



Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling; Christopher Arnold and Michael Hackl, eds.

Frühe alttestamentliche Arbeiten (1789–1793)

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Studies in the history of biblical interpretation have been ongoing for some time now. Within that expansive discipline, spanning more than two thousand years, various levels of attention have been paid to different time periods. In recent decades, increasing attention has been given to the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.¹ This present volume, *Frühe alttestamentliche Arbeiten (1789–1793)*, edited by Christopher Arnold and Michael Hackl, is part of a series that is publishing the works of Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling. It thus represents not so much a study within the history of biblical interpretation but rather is publishing primary sources that can be used for the study of the history of biblical interpretation in the modern period. Such publications are important to scholars because they bring important works resting in obscure stacks in very few libraries around the globe within the reach of a much wider scholarly audience.

Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling is not usually thought of as a biblical scholar; he is better known as a German philosopher. Usually categorized as an idealist philosopher, Schelling was an important figure in the eighteenth century, the time period we have grown accustomed to calling the Enlightenment. What is often forgotten, however, is that he wrote quite extensively on the Bible, the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament in particular. Born in 1775, Schelling studied philosophy, theology, and the Bible at the University of Tübingen. He became highly skilled in ancient languages,

1. I am thinking here especially of works such as Michael C. Legaspi, *The Death of Scripture and the Rise of Biblical Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); and Jonathan Sheehan, *The Enlightenment Bible: Translation, Scholarship, Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

especially Greek and Hebrew. He also wrote on both the Old and New Testaments, even while still a student. Schelling died in 1854 after an illustrious career as a professor of philosophy. He had taught at the University of Jena followed by the University of Würzburg, and then, after a hiatus, he completed his philosophy career at the University of Berlin.²

The time in which Schelling lived and worked was a period where the focus on the Old Testament and on Hebrew was gaining prominence.³ Much of this was tied up with the strangeness and foreignness of Hebrew as a language. In fact, the sort of work that was happening here already in the eighteenth century would lead to what in the nineteenth century would be called *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, the (German) “scholarly” study of Judaism. One of the more interesting points to note here is the ways in which eighteenth-century scholars, such as Johann David Michaelis (whom Schelling utilized throughout his works collected in this volume),⁴ relied upon Arabic in order to understand the history of the Hebrew language and to understand the meaning of Hebrew vocabulary. This has since become commonplace in any Hebrew lexical aids. Part of the argument was that Arabic, unlike the Hebrew of the time, was viewed as a living language among Arab peoples, and those Arab peoples were nomads just like the Hebrew patriarchs; consequently, these non-Jewish scholars thought, living Arabic would be closer to Biblical Hebrew than anything their contemporary Jewish sages might teach.

This represented a major break from the Christian intellectual past. For a long time, Christians sought out Jewish learning in the study of Hebrew. An entire “Christian Hebraism” developed where Christian scholars became focused on Hebrew learning, most of which they got from Jewish sages and teachers, in order better to understand the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible, and Jewish interpretation.⁵ One of the things this did, sociologically, is allow European Christian intellectuals to think they could understand Hebrew, the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament, and so forth without the aid of Jewish learning, Jewish scholarship, or any reference to contemporary Judaism; these intellectuals stylized themselves as the experts on (ancient) Hebrew. Even scholarly pronunciation began to change, such that to this day, as opposed to the Ashkenazic pronunciation of Hebrew one might learn in an Ashkenazic yeshiva or the Sephardic pronunciation standardized in the State of Israel or in most academic centers of Jewish learning, by Jewish scholars, a pronunciation emerging

2. See the comments on Schelling and Scripture in George S. Williamson, *The Longing for Myth in Germany: Religion and Aesthetic Culture from Romanticism to Nietzsche* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

3. See Yael Almog, *Secularism and Hermeneutics* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019).

4. Schelling also references Michaelis’s granduncle, Johann Heinrich Michaelis, also a famous Semitic philologist.

5. See, e.g., Stephen G. Burnett, *From Christian Hebraism to Jewish Studies: Johannes Buxtorf (1564–1629) and Hebrew Learning in the Seventeenth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 1996); Allison P. Coudert and Jeffrey S. Shoulson, eds., *Hebraica Veritas? Christian Hebraism and the Study of Judaism in Early Modern Europe* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); Stephen G. Burnett, *Christian Hebraism in the Reformation Era (1500–1660): Authors, Books, and the Transmission of Jewish Learning* (Leiden: Brill, 2012); and Eva De Visscher, *Reading the Rabbis: Christian Hebraism in the Works of Herbert of Bosham* (Leiden: Brill, 2014).

from Germany in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, patterned in part on modern Arabic pronunciation, dominates the academy.

As with these contemporary scholars such as Michaelis, Schelling, too, makes frequent reference to Arabic in his philological notes throughout the texts collected in this volume. Depending on the text, Schelling might include Arabic words in Arabic script, or, instead of Arabic words and letters, Schelling will sometimes include Latin translations of the Arabic, so his German text is punctuated with Hebrew, Greek, Syriac, Latin, Arabic, and also Latin translations of Arabic. The ostensible point is to arrive at a better understanding of the Hebrew text. This plays an important role in explaining the Arab people like the Qedarites, which Schelling has to explain were an Arab people referenced in the Psalms, for example: “The Kedarins were a wandering Arab shepherd people” (116).⁶ What is abundantly clear to anyone reading through Schelling’s philological treatment of the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible texts is that Schelling was in fact a highly skilled linguist.

Schelling’s first text the volume includes is his *Notamina ex Praelect. D. Schnurreri in Psalm.* from 1789/1790 (7–121). Next is his *Animadversiones in Jeremiam et Jesaijam* from 1790/1791 (123–234). Then we have Schelling’s *Jeremias* from 1791–1793 (235–72). After this comes his *Psalmen* from 1792–1793 (273–358). Finally, the volume concludes with expansive explanatory notes (*Erklärende Anmerkungen*, 359–457) and bibliography (461–94). Each of these is filled with philological notes, etymologies of words, geographical and cultural notes, and the like that display Schelling’s impressive command of at least five classical and ancient languages, namely, Greek, Latin, Hebrew, Syriac, and Arabic.

This volume is an important work for scholars of the history of interpretation, particularly of the history of interpretation in the eighteenth century. We need more such collections of primary sources by significant scholars or important intellectuals who worked in biblical philology, textual criticism, and biblical interpretation, in order better to be able to study their work as intellectual historians. Such compendia make the work of the intellectual historian, or the historian of the history of interpretation and criticism, easier to undertake. Although such a volume will likely not be used in the classroom, every university library should have a copy of this book, and any scholar of the study of the Bible in the eighteenth century will want to consult Schelling’s work in this regard. For such scholars, volumes such as these, are real treasures.

6. German original: “die Kedariner waren ein herumziehendes Arabisches Hirten Volk.”