

Investigatio Orientis

Beiträge zur Wissenschaftsgeschichte der Orientalistik

Band 6

Herausgegeben von
Thomas L. Gertzen,
Peter Heine,
Ludger Hieppl und
Hans Neumann

Der Babel-Bibel-Streit und die Wissenschaft des Judentums

Beiträge einer internationalen Konferenz
vom 4. bis 6. November 2019 in Berlin

Herausgegeben von
Eva Cancik-Kirschbaum
und Thomas L. Gertzen

Zaphon
Münster
2021

Cover-Illustration : Delitzsch vom Babylonischen Stier gegen die Kirchenwand gequetscht, Karikatur von Franz Albert Jüttner, Lustige Blätter, XVIII. Jahrgang, Nr. 44, 4. März 1903, Seite 13.

Die Tagung „Der Babel-Bibel-Streit und die Wissenschaft des Judentums“ vom 4. bis 6. Nov. 2019 in Berlin wurde gefördert durch die Fritz Thyssen Stiftung.

Die Drucklegung des Tagungsbandes wurde ermöglicht durch die Unterstützung der Moses Mendelssohn Stiftung.



Fritz Thyssen Stiftung
für Wissenschaftsförderung



DFG Kolleg-Forschungsgruppe 2635
Rethinking – Governance
in the Ancient Near East



Vorderasiatisches Museum
Staatliche Museen zu Berlin

Der Babel-Bibel-Streit und die Wissenschaft des Judentums.
Beiträge einer internationalen Konferenz vom 4. bis 6. November 2019 in Berlin

Herausgegeben von Eva Cancik-Kirschbaum und Thomas L. Gertzen

Investigatio Orientis 6

© 2021 Zaphon, Enkingweg 36, Münster (www.zaphon.de)
All rights reserved. Printed in Germany. Printed on acid-free paper.

ISBN 978-3-96327-098-7 (Buch) ISSN 2698-1904
ISBN 978-3-96327-099-4 (E-Book)

Inhalt

Vorwort.....7

Friedrich Delitzsch und der Babel-Bibel-Streit

Friedrich Delitzsch im Ausklang des langen 19. Jahrhunderts
Reinhard G. Lehmann (Mainz)19

A Centennial Review of *Die Große Täuschung*.
Friedrich Delitzsch's Final Reflections on the Babel-Bibel Controversy
Bill T. Arnold (Wilmore).....45

Die Berliner Keilschriftforschung im ausgehenden 19. und frühen
20. Jahrhundert im Spannungsfeld von Wissenschaft und Politik
Hans Neumann (Münster)63

Der Vater: Franz Delitzsch (1813–1890). Bibelforscher und Judenmissionar
Rudolf Smend (Göttingen)81

Der politische und gesellschaftliche Rahmen

Der Kaiser als Hobbywissenschaftler.
Wilhelm II. – Frömmigkeit – Kommunikation – Wissenschaftspolitik
Christoph Marksches (Berlin)89

Kaiser Wilhelm II. und der Babel-Bibel-Streit.
Wissenschaft, Offenbarung, Antisemitismus und die Legitimation
des Monarchen
Sabine Mangold-Will (Wuppertal)107

„Also strecken wir immer wieder unsere Flügel aus!“
Juden als Förderer altorientalischer Wissenschaften in Deutschland
Olaf Matthes (Hamburg)129

Babel, Bibel und die Völkischen
Uwe Puschner (Berlin)143

Theologie und Wissenschaft des Judentums

Der Jesuit, Astronom und Assyriologe Franz Xaver Kugler (1862–1929).
Sein Leben, Werk und Denken in der Zeit des Babel-Bibel-Streits und
des Panbabylonismus
Ludger Hiepel (Münster)163

