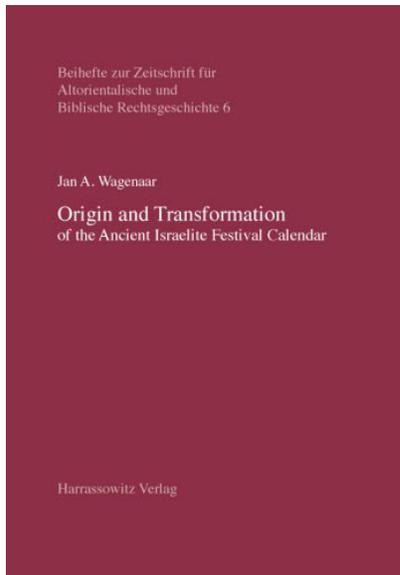


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***Origin and Transformation of the Ancient Israelite Festival Calendar***

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In the first sentence of his introduction Wagenaar clearly states the problem he wants to tackle: “The festival calendars preserved in the Old Testament differ considerably in the dates specified for the celebration of the three pilgrimage festivals: Pesach-Massot, Shabuot and Sukkot” (1). While the pre-Priestly festival calendars (Exod 23:14–19; 34:18–26; Deut 16:1–17) fix the dates of the festivals according to the state of the crops (barley, wheat, and grapes), the Priestly calendar in Lev 23 (and Exod 12:1–13; Num 28–29; Ezek 45:18–25) provides fixed dates by mentioning the number of the day and month. Julius Wellhausen tried to explain this phenomenon as “a process of ongoing denaturation or historicisation” (2); that is, the major pilgrimage festivals became more and more detached from their agricultural background. In the remainder of the introduction Wagenaar summarizes Wellhausen’s position about the historical-critical treatment of the ancient Israelite festival calendar. While Wagenaar still treats the Wellhausian reconstruction as a fundamental point of departure, he questions the hypothesis about a process of denaturation or historicization. In his own approach Wagenaar compares the agricultural year with the pre-Priestly and Priestly festival dates recorded in the Torah. From the results of this comparison, he explains the origin and meaning of the dates set in the Priestly festival calendar. The reason for the changes and differences may not have resulted from a process of denaturation but rather from specific Priestly concerns. These concerns have their origin in the fundamental change in the way dates were calculated in

the days of the Babylonian exile. Wagenaar demonstrates a deep influence of the Neo-Babylonian festival calendar by comparing the Priestly calendar with the overall structure of the Babylonian festival year.

In the first chapter Wagenaar analyzes the relationship between the ancient Israelite calendar and the agricultural seasons and consequently focuses on the three annual pilgrimage festivals: Massot, Shabuot, and Sukkot (these transcriptions by Wagenaar are used throughout this review). Since the dates of these festivals are closely related to agricultural activities that run from one autumn to the next, one needs an overview of the main agricultural conditions in this area. As main witnesses Wagenaar uses the Gezer Calendar and the observations of Gustav Dalman (“Arbeit und Sitte in Palästina”).

Since in chapter 1 Pesach-Massot was treated as a single festival (see Deut 16:1–8), Wagenaar wants to add more details in chapter 2: Pesach is not so much an agricultural festival as the sacrificial slaughter of an animal, and the regulations in Deut 16:1–8 show enough inconsistencies that one can assume that these verses “present a combination of two originally independent festivals” (35). Hence, Wagenaar hypothetically reconstructs an original instruction about the Passover sacrifice to which the regulations about the consumptions of unleavened barley bread were added later. In the next steps he examines the origins of Pesach with the help of observations about cattle breeding (according to the data collected by G. Dahl and A. Hjort, *Having Herds* [Stockholm, 1976]) and the origin of Massot. Having these hypotheses in mind, Wagenaar develops the origin and transformation of the Deuteronomistic festival calendar as well as the Yahwistic calendar. The earliest ancient Israelite festival calendar preserved in the Old Testament comprises Deut 16:1a $\beta$ , 2, 5–6a $\alpha$ , 7, 9b–11, 13–15 (i.e., the “centralization act” [58–60]). To this calendar a later Deuteronomistic editor added the Massot legislation (Deut 16:1a $\alpha$ , b, 3–4, 8 [61]).

