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The Great League of Israel?: Historical Scepticism and the Amphictyony Hypothesis in 20th Century Biblical Studies

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1 Introduction

Any student of the Hebrew Bible consulting 20th-century scholarship will inevitably run into various cryptic references to »the amphictyony«: a curious term that appears to dominate biblical scholarship starting from 1930 onward, before disappearing at the end of the century. While the concept appeared in various forms throughout this period, the majority of uses fall under the model of »the amphictyony hypothesis«. Given its classic form by Martin Noth in *Das System der zwölf Stämme Israels* (1930), the amphictyony hypothesis suggested that ancient Israel grew out of a sacred league of tribes, akin to the Greek amphictyony of city-states, during the period of the Judges.¹ While it may not sound particularly strange, the curiosity of the hypothesis lies precisely in the nature of its reception: »that a hypothesis so radically affecting the reconstruction of Israel's earliest history was so little criticized«

1 Martin Noth, *Das System der zwölf Stämme Israels* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1930).

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at its inception and then entirely disavowed 60 years later.² Unlike other merely descriptive or evaluative accounts, this paper aims to explain why for a while the amphictyony hypothesis enjoyed such overwhelming popularity by exploring other social and intellectual trends of biblical scholarship in the 20th century.

First, by tracing the use of the term »amphictyony« through Hebrew Bible works prior to Noth, I will show how the theory developed as part of a response to German historical scepticism, that is, the trend in historical-critical approaches to question or deny the historical relevance of biblical texts or traditions, associated foremostly with Julius Wellhausen. Second, special attention is given to how the hypothesis found surprising success in the Protestant aims of the American »Baltimore School« despite anti-European tendencies. And third, I will argue that the »biblical« amphictyony's confusing relationship with Classics delayed major criticism for decades but also eventually led to its downfall. Ultimately, the amphictyony hypothesis was popular because it allowed scholars to hold on to faith in the antiquity of the 12-tribe system when its textual tradition within the Hebrew Bible became riddled with doubt.

2 Amphictyony Before Noth

Comparisons between the Greek amphictyony and the biblical tribes of Israel first appeared at the end of the 19th century, in the wake of German investigations into the origins of Israelite religion. Starting in 1806 with his two volume »introductory« handbook, Wilhelm de Wette questioned the age and historicity of the Pentateuchal traditions, as reference to its material does not feature in the biblical text until the reign of Josiah and especially after the Exile.³ By the 1860s, this sceptical view had become the consensus of critical scholarship, particularly in Continental Europe. Wellhausen's 1878 book *Geschichte Israels* consolidated the scholarship of the previous decade into an elegant account of the formation of the Pentateuchal documents during the monarchic through post-Exilic periods.⁴ Wellhausen's work was the final break in the process of destabilising long-held assumptions about the relevance of the Pentateuch material for understanding the earliest stages of ancient Israel's history, but especially the antiquity of Mosaic monotheism and

2 Cornelis H.J. de Geus, *The Tribes of Israel: An Investigation into some of the Presuppositions of Martin Noth's Amphictyony Hypothesis* (Amsterdam: van Gorcum, 1976).

3 Wilhelm M.L. de Wette, *Beiträge zur Einleitung in das Alte Testament*, 2 vols. (Halle: Schimmelpfennig, 1806).

4 Julius Wellhausen, *Geschichte Israels* (Berlin: Reimer, 1878), second edition republished as *Prolegomena zur Geschichte Israels* (Berlin: Reimer, 1883).

the socio-political emergence of Israel prior to the united kingdom. Over the next century, scholars in both Europe and North America wrestled with the implications of German historical scepticism, with Wellhausen as a convenient centre of debate for defenders and detractors alike.⁵ The debate was especially tumultuous within confessional circles where the Hebrew Bible was not only a subject of intellectual inquiry but also a matter of faith. Even among Continental scholars, who in general seemed more open to critical analysis and alternative reconstructions, the claim that the Bible could have nothing to say about any part of Israel's history prior to the monarchy did not sit well with certain religious or philosophical convictions.

Religious discomforts with historical scepticism primarily manifested along two lines. First, those who traced their spiritual lineage back to the Patriarchs, both Jewish and Christian, felt that their tradition was somehow falsified if these figures were purely later constructions.⁶ This latest interrogation of the Pentateuch stood in a long line of texts whose historical reliability had been questioned during the 19th century, beginning with David Strauss's criticism of the Gospel accounts in his 1835 *Das Leben Jesu kritisch bearbeitet*.⁷ However, with the Patriarchs it felt as though the very roots of biblical religion were under fire. Though some scholars could accept Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as mythic figures, without at least a seed of historical truth behind them or the theological movements they represented, the origins of Judaism and Christianity seemed unclear.

5 Paul Michael Kurtz, *Kaiser, Christ, and Canaan: the Religion of Israel in Protestant Germany, 1871–1918* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018), 133–138; see also id., »Response to Adam Sutcliffe,« *History of European Ideas* (2022): DOI 10.1080/01916599.2022.2030929.

6 For Jewish reactions, see foremostly the critique of Yehezkel Kaufmann as analysed by Peter Szymovics, »Y. Kaufmann's Critique of J. Wellhausen: A Philosophical-Historical Perspective,« *Zion* 49/1 (1984) 61–92 (Hebrew); Thomas Krapf, *Yehezkel Kaufmann: Ein Lebens- und Erkenntnisweg zur Theologie der hebräischen Bibel* (Berlin: Institut Kirche und Judentum, 1990); and Friedemann Boschwitz, *Julius Wellhausen: Motive und Maß-Stäbe seiner Geschichtsschreibung* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1968). For an overview, see Michael A. Meyer, *Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1995), 202–224; Yaacov Shavit and Mordechai Eran, *The Hebrew Bible Reborn: From Holy Scripture to the Book of Books: A History of Biblical Culture and the Battles over the Bible in Modern Judaism* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2008), 85–155; Christian Wiese, *Challenging Colonial Discourse: Jewish Studies and Protestant Theology in Wilhelmine Germany* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 170–281. For an overview of Christian reactions, including numerous heresy trials in Europe and America, see Emil G. Kraeling, *The Old Testament since the Reformation* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1955), 95–97; and a slightly more positive perspective in Ronald E. Clements, *A Century of Old Testament Study* (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 1976), 1–3. A particularly strong opponent in the States was found in William H. Green, *The Higher Criticism of the Pentateuch* (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1895).