Die babylonische Gola: Wiege des Judentums? <i>Reinhard G. Kratz (Göttingen)</i>	181
Der sogenannte Sündenfall-Zylinder. Ein Beispiel für theologische und religionsgeschichtliche Einfalt <i>Rüdiger Liwak (Potsdam)</i>	191
Gesetz, Gnade und Ahndung. Das Alte Testament im Widerstreit zwischen akademischem Antijudaismus und Wissenschaft des Judentums <i>Werner Treß (Potsdam)</i>	207
„Auf das literarkritische ist das vorderorientalische Zeitalter gefolgt.“ Hugo Greßmann, die „Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft“ und der Babel-Bibel-Streit <i>Bernd U. Schipper (Berlin)</i>	227
The Paradoxical After-life of the Babel-Bible Controversy <i>Yaacov Shavit (Tel Aviv)</i>	241
Der Babel-Bibel-Streit: Politik, Theologie und Wissenschaft um 1900. Eine Sonderausstellung des Vorderasiatischen Museums im Pergamonmuseum <i>Nadja Cholidis, Youssef El Khoury, Juliane Eule, Helen Gries, Barbara Helwing, Christine Kainert und Lutz Martin (Berlin)</i>	249
Bildnachweise	285
Abkürzungsverzeichnis	289
Bibliographie	293
Register	331

Vorwort

Vor 100 Jahren erschien *Die grosse Täuschung* aus der Feder des Berliner Assyriologen Friedrich Delitzsch (1850–1922), in der er, wie schon der Untertitel ver-rät, „Kritische Betrachtungen zu den alttestamentlichen Berichten“ veröffent-lichte.¹ Diese Publikation markiert den Endpunkt eines weit über die Grenzen der Wissenschaft hinausweisenden Konflikts zwischen Vertretern der noch jungen Disziplin der Assyriologie und der Theologie, der alttestamentlichen Studien bzw. der Bibelwissenschaft.² Die von der amerikanischen Historikerin Suzanne Mar-chand als „furious“³ charakterisierten deutschen Orientalisten wollten sich, zum Ende des 19. Jahrhunderts, nicht länger auf die Rolle der Vertreter einer alttesta-mentlichen Hilfswissenschaft reduziert sehen. Zu deutlich zeichnete sich ab, in welchem Umfang Stoffe, Textsorten, Sprachlichkeit und Metaphorik der hebräi-schen Bibel den Traditionen des Zweistromlandes verpflichtet waren. Die philo-logische Erschließung der keilschriftlichen Überlieferung führte zu einer stetig wachsenden Kenntnis von Mythen, Epen, Rechtssammlungen, Königsinschriften, Ritualen, Klageliedern, Hymnen und Gebeten, Briefen und Chroniken aus Baby-lonien, Assyrien, Sumer und Akkade. Damit gewannen Geschichte und Kultur-geschichte des benachbarten Zweistromlands an Kontur, die Wissenschaft konnte nunmehr auf autochthone Zeugnisse zugreifen. Neben die historischen Angaben der hebräischen Texte und die Berichte und Mutmaßungen der griechischen und lateinischen Historiker traten Quellen für die Geschichte des Vorderen Orients, die in Vielfalt und zeitlicher Tiefe ganz neue Dimensionen eröffneten. Und, mehr noch, sie stellten das Paradigma der Einzigartigkeit der hebräischen Überlieferung in gewisser Weise in Frage. Die akkadische Erzählung von der großen Flut, die 1873 der Öffentlichkeit vorgestellt wurde, ist nur eines von vielen Beispielen für den jahrhundertelangen, intensiven Austausch zwischen den Gesellschaften des Zweistromlandes und der Levante. Und es war nicht länger zu leugnen, dass Vieles von dem, was wir in den hebräischen Texten lesen, schon Jahrhunderte zuvor von den Gelehrten des Zweistromlandes formuliert und niedergeschrieben worden war.

Öffentliche Aufmerksamkeit erfuhr das Emanzipationsbemühen einer bis da-hin vornehmlich wenigen Experten vertrauten neuen wissenschaftlichen Disziplin in Deutschland vor allem durch eine Reihe von öffentlichen Vorträgen, die Fried-rich Delitzsch ab dem Jahr 1902 für die Deutsche Orient-Gesellschaft (DOG)⁴ hielt. Ein explizites Ziel der wenige Jahre zuvor, am 24. Januar 1898 – dem Ge-burtstag Friedrichs des Großen –, in Berlin gegründeten gelehrten Gesellschaft

¹ Delitzsch 1920a; 1921b.

