessible to wider scholarship, especially outside the German-speaking scholarship.

[40] Exod 3:1: וּמֹשֶׁה הָיָה רֹעֶה אֶת־צֹאן יִתְרוֹ חֹתְנוֹ כֹּהֵן מִדְיָן וַיִּנְהַג אֶת־הַצֹּאן אַחַר הַמִּדְבָּר וַיָּבֹא אֶל־הַר הָאֱלֹהִים חֹרֵבָה׃

broader conception of how the texts must have developed. Exodus 2:16–18 mentions Reuel, the priest of Midian as the father of Zipporah, who is then given to Moses in marriage (2:21). According to Exod 3:1, Moses's father-in-law was called Jethro, not Reuel, which logically denotes that there probably were two independent stories about Moses's father-in-law. However, Levin assumes that the reference to Jethro as a Midianite priest was made in order to connect Jethro and Reuel.[41] While this is a logical argument, Exod 3:1 itself provides no reasons – syntactic or other – to assume an addition of these two words only. Although Levin's assumption could be correct here, a complicated literary- and redaction-critical reconstruction cannot be based on too many such conclusions that cannot be substantiated by literary-critical arguments, for otherwise the reconstruction becomes too hypothetical. Levin rightly relativizes the certainty of his conclusion, but the case is still illustrative of many other of his literary-critical conclusions.

The second addition of Levin's assumed additions, אֶל־הַר הָאֱלֹהִים, in Exod 3:1 is methodologically more critical. As discussed in the introduction, it challenges common readings of the passage, but literary critical reasons for assuming an addition are lacking. He notes that v. 1. contradicts with v. 18, according to which Moses asked the Pharaoh for a permission to go to the wilderness to sacrifice there. It is problematic, however, that the word for the wilderness in v. 18 is מדבר and not חרב. In Levin's reconstruction, the original text would thus read ויבא חרבה, "he came to the wilderness".[42] Not only is this theory highly conjectural, it fails to consider the LXX reading, which lacks the word האלהים. If the LXX preserves the older text, which seems highly likely, it is difficult to argue that a later editor added a reference to the Mount of God, and thereby it is likely that the text indeed referred to Mount Horeb, without any implication that the place is holy, and not to wilderness.

That literary criticism necessarily involves subjectivity is given, but as a scientific approach the method needs to be meticulously careful to expect controlled subjectivity, which means clear communication of the arguments for any literary critical decision. If classical arguments or indicators, such as syntactic problems, tensions etc., are missing, one needs to be explicitly clear about them and avoid building much on such cases. Here lies a paradox, however. If Levin's assumption that the literary development was exceedingly fragmentary is correct, many small additions could not be detected by classic criteria of literary criticism. This means that an element of intuition and very deep understanding of the texts may be necessary for detecting such additions. A fully dogmatic position about the literary-critical criteria is certainly a more secure position, but intuitive work may reach broader theories that despite uncertainties still advance our understanding of the Hebrew Bible. It is ultimately broader theories that matter, and their ability

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[41] LEVIN, *Der Jahwist*, 326.
[42] LEVIN, *Der Jahwist*, 329–331.

to convince. These questions are connected to the methodological problem about reconstructability of the literary processes, which cannot be solved here.

3. Conclusions

Despite lack of methodological deliberation on his position, documented evidence largely validates Levin's general model of Fortschreibung. In areas where his idiosyncratic conceptions are often characterized as extreme, he stands on a rather solid ground. What Levin lacks in methodological reflection and methodologically comprehensive arguments is largely compensated by his insight and deep understanding of the texts. It could be called *Fingerspitzengefühl*, feeling and intuition for the texts, which dwarfs that of his critics. Apart from the negligence of text-critical evidence, a clear weakness is his considerable optimism towards the results of literary criticism. It can be questioned whether multilayered text of very small additions could be detected and literary developments reconstructed. Despite areas of weakness, which partly concern other literary-critics as well, Levin's analyses and theories remain highly relevant for future scholarship.