THE EXPLICIT AND IMPLICIT IN BIBLICAL NARRATIVE

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I

The study of biblical texts for historiographical research is bound to attend to the reliability of sources and will examine the data available accordingly. The literary techniques of the ancient authors and redactors, as well as the rules of composition, must therefore be scrutinized from that point of view. This is in effect a literary problem, but the application of historical and historical-geographical criteria may enhance this investigation, as it introduces tangible tests and perceptions. The perfection of literary criteria as a result of such investigation benefits not only historiography but literary research in general.\(^1\)

When verifying the testimony of a given text in respect of its historical or ideological notions, a cardinal question generally posed is what is the cognizance of the text. Awareness of certain aspects, or lack thereof, is noted, as well as differences of detail and formulation compared to other texts that refer to the same subject. It is in this sphere of the testimony of texts that the question of explicit and implicit expression arises.

Explicit and implicit modes of expression in biblical texts, narrative or poetical, are known. The object of this study is a programmatic review of some of the more prominent phenomena that may assist in classifying and defining literary ways and means of the ancient authors in this respect. Closer attention to the scribal tradition and technique may lead to better understanding of the art of composition. It may furthermore facilitate the perception of literary complexes

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\(^1\) The subjects dealt with in this study touch upon many basic problems of the historical, literary and textual research of the biblical canon. The relevant literature is both comprehensive and basic, and comprises the commentaries on the individual books and the standard studies devoted to the various issues and textual problems raised. It therefore seems superfluous to itemize the extensive literature, and only a few specific or summarizing references will be given.
underlying the compositions known, and contribute to a reappraisal of literary relativity and history.

Whereas implicit rendering is always an abbreviated expression that refers in different ways to features otherwise known, and thus patently constitutes a citation, explicit writing may be a primary or a quoted formulation. Beyond that distinction another aspect of quoted formulation, common to both explicit and implicit writing, should be noted. Besides factual plain formulation, normative and stylized representative expressions may be used. Furthermore, a composition may be straightforward and informative relating events, or be designed to express ideas and concepts, in which case the details and motifs adduced may not be basically integral but chosen for illustration and redactional requirements only. All these aspects intimated here emphasize some of the more obvious marks of the intricate literary development that has to be considered when analyzing ways and features of composition.

Considering the complexity of the texts a cardinal requirement of any analysis must be reliance on the internal evidence as to the import of the composition and its objects. The questions to be posed must be aimed at differentiating the components and their place in the final product, and the manner of their integration must be elicited from the circumstances of their incorporation in the text. No imposition of extraneous criteria may be substituted for the presumable rationale of the text as it stands. An integral part of this attitude is to seek the message of the text as formulated. It is in this spirit that the scribal art, its rules and technique, must be studied.

II

As intimated already, the literary phenomena under discussion, centred on the explicit and implicit modes of expression, may best be scrutinized, when reviewing the question of cognizance of textual complexes. The diverse aspects involved will become apparent when various examples of such textual problems will be examined in detail.

In Num. xxxiii the story of the wandering of the Israelites from Egypt to the land of Canaan is summarized by listing the stations of their itinerary. The theophany at Mount Sinai is not even hinted at in this account. A few of the other occurrences, known from the detailed narrative are briefly alluded to, namely the strife due to lack of water at Rephidim in v. 14, Aaron's death in vv. 38–9, and the