² Johanning 1988; Lehmann 1994.

³ Marchand 2009, 212–251; bes. 220–221 und 244–249.

⁴ Matthes, 1998; Wilhelm 1998a.

ZAW wiederherzustellen.⁶⁴

5. Und zuletzt: Fragt man nach den Auswirkungen des Babel-Bibel-Streites auf die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft, so kann man zu Rudolf Kittels Ausführungen „Zum Stand der alttestamentlichen Wissenschaft“ aus dem Jahr 1921 zurückkehren. Für Kittel lag auf der Hand, dass die „Arbeit des Spatens und der Altertumskunde“ den eigentlichen „Anstoß zur Erneuerung unserer Wissenschaft gegeben“ hat.⁶⁵ Durch die Archäologie und die Beschäftigung mit den altorientalischen Kulturen wurde der alttestamentlichen Wissenschaft eine neue Aufgabe gegeben, die bis heute nachwirkt und sich gerade in jüngerer Zeit wieder neuer Zustimmung erfreut.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Vgl. Weber 1998, 193.

⁶⁵ Kittel 1921, 87 und Smend 2000, 266.

⁶⁶ Es ist ein Faktum, dass die großen Umbrüche im Fach durch außerbiblisches Material hervorgerufen wurden, seien es die Archäologie, die 1947 entdeckten Schriftrollen vom Toten Meer (Qumran) oder religionsgeschichtliche Fragestellungen. Vgl. zu alttestamentlichen Perspektiven aus dem Babel-Bibel-Streit Liwak 2013, 27–33.

The Paradoxical After-life of the Babel-Bible Controversy

Yaacov Shavit

In February 1903, Shimon Menachem Lazar (1864–1932), a Galician journalist and biblical scholar, wrote in a Hebrew-language newspaper about the “BB Streit,”

There, in the valley of northern Germany, on the *Spree River*, a second Tower of Babel [Babylon] was built, its head in heaven, from which the wise men of *Ashkenaz* [Germany] could wage a battle against the holiness of the Hebrew Bible and the influence of Shem on the world.

I find it remarkable that Lazar chose to compare Berlin to the Tower of the Babel rather than to the Babylon of Revelation 17, where Babylon is described as “Babilon the great, the mother of whores, and of earth’s abomination.” I cannot tell whether Lazar was familiar with the long history of Babylon as an archetype from Augustine to Luther; who used the name “Babylon” to allude to the Roman Catholic Church, but he certainly knew that in the Wilhelminian era, the image of Babylon had evolved and that Berlin had become the epicenter of German fascination with Babylon [and Assyria].¹

In any event, from Lazar’s perspective, and that of his fellow Jews, Berlin was seen as a source of great evil, to paraphrase Jeremiah 1:14, “out of Berlin disaster shall break forth” (or in the King James translation: “out of Berlin an evil shall break forth”). The “evil” associated with Berlin by Lazar referred to an immediate threat to the status of the Bible (the Old Testament), and thus to Judaism. Berlin became a new “Tower of Babel,” spreading a modern version of anti-Judaism [adversus Judaeos]; this time disseminated by “scholars” rather than by theologians and clerics.

Not everyone shared this view. For example, at a Jewish assembly which convened in Berlin in January 1903, one speaker asserted that people had over-reacted to “only helped fuel Delitzsch’s pseudo-scientific megalomania”. The German-French Jewish Assyriologist Julius Oppert commented sarcastically that the sensation generated by Delitzsch’s lectures was, in fact, the result of “the narrow-mindedness of the German public.” Some respondents mocked Delitzsch’s theory as mere “soap bubbles,” adding that his theory had been “blown away by scientific criticism and vanished.” One American Rabbi asserted that Delitzsch was attempting to provide the Germans “with an archaeological Krupp gun for the use of anti-Semitism,” while another suggested that there is no reason to get upset

* Much of what is written here relies on Shavit and Eran 2007, 205–232. Therefore, I did not make many references here.

