

# Review of: "Deuteronomic Redaction and the Evolution of the Decalogues in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5"

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Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

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The aim of this article is to review the theories on the origin and composition of the two versions of the Decalogue, Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5. The starting point of the study is Erhard Blum's theory, which distinguishes between two successive "compositions" of the Pentateuch in the Persian period, an initial composition by a Deuteronomistic school (KD) and a revision of this composition by a priestly school (KP). Based on this theory, the study seeks to find the earliest version of the Decalogue, which could be at the origin of the two current versions.

The first section of the article is devoted to the history of the research and summarizes a series of publications on the subject, choosing, presumably, the most important and significant. The next section takes up the question of chronology: which is the oldest version of the Decalogue, that of Exodus 20 or that of Deuteronomy? The author tends to favor the anteriority of Exodus 20.

The article goes on to question the date of composition of the more complete decalogue. It suggests that it was composed at the same time as the Deuteronomic reform (622 BCE) and the beginnings of the priestly reform during the Babylonian exile.

The next section, arguably more problematic, isolates the unique elements of both versions and asserts that they were added to an earlier, common version. This "trimmed" version contains, according to our author, numerous expressions in Deuteronomistic style. He therefore proposes to eliminate them to find the most original Decalogue. These Deuteronomistic expressions are said to have been added by prophetic editors. The author then proposes what he believes to be the most original version of the Decalogue. In this version, all the commandments are negative; there are twelve, not ten. All this leads to a conclusion that seems to call somewhat into question the research as a whole: "Thus, our hypothetical reconstruction of the 'Twelve Commandments' must remain only an interesting hypothesis".

The conclusion takes up the essentials of the study. Exodus 20, without the priestly additions, is older than Deuteronomy 5, but the text of Deuteronomy 5 has also been reworked. There are at least two stages in this re-elaboration. All this implies a highly complex editorial process that is difficult to reconstruct. Erhard Blum's hypothesis can essentially be accepted, but it should be modified to take better account of the idiosyncrasies of the biblical text.

A few comments.

1. The article is interesting and instructive. The history of the research, which could be more complete, certainly helps to orientate us in the vast field of studies on the Decalogue. The observations on the texts are valuable and meticulous. The hypothesis as such certainly remains a hypothesis, and the author himself acknowledges this.

2. I still have a few difficulties. Firstly, regarding the bibliography. The author cites Blum's theory, but neither mentions nor discusses a more recent article by the same Erhard Blum:

Erhard Blum, "The Decalogue and the Composition History of the Pentateuch", in: Thomas Dozeman - Konrad Schmid - Baruch Schwartz (eds.), *The Pentateuch. International Perspectives on Current Research* (FAT 78; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011) 289-301.

3. In the bibliography, it seems to me that it would be useful to mention at least the following works:

Aaron, David H., *Etched in Stone: The Emergence of the Decalogue* (London – New York: T&T Clark, 2006).

Clines, David J.A., "The Decalogue: The Scholarly Tradition Critiqued", in *The Decalogue and its Cultural Influence* (ed. Dominik Markl) (Hebrew Bible Monographs 58; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2013) 330-339.

Coogan, Michael, *The Ten Commandments: A Short History of an Ancient Text* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014).

Frevel, Christian e.a. (Hrsg.), *Die Zehn Worte. Der Dekalog als Testfall der Pentateuchkritik* (QD 440; Freiburg: Herder, 2004).

Himbaza, Innocent, *Le Décalogue et l'histoire du texte. Étude des formes textuelles du Décalogue et leurs implications dans l'histoire du texte de l'Ancien Testament* (OBO 207; Fribourg Suisse: Academic Press – Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004).

Otto, Eckart, „Alte und neue Perspektiven in der Dekalogforschung“, *Kontinuum und Proprium. Studien zur Sozial- und Rechtsgeschichte des Alten Orients und des Alten Testaments* (OBC 8; Eckart Otto) (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1996) 285-303.

