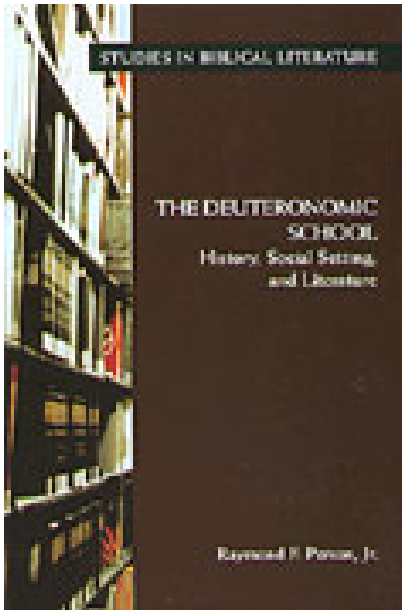


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Person, Raymond F.

The Deuteronomistic School: History, Social Setting, and Literature

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Raymond F. Person's book aims to create a new approach to the growing process of "Deuteronomistic History" (DtrH) and related literature. The work contains just a few comments about research history and moves to a hypothesis to explain "Deuteronomistic History" as a product of a scribal school (a connection first made by Moshe Weinfeld in *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1972]) in the midst of a mostly oral culture, which allowed a long and gradual redaction process. One of the central ideas is to use text criticism as an illustration and evidence for the gradual writing process.

Person limits his view of research history to three points, starting with Martin Noth (Deuteronomistic History edited by a single writer) and supplemented by the Harvard school (F. M. Cross and others, mainly Americans, proposing two redactors: Josianic and exilic) and the Göttingen school (R. Smend and others, mainly Europeans, proposing three exilic redactors with history, prophetic and nomistic orientations). According to Person very similar methods lead to different results, but the dilemma can be solved through a new understanding of the writing process. Person argues that analyses of the redaction process ought to be balanced with textual criticism, as can be illustrated in the book of Jeremiah. Therefore it is good to make "redactional arguments based strictly

upon text critical variants . . . [and] use text critical observations as a control upon [them]” (22). According to Person, various examples in Jeremiah and in the “Deuteronomic History” refer to both exilic and postexilic redactional activities.

Person argues that “the literary roots of Deuteronomic History are clearly in the pre-exilic period, most likely associated with the administrative bureaucracy under the monarchy” (24–25). Abandoning the minimalist’s view, he supposes that several literary sources mentioned in the “Deuteronomic History” were known and used by writers. This group of scribes continued their work in exile, and their return “occurred under Zerubbabel to provide scribal support for the Persian-supported bureaucracy that was to be restored with the rebuilt temple” (29). Examples from other ancient cultures illustrate the activities and hierarchy of the scribal school. The lower-ranked scribes concentrated on administrative duties and simple copying of texts, whereas scribes in higher rank also had the authority to correct the work of others. This higher rank of scribes had also authority to edit the texts.

“The ancient Israelite scribes were literate members of a primarily oral society,” which affected the “oral mindset” of the scribes (89). The oral mindset created a certain kind of understanding of texts and words. This attitude also allowed the possibility of making variations in the texts they copied and edited. Editorial insertions might be smaller (names, titles, words) or larger, but these changes were not understood as creating new or altered texts but rather applied texts (as in McKane’s idea of a *rolling corpus*). Person sees that “the details of the redaction process . . . most certainly must have been gradual and complicated” (100). The scribal school should be seen as a collective unity that shared theological themes, phrases, and way of thinking. Shared vocabulary and contents makes it difficult if not impossible to differentiate between individual scribes or redactors.

During Zerubbabel’s time (520–510) the scribal school emphasized the importance of law, the “restoration of the Davidic monarchy, the temple as the house of the Lord and Israel presiding over the nations” (122). “The end of Zerubbabel’s governorship led to a certain level of disillusionment” (135) and created the grounds for an eschatological vision. Finally, the mission of Ezra ended the period of the “Deuteronomic” scribal school by displacing it with an other group of scribes around the middle of the fifth century.

Person “has chosen to abandon the distinction between ‘Deuteronomic’ and ‘Deuteronomistic’ ” (6) primarily for two reasons: both titles were used interchangeably in earlier research; and there seems to be not only unidirectional influence from proto-Deuteronomy to the rest of the historical work during the writing process. However, it is

hard to see that these reasons would be convincing enough to abandon the meaningful distinction between the older sections (monarchical law material) and their later interpretation through redactional comments (mostly exilic-postexilic). The only researcher mentioned by Person using title “Deuteronomic” is Moshe Weinfeld in 1972.

In many cases Person’s work has fresh views. His hypothesis about the scribal school as collectors and redactors of the Deuteronomistic History is worth discussing, although there are few good arguments available in this research. The view can be supported also by the fact that oldest part of the Deuteronomistic History is connected to the central areas of state and temple scribes, namely, the law codex and historical frames of the Israelite nation. References to literary sources such as “the book of the Annals of the Kings of Judah” may be signs that these documents were somehow known and used by the scribes even in exile—perhaps not, however, any more as written but *remembered* documents.

Also, the use of text criticism is a meaningful addition to support the understanding of a literary growth process. This evidence can be used to support the existence and quality of different kind of insertions made to the text, but it can hardly be taken as an overall complementary redaction-critical method, other than in accidental cases (e.g., Judg 6:7–10). Textual variations show how the text may have grown in general, but they do not do so in every case. This becomes evident even in Person’s own work. When he introduces “Deuteronomic” theological reinterpretations during the time of Zerubbabel, there are no attempts to identify certain texts to be written at that time. Instead, the whole question of textual origins is simply ignored, and certain texts are “reinterpreted” in the context of Zerubbabel. This reading is not based on literary-critical or text-critical analysis but on rereadings of texts in a changed context. “Whether they are exilic or postexilic in origin they were read and preserved by the Deuteronomic school in the postexilic period” (103). Thus Person does not give text-critical examples of redactional activities during Zerubbabel’s period or the post-Zerubbabel period to clarify theological innovations of those periods. Because practically every existing text can be reinterpreted in a new situation, this kind of speculation unconnected to redaction analysis is based on the speculations of current views.

A basic rule of academic research is to be aware of earlier results and to confront them in public. When someone promotes the idea that the “Deuteronomi[stic] history underwent numerous, gradual redactional changes throughout the long span of its redaction within the Deuteronomi[stic] school, beginning in the exilic period and continuing into the postexilic period” (147), one should begin with a proper analysis of the research history, starting with A. Kuenen and C. Steuernagel and continuing with C. Levin (*Die Verheissung des neuen bundes; Der Sturz der Königin Atalja*; and several articles just

republished with title *Fortschreibungen*). A similar view was promoted also by the present reviewer a few years ago (Latvus, *God, Anger and Ideology*). Somehow this approach is also reflected in the writings of some representatives of the Göttingen school (Veijola, *Verheissung in der Krise*; Würthwein, *Die Bücher der Könige*), who see the nomistic redactions not as acts of individuals but as products of a group, *Kreis*.

Person's work, with its bold proposals, is a fresh approach in the American research tradition and is hopefully a long-awaited move toward new discussion and synthesis about the growth process of the Deuteronomistic History.