¹ Polaschegg/Weichenhan 2017.

because the polemic would quickly be forgotten, just as it happened with previous attempts to detract from the Bible its greatness. There was no need to be concerned about it since: "Babel is dead, and her gods have fallen and her monuments have crumbled into dust, Israel's God lives and will outlive all his cursers." However, many felt that Delitzsch's lectures should not be allowed to pass without notice, partly because the Kaiser had temporarily extended his patronage to him.

Jews' reactions to pan-Babylonism in general, and Delitzsch's lectures, in particular, hardly feature in the scholarly literature of (Jewish studies), or, more accurately, in the literature on the intellectual history of German Jewry during the period under discussion. However, at that time, early 20th century Jews were quick to dispute the *documentary hypothesis*, which, to quote Ludwig Phillipson already in 1875, "tore the Bible into shreds" – and continues to do so to this day. In some Jewish circles, Julius Wellhausen (and "his school"), not Delitzsch, was and still is presented as the arch-enemy of the Bible. On the other hand, Jews' response to pan-Babylonism, and particularly to Delitzsch, the "*Apostole der Neubabylonische Religion*," was indeed extraordinarily heated, but it was, nevertheless, a short-lived affair that soon faded away.

Given the above, two questions come to mind: First, why did Delitzsch's three lectures provoke such a flood of reactions, with people considering them an attack against the Bible and equating the need to refute them to fulfilling the commandment to sanctify God's name, even to the point of martyrdom (*kiddush HaShem*)? Moreover, why did this particular debate become such a public affair – or even an *event* – that it transformed the scholarly world into a world of pamphlets and journalism? The Orthodox historian Zeev Yavetz wrote that the debate made its way into Eastern European coffee houses and was taken up by "the coffee-drinking *maskilim*, who draw their wisdom from the press, morning and evening, [and] rise from their seats in the taverns, clapping their hands loudly enough to make the earth tremble."

Literature concerning the influence exerted in antiquity by various cultures, such as that of Pharaonic Egypt, Canaanite Ugarit, and Persia on the religion and culture of the Israelites had already emerged and began to proliferate in the eighteenth and, mainly, the nineteenth centuries; these theories found their way into Jewish literature as well, and their assertions were regarded as radical and even heretical but did not provoke the same type of furor. Why, then, the furious response to Delitzsch? The second question is why, following its brief ascendancy, did this stormy debate not have an afterlife. Instead, as we will see, some of Delitzsch's views were accepted by believing Jews.

Concerning the first question, from the Jewish point of view, it was, on the one hand, a debate between "Jews" and "Christians" and "new Pagans," and, on the other hand, a debate within the Jewish public. In the latter case, the reactions to Delitzsch's theory reflected the religious, cultural, and ideological schism within Jewish society in Germany, and elsewhere. In other words, the Jewish polemic

was conducted both "within and without," both as a dialogue with German (and, more broadly, European) theology and scholarship, and internally, among the various currents of 19th century Jewry. From the Jewish perspective, this new "attack" (*Angriff*) against the Bible was different from the traditional theological Christian polemic. Delitzsch's aim was not to Christianize the Bible, but, in the words of Eduard Köning, the *Babelisierung der Bibel*. This radical *Angriff* surfaced at a time when the Bible became, for a particular segment of Jews, almost a *sola scriptura*; the text that modeled and formed their identity and constituted Judaism's significant assets and heritage, the foundation of their world view and values, and it represented their contribution to humankind. (Heine declared that "wie Luther das Papstthum, so stürzte Mendelssohn den Talmud.") Indeed, in the 19th century, the (Hebrew) Bible became more than the "Torah" or a code of laws; it became a compendium of theology and political ideas. In Goethe's words, it offered material for reflection on human affairs, becoming a cultural Bible and historical Bible, and, no less important, from a liberal Jewish point of view, a "common property, shared by Jews and Christians."

