



BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY • PROVO, UTAH

- Title** *Review of Authoring the Old Testament: Genesis–Deuteronomy*, by David E. Bokovoy
- Author** Alex Douglas
- Reference** *Studies in the Bible and Antiquity* 8 (2016): 229–38.
- ISSN** 2151-7800 (print), 2168-3166 (online)
- DOI** <https://doi.org/10.18809/sba.2016.0112>

of the Eden narrative against the backdrop of image animation conceptions in ancient Southwest Asia, and I look forward to seeing the future development of and reaction to her work.

Cory Crawford is assistant professor of classics and world religions at Ohio University.

David E. Bokovoy. *Authoring the Old Testament: Genesis–Deuteronomy*. Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2014.

Reviewed by Alex Douglas

Studies in the Bible and Antiquity, vol. 8, 2016, pp. 229–38

© 2016 Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, Brigham Young University

Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18809/sba.2016.0112> Journal DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18809/misba.21683166>

DAVID BOKOVOY’S MOST RECENT BOOK, *Authoring the Old Testament: Genesis–Deuteronomy*, represents a fresh and much-needed perspective on how Latter-day Saints can simultaneously embrace both scholarship and faith. This book is the first in what is anticipated to be a three-volume set exploring issues of authorship in the Old Testament published by Bokovoy with Greg Kofford Books. Bokovoy uses current scholarship on the Pentateuch as a springboard for discussing LDS perspectives on scripture, revelation, and cultural influence. To my knowledge, this is the first book-length attempt to popularize the classical Documentary Hypothesis among Latter-day Saints, and Bokovoy does an exemplary job of tackling this issue head-on and taking an unflinching view of its implications for how we understand Restoration scriptures such as the Book of Moses, the Book of Abraham, and the Book of Mormon.

In the prologue, Bokovoy introduces the reader to “higher criticism,” and he lays out a paradigm in which believing readers need not feel threatened when the findings of modern scholarship contradict

previously held beliefs. As he notes, Latter-day Saints tend to impose modern LDS ideas onto all scripture, but he argues that “reading modern conceptions into ancient texts limits the original author’s ability to tell us what *he* knows” (p. xviii, emphasis in original). Bokovoy thus lays the groundwork for an approach in which tension and contradiction need not lead to a crisis of faith but are rather seen as an opportunity to expand one’s spiritual horizons and find more truth.

The first chapter lays out a brief history of interpreting the Pentateuch, beginning with the Bible’s traditional position as a “privileged text” (p. 5). The chapter describes a number of perceived inconsistencies in the text, such as the different order of creation in Genesis 1:1–2:4a and Genesis 2:4b–3:24, changes in use of the divine name, anachronisms in the text, and differences between the diverse pentateuchal legal collections. Bokovoy shows how these difficulties led to an eventual breakdown in the consensus that the Pentateuch was written by Moses—or indeed by any one individual.

Chapter 2 explores these narrative inconsistencies, and Bokovoy introduces higher criticism not as a faithless approach to the Bible but as “an attempt to explain the types of inconsistencies in the Bible we have witnessed so far by identifying original independent textual sources” (p. 17). He argues that the Pentateuch is a composite text, consisting of multiple preexisting, independent documents that were at some point combined to form the text as we now know it, and he provides some of the most compelling evidence we have for the Documentary Hypothesis. He demonstrates how the flood narrative (Genesis 6–9) can be separated into two overlapping, independent stories, and he shows how the J and P versions of the flood exhibit a clear thematic and literary relationship to the J and P creation stories, respectively. He carries out the same type of analysis on the sale of Joseph (Genesis 37), with one source set in bold to show how the verses can be separated into two independent stories. Throughout this chapter, Bokovoy presents numerous analogies and examples to help the reader contextualize this combination of sources, such as the literary combination seen in the Diatessaron, in Doctrine and Covenants 132, and even in the Book of Mormon.

Bokovoy goes into greater detail about the sources themselves in chapter 3; here he lays out the classical Documentary Hypothesis. He identifies the sources as J, E, D, and P, and he argues that the sources can be “extracted and read separately, each source tell[ing] the history of the House of Israel in its own unique way” (p. 42). He attributes P to Priestly circles writing in the sixth century BCE, addressing “an audience facing the prospect of Babylonian captivity (or perhaps even already in exile)” (p. 51), while J is said to be written by Judean scribes from the eighth to the seventh centuries BCE. He presents E as being “written in the North, probably in the ninth century BC” (p. 56), while D is written “by an Israelite scribal school from the Northern Kingdom,” beginning in the seventh century BCE (p. 63). Bokovoy shows how each source has its own unique emphases, literary style, historical focus, emphasized hero, view of God, and religious focus, and he provides a helpful chart comparing all the sources (p. 71).

