Israelite and Jewish historiographers in antiquity interpreted the dissolution of the united Israelite monarchy into two kingdoms as a significant event. Recent studies of the accounts of the reigns of Rehoboam and Jeroboam by the Deuteronomistic Historian, the Chronicler, and Josephus have focused on the interpretative framework of each historian (See Gary N. Knoppers, Two Nations under God: The Deuteronomistic History of Solomon and the Dual Monarchies [HSM 52-53; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993-4]; idem, "Rehoboam in Chronicles: Villain or Victim?" JBL 109 [1990] 423-40; idem, "'Battling against Yahweh': Israel's War against Judah in 2 Chr. 13:2-20," RB 100 [1993] 511-32; Christopher Begg, Josephus' Account of the Early Divided Monarchy: Rewriting the Bible [BETL 108; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1993]). A lesser known version, a so-called "alternative story" of the division of the kingdom, is preserved only in the gg section of the Book of Kingdoms (LXX). While textual critics have previously shown interest in this section, Zipora Talshir's monograph, revised from a Hebrew edition published by Simor in 1989, rightfully analyzes this version of the division as a literary work in its own right and thus places the work within the context of other interpretive activities of the biblical text in Second Temple Judaism.

Talshir analyzes 3 Kdgm 12:24a-z in two distinct parts. First, she examines the text as a text critic, seeking to establish the Vorlage of the "alternative story" (pp. 21-143). Her conclusions are persuasive. The Greek text represents a Hebrew Vorlage that may be critically reconstructed through careful attention to parallels in the LXX and MT. Thus well over a third of the book (pp. 37-143) presents Talshir's reconstruction of the Hebrew Vorlage with critical notes on the language and content of each passage. While such work remains hypothetical, the retroversion displays technical mastery of the material and provides a reasonable version of what the Hebrew Vorlage of the text might have looked like. Her work thereby renders obsolete an earlier retroversion done by J. Debus (Die Sünde Jerobeams [FRLANT 93; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1967]).
In the second section of the book (pp. 147-276), Talshir pushes beyond the traditional boundaries of textual criticism to analyze the text as "a complete literary unit." She examines questions of the text's context, its literary structure and design, characterization, and relationship to the MT, with the attendant historical-critical implications. Talshir argues that the version is "a carefully planned literary composition based on material very similar to that preserved in the Book of Kings" (p. 161), written, however, for its present setting with its own particular (and one might add, artistically constructed) plot and characterization. Its differentiation from its 2 Kings' source arises, therefore, from the author's own literary activity rather than from an independent, unknown source. Therefore the passage has little extra to tell us concerning the division of the kingdom for our reconstruction of Israelite history. Neither does the text reveal significant data concerning the redactional/compositional history of the Book of Kings, though its text does evince a Hebrew textual form that is closer to the Hebrew Vorlage of the LXX than to what we now have in the MT.

Talshir's conclusion summarizes the results of her study and attempts to provide a generic and historical setting for the "alternative story" (pp. 277-91). She believes that the version's characterization provides the key both for its genre and for its original historical setting. The author's literary method indicates that the version is a midrash "formulated by the methods of Midrash-Aggada" (p. 280). Focusing on the midrashic animosity in the characterization of Jeroboam, Talshir cautiously suggests that the version may have originated in the mid-fourth century BCE, from which time coins, believed to be Samaritan, have been recovered bearing Jeroboam's name. Yet historical polemic was not the author's main purpose: "Literary composition was his goal" (p. 288), a goal sufficiently achieved, according to Talshir, "to afford its author a pride of place among the masters of historical Midrash" (p. 291).

Talshir is astute in her observations and reasonable in her conclusions. A problem arises, however, in her method of comparing the "alternative story" primarily to 2 Kings 11-12. She never systematically investigates the relationship of 3 Kgdm 12:12 a-z to 2 Chronicles 10-13, another source possibly accessible to the writer. Thus Talshir consistently minimizes the impact that Chronicles may have had on the alternative story's composition. For instance, the alternative story gives Rehoboam's age as sixteen (contra 2 Kgs 14:21//2 Chr 12:13 where his age at his accession is forty-one). In 2 Chr 13:7, however, Abijah the prophet attributes the division of the kingdom to Rehoboam's youth. While Talshir notes this, she denies that the alternative story depended on Chronicles and quickly opts for the much more complicated hypothesis that both Chronicles and the "alternative story" depended upon an otherwise unknown midrashic source (pp. 168-69). Her omission of systematic comparison with Chronicles is significant. Without pursuing the issue of the relationship of the alternative story to Chronicles in detail, the version may look like a midrashic interpretation of 2 Kings. If, however, the author knew of Chronicles, the work would not be midrash as much as historiography, an attempt to harmonize Kings and Chronicles, using Kings as the base text. The author then would be...
an example of a Second Temple Jewish historiographer standing between the Chronicler and the hellenistic Jewish historiographers and, ultimately, Josephus.

Despite this reservation, Talshir has produced an important monograph that will provide the starting point for any future discussion of the LXX's "alternative story" of the divided kingdom. Unhappily, the publisher erred in the production of the appendix, Talshir's reconstructed Hebrew Vorlage with an English translation; happily they remedied the situation as much as possible with a loose-leaf inclusion of a corrected version.