Kalimi, Isaac

*The Reshaping of Ancient Israelite History in Chronicles*


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The question of how Israelite historiographical writers might have used earlier sources is an intriguing one, and an obvious place to begin examining the question is with Samuel–Kings and Chronicles. It is widely (though not universally) believed that the writer of 1–2 Chronicles used 1–2 Samuel and 1–2 Kings as his major (or even exclusive) source. One can hardly say that the relationship between these writings has been neglected, but up to now there has been no full study of how the Chronicler used Samuel–Kings. Isaac Kalimi has filled this gap with a detailed and comprehensive catalogue of the way in which the Chronicler worked. The study originally appeared in German in 1995 and in Hebrew in 2000, but the English version has been revised and expanded, with additional bibliography and material, and can thus be considered a new edition.

Kalimi begins with an introductory chapter that explains what he is setting out to do and surveys the present state of research on the question. He also notes some methodological points, mainly focusing on the question of whether the textual version of Samuel–Kings likely to have been used by the Chronicler was the same as the Masoretic Text. Although he discusses the Septuagint version to some extent, he decides to use the MT of both Samuel–Kings and Chronicles. This is a point that could be debated at greater length (especially in light of the Qumran Cave 4 material), but one has to accept that Kalimi has made a legitimate decision. Where one could have liked greater discussion, however, has
to do with the relationship between Samuel–Kings and Chronicles: Is it a case of dependence of the latter on the former? A. Graeme Auld recently revived the hypothesis that both depended on a common source no longer extant (Kings without Privilege: David and Moses in the Story of the Bible’s Kings [Edinburgh: T&T Clark 1994]). Kalimi dismisses this with a single sentence in a footnote (4 n. 11). Auld may be wrong—few seem to have followed him in this interpretation—but as a recent serious proposal it should have been given a proper discussion by Kalimi.

After his introductory chapter, most of the rest of the study is devoted to considering the different ways in which the Chronicler has adapted the text of Samuel–Kings (chs. 1–19). Each chapter looks at a particular mode of exegesis or adaptation, such as historiographical revision, additions, omissions, harmonization, allusion, chiasm creation, inclusio creation, simile, and numerical patterns. A number of the chapters are further subdivided into a particular sort of the technique in question (e.g., revision, harmonization), but each type of revision is illustrated with a number of examples. These are well presented and clearly explained. The study will serve as a database of examples for further research or for teaching. It is a well-catalogued and extremely useful collection of material.

Chapter 20 is different from those that precede it. Having shown the Chronicler’s mastery of his historiographical-literary method in nineteen chapters, Kalimi then shows where the ancient author was deficient by giving examples of “inconsistency, disharmony, and historical mistakes.” The final chapter draws out a number of conclusions. A major emphasis is the literary creativity of the author: “no longer is he to be viewed as a passive scribe-copier but as an inspired artist with a variegated range of literary and historiographical talent—a skilled professional historian with sophisticated writing methods at his disposal” (407). He was thus also acting in some way analogously to a historian, in that he drew on his “sources” to create a historical narrative (even if we regard his product as far removed from history in a modern sense). Although some changes were made because of his theology, more often it was literary technique that created differences from the original. Kalimi suggests that seeing how one author-redactor used his sources might help us in evaluating other historiographical sections of the Bible for which sources have been postulated but are no longer extant, but this remains to be explored.

The book ends with a set of good indices; unfortunately, there is no index of topics (though the detailed table of contents partially makes up for this lack). One can always point out a missing bibliographical item or two, but on the whole Kalimi’s bibliography cannot be faulted. One useful and relevant set of studies has been omitted, however, which many others with an interest in Chronicles might also not be aware of: the works

There is, thus, much to praise in this book; however, it contains a major gap. We have all the trees, but where is the wood? Kalimi rightly notes, “This study also offers a model for the study of other parallel texts and their literary and historical variations” (411). He goes on to express the hope that his study will impact on issues such as “the relationship between literary criticism and textual criticism, historical study and textual analysis” (412). I hope so, too, but where is this “model” that he wants us to use? What we have is a mass of examples—well organized, well presented, very useful—but we have no theoretical model explicitly laid out for us. The implications of the many different passages and the different techniques used by the ancient author have not been spelled out by the modern author, as we would expect if we were being given a “model.” Similarly, where is the discussion about the relationship between literary and textual criticism? This is an important issue that has all too often been ignored (see especially Shemaryahu Talmon, “The Textual Study of the Bible—A New Outlook,” Qumran and the History of the Biblical Text [ed. Frank Moore Cross and Shemaryahu Talmon; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975], 321–400; Lester L. Grabbe, “The Law, the Prophets, and the Rest: The State of the Bible in Pre-Maccabean Times,” Dead Sea Discoveries [forthcoming]).

This deficiency is evident in his last chapter: Kalimi draws some general conclusions that are helpful (as noted above), but they do not constitute the structured conclusions we should expect. What do the detailed and categorized studies of individual passages tell us about the relationship between the texts? Are there any overall conclusions, with a set of broader points, about how the Chronicler worked? Did the author have a particular methodology that guided his use of Samuel–Kings? Or if not a systematic or mechanical procedure, were there general principles that guided him when he approached a new passage? Kalimi has stopped short of producing an orderly synthesis from his diligent collection of multiple textual examples.

Kalimi has produced a very useful and needed study and made a significant contribution to Chronicles study. Let’s hope that the next time he is thinking of a journal or Festschrift article, he will devote it to giving us the proper synthesis that his study calls for.