In chapter 4, Bokovoy explains how the sources are dated, and he begins with the claim that a diachronic linguistic analysis shows the relative date of the sources to be J/E, P, and then D as the latest source, with P being written before the book of Ezekiel (pp. 77–78). He briefly reviews the history of the development of Hebrew—largely in an attempt to show that Moses, Abraham, or Jacob could not have written the Pentateuch—and he argues that Assyrian influence on scribalization was a key driving force behind the development of the written sources of the Pentateuch. All of this, he contends, points to seeing the development of these sources between the mid-eighth to early-sixth centuries BCE.

Bokovoy describes Mesopotamian influences on the Pentateuch in chapter 5. Here his academic training truly shines. He begins by addressing the common question of whether Israelite sources might have influenced Mesopotamian ones, rather than vice versa, and he goes on to lay out the rich mythological and cultural background from which the pentateuchal stories draw. He shows some of the direct (and indirect) influences exerted on the Bible by sources such as the Babylonian creation myth, Atrahasis, Gilgamesh, the Sumerian King List, the

Laws of Hammurabi, and the legend of Sargon of Akkad. He also draws out the parallel structures of Deuteronomy and Assyrian vassal treaties, leading the reader through this evidence to show that “scripture is never produced in a cultural vacuum” (p. 122).

Drawing together the previous five chapters, Bokovoy in chapter 6 addresses how to read the Pentateuch critically as a Latter-day Saint. He acknowledges that much of the information presented up to this point can be challenging, but he argues that a critical approach to scripture is not antithetical to faith; rather, it “only presents problems for certain religious paradigms” (p. 123). He then advocates a new paradigm for understanding scripture, where scripture is seen not as the inerrant word of God but as the testimony of those who have experienced God and who try to express that experience in writing. He writes, “In our worship services and Sunday meetings we listen to fellow members who all experience God in different and varying ways. And while we may not always fully agree with them, we are still able to appreciate and even learn from their testimonies” (p. 133). Different scriptural voices, as with members of our congregation, represent “persons whom we worship *with*” (p. 133, emphasis in the original).

In chapter 7, Bokovoy addresses the implications of the Documentary Hypothesis for understanding the Book of Moses in the Pearl of Great Price. He states the problem bluntly: the Book of Moses “revises sources that were originally produced by Judean scribes interacting with Mesopotamian texts hundreds of years after Moses would have lived. Moses simply could not have written the Book of Moses” (p. 141). To address the problem, Bokovoy establishes pseudepigraphy as a norm in the ancient world, as seen with the disputed Pauline letters, and he argues that the mere fact of pseudepigraphy need not necessarily mean that a given work is uninspired. Despite this claim for modern origin, Bokovoy goes on to argue that the Book of Moses shows a number of authentically ancient themes, such as the idea of controlling water as God, God as a “Man of Council,” and so on. Thus the Book of Moses should be seen “as an inspired text that not only restores ancient theological insights concerning divinity, but that builds upon and advances

these earlier perspectives” (p. 149). In short, Bokovoy argues that the Documentary Hypothesis rules out the possibility of seeing the Book of Moses as an ancient text, but this modern text nevertheless restores and expands on ancient themes. “In Joseph’s revelation,” Bokovoy writes, “the temple perspective on Genesis is presented through Moses as a reflection of what Israel’s great prophet *would* have written if given the chance” (p. 148, emphasis in the original).

Bokovoy draws similar conclusions regarding the Book of Abraham in chapter 8. He outlines a number of ancient themes seen in the Book of Abraham, such as the idea of Facsimile 3 as a presentation scene, the divine council, and gods as stars, but the fact that the Book of Abraham incorporates and adapts the P and J creation stories rules out the possibility that this could have been written by Abraham himself. Again, this “need not lead to the conclusion that the interpretations Joseph Smith offered are not inspired,” but rather “Joseph’s explanations can be seen as a religious adaptation of ancient images that reflects newly revealed teachings” (p. 179).

Chapter 9 addresses the implications of the Documentary Hypothesis for our understanding of the Book of Mormon, and Bokovoy notes that the main problem stems from the plates of brass, which are said to contain “the five books of Moses” (1 Nephi 5:11). For Bokovoy, the Documentary Hypothesis itself does not pose a problem for Book of Mormon historicity, but it does pose a problem if we date the composition and compilation of the sources to after the early sixth century BCE, when Lehi would have left Jerusalem. Bokovoy allows that such an early date is possible, but he approaches the Book of Mormon much as he does the Book of Moses and the Book of Abraham, where he sees a mix of both ancient and modern themes. Thus he advocates the position commonly associated with Blake Ostler, which is that the Book of Mormon is a modern expansion of an ancient source. Bokovoy then concludes his book with an exhortation that just as we see Jesus as both fully human and fully divine, so we should understand the production of our scripture as being both human and divine.

