Since the declining of the sun of source criticism in the 20th century the book of Numbers has become a “sleeping beauty.” There are a lot of prejudices against this book, be it its legal content or the mostly misunderstood alternation of story and law. The Christian prejudices of the 19th century are still perceptible. Only one example of an influential judgment shall underline this, namely Bruno Baentsch’s comment on Numbers 1–10:

Übrigens gehört der ganze Abschnitt so ziemlich zu dem Ödesten, das in der Literatur jemals produziert worden ist. Aber wie eine Perle in wertloser Schale liegt darin doch der herrliche Priestersegen 6.22–27 eingebettet, und die Eifersuchts-Tora in 5.11–31 gehört zu den in kulturhistorischer Beziehung interessantesten Dokumenten des Pentateuchs.¹

Numbers is interesting, but not relevant. The source critical model worked out well in Genesis. It worked less well in Exodus, but in Numbers only roughly, and sometimes with violence. Martin Noth has set a landmark with his exegesis of Joshua, in which he neglected the traditional sources and found the Deuteronomistic History instead.² In his commentary on Numbers on the one hand he held fast to the sources in this book, but on the other hand he recognized the pressure of the documentary hypothesis, which seeks to trace the lines starting in Genesis. Noth respected the bridge-building function of the book of Numbers and

¹ B. Baentsch, Exodus, Leviticus, Numeri (HK 1.2; Göttingen 1902), 444.
searched for Hexateuchal and Enneateuchal solutions. But in the meanwhile the source critical model as a base for Old Testament exegesis of the Pentateuch has been broken. The Yahwist is challenged just as the Priestly source. One of the new arising battlefields can be found in Numbers. To give just one example: if one asks for the end of the Priestly source (P^G), the alternative between the Sinai pericope and the traditional end with the death of Moses in Deut 34:8 or 9 is not decided in Exodus, Leviticus, or Deuteronomy: the crucial point is the existence of a P-version of the spy story in Numbers. During the last decade the book of Numbers is re-evaluated in Pentateuchal discussions as well as in redactional criticism. This is due to the broad study *Die Vollendung der Tora* of Reinhard Achenbach, the studies of Oliver Artus and Ulrich Fistill, or the famous compositional analysis of Won Lee.

Certainly, the structure is a challenge to many and was often misunderstood as chaotic or "reichlich undurchsichtig" ("amply obscure"). Thomas C. Römer has characterized the situation felicitously: "Numbers is indeed the only book of the Pentateuch where commentators need several pages to justify their idea of the structure of the book and to refute

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9 M. Noth, *Das vierte Buch Mose. Numeri* (3d ed.; ATD 7.4; Göttingen 1977), 5; see ch. 7, where Noth calls it "verworren Anordnung des Inhalts."