Who would have thought that a doctoral dissertation (Zurich, 2007) on the censorial judgments within the “Deuteronomistic framework” of Kings, that so-well trodden path, would break new ground and put the study of Kings on a new ground, and ground much firmer than there has been before? But Felipe Blanco Wissmann did it.

In the introduction (“A. Einleitung,” 1–30), Blanco Wissmann places himself among those who now restrict the “Deuteronomistic History” to Samuel–Kings (1–16). In order to pursue the question of how the “judgments” in Kings relate to Deuteronomy, he devotes a section to that book’s problem. He opts for an origin of Deuteronomy under Josiah (after presenting the evidence to the contrary very well; 16–24). The main part (“B. Beurteilungen von König und Volk in 1Kön 12–2Kön 25,” 31–211) first deals with judgments in the narrative (31–173), then in direct speech (174–211). The synchronisms (32–42) were produced by the authors of Kings* following the model of the Neo-Babylonian chronicle series. Judah and Israel are treated as two nations as in Jeremiah, Ezekiel and the Twelve, in opposition to Deuteronomy, which speaks of Israel only, and to Isaiah and Chronicles, which concentrate on Judah. The formula “He did what was right/wrong in the sight of YHWH” has its background in Phoenicia and Babylonia, not in Deuteronomy. The frame of Kings and the frame of Judges, despite a common stock of
terms, are following different ideologies and are not the work of the same authors (42–54). The comparison with the “fathers” in Kings has nothing to do with the “fathers” in Deuteronomy; again, it is firmly rooted in ancient Near Eastern dynastic principles (54–58). The “high places,” (59–91) are a nonentity in Deuteronomy; again, Kings sides with the Latter Prophets. Blanco Wissmann finds a parallel for the “cultic jealousy” between the capital Jerusalem and the cult places of the Judean towns in Sennacherib’s suppression of the cult of Marduk for the sake of some “Ashur-alone” policy (67–68). In the Weidner chronicle, the king’s attitude toward Babel’s main sanctuary, Esagila, determines his “righteousness”; the motif is applied to Nabonidus by Kyros (69–71). Judah outlived Israel because more Judean than Israelite kings “did what was right”; the high places—and the people sinning at them—are needed in order to explain the fall of Jerusalem in spite of “good kings” such as Hezekiah and Josiah. A preexilic version of Kings is thus excluded (75), as the high places form part and parcel of the “first edition” of Samuel–Kings (90). A—mostly Israelite—counterpart to the Judean topic of the high places are “foreign gods” (91-116) such as “Baal,” who does not figure in Deuteronomy (93–95). It is by no means clear which god is addressed in every single case under the epithet “Baal”–“Lord” (101). The polemic against Baal groups Kings with Hosea and Jeremiah (106–7). Hosea and Jeremiah, however, do not (or, in the case of Jeremiah, not very much) worry about Asherah, making Kings the most monotheistic composition of the three (114). The “sin of Jeroboam” (116–35)—or rather, “the sins that Jeroboam committed and that he made Israel to commit”—are specific to (northern) Israel. In Exod 32 and Deut 9, the making of a “golden calf” is attributed to the people, not to a king (120–21). Again, there is a rich ancient Near Eastern background for the king who leads his state to disaster by cultic misdemeanors (123–26), from the third millennium B.C.E. to Hellenism. “Sin” and sinning in Kings have (again) their closest parallel in Jeremiah (126–35). “Torah,” too, is applied by Kings differently from Deuteronomy (135–54). The reference to the “law” in Kings shows some similarities with the “Demotic Chronicle,” which judges the pharaohs of the fourth century according to their attitude to “the law” (139–44) in reception of the Persian concept of dâta (this, however, affect the dating of the “law”-stratum in Kings [153]). Under the heading “additional judgments” (155–73), Blanco Wissmann discusses 2 Kgs 17 (155–61), which is not only an epilogue to the history of Israel but also a prologue to the demise of Judah, and Manasseh, the only Judean king supposed to have “led his people to sin” (161–73). “Judgments in direct speech” are divided into “speeches by kings” (175–87), “speeches of prophets” (187–204), and “divine speeches” (204–11), common in Genesis–Numbers but mainly absent from Deuteronomy (205).

The conclusions are presented in two final chapters: “Reconstruction of Cultural and Theological History” (“C. Kultur- und theologiegeschichtliche Rekonstruktion,” 213–33); “The Place of Kings in Cultural History” (213–23) summarizes the evidence for Kings’
dependence on the Babylonian chronicle series and intellectual developments first associated with the reign of Nabonidus. For the place of Kings in the history of (biblical) theology (224–33), coordinates much closer to the prophetic books than to Deuteronomy are proposed. In other words, Kings is not “historiography” misunderstood in the Tanak as a “prophetic book”; Kings started as a “prophetic book” and was misperceived as “historiography” by Josephus (together with the rest of Torah and Prophets) and the Christian Bible. (I agree with that conclusion as far as the “book redaction” of Kings is concerned, but not for the “first draft” of Samuel–Kings in the sixth century B.C.E.) The consequences for the assumption of “DtrH” are summarized in “Kgs and ‘DtrH’: Considerations in Conclusion” (“D. Die Königebücher und das ‘Deuteronomistische Geschichtswerk’: Auswertende Überlegungen,” 235–61), which cannot have consisted of more than Samuel* and Kings*.

This is the position of R. G. Kratz, Die Komposition der erzählenden Bücher des Alten Testaments (Göttingen, 2000), who already defined “Deuteronomistic” as “nicht deuteronomisch und mit dem Deuteronomium identisch, sondern davon abgeleitet und nur entfernt verwandt ist” (159). That statement has been thoroughly corroborated by Blanco Wissmann. Deuteronomy was elaborated at Mizpah and Bethel in the course of the sixth century B.C.E. (pace Blanco Wissmann) and was “kidnapped” or “hijacked” by the D-group in the first half of the fifth century, who were returnees from Babylonia with the first draft of Samuel–Kings in their luggage. They formulated their specific ideology in order to regain supremacy for “Jerusalem” as opposed to “Benjamin” in the Persian province of Judea. This situation is the only one I can think of where the “cult centralization” makes some sense (according to 2 Kgs 23:8, Josiah’s cultic measures did not affect Benjamin). In consequence, my “first draft” of Samuel–Kings constitutes a volume much slimmer than Blanco Wissmann’s Grundschicht; 1 Kgs 21 and 2 Kgs 1, which he wants to save for the “first draft” or “first edition” of Samuel–Kings (199–200), are linguistically the latest additions to the Elijah story. There is also more “Late Biblical Hebrew” in the judgments in direct speech than in the narrative, but Blanco Wissmann must be excused for not paying attention to this feature, as no German-language biblical scholar seems to be aware of this discourse.

In spite of these minor disagreements, I heartily welcome this product of sound, thorough, and wide-ranging scholarship. It is the most thorough investigation of Kings in the context of ancient Near Eastern historiography and, consisting of 293 pages and 1,294 footnotes, a mine of insight and information.