Delitzsch's lectures were perceived as a deliberate and malicious attempt to deprive Judaism and Jews of their most precious asset – carried out not by theologians, but by scholars who employed the new and prestigious disciplines of historical-philology and archeology to attack the Jews. Delitzsch's anti-Judaism was not directed neither against the Talmud and rabbinical Judaism nor against the Judaism of the Second Temple period, but against "biblical Judaism." What was so astounding and dangerous in the opinions that Delitzsch expounded in his three lectures? It was not the assertion that foundational elements of ancient Israel's religion and culture, such as omnipotent God and the revealed Mosaic laws, were borrowed from Mesopotamia? Indeed, this was partly the case, but what was more worrying were the anti-Jewish and racial elements in the second and third lectures, in which Delitzsch crossed the line separating philological-historical discussion about cultural parallels and influences to value-laden arguments on moral superiority, and, as a result, instead of *Babel und Bibel*, or the Bible in light of Babel, the debate became one of *Babel gegen Bibel*. This was not a matter of tracing the influence of Mesopotamian literature on the Bible, because Delitzsch now maintained that the Bible had distorted the content of the former. Instead of a humane worldview and benevolent values, the God of Israel, he asserted, was a god of [insatiable] anger. From a Jewish point of view, Delitzsch's assertion that the Mesopotamian original was "better" than its Jewish "imitation" by virtue of its universal and moral nature could not be left uncontested since this was an inversion of the Jewish self-awareness.

The "evil" element in Delitzsch's argument was his tendency toward neo-paganism and his racialist theory. It seems then that the intensity and fervor of the Jewish response stemmed not only – or not primarily – from its rejection of the idea of Mesopotamian influence on the Bible, but rather because of the negative

way in which Delitzsch portrayed ancient Judaism, and the implications of that portrayal for contemporary Judaism. However, the Jews' response, then, could not be restricted to the domain of values and moral superiority. It was necessary to ground objections in "scientific," or scholarly, "facts" and analysis to prove that Delitzsch's theory rested on pseudo-science. Thus, a new type of Jewish scholar was emerging in Orthodox, liberal, and reform circles, and more than a few Jewish scholars were well-versed in the languages and cultures of the ancient Near East.

The result was a profound transformation in Jewish intellectual history that we could define as a response *in kind*. In other words, both learned Orthodox and non-Orthodox Jews not only accepted that modern "scientific" scholarship was relevant and recognized the primacy of the interpretative tradition, but both were also ready to employ new sources (extra-biblical documents) and methods, and to use the findings of this new form of scholarship to refute what they considered to be distorted and biased work.

However, perhaps above all else, the most significant result of the Streit was the awareness that one cannot adequately understand the history of the Israelite religion and culture in isolation from its *Grossen Zusammenhang*. Israel is not "a people living alone" (Numbers 23:9). In their pioneering Hebrew-language book published in Berlin in 1925 *Geschichte der Biblekritik*, (in Hebrew) Solowetschik and Rubascheff wrote that once the wall separating the study of the Bible from the study of "Babylon" had collapsed, scholars no longer restricted themselves to pointing out parallels between the two. Instead, they found countless aspects of Babylonian culture "spread throughout the entire breadth of the Bible" – from Genesis to Psalms. Ancient Israel was nourished by its neighboring cultures and nourished them in turn.

This argument gained an essential role in modern Jewish polemic. Here is one example: In 1911, in the aftermath of the BBS, a feuilleton in Russian titled *An Exchange of Complaints* was published in which a casual conversation takes place between a Russian and a Jew on a train. This feuilleton is one piece of evidence, out of many, of the extent to which Delitzsch's views penetrated the popular discourse at the time. The Russian claims that Jews are "a race with no real value; they had never created anything of their own." "It has been proven already that your one God and your Sabbath were borrowed from others," "... you acted as nothing more than a popularizer and a traveling salesman." The Jew responds: "In your opinion, anyone who has borrowed cultural elements from Babylonia is likened to a traveling salesman. And, in my opinion, every work of creation in the world is based on borrowed elements." Thus, Jews knew "how to collect fragments of gold and make of them an eternal temple."

