

Introduction

Deuteronomistic influence may be traced, but there is still no agreement as to who the Deuteronomists were.¹

“Whodunit?” Everyone loves a good mystery novel or movie that highlights some persistent detective trying to get to the bottom of a prevailing conundrum. Of course, this is no less true of those seeking to solve the mystery of authorship of certain unasccribed or questioned ancient texts. In the vein of “Whodunit?” inquiries, one can also find conspiracy theories galore. One need only to look at the controversies over the writings of Shakespeare—did he, or did he not, write many of his great works? A quick “online” search will reveal any number of alternate candidates such as Sir Francis Bacon, Christopher Marlowe, or Edward de Vere who have been put forward as the real genius behind the timeless and eloquent Shakespeare. Similarly, in the world of biblical studies, one could look to the long-running discussion on the authorship issues of the Pauline epistles among the non-*Hauptbriefe* texts. Furthermore, so as not to exclude my Synoptics colleagues, who is the author of the infamous “Q” source?

1. Richard Coggins, “What Does ‘Deuteronomistic’ Mean?” in *Those Elusive Deuteronomists: The Phenomenon of Pan-Deuteronomism*, ed. Linda S. Schearing and Steven L McKenzie, JSOTSup 268 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 26.

In Old Testament (hereafter OT) studies, these same questions have been pondered literally for more than two thousand years. For example, in Jewish rabbinic tradition, which always sought to harmonize and offer solutions to plaguing questions from the text, rabbis attempted to alleviate the authorship issues of their Bible in a series of attributions found in *Baba Bathra* folios 14b and 15a. (I will address some of these in the chapters that follow.) In the world of OT/Hebrew Bible higher-critical studies, even when a text has been ascribed to a particular biblical author, scholars have spilled much ink debating the legitimacy of that attribution—Isaiah and Daniel being two of the key flashpoints in this regard over the past century.² Therefore, it goes without saying that OT scholars have been less than eager to offer absolute identifications of authors for particular unasccribed texts.³ Rather, scholars prefer more elastic and malleable authors such as the “Yahwist,” the “Elohist,” the “Priestly authors,” the “school of prophet X,” or, in the case of the Former Prophets, the ever-nebulous “Deuteronomist” or “Deuteronomistic Historian(s)” (Dtr).⁴ Indeed, it is this latter designation that I seek to scrutinize.

2. For example, in Isaian studies, terms such as “First,” “Second,” and “Third Isaiah” or “Deutero-Isaiah” and “Trito-Isaiah” have become dominant monikers for blocks of Isaiah. These terms, more often than not, leave a lay audience and first-year Bible students scratching their heads and asking the question, “Who is ‘Trito-Isaiah?’” In the study of the book of Daniel, scholars are split as to whether we have a sixth-century Daniel, a second-century “Daniel,” or some combination of the two.
3. Some prefer to sidestep the issue entirely. See, for example, Ronald E. Clements, *Deuteronomy* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 79. On the other hand, Rainer Albertz, in his work “In Search of the Deuteronomists: A First Solution to a Historical Riddle,” in *The Future of the Deuteronomistic History*, ed. Thomas Römer (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2000), 1–17, does posit that the Hilkhiades and the “nationalistic party” wrote the DtrG (i.e., the first edition of the Deuteronomistic History [DtrH]) from Babylon. For an overview of the differing perspectives on authorship, see Albertz, 2–6, esp. the footnotes there.
4. The former grouping is used among Pentateuchal and DtrH scholars, whereas the idea of “schools of prophet X” was made popular in studies of the prophetic corpus by scholars such as Walther Zimmerli who adopted this phraseology for those who shaped and edited the book of Ezekiel. This has since become a popular phrase for labeling the ones who were responsible for the editing and compiling of a given prophet (e.g., Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Isaiah, etc.).

In this book, I will attempt to answer the query: Can one examine the text and piece together historical and textual clues to help answer the “Whodunit?” question? Much like a criminal-court setting where the preponderance of evidence decides a case, I assert that by examining the intertextual clues, possible character motives, and the historical opportunity in general, one can offer some valid suggestions and possible answers to this proposition. I will conclude that among the priestly family from the town of Anathoth, roughly three miles northeast of Jerusalem in the tribal allotment of Benjamin, may be a good place to begin this search. In particular, I will examine the likelihood that Abiathar the priest, his sons Jonathan and Ahimelech,⁵ their priestly descendants, and finally Jeremiah and Baruch all may have had a key role to play in formulating what has come to be known as the “Deuteronomistic History” (hereafter the DtrH).⁶ Now, to be certain, there will be those who quickly dismiss such a theory as speculative and presumptuous. Yet, is it presumptuous to assert that the DtrH may have had a number of editors or, dare I say, editions? One need only look to the numerous redactions of the DtrH suggested by scholars since the days of Martin Noth (1902–1968) to dismiss this concern (see ch. 1). Therefore,

5. Two sons of Abiathar are mentioned in the Bible: Jonathan (cf. 2 Sam. 15:27, 36; 17:17, 20; 1 Kgs. 1:42–43) and Ahimelech (cf. 2 Sam. 8:17; 1 Chr. 24:6, 31). Ahimelech was also the name of Abiathar’s father. It was not uncommon for men to name their sons after their grandfathers.
6. I am not the first to point to a particular person as the author of the DtrH. As of the seventeenth century and earlier, scholars such as Baruch Spinoza (1632–1677) suggested that Ezra was the author/compiler. Cf. Jeffrey C. Geoghegan, *The Time, Place, and Purpose of the Deuteronomistic History: The Evidence of “Until This Day,”* BJS 347 (Providence, RI: Brown University Press, 2006), 22. Also, Richard E. Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible?* (New York: Summit, 1987), 146–49, identifies Baruch and Jeremiah as possible authors. The discovery of the seal of Baruch, which said “belonging to Baruch son of Neriyah the scribe,” gives further credence to the historicity of Baruch and his occupation. Cf. Nahman Avigad, *Hebrew Bullae from the Time of Jeremiah: Remnants of a Burnt Archive* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1986), 28–29; and idem, *Bullae and Seals from a Post-Exilic Judean Archive*, QMIA 4 (Jerusalem: Hebrew University Press, 1976). Of course, there is some debate as to the seal’s authenticity. See Karel van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 84 and nn.34–35.

what I am suggesting is that textual indicators may help focus us enough to propose a plausible theory as to when these editions were written and by whom. What better place to look than among a group of men who shared a similar occupation, locale, and perhaps even genealogy? Throughout our discussions may the following words of Rainer Albertz encourage scholars and students alike to keep an open mind about the authorship of the DtrH and may they also be our guiding principle:

Considering the optimistic proliferation of the Dtr hypothesis on the literary level, I want to ask the simple historical question of who these enormously productive Deuteronomists could have been. Such a question seems to be totally out of fashion today, since a scholarly attitude has become prominent in recent OT research: on the one hand, it shows a surprising confidence in the reliability of literary-critical results through the most exacting investigation of the text. But, on the other hand, it demonstrates exaggerated skepticism toward any certainty on the historical level, or even a lack of interest in any historical questions. Contrary to this modern “scholarly docetism,” I want to emphasize the old-fashioned opinion that a literary hypothesis can only be regarded as proved if it is possible to supply it with a plausible basis in real history.⁷

7. Albertz, “In Search,” 1.