7 David Friedrich Strauss, *Das Leben Jesu kritisch bearbeitet* (Tübingen: Osiander, 1835).

Second, religious tensions in a decades old debate about Semitic monotheism boiled over in Wellhausen's work.⁸ Wellhausen himself had contributed to discussions among Orientalists like Ernst Renan and William Robertson Smith over questions like whether Semitic peoples were by nature monotheists, whether monotheism preceded or succeeded polytheism in the Semitic world, whether Jews were the original monotheists.⁹ Underlying this debate was a broader ideological question: If monotheism, or further still the monotheistic tradition handed down by the Jews, was indeed the original mode of religion, modern Judaism and Christianity carried a sort of authority as the most ancient of traditions.¹⁰ However, in *Geschichte Israels*, Wellhausen explicitly denied that Israelite monotheism was established by Moses and instead relegated it to a much later religious development.¹¹ Thus, if monotheism could not even be traced back to early Israel, such claims to religious pre-eminence were futile. So, in response to Wellhausen's scepticism, many scholars set out to prove the historicity (or at least historical feasibility) of the tribes of Israel as they were described in the biblical text – and they turned to sources outside the Hebrew Bible for evidence.

Amid attempts to establish the origins of Israel and monotheism, mentions of the similarities between the Greek amphictyony and the biblical tribes of Israel can be found across academic literature in the decades leading up to the publication of *Das System* from 1930. Noth himself points to Heinrich Ewald as a forerunner to his own amphictyony hypothesis.¹² Ewald's 1843 *Geschichte des Volkes Israel* represents one of the common lines of argumentation for the historicity of the tribes of Israel during this time, which focused on the significance of the number twelve. Ewald gathered examples of societies arranged in units of twelve from elsewhere in the Bible, the ancient Near East, Africa, and, most importantly for our purposes,

8 For an excellent overview and discussion of »Semitic Monotheism,« see Guy G. Stroumsa, *The Idea of Semitic Monotheism: The Rise and Fall of a Scholarly Myth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021).

9 Stroumsa, *Semitic Monotheism*, 191–218. See for example Julius Wellhausen, *Reste arabischen Heidentums gesammelt und erläutert* (Berlin: Reimer, 1887), 208.

10 Stroumsa summarises this feeling in relation to a European obsession with »Oriental« philology: »European scholars study Oriental languages because texts in those (to Western ears) obscure idioms retain a primal relationship with a primordial Christian revelation« (*Semitic Monotheism*, 30).

11 Julius Wellhausen, »Israel,« *Encyclopedia Britannica* (1881) 396–432; id., *Geschichte*, 29–32; 399–416. For a discussion of Wellhausen's view of monotheism within biblical studies, see Nathan MacDonald, *Deuteronomy and the Meaning of »Monotheism«* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 22–29.

12 Noth, *Das System*, 46 f. See also Walter C. Kaiser, *History of Israel* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 1998), 175; Niels Peter Lemche, *Biblical Studies and the Failure of History* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 1986), 61 f.

Greece and Italy.¹³ While he does not use the word »amphictyony«, he discusses in a footnote parallels to (among others) the Ionian, Aeolian, Dorian, and Attica peoples who were divided into twelve *Gemeinden* (»communities/municipalities«) or subdivisions thereof.¹⁴

Most historical accounts of the amphictyony theory usually jump from Ewald to Max Weber's *Das antike Judentum* in 1921, missing the fact that during those 57 years these parallels between the Hebrew tribes and Greek leagues continued to be developed within academic circles far beyond the confines of a footnote. A full 25 years before Roland de Vaux and others claim the term »amphictyony« was first applied to Israel by Weber, August Klostermann in his 1896 Ezra-Nehemiah commentary refers to post-Exilic Jerusalem-centred Israel as »Amphiktyonie der heiligen Stadt« or the »amphictyony of the holy city«.¹⁵ Klostermann's use of the term is interesting because, as opposed to Ewald and those after him, his argument is not rooted in the pre-monarchic time period. Instead, he compares the national-political arrangement of the tribes around the restored temple under Persian suzerainty to the religiously-based associations of the Greek states under Roman rule.

However, Klostermann signals a shift in the application of the amphictyony comparison: he does not count twelve tribes or cities but uses amphictyony as an analogy for political organisation around a common religious centre. Paul Haupt exemplifies this in his 1909 discussion of the names »Midian« and »Sinai«. He asserts that Midian was another name for Judah designating the Edomite »Sinai-Amphiktyonie«, and goes on in a note to liken this Midianite cult association to the Delphic Amphictyony with its central sanctuary, communal cult festivals, and religious administration of justice.¹⁶ Johannes Hehn seems to assume these common traits when in 1912 he describes »die Amphiktyonie der Jahweverehrer« as a Sinai coalition with an entirely religious basis.¹⁷ His description emphasises the power of a shared deity to unify diverse peoples, in order to argue that monotheism did not develop from philosophical speculation but was the natural religious conclusion following from ancient Israel's political formation. Because the amphictyony addressed both

13 Heinrich Ewald, *Geschichte des Volkes Israel*, vol. 1 (Göttingen: Dieterichsche Buchhandlung, 1843), 519–546.

14 *Ibid.*, 530 f., n. 2.

15 August Klostermann, *Geschichte des Volkes Israel bis zur Restauration unter Esra und Nehemia* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1896), 266. Gustav Jahn quotes this description in 1909, but only to say that Klostermann exaggerates the political nature of the book of Nehemiah against the supposed cultic nature of Ezra (Gustav Jahn, *Die Bücher Esra (A und B) und Nehemja text-kritisch und historisch-kritisch untersucht mit Erklärung der einschlägigen Prophetenstellen und einem Anhang über hebräische Eigennamen* [Leiden: Brill, 1909], xxiv).

16 Paul Haupt, »Midian und Sinai«, *ZDMG* 63 (1909) 506; 514, n. 7.

17 Johannes Hehn, *Die biblische und die babylonische Gottesidee* (Stuttgart: Hinrichs, 1912), 277.

the union of distinct peoples (seen as a precursor to monarchy) and the centrality of a single deity, the analogy became a useful tool to establish the potential for the twelve tribes and monotheism to exist in the time before the united kingdom.