Otto, Eckart, "Der Dekalog als Brennspeigel israelitischer Rechtsgeschichte", *Alttestamentliche Glaube und Biblische Theologie*. Festschrift H.D. Preuß (Hrsg. Jutta Hausmann – Hans-Jürgen Zobel; Stuttgart 1992) 59-68 = *Kontinuum und Proprium. Studien zur Sozial- und Rechtsgeschichte des Alten Orients und des Alten Testaments* (OBC 8; Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz, 1996) 293-303.

Otto, Eckart, "Der Dekalog in den deuteronomistischen Redaktionen des Deuteronomiums", *Die Zehn Worte. Der Dekalog als Testfall der Pentateuchkritik* (Hrsg. Christian Frevel – Michael Konkel – Johannes Schnocks) (QD 140; Freiburg – Basel – Wien: Herder, 2005) 95-108.

Reventlow, Henning Graf - Yair Hoffman (eds.), *The Decalogue in Jewish and Christian Tradition* (LHBOTS 509; New York - London: T&T Clark, 2011).

Rom-Shiloni, Dalit M., "The Decalogue," in *Oxford Handbook of Biblical Law* (Edited by P. Barmash) (Oxford – New York: Oxford University Press, 2019) 135–155.

Stamm, Johann Jakob – Maurice E. Andrew, *The Ten Commandments in Recent Research* (Studies in Biblical Theology. Second Series 2; London: SCM, 1967).

The recent article by Dalit Rom-Shiloni is one of the important publications in recent years. Innocent Himbaza's book is essential because it treats the textual problems, and this is today unavoidable in a study on the history of a biblical text. Unfortunately, the book is written in French – and *Galli non leguntur*. For the history of research, besides Nielsen and Segal, Stamm-Andrew' monograph contains some important pieces of information. There are several articles by Eckart Otto on the Decalogue and, as far as I can see, his perspective is different from that defended in the article under review.

3. The article remains very hypothetical, and the author himself admits it. In my opinion, this is somewhat regrettable. Do we just have one "intelligent guess" more to add to a long list of articles on the same topic?

To confirm this view, in these 16 pages, the word perhaps is used 16 times; the auxiliary "may" is used more or less 20 times; the verb "would" is used more or less 30 times; the verb "could" is used 15 times.

4. The article does not mention a question raised by several commentators, and at least since Martin Noth's seminal work on the topic. The decalogue in Exodus 20 does not fit its context. The introduction is awkward (cf. Exod 19:25 and Exod 20:1). According to Noth and others, we have good reasons to believe that the original text passed from Exod 19:16-19 to Exod 20:18-20 or 21. The continuation of the theophany is to be found in Exod 20:18-21 that describes the people's reaction to this theophany. Several scholars also noticed that the decalogue in Deuteronomy 5 is better integrated in its context, with two allusions to Exodus (Dt 5:6, 15) whereas to reference to creation in Exod 20:13, which means to a very different tradition, is generally considered as a sign of a later development.

See, at least, Martin Noth, *Das zweite Buch Mose: Exodus* (ATD 5; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1959); English translation: Martin Noth, *Exodus* (OTL; Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1962) 154:

"But the introductory remark 20.1 is of quite general content, and vv. 18-21 do not connect immediately with the Decalogue but with the description of the theophany in 19.16b, 17, 19. The Decalogue is thus so loosely inserted into the narrative that we are led to the conclusion that from a literary aspect it is a secondary passage in the account of the theophany on Sinai."

It could be perhaps useful to consult other commentators, for example, Childs, Propp, or Albertz.

5. The article discusses at length the Deuteronomistic vocabulary and phraseology of the decalogue. But there is no mention of some classical works in the field, for instance, Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972 = Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1992). The topic is object of some discussions. See, for instance, Linda S. Schearing – Steven L. McKenzie (eds.), *Those Elusive Deuteronomists: The Phenomenon of Pan-Deuteronomism* (JSOTSS 268; Sheffield: Academic Press, 1999).

In conclusion, it seems that the articles could be easily improved after integrating and discussing some of the important items mentioned above.

With my kind regards and every good wish.

Yours faithfully,



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