Authoring the Old Testament does an impressive job of navigating the worlds of scholarship and faith, and such an approach is a welcome addition to the current conversation surrounding these issues. Bokovoy leads his reader carefully through the evidence, all the while helping facilitate a shift in paradigm that can accommodate multiple—and at times contradictory—perspectives. He also builds a compelling case for multiple authorship within the Pentateuch, and he models for his reader a viable way to reconcile multiple authorship with a view of Restoration scripture as divinely inspired.

Nevertheless, numerous points of concern can be raised about Bokovoy's work. At the most basic level, his case for multiple authorship is based entirely on a Neo-Documentarian approach to the Pentateuch. The Neo-Documentarian approach does have some advocates (most notably Joel Baden and Richard Elliott Friedman, on whom Bokovoy relies extensively), but this view of the Pentateuch is otherwise considered problematic by many contemporary biblical scholars. In the early twentieth century, most scholars agreed on the basic tenets of the Documentary Hypothesis as described by Bokovoy, but this consensus has long since collapsed as scholars have questioned the fundamental assumptions of this model for understanding pentateuchal authorship. For example, should multiple authorship in the Pentateuch be seen as deriving from independent sources? Might the data be better explained through a supplementary hypothesis or through scribal expansions on preexisting material? Might it be more productive to view the Pentateuch as a compilation of various oral and written *traditions* rather than four complete written sources? The possibilities for explaining the text as we now have it are legion, but the criticisms leveled against the classical Documentary Hypothesis are serious enough that most scholars have backed away from sweeping claims about J, E, D, or P.

Bokovoy's presentation of the Documentary Hypothesis gives little more than a nod to these criticisms, and his ensuing discussion is therefore based on a number of highly problematic claims. For example, Bokovoy writes extensively of the narrative arc, religious focus, date, and even provenance of the J and E sources, but compare this with

Jean-Louis Ska, who writes: “Today, only a few scholars continue to speak about an ‘E source,’” and “It seems increasingly difficult to agree that an ancient Yahwist source ever existed.”¹ David Carr, in his recent book *The Formation of the Hebrew Bible*, likewise notes: “However easy to grasp and teach, . . . the portion of the documentary hypothesis relating to the identification of cross-Pentateuchal ‘J’ and ‘E’ sources (even aside from questions of dating them) has proven multiply flawed.”² None of this is to say that modern scholars see the Pentateuch as an essentially unified document stemming from one author. On the contrary, practically everyone agrees that the Pentateuch is a composite text, but scholars now view the Documentary Hypothesis—particularly in its classical formulation under Julius Wellhausen—as a questionable model for explaining the nature of this text.

In and of itself, the continuing debate around these questions does not pose a problem for Bokovoy’s work. The real issue comes in how the debate is presented for a lay audience. According to Bokovoy, “Today, virtually all biblical scholars agree with the fact that separate sources appear in the Pentateuch, and despite the academic debates *concerning historical dating and specific textual parameters*, there is much that can be known concerning these sources” (p. 41, emphasis added). On the one hand, this gives the impression that the current debates center only on when J was written or which texts should be assigned to E. But as shown above, these debates touch on the very core of the Documentary Hypothesis, such as whether we should even posit independent documents to begin with. On the other hand, this introduction leads the reader to believe that what follows represents the scholarly consensus—that is, that which “can be known concerning these sources” “despite the academic debates.” In just one example, Bokovoy implies that most scholars agree that E was written by northern scribes in the mid-eighth century, but this is a vast overstatement of both what can be known

1. Jean-Louis Ska, *Introduction to Reading the Pentateuch*, trans. Sr. Pascale Dominique (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 132, 142.

2. David M. Carr, *The Formation of the Hebrew Bible: A New Reconstruction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 124.

from the data and what scholars agree concerning it. If, as Ska claims, “only a few scholars continue to speak about an ‘E source,’” we would be hard pressed to say that we can pin down the date, provenance, and major religious themes of this text, much less whether it even exists.

This same issue applies to dating the sources. Bokovoy is quite specific in the dates he assigns to each source, but in so doing he places himself near the fringe of biblical scholarship. Even Joel Baden, one of the most vocal proponents of the Documentary Hypothesis, advocates caution here. Baden writes, “Attempts to order the documents chronologically (that is, to date them relatively) and situate them temporally (to date them absolutely) with any specificity are based more on a given scholar’s a priori historical beliefs than on the texts themselves.”³ Bokovoy not only assigns relative dates to the text, but he also gives fairly precise ranges for composition, all of which fall before the exile.