Such comparison was not only found within biblical studies. In a reversal of Ewald, the classical historian Emil Szanto used the example of the twelve tribes of Israel in his 1901 discussion of the Greek phylae to explain the classical dihedral division of Greek amphictyonies, as (under Solomon) each was allotted a month of the year in which they were responsible to provide food for the central administration and, by extension, the temple.¹⁸ Hermann Gunkel, in turn, cited Szanto's (not Ewald's) reasoning in his 1901 Genesis commentary in order to prove the antiquity of the tradition of twelve tribes and its organisation around cultic duties, resulting in a rather circular argument between classics and biblical studies.¹⁹

As Gunkel exemplifies, some scholars continued to highlight the significance of the number twelve as inherent evidence for the historical existence of the Israelite tribes as described in the Hebrew Bible; Noth himself and his followers pick up this argument in the early days of his amphictyony hypothesis. However, the above examples show that prior to Noth the amphictyony analogy was foremostly employed as precedent for political organisation centred around shared religion. In particular, the unity of one god, one (primary) sanctuary, one law/tradition, to create one people contributed to the combined case for a monotheistic league of tribes preceding the Israelite monarchy – a case which echoed down through the literature to Weber.

Max Weber's interest in the social role of religion and involvement in the developing sociology of his day led him to expand the central role of cult in »die israelitische Eidgenossenschaft« or »the Israelite confederation«.²⁰ The sociologist Shmuel Eisenstadt notes that he was especially interested in the meeting point of his two major lines of inquiry into history and the social sciences: »the institutional structural« and the »religious ideological«.²¹ It should come as no surprise then

18 Emil Szanto, *Die griechischen Phylen* (Vienna: Carl Gerold's Sohn, 1901), 41–43. This comparison was noted as a development of great interest to Classics by Henri Francotte in his review of the book: »Emil Szanto, Die griechischen Phylen,« *Le Musée Belge: Revue de Philologie Classique* 7 (1902) 291.

19 Hermann Gunkel, *Genesis* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1901), 332.

20 The first chapter of Max Weber's *Das antike Judentum* is titled »Die israelitische Eidgenossenschaft und Jahwe« and he uses the term throughout the book (*Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie*, vol. 3, *Das antike Judentum* [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1921]). See also Christa Schäfer-Lichtenberger, *Stadt und Eidgenossenschaft im Alten Testament. Eine Auseinandersetzung mit Max Webers Studie »Das antike Judentum«* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1983), 12 ff.

21 Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, »The Format of Jewish History – Some Reflections on Weber's Ancient Judaism,« *Modern Judaism* 1 (1981) 54–73: 61.

that, similar to his predecessors, for Weber, Yahweh was »ein sozialer Verbands-gott« or »a god of a social association«, the giver of law and religious practice and thus social order for the disparate Hebrew tribes.²²

But what did that mean practically for the ancient Israelites? Orientalists of the late 19th and early 20th century understood Semitic peoples to be trapped in a social dichotomy between blood kin and blood enemy and hence perpetually at war with one another.²³ Weber's innovation of the amphictyony analogy thus lies in his emphasis on the military aspect of amphictyony, bonding the tribes together through »amphiktyonische Ritualakte« (amphictyonic ritual acts) to defend themselves against their common enemies.²⁴ This picture in turn lent itself to identifying the formation of the cultic league of »Israel« during the period of the Judges amongst the stories of local conquest and occasional in-fighting.²⁵

Weber does not make a comprehensive evaluation of similarities and differences, as some like Haupt had done before him; rather, his adoption of the term »amphictyonic« without further qualification marked another subtle change in the role of amphictyony within biblical studies. What had begun as a simple comparison of similarly numbered groups and then a historical analogy for religiously centred political cohesion had been transformed into a *terminus technicus*, a model of civilisation – a model which perhaps had its technical name from the ancient Greek and Italian leagues, but of which Delphi and Israel were equal examples, both instantiations of the same abstract concept.²⁶

Weber's picture of the amphictyony of Israel, of twelve warlike tribes bound only by the cultic rites of Yahweh, laid the groundwork for Albrecht Alt to begin addressing Wellhausen's questions about the mysterious origins of Israel. Although the word does not appear regularly throughout his writing prior to 1930, the model of amphictyony became an important piece of Alt's theory concerning the historical events behind the narratives of Joshua and Judges.²⁷ Noth's amphictyony hypothesis is considered by many to be what Thomas L. Thompson has called an »amplifi-

²² Weber, *Das antike Judentum*, 140.

²³ For example, Smith asserts »that the Arabs were incapable of conceiving any absolute social obligations of social unity which was not based on kinship« and »the only effective bond is the bond of blood, and that the purpose of society is to unite men for offense and defense« (William Robertson Smith, *Kinship and Marriage in Early Arabia*, ed. Stanley A. Cook [London: Adam and Charles Black, 1903], 50; 69).

²⁴ Weber, *Das antike Judentum*, 98.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 90.

²⁶ F.R. Wüst sees this as happening with Noth in »Amphiktyonie, Eidgenossenschaft, Symmachie,« *Historia* 3 (1954) 129–153.

²⁷ After the publication of *Das System*, Alt explicitly adopts the amphictyony model in *Die Staatenbildung der Israeliten in Palästina* (Leipzig: Edelmann, 1930), esp. 11.

cation« of his teacher Alt's »peaceful infiltration« theory first presented in 1925 in *Die Landnahme der Israeliten in Palästina*.²⁸ Alt's theory suggested that the tribes who would become Israel moved from the outskirts of Canaanite city-states and settled peacefully in the hill country of Palestine over time rather than in a single violent conquest.

