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Review: Text and History: Historiography and the Study of the Biblical Text

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BOOK REVIEWS

Text and History: Historiography and the Study of the Biblical Text. By Jens Bruun Kofoed. Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2005, xiii + 298 pp., \$34.50.

Text and History is a revision of the author's doctoral dissertation (University of Aarhus, Denmark, 2002). The book is an informed response to the progressively skeptical outlook, led by the so-called Copenhagen School (Niels Peter Lemche, Thomas L. Thompson), toward the value of the texts of the Hebrew Bible for reconstructing the history of ancient Israel. Kofoed's particular expertise is in historiographical methodology, and it is in this area that the book makes its most important contribution.

The initial chapter lays out the importance of presuppositions in the historiographical enterprise. For example, the author overviews recent contributions to the "hermeneutical, linguistic, and literary aspects of historical theory" (p. 11), demonstrating that real historians do use plot and that the product of their writing is always influenced by their environment—and yet historical integrity is not necessarily compromised. The author utilizes modern historiographical output to make the point that any author, ancient or modern, "must have determined which traditions or sources to deploy and how to arrange the selected material," and that "the bringing together of already existing sources with perhaps newly written material did create a new text" (p. 29). However, "to argue that the historical information present in such a literary innovation must be considered a *literary invention* is a non sequitur" (p. 29, author's italics).

Building on his methodological critique and its realities, Kofoed suggests that "the texts of the Hebrew Bible contain reliable information for a reconstruction of the period it purports to describe" (p. 30). The rest of the book is his attempt to defend this thesis. The author presents his defense in four chapters, and he narrows the discussion to the books of Kings. Kofoed's procedure for proving his case is to isolate "markers" in the text. Specifically, Kofoed is searching for textual markers that have source-critical value and imply or evince historical intentionality on the part of the ancient author. By comparing these markers in the Hebrew text with non-biblical material, one can gauge (to varying degrees of plausibility) a *terminus ad quem* for composition and deduce whether the writer intended the product to be a record of events for posterity.

Chapter 2 ("The Lateness of the Text") focuses on the strategy of minimalist historians to discard the biblical texts as sources for ancient Israel's history based on the texts' perceived lateness (i.e. their distance from the actual events). The author first examines the methodological presuppositions guiding this dismissal and then seeks to find markers in the text of Kings to orient those books in chronological proximity to the events they describe.

With respect to methodology, Kofoed gives evidence of his considerable grasp of the scholarly literature pertinent to the issue and embarks on very worthwhile discussions of the nature of source evaluation, comparative method, the workings of oral tradition, and how genre affects these areas. The excursus on "primary" and "secondary" sources should be required reading for students in OT history courses. Kofoed explains the flaws in defining a "primary" source as a text "written at a time close to an event," and a "secondary" source as "removed in time from the events they narrate or to which they testify" (p. 41). These definitions, argues Kofoed, "fail to acknowledge another important

distinction in heuristic terminology—namely between ‘primary’/‘secondary’ and ‘first-hand’/‘secondhand’ sources” (p. 42). The point of this comment is that “a source may still be secondary even if its information is taken from an earlier extant source” (p. 42). A source should be regarded as primary “if it stems directly from an eye- or ear-witness or, importantly, a later account that relies on an earlier non-extant source” (p. 42). A firsthand account will always be a primary source, but the opposite does not hold true.

Chapter 3 (“Linguistic Differentiation”) examines the text of Kings for source-critical markers to deduce diachronic layers within the text with a goal toward situating the text chronologically to the events described. Kofoed is well aware of the pitfalls of trying to date biblical texts via linguistic features, and so he first attempts to rule out synchronic explanations for the features often used for such analysis. He notes that the presence of Aramaisms in a text points to a sixth or fifth-century BC date of composition, but that absence of Aramaisms only tells us the text is earlier (and cannot tell us how much earlier). Grammar, dialect, and orthography are not useful for advancing clarity here, and so linguistic differentiation is an inadequate trajectory for determining whether Kings was written any closer to the events described therein than the Persian period.

Chapter 4 (“The Comparative Material”) seeks to lay out a responsible comparative method and then discern whether there is any non-biblical material that might correlate the (potentially) historiographical material in Kings. Kofoed concludes this chapter by noting, “The information in the books of Kings is in accord with the external sources wherever we can check it. . . . The author of the books of Kings . . . paints a picture that is consistent with the information of the extrabiblical sources . . . irrespective of *when* the books of Kings were written or edited” (p. 189, author’s emphasis).

Chapter 5 (“Genre”) takes on the question of intentionality; that is, are there indications that Kings was written intentionally as “history”? Kofoed argues that this case can indeed be made. He does so (following Ricoeur) by insisting that this question must be answered by focusing on the explanatory level (what the author intended) and the documentary level (eyewitness testimony), as opposed to the literary level. What he means by this is that it is methodologically incorrect to approach the books of Kings with the thought that certain genres cannot convey history. Kofoed demonstrates in this chapter that “factual texts employ precisely the same literary devices as a number of fictional genres” (p. 246).

I would highly recommend this work for a graduate-level course in the historical books. Its focus on methodology and presuppositions is much needed. This book would be an effective complement to V. P. Long’s *Art of Biblical History and Faith, Tradition, and History: Old Testament Historiography in Its Near Eastern Context* (ed. J. K. Hoffmeier, A. R. Millard, D. W. Baker).

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The Jazz of Preaching: How to Preach with Great Freedom and Joy. By Kirk Byron Jones. Nashville: Abingdon, 2004, 137 pp., \$16.00 paper.

Kirk Byron Jones is jazzed about preaching with great freedom and joy! Jones teaches social ethics and pastoral ministry at Andover Newton Theological School in Newton Centre, Massachusetts. He states the thesis of this one-of-a-kind book: “Preaching may be enhanced by exploring key elements of jazz and learning to apply those elements to the act of preaching” (p. 15).