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Gass, Erasmus

Die Ortsnamen des Richterbuchs in historischer und redaktioneller Perspektive

Abhandlung des Deutschen Palätina-Vereins 35

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The Tübingen dissertation by Erasmus Gass aims at localizing the toponyms mentioned in Judges—or, at least, to present the present state of the scholarly discussion concerning these localizations. It definitely accomplishes the latter. The toponyms are first divided between the two banks of the River Jordan but then are treated according to the order of their occurrence in the text. An overall conclusion is not given (it might have been of interest to more than the present reviewer to summarize the “toponymic evidence” for the work, the world, and the worldview of the “last redactor,” whoever that was). There are partial summary discussions for certain pericopes, such as Judg 1:1–20; 2:1–3:6; 3:12–30; 4–5; 6–9 (minus Transjordan); 13–16; 17–21; 8; 10:6–12:7; and 21.

The book’s main strength and, concomitantly, its basic weakness are the detailed discussions of each and every site in Judges. They prove a useful summary of recent research (for those who regard past research and a summary thereof as useful) but contain little that leads the scholarly world much further. For Jebus (11), the author missed the reviewer’s suggestion that the ethnonym “Jebusite” is of Transjordanian origin and designated someone who originated from Jabesh in Gilead. For Luz (76–82), he connects Judg 1:26 (for the reviewer, convincingly) with the Samaritan settlement on Mount Gerizim but fails to give any archaeological data for its beginning (which may now confidently be sought in the first half of the fifth century B.C.E.). This reviewer, somewhat acquainted with the site of Megiddo and its problems, fails to understand its history as summarized on page 96—at least without consulting the references, which should not be necessary in the case of a book of this price and size. This failure is mainly due to the author’s refusal to discuss excavated sites by stratum and locus, a method of

reference (or rather, nonreference) comparable to an archaeologist who would start to quote the Bible without regard for chapters and verse.

These critical remarks notwithstanding, this is a book that every commentator of Judges, present and future, will be glad to have.