Alt's settlement model has been discussed at length elsewhere, but what is important for our purposes is Alt's positioning of the model at the crux between critical scholarship and historical affirmation.²⁹ It might appear strange that someone who presented an alternative to the conquest would argue for the historicity of the (pre-)Israelite tribes. But unlike Wellhausen, Alt's reconstruction of the pre-monarchic period was not driven by historical scepticism of the Pentateuch. Instead, his form critical analysis of the conquest narratives led him to interpret them as aetiological and thus not historical, which did not preclude him from arguing for some sort of tribal formation that produced said narratives.³⁰ But in order to bridge between his reconstruction of unrelated tribes – moving from various cities at various times for various reasons – to the emergence of the monarchy under Saul and David as reported in the historical books of the Hebrew Bible, Alt had to explain what had brought the tribes together. Weber's characterisation of the amphictyony model provided two perfect reasons: the commonality of Yahweh worship, inherited from ancestral traditions brought with them into Palestine, and mutual defence against the Canaanites, in the inevitable violent clash once the Israelite population began to expand into the coastal plain. Both elements accounted for the monotheistic conquest narratives in Joshua and Judges. Alt even refers to an »Amphiktyonie von Mamre«: a military coalition of the pre-Israelite tribes around the God of Abraham (later known as Yahweh) by which he became the dominant god in Canaan.³¹ Thus, amphictyony allowed Alt to reverse engineer the history of Israel from what Wellhausen perceived to be later traditions, framing the importance of the twelve tribes in the text as an intimation of their importance at Israel's origins to re-establish their historical reality.

Following Alt's lead, Martin Noth developed the amphictyony model into a programmatic hypothesis for the emergence of tribal Israel, which allowed scholars to

²⁸ Thomas L. Thompson, *Early History of the Israelite People: From the Written and Archaeological Sources* (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 41–45; Albrecht Alt, *Die Landnahme der Israeliten in Palästina: Reformationsprogramm der Universität Leipzig* (Leipzig: Druckerei der Werkgemeinschaft, 1925). Alt's theory was expanded in id., *Der Gott der Väter. Ein Beitrag zur Vorgeschichte der israelitischen Religion* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1929).

²⁹ See for example Thompson, *Early History*, 34–41.

³⁰ Thompson, *Early History*, 34.

³¹ Alt, *Der Gott der Väter*, 59.

hold in tension historical scepticism of the biblical text and the historical reality of early monotheistic tribes.³² What for Alt was only a justification for harmonising his peaceful infiltration model with pre-monarchic biblical texts was filled out by Noth to include details of the Israelite amphictyony's formation, activities, and relation to the biblical tradition. To do so, Noth transposed features from the leagues of ancient Greece and Italy to that of Israel. According to Noth, the amphictyony of Israel collated around a central sanctuary in Shechem, where according to Joshua 24 they acknowledged Yahweh to be their God.³³ There they held an annual cultic festival, at which delegates of the twelve tribes – the נְשִׂיִּים of Numbers 1:1–15 – participated in collective Yahweh worship and discussed public affairs.³⁴ The central administration of the amphictyony was maintained according to the »Amphiktyonenrecht«, in part reflected in the Book of the Covenant (Ex 21–23).³⁵ Transgression of this common law by one of the tribes resulted in holy war, as evidenced in the intratribal war with Benjamin following the crimes of Gibeah in Judges 19–20.³⁶

As we can see, Noth understands bits and pieces of the Pentateuch, Joshua, and Judges to be sneak peaks into the historical reality of Israel's tribal period which had been re-contextualised within a later literary tradition. The amphictyony hypothesis thus provided a comprehensive historical model of the tribes of Israel during the approximate »period of the Judges«, which at once differed from the descriptions of the biblical text, thus answering to the textual discrepancies and ideological anomalies which were the source of Wellhausen's scepticism, but also could be glimpsed through it in places, so that the material could not be completely disregarded.

3 Amphictyony in the Baltimore School

The amphictyony hypothesis soon became the dominant view across biblical studies, regardless of one's reconstruction of (pre-)Israel's entry into the land of Canaan. Noth's European supporters continued to champion it as the historical reality of Israel's pre-monarchy formation following Alt's peaceful infiltration

32 For further discussion of Noth's »preservative method« including the amphictyony hypothesis, see Andrew Tobolowsky, *The Myth of the Twelve Tribes of Israel: New Identities Across Time and Space* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 27–33, esp. 28 f.

33 The sanctuary subsequently shifted to Bethel, Gilgal, and finally Shiloh, following the ark's journey in the Former Prophets. Noth, *Das System*, 135–140.

34 Noth, *Das System*, 97.

35 *Ibid.*, 98.

36 Noth, *Das System*, 100–105.

model.³⁷ Notably, Martin Buber references the amphictyony model in his argument for early Israelite theocracy.³⁸ Across the Atlantic, William Foxwell Albright introduced the theory into American biblical studies but argued that the amphictyony formed outside of the land prior to an organised conquest, more closely to what is pictured in Joshua.³⁹ Positive reception of the amphictyony hypothesis in the US, specifically within Albright's »Baltimore« or »Hopkins School«, is especially surprising and deserves closer attention. Indeed, this hypothesis ran counter to some of the strongest currents of American scholarship at the time – and yet became a key tool in keeping certain European trends of higher criticism at bay.

We know from both academic publications and personal correspondence that Albright and his students felt strongly about what they understood to be the proper methods and priorities of biblical scholarship.⁴⁰ They were committed to privileging archaeology, especially the archaeology of Palestine, as well as philology and Semitics, which they understood to be objective scientific approaches, over subjective literary analysis. As Burke O. Long points out, the Baltimore school's strong front was underpinned by the belief that the Bible was a scientific object which could be objectively mined for history.⁴¹ Albright and his students often described the discipline of biblical studies as a battlefield, with the Baltimore school and sympathetic scholars who had the right training, methodology, and enthusiasm for archaeology on one side, and others who mainly practiced literary higher criticism or textual history approaches, usually those who followed in the tradition of Wellhausen, on the other side.⁴² They were determined to win the battle for the fate of biblical studies, to preserve »[Albright's] ideal; to preserve his identity, his ideas, his school«. ⁴³ As such, while Albright held Alt in high regard, he viewed Alt's

37 E.g. Gustaf A. Danell, *Studies in the Name Israel in the Old Testament* (Uppsala: Appelbergs Boktryckeri-A.-B., 1946), 27–38; Harold H. Rowley, *From Joseph to Joshua: Biblical Traditions in the Light of Archaeology* (London: Clarendon Press, 1950), 123–160.

38 Martin Buber, *Königtum Gottes* (Berlin: Schocken Verlag, 1932), 148, n. 47; 287 f. Special thanks to Paul Michael Kurtz for this reference.

