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Bauer, Uwe F. W.
**“Warum ubertretet ihr SEIN Geheiss!”: Eine synchrone Exegese der anti-Erzählung
von Richter 17-18**

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Unless one reads the forward to this volume, the first part of the title remains a mystery until pp. 344-45, when the author finally declares that it was triggered by the occurrence of the word עָבַר, "to pass over, overstep" (German *übertreten*). Illustrative of Bauer's method, in the use of the term in Judg 18:13 he hears an echo of Num 14:41, where, in another narrative involving a scouting mission, Moses expresses his exasperation with the Israelites because of their refusal to acquire territory according to the orders of Yahweh. This is how Bauer reads Judges 17-18: as an antinarrative declaring the biblical author's perspective on the Danite seizure of Laish and the erection there of the cult of Micah's image.

Bauer begins the monograph with a theoretical presentation of his methodology. In his *Vorwort* he admits that the holistic literary approach taken in this study is new territory in German scholarship, which has since Wellhausen preferred diachronic to synchronic exegesis. The influence of J. P. Fokkelman is freely acknowledged at the beginning (pp. 40-46) and evident throughout the work. Bauer sets the chronological context for his own work by surveying previous studies of Judges 17-18. His own investigation begins with a colometric formatting of the Hebrew text, followed by his German translation. Thereafter he explores successively the place of this passage in the broader context of Genesis-2 Kings and the narrower context of the book of Judges, its temporal and spatial structures, its literary structure, divided into scenes, and scene segments, consisting largely of introductory exposition, dialogue, and event (*Sequenz*). In his detailed serial analysis of the three scenes (17:1-5[6]; 17:7-13; 18:[la]1b-31) he follows Fokkelman's model of levels of meaning, paying particular attention to scenes, scene segments, sentences, phrases, and words. Especially helpful is his attention to the nature and function of literary features of the text (chiasms, word plays, irony, etc.). His conclusions are effectively and efficiently summarized in the final part of the book (pp. 415-47).

The intensity of Bauer's work is extraordinary. He explores individual words and phrases from every conceivable angle, often producing fresh insights into longstanding cruxes. Bauer's disposition toward the Masoretic text is very conservative; he calls for only a handful of minor adjustments. (Compare for example his treatment of "the exile of the land" in 18:30 [pp. 396-414] with that of Robert O'Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges* [Leiden: 1996], pp. 481-83). And rejecting the fragmentation of the text by source and redaction critics, he finds literary significance in the details, even of those that have long been discounted as secondary.

Bauer's work provides students with a model of synchronic exegesis. Nevertheless, it raises several questions. First, while his presentation of Judges 17-18 as an "Anti-Erzählung" ("anti-narrative"?) is totally convincing, a clear definition of the term is lacking. In the end (p. 429) he explains that in its presentation of an event an *anti-erzählerischer Text* always presupposes several other texts or an entire text complex (a conclusion one also deduces from earlier statements), but why call this an *Anti-Erzählung*? It is not the narrative that is negated/critiqued by appeal to previous accounts. Rather, the text critiques the events described by holding them up to the norms established by previous texts. Accordingly, just as Judges 1 may rightfully be characterized as an "anti-conquest narrative," inasmuch as the portrayal of the tribes' experiences is deliberately contrasted with the narratives of Joshua, so chapters 17-18 are better characterized as "anti-cult establishment narratives," or "anti-reconnaissance mission narratives," or "anti-conquest narratives." But to speak of "anti-narrative texts" is confusing.

Second, some of Bauer's interpretations are forced, such as his reading of the *Königsformel* in 17:6 and 18:1 as looking forward to a David *redivivus* as the *idealized* king of Israel. The formula does antedate the account and the narrative was written as an exposition of the statement, but like most scholars Bauer interprets the book as an exilic or post-exilic political document, calling for the establishment of the (idealized) monarchy. But this interpretation is questionable on three counts. First, after the deplorable history of Israel's monarchy, particularly its hand in leading Israel into idolatry, it is difficult to imagine how an exilic writer would look upon the monarchic institution as the answer to the evils described in the book. Second, where the book speaks of or alludes to an Israelite monarchy, the image is consistently negative: witness Gideon, whose rejection of kingship is a sham, and Abimelech's disastrous tenure in Shechem. Third, if one follows Jewish tradition and interprets the book of Judges as a prophetic rather than political composition, the meaning of the so-called *Königsformel* may actually be the opposite of what is commonly accepted. The addition, "all did what was right in their own eyes," functions as the obverse of "they did evil in the sight of Yahweh," variations of which are found seven times in the book and more than fifty times in the OT. This form of evaluation is especially frequent in the deuteronomistic literature, appearing often with reference to specific kings (e.g. Manasseh, 2 Kgs 21:2). With this history of royal apostasy, rather than expressing a longing for a king, the

formula declares the democratization of the evils sponsored by later kings. According to the picture presented here, in the pre-monarchic period Israel did not need a king to lead them into the kinds of evils described; Micah and his mother, the Levite, and Danites all serve as illustrations of the problem the authors of Samuel-Kings present as localized in the king.

Raising these questions does not diminish the value of Bauer's work as a model of exegetical precision. His method is clear, and his conclusions are succinctly stated. In the end he notes that the type of *Anti-erzählung* represented by this text is rare in the Hebrew Bible. However, I have been so stimulated by the work that I have begun to wonder if other enigmatic texts might not function similarly (e.g., 1 Samuel 8). For those who would pursue such matters Bauer has provided an extremely helpful paradigm.