Historical Criticisms

Historical Criticism-
an attempt to take the historical nature of Scripture seriously- An attempt to look carefully at a text in order to discern “the process by which the text developed into its present written or literary form.” Scriptu re did not drop out of the sky, but was a product of real life and real historical processes.

3 main types of historical criticism: Source Criticism, Form Criticism, Redaction Criticism

Source Criticism
OT knows of other ancient documents that existed before OT written, Num 21:14, Josh 10:13, lKgs 11:41 etc. Luke specifically says in the prologue of his Gospel that he used sources Also noticed that there are some similar and overlapping accounts in the OT, most notably Gen 1+2 Gen 1:1-2:3 and 2:4ff. seem to be two different accounts of creation from a different viewpoint.

Ch 1 uses ‘Elohim’, is arranged in a clearly structural pattern of 7 days, God is transcendent and works by speaking His word, humanity is the climax of creation, created male and female

Ch 2 uses ‘Yahweh’, is a free narrative set off by the ‘Toledoth’ formula, God is more immanent, forming and fashioning, man is created from the dust, separate from the rest of creation, woman is created later as a suitable partner.

The History of Source Criticism
In 1753, French Physician Jean Astruc drew attention to some of these differences and proposed that Moses used written sources in composing the Pentateuch. Others followed, notably Eichhorn who in 1780 added other criteria for separating sources (determining which parts of the Pentateuch came from which sources) and rejected Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch Julian Wellhausen- 1880s used the hypothetical sources already distinguished by contemporary scholarship and put them into a historical progression, dating the documents.
The Method of Source Criticism

3 assumptions
1. It is possible to determine sources by objective, scientific means
2. Finding sources is a good thing that aids understanding
3. Finding sources gives us access to more authentic, truer earlier accounts

Dividing sources
1. Recognizes that it involves certain conjecture, but believes in certainty
2. Carefully looking for breaks and dislocations of sequence in the text
3. Including stylistic inconsistencies, theological inconsistencies, and historical inconsistencies
4. Looking for ‘doublets’ i.e. 2 creation accounts, Abraham and Isaac both visiting ‘King Abimelech’
5. Use of Divine Names
6. Different characteristic vocabulary

Putting into Historical progression
1. Dating sources as important as dividing sources
2. Sources related to certain point of Israelite history
3. Usually based on ‘evolutionary’ view of history from Hegel
4. Some rewrote Israelite history “free from religious dogma and prejudice”

The Graf-Wellhausen hypothesis
Wellhausen thought the legal tradition of Israelite history came from a time after the prophetic movement of Israel.
He proposed that the legal tradition was a product of, and not the cause of prophetic history

The sources and their dates according to Wellhausen
1. ‘J’ (Jahwist, from the use of the divine name Yahweh) mostly narrative dating from the time of the monarchy 10th/9th cent. BC (time of David)
2. ‘E’ (Elohist, from the use of the divine name Elohim) dating from the 9th/8th century. (time of divided monarchy)
3. ‘D’ (Deuteronomist, basically the book of Deuteronomy) a complete source in itself dating from the time of Josiah’s reform (this is thought to be the ‘book of the law ‘found’ in the temple in 2 Kings 22:8, according to this theory, it was not found but composed and passed off as ancient, or recently composed and thought to be ancient)
4. ‘P’ (Priestly, because it contains priestly details) containing genealogies, statistics, cultic rules and lists and dated from the time of the exile (6th/5th cent.)

These sources were combined into the form of the Pentateuch in about the 5th cent. B.C.

3 implications from the Wellhausen hypothesis which became widely accepted
1. Moses could not have authored the Pentateuch
2. The Law originated after the historical books, not before them.
3. The true history of Israel is very different from the history narrated by the OT.
NT Source Criticism- ‘The Synoptic Problem’

The story is somewhat different, there are at least 3 existent documents which are probably related, one or more possibly using the other as a source (i.e. the synoptic Gospels).

Method of NT Source Criticism

Compare the 3 synoptic Gospels and look for a number of clues to possible relationship

1. Wording- Exact wording? If not, what has changed? How is this explained?
2. Overall arrangement- Is the order the same? What has changed and why?
3. Overall contents- Are any pericopes omitted? Doubled? Added?
4. Style- Any hints of author’s style of ‘fixing’ a source?
5. Theology- Ideas and theology that are known to be unique to an author?