39 W.F. Albright, »Archaeology and the Date of the Hebrew Conquest of Palestine,« *BASOR* 58 (1935) 10–18; Id., »Further Light on the History of Israel from Lachish and Megiddo,« *BASOR* 68 (1937) 22–26; Id., »The Israelite Conquest in Light of Archaeology,« *BASOR* 74 (1939) 11–23.

40 See Burke O. Long, *Planting and Reaping Albright: Politics, Ideology, and Interpreting the Bible* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), esp. chapter 2.

41 Long, *Planting and Reaping*, 44.

42 *Ibid.*, 34–48.

43 Leona Glidden Running and David Noel Freedman, *William Foxwell Albright: A Twentieth-Century Genius* (New York: Morgan Press, 1975), 316. Albright himself in correspondence with his parents expressed so much confidence in his students that he says, »I am no longer worried about seeing my views about the Bible win out« (Albright to parents, December 22, 1946, qtd. in Long, *Planting and Reaping*, 30). Ernest Wright similarly assured Albright that »the future belong[ed] to

history-of-traditions approach and form critical methodology with suspicion and was blatantly critical of Noth's historical reconstructions based on aetiologies.⁴⁴ However, Alt, Noth, and Albright shared a common dispute in Wellhausen's historical scepticism.

While Alt and Noth always spoke reverently of Wellhausen, even as they disagreed with his work, Albright framed Wellhausen as a malicious spectre of a bygone age who had mired the field in unproductive speculation, particularly concerning the Pentateuch.⁴⁵ As such, Albright's own adaption of the amphictyony hypothesis sought to reap from Alt and Noth all the aspects of the basic model that could defend the historical relevance of the Pentateuch, Joshua, and Judges against Wellhausen's arguments. This is seen foremostly in the work of his student John Bright, who like Noth building on Alt, sought to expound the relevance of Albright's work.

In his 1956 book *Early Israel in Recent History Writing*, Bright accepts and praises a good deal of Noth's amphictyony hypothesis, especially the league of the twelve tribes as a historical-political reality and a reliable conduit of the Patriarchal, Exodus, and Sinai traditions. However, Noth's evaluation of the Hexateuchal material produces too little »history« and leaves the explanation of Israel's origins and early history »distinctly dissatisfying«.⁴⁶ Instead, pan-Israelite tendencies in the texts and the solidarity of the tribes within Canaan suggests that the league came together long before entry into the land; the amphictyonic traditions therefore illustrate not simple aetiologies but Israel's original political and religious formation.⁴⁷ Bright's presentation of an Albrightean amphictyony hypothesis was soon followed by Edward Campbell and Ernest Wright's explication of archaeological evidence for amphictyonic sanctuaries in Jordan.⁴⁸ Thus, in the hands of the

[his] school of thought« (Wright to Albright, August 2, 1950, qtd. in Long, *Planting and Reaping*, 31). David Noel Freedman referred to Wright as producing »new generations of hoplites [students of Albright at Johns Hopkins] in the great army of the biblical archaeological crusade« (David Noel Freedman, »G. Ernest Wright: Scholar, Teacher, Christian,« Memorial Minute for G. Ernest Wright, *Minutes*, Biblical Colloquium, November 1974, qtd. in Long, *Planting and Reaping*, 18).

⁴⁴ Long, *Planting and Reaping*, 54–59. Note that the articles listed in note 38, while adopting amphictyony, explicitly criticise the first edition of Noth's Joshua commentary.

⁴⁵ Thompson, *Early History*, 11–12; Long, *Planting and Reaping*, 35–38. For Albright's criticism of Wellhausen, see W.F. Albright, »Archaeology Confronts Biblical Criticism,« *The American Scholar* 7 (1938) 176–188; and *inter alia* Id., *The Archaeology of Palestine and the Bible* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1940); Id., *From the Stone Age to Christianity* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1940); Id., *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan* (New York: Doubleday, 1968).

⁴⁶ John Bright, *Early Israel in Recent History Writing* (London: SCM Press, 1956), 83.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 89–113.

⁴⁸ Edward F. Campbell and G. Ernest Wright, »Tribal League Shrines in Amman and Shechem,« *BA* 32 (1969) 104–116.

Baltimore school, the amphictyony hypothesis became a weapon that could be used against historical scepticism to prove the historicity of the Israelite tribes irrespective of differences in methodology and reconstruction.

Several ideological influences may underlie Albright's acceptance and adaptation of the amphictyony hypothesis, but in light of his personal correspondence, his religious convictions shine through most strongly. Albright's particular variation of an amphictyony model may have been in part influenced by the work of his doctoral supervisor, Haupt, who we have seen was one of the first to use the concept in modelling tribal Israel, specifically a Sinai-based amphictyony.⁴⁹ Although seen more clearly in some of Albright's students, the emphasis on the autonomy of the individual tribes as well as the unity of the whole may also have been shaped by American Federalist politics in the context of the Baltimore School.⁵⁰ But on the conceptual level, the amphictyony hypothesis likewise allowed Albright to defend one of his central intellectual commitments against the thralls of historical scepticism – that is, the legitimacy of Mosaic monotheism. From very early on in his career, Albright found in Moses the seed of »true« Israel, the author of »authentic« monotheism which would come to define the history of Israelite religion.⁵¹ Where Wellhausen had argued that ethical monotheism was far too complex a belief system to be held by Israel's »primitive« Hebrew ancestors and thus must have originated with the later prophets of the Hebrew Bible, Albright was adamant that the prophets were merely reformers, recalling Israel to »pure Mosaic ideals« that had been lost in the later years of the monarchy.⁵² And the amphictyony hypothesis, modified to fit a league centred around Sinai and the covenant as *Amphiktyonenrecht*, provided a historical Moses the perfect *Sitz im Leben*.

Privately, Albright admitted that his stake in this academic debate was personal: he wrote in a letter to Harold H. Rowley that he and his opponents »can

49 Albright had a rocky relationship with Haupt, my argument is mostly about possible exposure Albright could have had to amphictyony in other formulations (See Long, *Planting and Reaping*, 123–136).

50 This is especially seen in George E. Mendenhall, *Law and Covenant in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (Pittsburgh: The Biblical Colloquium, 1955). See Sophia R.C. Johnson, »We the People of Israel: Covenant, Constitution, and the Supposed Biblical Origins of Modern Democratic Political Thought,« *JBR* 8/2 (2021) 256–259.

