

**The Higher Criticism**  
**Johann Gottfried Eichhorn**  
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 (1803)

EDITORS' NOTE. From the 3rd (1803) edition of Eichhorn's Introduction to the Study of the Old Testament, translated by George Tilly Gollop (1888). Eichhorn's OT researches were the model for Wolf's work on Homer. Says Wolf, in n25 to his Chapter 15, "See above all Eichhorn, Einleitung in das Alte Testament (1787). 1:136 (#63), 2:213 (#405)."



. . . it behoves the higher criticism only to exercise its office and pronounce sentence after separating, from internal evidence, what belongs to different authors and times. He who blames a Biblical scholar, or even sighs with pious apprehensions, when he beholds him instituting with critical precision and judicial severity an examination into each book of the Old Testament . . . must be either altogether unacquainted with antiquity, profane literature, and the usual mode of dealing with it, or be so entirely destitute of strength of mind as to be incapable of perceiving the serious consequence of omitting to supply a test of this nature and also the otherwise invincible army of doubts, which only by the method proposed can be driven from their entrenchments. And he who, holding such proof to be alike useful, important, and necessary, should from sensitive and over-anxious piety wish to prescribe a law to the critical inquirer, only to separate where external marks afford occasion or compel to such division: such a person, in the realm of criticism, must still be classed among the weak, and would still endanger the character for genuineness of the greatest number of Hebrew writings. The ancients [had] a custom at times of marking the end of a book by a subscription, as for instance, Moses and Jeremiah did, and the authors of an old collection of Psalms, by means of the words, 'Here end the Songs of David.' Continuators also indicated the places where the continuation commenced, by a marginal note . . . But such examples are rare; and for the most part it becomes necessary by entirely other means, and by the finest operations of the higher criticism, to attempt to discover what, through the progress of time, in an ancient work is interpolated and appended.

## Appendix

NOTE: We here add, from the Introduction to their translation of Wolf's *Prolegomena* (Princeton 1985, 20f), a comment by Anthony Grafton et al.

. . . the *Prolegomena* was directly modeled on . . . J G Eichhorn's *Einleitung ins Alte Testament* . . . Like Wolf, Eichhorn studied at Göttingen under Heyne and Michaelis . . . His works on the Old and New Testament fascinated literati of widely different stripe. Coleridge filled the margins of his copies with approving, detailed notes. Wolf thought the volumes on the New Testament exemplary. He cited those on the Old Testament in passing in the *Prolegomena* . . . But the connection between his work and Eichhorn's is far closer even than his explicit remarks suggest.

Like Wolf, Eichhorn treated his text as a historical and an anthropological document, the much-altered remnant of an early stage in the development of human culture. Like Wolf, he held that the original work had undergone radical changes, so that the serious Biblical scholar must reconstruct "the history of the text." Like Wolf too, he saw the true history of the text as its ancient history, before the standardized manuscripts now extant had been prepared. With the work of the Masoretes, he wrote, "properly ends the history of the written text; for the chief work was accomplished, and the Hebrew text continued now, some insignificant changes excepted, true in all its copies, to its once-for-all established pattern . . ." Like Wolf, Eichhorn paid much attention to the development of the literary language in which his texts were couched, the history of the alphabet and writing implements by which they were recorded, and the growth of a canon of books accepted as genuine. Like Wolf, though from the opposite standpoint, he compared the Bible's growth and fate with Homer's.

Eichhorn's and Wolf's conclusions about the early formation of their texts had almost as much in common as their methods. True, they differed on many points of detail. Yet each found errors and inconsistencies of thought and language everywhere in his masterpiece, and each saw these as the clues that could enable one to identify the original substrates that Moses on the one hand, Pisistratus on the other, had reworked. In *Prolegomena* chs 30-31, Wolf shows how to use literary and linguistic evidence ("unusualness and ambiguity of their diction," "unusualness in words and phrases," "a disparate color in thought and expression," "the sinews and the Homeric spirit are lacking") to challenge the authenticity of passages and whole books. In the *Einleitung* Eichhorn had shown how to use literary and linguistic tests (differences in preferred subject matter, different names for God) to cut Genesis up into the original narrative sources that Moses had conflated . . .

Even clearer are the similarities between what Wolf and Eichhorn made of the early histories of textual scholarship in the Greek and Jewish worlds. Eichhorn ransacked the Masorah for evidence about the methods of its creators as ruthlessly as Wolf later attacked the Venice scholia. His conclusions, set out point by point in heavily documented chapters, resemble Wolf's far more than anything in strictly classical philology. If Wolf showed great resource in cataloguing the means by which Alexandrian scholars expressed their opinions of the received text of Homer, Eichhorn had already done the same for the critical remarks that filled the margins of the Masoretic text . . . . .