After describing the oldest material depending on agricultural activities, Wagenaar turns in the third chapter to the phenomenon of “fixed dates,” especially the festivals of the first and seventh month. Analyzing the material in Lev 23, he detects some post-Priestly additions and comes to the conclusion that “the Shabuot legislation in Lev 23:9–21 and the additional instructions for the Day of Atonement in Lev 23:28a $\beta$ b–32 as well as Sukkot in Lev 23:39–43 were added to the festival calendar simultaneously with the post-priestly sabbath law in Lev 23:2a $\beta$ b–3” (88). Wagenaar also demonstrates how the first part of the Priestly festival calendar is embedded in the larger Priestly exodus story (Exod 12:1–13, 21–23, 28, 40; 13:1–2), while the latter part lists festivals to be celebrated annually (Lev 23:4–8, 23–25, 26–28a $\alpha$ , 33–36; see p. 100).

In chapter 4, the close relationship between the Priestly festival calendar and Ezek 45:18–25 moves the focus to the Babylonian exile and thus to the Babylonian festival calendar. The Babylonian festival year shows a similar semiannual layout with two New Year festivals in the first and seventh months. Wagenaar presents several details of the Babylonian festival year and demonstrates the agricultural background of the Akitu-festival.

These observations provide the basis for the final chapter. Here Wagenaar describes the transformation of the ancient Israelite festival year under the influence of the Babylonian calendar. Instead of two New Year festivals, however, the Priestly calendar has a single, fixed New Year around the vernal equinox (Exod 12:2) in close connection with the exodus from Egypt. Thus, there were two concepts of festival calendars in early postexilic times: the Priestly semiannual layout (under Babylonian influence) and the traditional tripartite calendar of Deut 16:1–17. “The argument may ... have been settled by a compromise. The introduction of Shabuot into the priestly festival calendar of Lev 23 does indeed seem to be the work of a post-priestly editor who wished to reconcile the traditional tripartite festival calendar with the semi-annual layout of the priestly festival calendar” (134–35). The chapter ends with an look to the last comprehensive list of ancient Israelite festivals in the Old Testament: Num 28–29. This list “presents an elaboration of the festival calendar in Lev 23 and the list of festival sacrifices in Ezek 45:17–46:15.... The festival year envisaged by Num 28–29 was the point of departure for the festival calendars of Qumran, the rabbinic traditions and early Christianity” (155).

In his summary and conclusions, Wagenaar draws a “fresh picture of the origin and transformation of the ancient Israelite festival calendar” (156). He summarizes the main points of his suggestions for a historical development of the festival calendars. Then he returns to his argument with Wellhausen’s reconstruction: the Wellhausian reconstruction is essentially vindicated insofar as the pre-Priestly calendars, which date the festivals in accordance with agricultural conditions, are older than the (post-)Priestly calendars assigning Pesach-Massot and Sukkot to fixed dates.

The fixed dates, however, are not the result of a gradual denaturation of the festival calendar but follow from the conscious presentation of Pesach-Massot and Sukkot as semi-annual New Year festivals in Ezek 45:18–20, 21a, 22–25. In marked contrast to the Wellhausian scheme, however, the “centralisation act” in Deut 16:1a $\beta$ , 2, 5–6a $\alpha$ , 7, 9b–11, 13–15 can no longer be considered as the axis around which the evolution of the ancient Israelite festival calendar revolves. (161)

As pointed out above, Wagenaar regards this “centralisation act” as the oldest festival calendar preserved in the Bible. He continues, “A new anchor point for the reconstruction of the origin and transformation of the ancient Israelites festival calendar may nevertheless be found in the list of festival sacrifices in Ezek 45:18–20, 21a, 22–25” (161).

Wagenaar adds an extensive appendix with the following helpful items: (1) synopses: Exod 23:14–19 // Exod 34:18–26 // Deut 16:1–8 (in English translation with markers in italics and boldface), likewise Deut 16:1–8 // Exod 13:6–7; 23:18; 34:25\*; Exod 23:14–19 // Exod 34:18–26; Lev 23:1–21 // Lev 23:23–43; Exod 12:1–13+Lev 23:5–8 // Lev 23:23–25, 26–28a, 33–36; Ezek 45:18–25 in the MT version and a new reconstruction; Lev 23:1–43 // Num 28:1–29:39; (2) translation and notes of the major texts dealt within the book; (3) bibliography, list of abbreviations, and index of biblical and extrabiblical references.

Wagenaar has written a very interesting and helpful book that reveals its value only after a careful look. This is not a book for beginners but for experts who will draw new ideas for the interpretation of a complicated Old Testament matter. Wagenaar has done his very best to make a clear and understandable presentation of the facts and his hypotheses; still, due to the difficult subject one needs some time to get acquainted with the texts, the older reconstruction of the history, and Wagenaar’s new suggestion. His study is an important contribution to the analysis of the literary history of the Torah texts and a plausible and comprehensive hypothesis about the origin and transformation of the ancient Israelite festival calendar. Everyone dealing with these texts will have to consider Wagenaar’s “fresh picture.”