51 See W.F. Albright, »The Archaeological background of the Hebrew Prophets of the Eighth Century,« *JBR* 8 (1940) 131–136, esp. 135.

52 For the history of the ethical monotheism debate, see Paul Michael Kurtz, »Is Kant among the Prophets? Hebrew Prophecy and German Historical Thought, 1880–1920,« *Central European History* 54/1 (2021) 34–60; Uriel Tal, *Christians and Jews in Germany: Religion, Politics, and Ideology in the Second Reich, 1870–1914*, trans. Noah Jonathan Jacobs (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1975), 199; Wiese, *Challenging Colonial Discourse*.

never agree on a definition of [Mosaic] monotheism, for the very simple reason that [he] refuse[d] to accept a definition which denies monotheism to orthodox trinitarian Christianity.«⁵³ We know from other correspondence, particularly to his mother, that since his days as a graduate student Albright had been on a crusade for what he later referred to as »Christ-myth rationalism«, a »scientifically explained Protestant Christianity Triumphant«.⁵⁴ Moreover, works like *From the Stone Age to Christianity*, which trace pre-Christian theological universalism throughout the title time period, demonstrate that both the primitivity and the universality of monotheism were essential parts of this formulation. Finding hints of religious movement towards Christianity in Mesopotamian, Egyptian, Levantine, and Greek cultures, Albright asserts at the end of the book that »the Church Fathers saw truly when they represented aspects of paganism [pre-Christian elements of culture] as part of the divine preparation for Christianity.«⁵⁵

It cannot only be, then, the historical grounding for Moses that attracted Albright to the amphictyony hypothesis, but also the antiquity and universality of the amphictyony model itself as a political expression of monotheism. The same predilection to organise around a single deity that had been felt in ancient Israel could be found also in ancient Greece and Italy – and with Albright's encouragement of his students, in Jordan and the ancient Near East also – which must in turn attest to its fulfilment in the Jesus movement of the first century. Amphictyony was therefore for Albright a ward against Wellhausen's attacks not only on his understanding of the Hebrew Bible, but his religious beliefs rooted in Mosaic monotheism and their witness to the universal truth of Christianity. Given Albright's position at the centre of the Baltimore school, it is perhaps safe to say that the amphictyony hypothesis was most successful in America because its Albrightean form had been assigned an authoritative role in the scholarly service to Protestant spirituality.

4 Classical Influences and Later Criticism

The adoption of amphictyony as a socio-political model is a unique phenomenon to biblical studies. No other field, including the developing social sciences of the late 19th and early 20th century, applied the model beyond the bounds of Classics

53 Albright to H.H. Rowley, May 25, 1942, qtd. in Long, *Planting and Reaping*, 43, n. 79.

54 Long, *Planting and Reaping*, 132. See there qtd. Albright to »Mother,« Zephine Viola Albright, December 26, 1913, and Albright to Sam Geiser, October 8, 1918.

55 Albright, *Stone Age*, 399.

until it had been applied to the Hebrew Bible.⁵⁶ Although the term »amphictyony« was known from classical history, its scholarly history did not follow when it entered Biblical scholarship. In fact, Noth is the only one to cite secondary literature on amphictyony (and as we have seen, the concept is already known in the field by the time he is writing).⁵⁷ As such, there has been some speculation about possible influences from Classics. Niels Peter Lemche, for example, suggests that Noth's reconstruction of six members of the Calaurian amphictyony (against seven reported in Strabo) is dependent upon Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff.⁵⁸ The works of Barthold Georg Niebuhr, one of Germany's most eminent historians on ancient Rome, were widely influential long after their publication in the mid-19th century and thus his writing on the Delphic amphictyony may have been known to the Continental scholars who first developed the analogy.⁵⁹ But overall, early- to mid-20th-century Hebrew Bible scholarship's engagement with classical material remained quite superficial, which allowed the concept to take on a life of its own.⁶⁰

In relation to amphictyony, this discrepancy between the disciplines had two effects: first, Noth's own dip into the secondary literature on amphictyony made his hypothesis seem more impressive. Though he cites a scant two sources, Noth became the authoritative figure on amphictyony within biblical studies.⁶¹ Second, no one at the time knew the amphictyony material and literature well enough to be

56 De Geus decries the »rank growth« of the amphictyony hypothesis outside of Hebrew Bible studies, pointing to other ancient Near Eastern studies influenced by the biblical field finding amphictyony as »an intermediate stage between tribal forms of organization and the formation of a real state« (*The Tribes of Israel*, 67 f.). He cites as examples, Giorgio Buccellati, *Cities and Nations of Ancient Syria* (Rome: Universita di Roma, 1967); Campbell and Wright, »Tribal League Shrines«.

57 See Noth, *Das System*, 47, where he cites G. Cauer, »Amphiktyonia,« PRE I,2 (1894) 1904–1935; G. Busolt, *Griechische Staatskunde* 2 (Munich: Beck, 1926), 1280–1310. The only other exception is Gunkel, who cites Szanto, however, because Szanto's speculation on the number twelve is dependent on biblical material and not necessarily the Classical, the argument is circular (Gunkel, *Genesis*, 332).

58 Lemche, *Biblical Studies*, 62, n. 4. Lemche does not refer to a specific work, but likely Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, »Die Amphiktyonie von Kalaurea,« *Nachrichten der Königlichen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen* (1896) 158–170.

59 E.g. Barthold Georg Niebuhr, *Kleine historische und philologische Schriften*, vol. 2 (Bonn: Eduard Weber, 1843), 148. An English translation of Niebuhr's lectures on Delphic Amphictyony can be found in Leonhard Schmitz, ed., *Collected Lectures of B.G. Niebuhr on Roman History, Ancient History, Including the History of Greece, Ancient Ethnography and Geography*, vol. 4 (London: Walton and Maberly, 1853), 244–253.

60 For another example of this, see Andrew Tobolowsky, »The Problem of Reubenite Primacy: New Paradigms, New Problems,« *JBL* 139/1 (2020) 27–45.

