

The Authors of the Deuteronomistic History: Locating a Tradition in Ancient Israel. By Brian Neil Peterson. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014, xiv + 395 pp., \$34.00.

The background, authorship and growth of the extensive section of the Old Testament (OT) known as the Historical Books form no small aspect of OT biblical criticism. From Deuteronomy to 2 Kings, these texts recount Israel's early history with both detail and artistry, and are in many ways the beating heart of OT theology. For this reason, bound to the intricate issues related to these books, often known as the "Deuteronomistic History" (DtrH), is a host of critical implications. While the prevailing winds of OT scholarship blow stiffly in one direction, Brian Neil Peterson has produced a volume that heads persistently in another.

In the introduction to his project, Peterson frames his investigation in terms of a "whodunit?" mystery novel. His aim is not only to establish a cogently argued alternative view of the Historical Books, but even to posit authorship of (a) specific individual(s), an endeavor rarely attempted in favor of concepts like the "Elohist" or a "school of 'X'." By examining "intertextual clues, possible character motives, and the historical opportunity in general," Peterson posits that "Abiathar the priest [of Anathoth], his sons Jonathan and Ahimelech, their priestly descendants, and finally Jeremiah and Baruch" each had a hand in authoring and editing the DtrH (p. 3). Peterson thus wishes to historicize the DtrH.

The book unfolds in two parts. In the first, Peterson provides an extensive orientation to scholarly trends in views of the authorship, date, and influences on the DtrH (pp. 7-117). Starting in chapter 1 with the work of Martin Noth, Peterson situates the reader in the current scholarly discussion of the DtrH. In this chapter Peterson also articulates his holistic and synchronic approach to the canonical text, bypassing what he sees as the "slugfest" of redaction-critical debates on the microtextual level (p. 8). In short, the predominant, but often modified, consensus view of the DtrH is that it was compiled by an author (the "Deuteronomist") in the mid-6th c. B.C.E. from earlier, fragmented sources. This was prompted by the "discovery" of the Book of the Law (= Deut. 4:44-30:20) by Hilkiah (2 Kgs. 22:8-10) chiefly to explain the failure of the monarchy and Israel's exile, and thereby furnish an apology for Josiah's reform.

Peterson draws attention to the disagreement and near "pan-Deuteronomism" among OT scholars. To him this situation suggests the need for a new evaluation of whether the DtrH may have originated from an earlier period in Israel's history, viz. the time of Abiathar, David's high priest, after which the DtrH underwent subsequent editorial expansions. In chapter 2, Peterson substantiates this approach by examining Noth's work and the ways in which his own views of the DtrH partially align with Noth. This prompts Peterson to reevaluate other claims made by Noth's that have become axiomatic.

Chief among these is a late date for Deuteronomy, with which Peterson interacts in chapter 3. He resists a late date for the book on the basis of what he understands as Deuteronomy's second millennium B.C.E. Hittite treaty structure. While Peterson acknowledges that his position "may turn off some readers," he expresses hope that his arguments will "speak for themselves" as he posits an alternative theory (p. 63). In chapter 4, Peterson examines key grammatical constructions as they occur throughout the DtrH, such as *עַד-הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה* and *בְּעֵבֶר הַיַּרְדֵּן*. Examining each occurrence with regard to chronology and geography, and interacting closely with Jeffrey Geoghegan's similar analyses (see p. 113), Peterson suggests the fittingness of these phrases for authorship by Abiathar and the subsequent Anathothian priests, including Jeremiah.

Peterson maintains that “very few” of the phrases could be satisfyingly situated after a 6th c. B.C.E. timeframe (p. 112).

In part two Peterson moves into a chapter by chapter, systematic investigation of the editing of Deuteronomy and each book of the DtrH. His goal is “to determine how, if at all, the priestly authors from Anathoth may have influenced their content and shaping” (p. 121). To do this, Peterson focuses on “macro thematic and rhetorical indicators that point to authorial perspective,” providing a considerable amount of exegetical detail as well (p. 262). Peterson is cautious in his analysis, occasionally conceding that a given point is “inconclusive,” (e.g., pp. 131, 140), yet he identifies many textual features that firmly support his thesis. For example, in his treatment of the book of Judges (ch. 7), Peterson forcefully argues that the book is “an anti-Saulide polemic ... commissioned by David at Hebron” that underwent later editing before incorporation into the DtrH (p. 197). He proceeds to examine the ways in which David’s high priest, Abiathar, “had the necessary qualifications, the motive [cf. 1 Sam. 22:14-15], and opportunity to write Judges as a means to draw a war-torn nation together under the banner of one king” (ibid). Peterson finds in the following DtrH books similar “hints” at authorship.

In conclusion, Peterson rightly reminds the reader that to exclude *a priori* the possibility of an early date for the DtrH “serve[s] only to hamstring open debate” (297). In contrast to the prevailing scholarly view, he proposes that the thematic and ideological diversity in the DtrH is best explained as “a history preserved over a long period of time that was reworked some time shortly after the fall of Judah, with final notations added c. 560 BCE” (p. 298). This position alleviates the need to posit a single theological purpose for the entire DtrH, as it served various needs along the course of its editorial history; yet it is unified by its authors’ task of accurately preserving Israel’s history.

There is much to commend in this volume, which will primarily benefit biblical studies scholars and students. Despite a few grammatical oddities (viz. “points up” often for “points out” [e.g., pp. 110, 182n64, 200, 274], overuse of exclamation marks), in terms of content Peterson has made cogent arguments for re-evaluating key aspects of the conventional view of the DtrH. Peterson’s synchronic approach and his desire to ground the study in actual history are refreshing in the context of this debate. His approach permits the valuable analysis of editorial phrases to justify the subsequent analysis of each book. This in turn also establishes credibility for taking an early view of the composition of the DtrH. Peterson’s volume will hopefully generate further scholarly conversation in at least this respect.

Peterson’s case for Abiathar (et al.) as original author is a cumulative one and, while plausible, will certainly face criticism from the broader academy. Nevertheless, Peterson builds a firm argument overall for an early *Sitz im Leben* for the authorship of the DtrH, and his volume has strengthened the warrant for holding such a view.

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