This early dating of the sources to the preexilic period makes Bokovoy’s argument even more problematic. For example, most pentateuchal scholars acknowledge a clearly identifiable layer of Priestly material in the Pentateuch, but proposed dates for this material tend to be quite late, with some scholars even proposing an origin in the Hellenistic period.⁴ Bokovoy’s assertion that P is preexilic, “*yet perhaps* not finished until the Exile in 586 BC” (p. 87, emphasis added) again places him outside mainstream biblical scholarship.

These problems in the argument are unfortunate, especially since *Authoring the Old Testament* would be equally as effective (if not more so) in reconciling scholarship with belief if it were based on more solid ground. The examples that Bokovoy cites, such as the two creation accounts or the dual flood narratives, are compelling evidence of multiple authorship in the Pentateuch, even without the questionable claims

3. Joel S. Baden, *The Composition of the Pentateuch: Renewing the Documentary Hypothesis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 31.

4. See Carr, *Formation of the Hebrew Bible*, 298, and Ska, *Introduction to Reading the Pentateuch*, 161. As Douglas Knight points out in *Law, Power, and Justice in Ancient Israel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2011), 28, a postexilic date of composition also helps make sense of the intimate connection between the Pentateuch and other Mesopotamian texts.

of the classical Documentary Hypothesis. As Bokovoy points out, the issue of multiple authorship in the Pentateuch poses numerous problems for Latter-day Saint readers, and Bokovoy's reconciliation would work just as well without the claim that these stories can be separated out into independent documents whose dates and provenance can be ascertained by modern scholarship

In the second major section of the book, Bokovoy's treatment of Mesopotamian influence on the Pentateuch is nothing short of superb. He makes a compelling case that we cannot understand this text without some awareness of the rich cultural background from which these authors drew, and the implications of this conclusion are far-reaching. He argues that from the Old Testament through the Doctrine and Covenants, God always speaks to humans "after the manner of their language, that they might come to understanding" (D&C 1:24). Thus if we wish to truly understand these texts, a knowledge of the surrounding culture that informs their composition is essential. Bokovoy does a great job in helping the reader see how a faithful Latter-day Saint can understand the interaction between God, culture, and a human author in the production of sacred texts.

Among certain segments of Latter-day Saints, Bokovoy's treatment of the Book of Moses and the Book of Abraham will doubtlessly raise some hackles. In denying Mosaic and Abrahamic authorship, he attempts to soften the blow by using the term "scriptural attribution" rather than pseudepigrapha or inspired fiction (p. 172), but this still represents a profound paradigm shift from the dominant LDS narrative concerning these books. The same could be said of Bokovoy's treatment of the Book of Mormon as a modern expansion of an ancient source. Throughout these sections, Bokovoy does an exemplary job of explaining how such paradigms can harmonize with other LDS teachings, but regardless of how the topic is broached, there will still be a sizable portion of LDS readers who will bristle at some of Bokovoy's conclusions.

Yet despite the discomfort this book is sure to produce, it also fills a real need within the LDS community. There are many Latter-day Saints struggling to find ways to reconcile what they learn with what they

believe, and Bokovoy takes these readers by the hand, gently showing them one viable path through these issues. The path Bokovoy charts is not the only possible way, and it has its drawbacks, just as every path does. But the reader cannot get more than a few pages through this book without feeling Bokovoy's love and passion for his faith, for the world of academic scholarship, and for the reader. For Bokovoy, these tensions are "challenges to learn, not contradictions to avoid,"⁵ and it is this spirit of honest inquiry that makes his book such a delight to read. This is precisely the type of discourse that is needed among Latter-day Saints, and I look forward to the next two books in the series.

Alex Douglas is a PhD candidate in Hebrew Bible/Old Testament at Harvard University.

Eva Mroczek. *The Literary Imagination in Jewish Antiquity*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016.

Reviewed by Carli Anderson

Studies in the Bible and Antiquity, vol. 8, 2016, pp. 238–49

© 2016 Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, Brigham Young University

Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18809/sba.2016.0113> Journal DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18809/misba.21683166>

OVER THE LAST SEVERAL DECADES, scholarly discussion on the textual world of the Second Temple has been shifting. Ideas about texts and the development of the biblical canon began to be reshaped by the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, which altered previously established ideas about the configuration of a prebiblical canon. Investigation of those and other texts made it apparent that the structure of the biblical canon was still fluid at a much later date than was originally thought. These new scholarly analyses are redefining the timelines and ideas about

5. "Mormon and Modern," Church Newsroom Release, July 6, 2012, <http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/article/mormon-and-modern>.