61 See note 55 for references.

able to challenge Noth on the comparative level. Along with the ambiguous, idealised character that Weber had given to the amphictyony model, such incongruities led to what Otto Bächli and later Thomas Thompson perceived as a total lack of consensus on the definition of »amphictyony«.⁶²

As the hypothesis began to face criticism over certain problematic details, the concept of amphictyony became fluid and could gain or lose features conducive to the overall argument. For example, Noth picks up Ewald's original argument about the number twelve being an essential point of evidence.⁶³ He goes so far as to reconstruct an original amphictyony of only six tribes from the sons of Leah, as found in some of the Greek leagues, which became twelve as the host adopted Yahweh and only then became the amphictyony called »Israel« in the Hebrew Bible.⁶⁴ However, when scholars like Cornelis de Geus pointed out that these numbers in both the biblical and classical material were dependent on Noth's arbitrary reconstructions (for example, six tribes instead of seven in Gen 36:20 and twelve instead of thirteen Etruscan tribes), Noth and his followers began to move away from the argument of »twelve«.⁶⁵ Similarly, one of Noth's earliest critics, Elias Auerbach, pointed out that the classical amphictyony never formed a coherent nation or people.⁶⁶ He especially stresses the lack of *ethnos* in the amphictyony model which would have been necessary to match the early language of »the people of Yahweh« and the descriptions we find in the first part of Samuel. However, because the main thrust of the hypothesis was primarily concerned with social-political organisation, scholars side-stepped this apparent clash with the classical literature by assuming amphictyony to presuppose *ethnos*.⁶⁷ The lack of comparative engagement with Classics therefore made it difficult to argue against Noth's hypothesis and the amorphous concept of amphictyony at its base.

Because of these effects and the utility of the theory in combatting historical suspicion, there were very few early critics of the amphictyony hypothesis.⁶⁸

⁶² Otto Bächli, *Amphiktyonie im Alten Testament* (Basel: Friedrich Reinhardt Verlag, 1977), 5; Thompson, *Early History*, 43.

⁶³ Noth, *Das System*, 47–49.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 59–93.

⁶⁵ Lemche, *History of Israel*, 176; Cornelis H.J. de Geus, *Tribes of Israel*, 195. For Noth's reconstructions, see *Das System*, 44, n. 1; 49 f.

⁶⁶ Elias Auerbach, *Wüste und Gelobtes Land. Geschichte Israels von den Anfängen bis zum Tode Salomons* (Berlin: Kurt Wolff, 1932), 72 f. This line of critique was later offered in the Netherlands by M.A. Beek, *Wegen en Voetsporen van het Oude Testament* (Delft: Ambo, 1954); *Id.*, *Van Abraham tot Bar Kochba* (Zeist: Academische Bibliotheek, 1964).

⁶⁷ De Geus, *Tribes of Israel*, 55.

⁶⁸ There are only a handful of reviews of *Das System* from around the time of its publication, and all of them only have minor critiques: H.W. Hertzberg, »Noth, Martin, Das System der zwölf Stämme

Besides Auerbach, Otto Eissfeldt was one of the only other scholars to criticise Noth's theory around the time of its publication. He wrote multiple articles in the 1930s and 40s attempting to demonstrate that there is no evidence for an amphictyony in Judges and Joshua.⁶⁹ All of Noth's argument for situating the amphictyony in the period of the Judges is dependent on Joshua 24 and Judges 19–21, neither of which make mention of a tribal league and instead accentuate a lack of continuous leadership. Eissfeldt challenged Noth to argue for the antiquity of an amphictyony without recourse to pan-Israelite themes and terms which elsewhere in Judges seem obviously secondary and quite late.⁷⁰

These serious questions went largely unanswered, either negatively or positively, until the 1960s. During this period in which the amphictyony hypothesis enjoyed almost universal consensus, several research projects were aimed at uncovering the various amphictyonic institutions presented by Noth as standing behind the early biblical texts. A. Bester set out in his doctoral dissertation to uncover the central sanctuary in Judges 19–21;⁷¹ Manfred Weippert attempted to schematise the practice of holy war;⁷² Wolfgang Richter endeavoured to write a job description for the position of Noth's central amphictyonic judge.⁷³ However, to their authors' surprise, such projects almost universally turned up a negative or

Israels,« *OLZ* 31 (1931) 852–855; Johannes Meinhold, »Das System der zwölf Stämme Israels: Rezension,« *ThLZ* 52 (1931) 411–414; F. Horst, »Martin Noth, Das System der zwölf Stämme Israels,« *ThBl* 12 (1933) 104–107; K. Galling, »Martin Noth, Das System der zwölf Stämme Israels,« in *DLZ* 52 (1931) 433–440; Willy Staerk, »Noth, Martin, Das System der zwölf Stämme Israels. Rezension,« *ThLBl* 52/8 (1931) 114–116.

69 Otto Eissfeldt, »Der geschichtliche Hintergrund der Erzählung von Gibeas Schandtat (Richter 19–21),« in *Festschrift Georg Beer zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. Albrecht Alt and Artur Weiser (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1935), 19–40; Id., »Israel und seine Geschichte,« *ThLZ* 76 (1951) 335–340. See also Id., »The Hebrew Kingdom,« *Cambridge Ancient History*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 12–17.

70 Eissfeldt, »Israel und seine Geschichte«: 340.

71 A. Bester, »Le sanctuaire central dans Jud. XIX–XXI,« *ETHL* (1965) 20–42 (based on his doctoral dissertation); see also W.H. Irwin, »Le sanctuaire central israélite avant l'établissement de la monarchie,« *RB* 72 (1965) 161–185; on the role of the ark in establishing such a sanctuary: H.A. Brongers, »Einige Aspekte der gegenwärtigen Lage der Ladeforschung,« *NThT* 25 (1971) 6–27.

72 Manfred Weippert, »Heiliger Krieg in Israel und Assyrien. Kritische Bemerkungen zu Gerhard von Rads Konzept des Heiligen Krieges im alten Israel,« *ZAW* 84 (1972) 460–493; See also A.D.H. Mayes, »Israel in the Premonarchy Period,« *VT* 23 (1973) 151–170. Weippert also wrote a lengthy analysis of the different suggestions for settlement models in which he thoroughly defended Alt and Noth, *Die Landnahme der israelitischen Stämme in der neueren wissenschaftlichen Diskussion. Ein kritischer Bericht* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1967).

