FROM JOSHUA TO SAMUEL: SOME REMARKS ON THE ORIGIN OF THE BOOK OF JUDGES

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1. Introduction

The basic problem or challenge a modern commentator on books such as Joshua and Judges faces is that he/she has to take a deliberate stand in the ongoing discussion on the Deuteronomistic history.\(^1\) We are no longer in the enviable position of J. Alberto Soggin, who could write, almost thirty years ago, in the preface of his commentary on the book of Judges: “I think that the hypothesis of a Deuteronomistic redaction of the ‘former prophets’ has now been established.”\(^2\) Today anyone stating something like that can be accused of not keeping up with recent research or of having a one-sided view ignoring many other exegetical positions. The refinement of and alternatives to Martin Noth’s theory have in the recent decades led to an “unsettling wide array of conflicting options that encourage skepticism of past attempts to sort out discrete redactional layers in the Dtr history.”\(^3\)

It is tempting to conclude from this situation that the classic diachronic approach finds itself here in a cul-de-sac and we can simply ignore its arguments. However, one cannot easily flee into the assumption that the book can be studied as one coherent unit. A survey of the field of syn-

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chronic studies leads to a similar disturbing list of contradicting results with lots of recreated overall structures or assumed central themes. Also with this approach the theories tend to get more complicated but less convincing.

In this article I hope to show that it is possible to profit from the arguments used in both the diachronic and the synchronic approach—they are often the same though interpreted differently—in an attempt to offer a plausible sketch of the origin of the book. There appear to be many good reasons to assume that the book of Judges in its present form can be explained as a bridge that was laid relatively late between the books of Joshua and Samuel. This has also consequences for the interpretation of the ending of the book of Joshua.

2. The Problems of Judges 1

In her recent monograph on Judges 1 Mareike Rake makes a new, impressive effort to explain the inconsistencies, contradictions, and unexpected repetitions the reader comes across in the transition from the book of Joshua to the book of Judges. Most obvious are the different reports about Jerusalem (taken by Judah according to Judg 1:8, but left to the Jebusites by Benjamin according to 1:21) and the repeated mention of Joshua’s death and burial (Josh 24:29–30 and Judg 2:8–9). In the line of among others Rudolph Smend, who supervised this doctoral thesis, Rake assumes that we are dealing here with the result of many redactional activities which can be unraveled by a precise literary analysis. She therefore starts with reconstructing the original text, which leaves about half of the Masoretic text. Then she compares the text to the parallel passages in the book of Joshua. She concludes that in some cases the texts in Joshua are dependent upon those in Judges 1, although she admits that things appear to be very complicated here: sometimes the dependence may also be the other way around, whereas one also has to reckon with the possibility that in a next stage the older text may have been edited on the basis of the later text. Originally, the transition between the two books would

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5 M. Rake, “Juda wird aufsteigen!”: Untersuchungen zum ersten Kapitel des Richterbuches (BZAW 367; Berlin 2006).