The Streeter (Oxford) Hypothesis

Currently the dominant view

1. Mark written first
2. Luke and Matt. independently used Mark as a source
3. Luke and Matt. also had access to a hypothetical common written source or group of sources called ‘Q’ (from German Quelle ‘source’)
4. Luke and Matt. also used material unique to each book (called ‘L’ and ‘M’).
The Positive contributions of Source Criticism
1. Great care in examining details
2. Raises important questions
3. Lays groundwork for other disciplines
4. Take history and the historical process seriously

The Criticisms of Source Criticism
1. The methods weren’t as ‘scientific’ and ‘objective’ as thought
   a. Many source critics worked with skeptical presuppositions
   b. Began with the presupposition that the text did not have integrity
   c. Used Hegel’s evolutionary view of history
   d. Took history seriously, but ignored Scripture’s claim to be a product of supernatural process.
   e. Describing the data is objective, but explaining the data is subjective
   f. Hypothesis added onto hypothesis without recognizing tentative nature
   g. Scholarly pride- 18\textsuperscript{th} cent. ‘scholars smarter even than the original authors and compilers.’
   h. 2 huge red flags
      1. Complete lack of consensus as to the dividing or dating of sources
      2. Complete lack of independent evidence for proposed sources
   i. Classic example of Carson’s fallacy of “Uncontrolled Historical Reconstruction
   j. Better explanations have been found for many ‘discrepancies’

2. Didn’t deliver any true insight into the meaning of the text
   a. It looks at the trees in great detail, but doesn’t tell us about the forest
   b. Gives scattered bits of material, but ignores larger context because sources seen as unrelated
   c. Got caught up in finding and dating sources and completely ignored the meaning of the text.
   d. Became a laundry list of scholarly conjectures
   e. Assumes that the sources were more authoritative than the final form, the ‘Inspired text’.

The bottom line of Source Criticism:
It asked some important questions, but usually gave unsatisfactory answers
Form Criticism

History of Form Criticism

1. Grew out of Source Criticism and the disillusionment thereof.
2. Started asking about the prehistory of the ‘sources’
3. Asked about oral transmission of the OT stories before they were written down
4. Compared with the oral transmission of German and Norse Myths
5. Found that these myths often took on a stereotypical ‘form’
   e.g. started with “once upon a time…”
6. About the same time, documents from the Ancient Near East were being discovered.

These two insights- the nature of oral transmission and the comparison with other ancient documents- led to the theory that the Old Testament material was originally made of a number of stories cast in stereotypical ‘forms’

Results of Form Criticism

1. For instance a Babylonian ‘creation epic’ was discovered that had many similarities to the Genesis creation narrative and there were many primitive flood stories.
2. Stories that explained an aspect of Israelite custom or religion were thought to have been composed to explain this custom. e.g. the Passover to explain the feast or the Noah story to explain the rainbow.
3. Likewise stories that ended with an explanation of a place name were thought to have been composed to explain that place name.
4. NT Gospel pericopes categorized as ‘miracle stories’, ‘proclamation stories’ etc.

The Strengths of Form Criticism

1. Takes Genre seriously- many prophetic oracles are better understood by looking at their ‘form’
2. Many forms, e.g. ‘lament’ ‘lawsuit oracle’ illuminate text.
3. Gave much insight into contemporary customs, which shed light on Scripture- it is widely recognized that the Sinai covenant is very similar to ancient Suzerain/Vassal covenants, which gives insight into the text.
4. Forces us to take seriously stereotypical forms, e.g. the literary form for reporting the lives of the Kings in I Kings 15-16.

The Criticisms of Form Criticism

1. Often treats OT Scripture as ‘Myths’ and ‘Legends’, which tends to place them in the category of fiction.
2. Ignores the uniqueness of Israelite History and the Supernatural character of Scripture
3. Often pays attention only to the form, and ignores the contents
4. Uses form as ‘procrustean bed’ ignoring or chopping off what does not fit
5. Separate forms are disconnected from larger context
Redaction Criticism

History of Redaction Criticism
Built on Source Criticism
Discouraged with Source Criticism’s inability to illumine the meaning of the text
Shifted from focus on the original sources to focus on the act of putting them together
OT first then NT

Method of Redaction Criticism
1. Start with results of Source Criticism
2. Try to determine the process of how these sources were put together
3. Ask “what was included and what was left out?”
4. Ask “what was added by the editor (redactor)?”
5. Ask “how did the redactor organize the material?”
6. Ask “what is the significance of these arrangements/additions?”

Strengths of Redaction Criticism
1. Takes historical process seriously
2. There probably was editing involved, e.g. death of Moses story
3. Looks carefully at the objective details
4. In looking at arrangement, sees big picture of documents e.g. Matt. arranged around 5 longer blocks of teaching- possibly implying that they replace the 5 books of the Law.
5. In looking at unique material, sees separate themes and focuses of individual authors- e.g. Luke champions the cause of women, the poor and the disadvantaged, He also focuses on prayer.
6. Takes the documents seriously as a whole, not just individual parts

Criticisms of Redaction Criticism
1. Often ignores the supernatural composition of the Scriptures
2. Only as strong as the foundation of Source Criticism on which it is built.
3. In focussing on what is unique to each author, often ignores what is common to all authors or sources
4. Assigns relatively greater weight to that which may only be of minor weight or incidental to the author.
5. Still extremely subjective in offering explanations for the data.