73 Wolfgang Richter, »Zu den ›Richtern Israels,«« *ZAW* 77 (1963) 40–72; see also C.H.J. de Geus, »De richtern van Israel,« *NThT* 20 (1965) 81–100.

weak result.⁷⁴ As Eissfeldt had tried to warn, these features of amphictyony were nowhere to be seen in the text, and the lack of evidence began to cast doubt on the whole hypothesis.

In the wake of these failed projects, scholars began to reassess the data that Noth had presented to ground his historical reconstruction of the amphictyony of Israel. The most effective criticism was levelled by Noth's own assistant, Rudolf Smend, who, like Eissfeldt before him, revealed that the hypothesis was entirely dependent on Noth's dating of redactional layers. In his *Habilitationsschrift*, published in 1963, Smend found references to a tribal league, particularly relating to holy war and central organisation, to be secondary and likely influenced by later provincial systems, which detached them from the period of the Judges.⁷⁵ About a decade later, de Geus published his dissertation analysing the presuppositions of Noth's thesis and revealed the discrepancies between Noth's understanding of amphictyony and what was presented in the classical texts.⁷⁶ With all of these holes, the bridge which Noth had built between the possibility of reconstructing historical pre-monarchic Israelite tribes and finding references to such a historical reality in the Hebrew Bible began to break down. Amphictyony was called out for what it truly was: an analogy, a model, a heuristic device, but one which had no purchase in the text without arbitrary speculation. Once it could no longer serve the purpose that had made it so popular – to harmonise historical tribes of Israel with the disputed age of texts that reported them – Noth's model quickly fell out of favour. By the late 1990s, the amphictyony hypothesis, once the touchstone of Hebrew Bible studies in the Pentateuch, Judges, and Joshua, was left to emeritus holdouts and historiographers of the discipline.⁷⁷

5 Conclusion

Since initial reactions against Wellhausen were so strong, especially with heresy trials across the globe in the early 1900s, it should come as no surprise that arguments in defence of the reality and antiquity of the traditions that he had cast into doubt would be sought from all corners of the ancient world. But as the parallel to a Greek amphictyony had already been circulating idly in Hebrew Bible schol-

⁷⁴ De Geus, *The Tribes of Israel*, 54.

⁷⁵ Rudolf Smend, *Jahwekrieg und Stämmebund: Erwägungen zur ältesten Geschichte Israels* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1963), esp. 23–26; 110.

⁷⁶ De Geus, *The Tribes of Israel*.

⁷⁷ Norman Gottwald continued to use his own version of the amphictyony hypothesis (without the word »amphictyony«), e.g. *The Tribes of Yahweh* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1979).

arship long before Noth, we can see the appeal of his hypothesis was not really in its particularly fitting formation. Rather, the amphictyony hypothesis was in part so popular because it became a vehicle that allowed scholars to make other more invested arguments: for Noth, it provided the pre-monarchic unity to bolster Alt's peaceful infiltration model; for Albright, it protected Moses as the origin of monotheism; for both, and most confessional scholars, it preserved a seed of historicity behind the textual difficulties of the Pentateuch and the Former Prophets. Without a clear definition of »amphictyony« or understanding of the classical literature, the power of such an image allowed the hypothesis to run wild throughout studies of the Hebrew Bible and even into ancient Near Eastern scholarship. It took a new generation of scholars to take a second look and realise that the picture presented of Israelite amphictyony could only be matched up with an early biblical account through a convoluted dance of conjecture.

While the historiographical power of the amphictyony hypothesis might have been lost for contemporary scholarship, exposing the confessional impulse behind it to assign antiquity to the tradition of twelve Israelite tribes may instead suggest the power of such analogy even in ancient times. What if the ancient stories of sacred leagues were as inspiring to later editors of the biblical texts – who were, after all, in increasing contact with the varied cultures of Greece and Anatolia – as they were to Noth and Albright? The Great League of Israel maintains its legendary status even if it is simply that: a legend, with little historical reality behind it but a propensity to inspire writers both ancient and modern.

Abstract: This paper explores the social circumstances of 20th-century Biblical Studies surrounding the popularity of the amphictyony hypothesis – comparing tribal Israel to the Greek amphictyony of city states. I argue that this theory allowed scholars to reverse-engineer the importance of the Pentateuch as an early but skewed historical source against German historical scepticism. The »Baltimore School« exemplified such efforts were mainly motivated by Protestant biblicism. The theory broke down because it relied on superficial readings of Classics scholarship and convoluted historical reconstruction.

Keywords: amphictyony hypothesis; reception history; Baltimore School; Martin Noth; William Foxwell Albright

Zusammenfassung: Die im 20. Jahrhundert verbreitete Amphiktyonie-Hypothese, die das vorstaatliche Israel mit der griechischen Amphiktyonie vergleicht, hat im Kontext der nordamerikanischen Bibelwissenschaften eine besondere Rezeption erfahren. Sie ermöglichte es, den Pentateuch als frühe, aber verzerrte historische Quelle gegen den deutschen Geschichtsskeptizismus zu verteidigen. Die »Baltimore

School« zeigt exemplarisch, dass solche Bemühungen meist vom protestantischen Biblizismus motiviert waren. Die Theorie setzte sich nicht durch, weil sie sich auf oberflächliche Lesarten der klassischen Altertumswissenschaften und komplizierte historische Rekonstruktionen stützte.

Schlagwörter: Amphiktyonie-Hypothese; Rezeptionsgeschichte; Baltimore School; Martin Noth; William Foxwell Albright

Résumé: Cet article explore le contexte social des études bibliques du XX^e siècle entourant la popularité de l'hypothèse de l'amphictyonie qui compare l'Israël tribal à l'amphictyonie des cités-états grecs. L'article démontre que cette théorie a permis aux chercheurs de défendre l'importance du Pentateuque en tant que source historique ancienne mais biaisée contre le scepticisme historique allemand. L'«École de Baltimore» sert d'exemple pour montrer que ces efforts étaient principalement motivés par le biblicisme protestant. La théorie s'est effondrée parce qu'elle reposait sur des lectures superficielles de la recherche des lettres classiques et sur une reconstruction historique alambiquée.

Mots-clés: hypothèse de l'amphictyonie; histoire de la réception; École de Baltimore; Martin Noth; William Foxwell Albright