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**Fischer, Alexander Achilles**

***Von Hebron nach Jerusalem: Eine redaktions-  
geschichtliche Studie zur Erzählung von König  
David in II Sam 1–5***

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All historical and literary disciplines experience times when old reconstructions come under close scrutiny as new methods emerge or problems in the regnant interpretation reach a high enough level. Certainly the study of the Deuteronomistic History furnishes a parade example of such a line of inquiry under fire. The date, provenance, purpose, and in some cases even the existence of the underlying sources of this work, as well as of the work as a whole, all are provoking extensive reexamination, particularly in English-language scholarship.

Proving that the notorious insularity of German scholarship can be breached, Fischer has written a volume (his Jena *Habilitationsschrift*) reexamining the literary history of 2 Sam 1–5, a section often ignored in the redaction-critical discussions. Fischer identifies within these chapters five layers: early source material, a seventh-century pro-Davidic redaction, an early Deuteronomistic redaction (Dtr[Sam]), a later Deuteronomistic redaction (Dtr[S]), and postredactional accretions. Quite apart from this reconstruction, his work provides useful commentary on the chapters (indeed, the basic structure of the book is a pericope-by-pericope analysis) as well as excurses on Ishbosheth's realm, the archaeology and history of Mahanaim, the location of Geshur, the relationship between Ishbosheth and Mephibosheth, and the hermeneutic of suspicion [especially regarding the charges against David]). A comprehensive bibliography ends the book. Again, numerous

comments on particular passages (for example on connections between 1 Sam 4 and 2 Sam 1 [18–19]) shed light on difficult problems. However convincing or otherwise Fischer’s overall redaction-critical analysis may be, his volume does help us understand the extraordinary tales of David more clearly.

It may be instructive to compare Fischer’s reconstruction with another recent one, that of Campbell and O’Brien’s *Unfolding the Deuteronomistic History* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000). Campbell and O’Brien retain the older idea of a pre-Deuteronomistic Prophetic Record, which they find in most of 2 Sam 1–5 (except 2:10–11; 3:2–5; 4:2b–4; 5:2bβ, 4–5, and 13–16; most of these verses being glosses of the Josianic redactor). In contrast to this rather simple analysis, Fischer finds his five layers woven intricately throughout 1–5, though chapters 1–2 (except 2:10b–11, which are Dtr[S]) consist entirely of the Davidic redaction and its sources, thus agreeing in essence with the position of Campbell and O’Brien. For chapters 3–5, on the other hand, Fischer’s analysis is almost bewilderingly complex, imagining significant reshaping of stories and finding in every shift of perspective a new source. Of course, simplicity does not guarantee accuracy, but arguably complexity may indicate a tendency, which many Americans find in older German redaction criticism, toward arbitrary over-reading.

Still, generalizations about the merits or otherwise of redaction criticism cannot substitute for close arguments. We still lack clear criteria for deciding whether a retouching of a text occurred five minutes or five centuries after its composer put down the pen. Perhaps such decisions will always be ad hoc and controvertible, dependent on cumulative evidence differently evaluated by different scholars. Fischer does offer a detailed, if ultimately unconvincing, defense of his dating of the Davidic Redaction to the late monarchy (280–91): an earlier dating seems improbable to him because the pro-southern views of 2 Sam 1–5 do not reflect the political realities of an earlier time and there is no evidence (*contra* Halpern’s magisterial *David*) for a Davidic state document behind this material, among other reasons. However, this proposal depends in part on assigning verses mentioning a bipartite state (3:9–10, 19b; 5:1–2) to his first Deuteronomistic redaction, dating to the seventh century, a problematic move in view of his implied principle that texts reflect current political realities. More generally, he argues (against Rost and most others) for a “Fragmenten- und Ergänzungshypothese” (316) as the best explanation for the development of 1–2 Samuel, with a late monarchic proto-Deuteronomistic redaction responsible for the basic architecture of the material. This proposal, though bound to be controversial, deserves serious attention, though at some level his reconstruction differs from Rost chiefly in lowering the date of the major shaping of the material from the era of David or Solomon to that of Josiah and positing later additions.

Fischer's study, along with the contemporary English-language work of Halpern, Launderville, Lasine, and others, at least by implication raises the important question of how we should understand the motivations of those transmitting the tales of David. Are the stories propaganda legitimating David's rule, attempts by later royal chanceries to legitimate subsequent rulers, popular tales circulating beyond the court, or something else? Given 1–2 Samuel's ambivalence toward David (as Otto Kaiser pointed out some years ago), what sort of propaganda (granting that the word is anachronistic for ancient states) could such tales in their extant form be? Unfortunately, redaction criticism is unlikely to be a tool for answering these questions, but perhaps studies such as Fischer's can help us clarify the development of these texts as they pass through a series of literary settings with different intellectual and political (or even entertainment) needs. We do know that the David tales provoked several generations of Israelites, not merely because the larger-than-life successes and failures of the great perennially entertain, but because kingship was thought to be a locus of Yahweh's presence and vehicle of Yahweh's grace among human beings. The stories fascinate many readers today for the same reasons.

In sum, Fischer's weighty volume reexamines older analyses of these too little studied chapters, offering a sustained argument for a multilayered literary history. Avoiding extremes and engaging in a commonsensical reading of the text, he offers a reconstruction that will challenge us for some time. Even one who finds, as I do, his analysis overly complex and thus unpersuasive in all its details, must take it seriously. For this, Fischer deserves our thanks and a hope that he will step beyond close reading to larger historical-critical issues.