But, and this is a fundamental "but," what gave the ancient Israelites the power to make an eternal temple from collected fragments? The answer: it was their unique creative genius, or *Geisteskraft*, or *Volksgeist*, that was the motivating

power behind this unique creation and entity (*Eigenheit* and *Einheit*). In the end, Jews became, for many, a *Kulturvolk* or *Kulturnation*.

Like its German predecessors, modern Orthodoxy operates within the internal tension between science and faith (or tradition). Orthodox scholars see no problem accepting that ancient Israel borrowed *words, concepts, symbols, and material culture* from Mesopotamia, but the idea that it borrowed religious concepts is unacceptable. According to Orthodox scholar Jacob Klein, during the biblical period, the people of Israel "absorbed many values from the rich and advanced Mesopotamian literature, but the people of Israel internalized some of these values and put its original stamp on them while rejecting others, and, in so doing, developed its unique culture."² Another Orthodox rabbi, and biblical scholar, does not find it problematic accepting the view that there are similarities between the laws of the Bible and the legal systems of Near Eastern cultures and explains that the authors of the Bible were familiar with these legal systems and drew from them. In this, he finds no theological problem. The Torah, he writes, adopted those laws that were compatible with the demands of morality and probity, while, at the same time, they fundamentally altered a good number of their underlying principles. The Torah, he maintains, has a "divine perspective." However, he disregards – or ignored – the fact that, according to the Believers, the Pentateuch, or the Torah, or the five books of Moses, in their entirety, were given to the Jews by God.³

Furthermore, here is the paradox: while Believers consider biblical criticism's hypothesis to undermine belief in the "Heavenly Torah," Delitzsch is almost forgotten, but his foundational view is considered the mainstream of biblical studies. It is not based on historical philology but rather on "objective" literary evidence, that is to say, the parallelisms between Mesopotamian and biblical literature. Perhaps there is hard evidence that the Pentateuch is not the "Heavenly Torah" and not written by Moses, but, instead, that it took shape sometime at the end of the monarchy and the Babylonian exile.⁴ Thus the reason for ignoring them and their conclusions, or alternatively, as a strategy to establish the individuality of the Jewish religion and culture during the biblical period not upon theology but the inherent qualities of ancient Israel.

² Klein 2011, 523–579 (in Hebrew).

³ Bazak 2013 (in Hebrew).

⁴ Ignác Goldziher, the great scholar of Islam, wrote that the Babylonian exiles adopted aspects of Mesopotamian heritage but adapted it to their mature monotheistic view, which inspired a new spirit within them and accorded them a broad moral influence that has existed forever. Moreover, it is impossible to accept the view of a culture with a low degree of cultural development that takes an interest in complex theological matters. Only when ancient Israel attained a sufficiently high degree of cultural development was it able to cultivate its own unique literary heritage. This was stated in a speech in memory of Ernst Renan in 1893 and printed the following year by the Hungarian academy at which he taught. Goldziher 1894.

However, the BBS consists of many arguments, which are still alive and relevant today, that anticipated later polemic. Among these are the tensions between scholarship and pseudo-scholarship and ideology; the built-in tension between "belief" and "science"; fundamental questions regarding the contacts between cultures; questions of cultural transmission, debt, acculturation, and others; and finally, determining the normative (or practical) boundaries between the "inner" and the "outer" concerning culture.

Perhaps this is the main reason why the BBS deserves an after-life as a typological event in the corner of the history of biblical studies, and the history of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*.

Jacob Burckhardt argued that parallels may be investigated up to a certain point, but can never be compared to one another with absolute strictness and certainty. The more plainly our evidence seems to speak in these matters, the more carefully must we refrain from certain assumptions and rush generalization⁵ (*The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, 271–370). Moreover, parallels and resemblances are important, but no less the distinguish marker signals which define the nature of an individual culture and its boundaries.

**Der Babel-Bibel-Streit:
Politik, Theologie und Wissenschaft um 1900**

Eine Sonderausstellung des Vorderasiatischen Museums
im Pergamonmuseum

⁵ Burckhardt, 1990, 270–271.