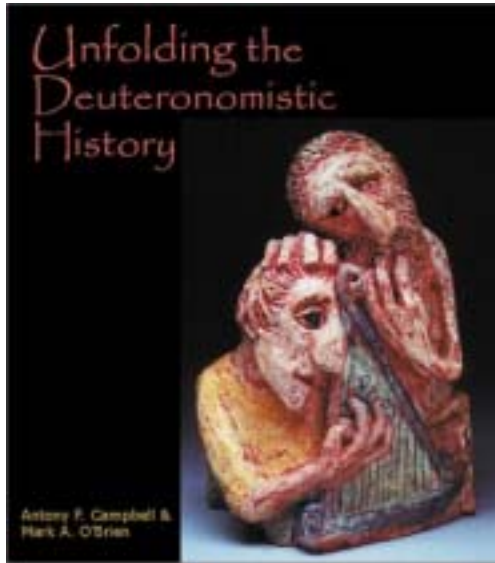


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Campbell, Antony F., and Mark A. O'Brien

Unfolding the Deuteronomistic History: Origins, Upgrades, Present Text

Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2000.
Pp. vi + 505. Cloth. \$37.00. ISBN 0800628780.

Raymond F. Person Jr.
Ohio Northern University
Ada, OH 45810

Let me preface my remarks by recognizing the burdensome task that Campbell and O'Brien set out to accomplish. As someone who is currently in the early stages of working on a commentary on Kings, I find myself sometimes overwhelmed by the task before me. I certainly would not want to try to tackle assigning every verse of the entire Deuteronomistic History (DH) to a source or redactional layer, as they have done. At the same time I recognize the pedagogical importance of books that strive to provide such a comprehensive explanation of, for example, the DH, and Campbell and O'Brien's commitment to provide such pedagogical tools is to be commended.

I will focus my comments on how useful *Unfolding the Deuteronomistic History* can be as a pedagogical tool in an upper-division class on the DH. I will first comment on the visual presentation of their results and will then evaluate their book on the basis of four aspects that Campbell and O'Brien explicitly state are significant to their work:

1. Concern for the present biblical text....
2. Respect for the intelligence and skill of the biblical editors....

3. Acceptance of the possibility that on occasion these biblical editors used the present text as a vehicle to express or preserve other views, variant versions, and contrary or even contradictory traditions.
4. Acceptance that the text is often to be understood as reporting the gist of stories, rather than narrating their performance. (6)

Before beginning my evaluation of these four aspects, some background remarks on my own approach to the DH may prove helpful. I think that redaction criticism of the DH is especially difficult due to the observation that different Deuteronomistic redactors nevertheless use very similar language. Because of this difficulty, I insist on using text-critical observations to limit redactional arguments. This text-critical approach to the redaction history of the DH is also found in the work of Graeme Auld, Alexander Rofé, Emanuel Tov, and Julio Trebolle Barrera. Therefore, even though I assume that the process that produced the biblical text was a long process that produced a text with multiple literary layers, I remain skeptical of complicated redactional conclusions that purports to identify six or more layers.

Visual Presentation of Their Results

Campbell and O'Brien present their results graphically by using different font styles, indentation, and single or double lines in the margins. Readers will find that this presentation requires a lot of work to become familiar with it and that, to some degree, this hard work has to be done with each new chapter, since some of the categories change from book to book and new categories are sometimes added. For example, the "dtn lawcode" in Deuteronomy, the "Conquest Narrative" in Joshua, the "Deliverance Collection" in Judges, and the "Prophetic Record" in Samuel and Kings are all printed in italics as the "main pre-DH" sources for these works. Fortunately, Campbell and O'Brien include footers at the bottom of the pages to serve as guides for working through this material, thereby enabling readers to make sense of the visual presentation more easily. Given the complicated character of their conclusions—that is, six or more layers to differentiate—the visual presentation probably could not be simplified any further, unless the text was printed in different colors, what I assume was a cost-prohibitive solution. Instructors using the volume will have to devote considerable amount of class time helping students become more comfortable with the visual presentation of their results.

Concern for the Present Biblical Text.

One of the objectives for all of my Bible classes, including introductory classes, is to help students understand that there are multiple texts of the Bible and that scholars must make use of variant traditions in order to discern the textual and literary history of the any biblical book. Campbell and O'Brien's use of the phrase "the present biblical text" is therefore problematic, especially since it refers to the NRSV, which itself is clearly not based on any one text or even one textual tradition (especially in Samuel). This would not necessarily be a problem if their approach was strictly synchronic, but their approach is inherently diachronic, and, therefore, they appear to be far too dependent on the MT for their research and the NRSV for the presentation of their research.

I commend the choice of the NRSV as the base English translation, and their comments sometimes clearly point out to their readers where other textual traditions differ from the MT. In fact, in their discussion of 1 Sam 16–18 Campbell and O'Brien briefly note that the MT preserves an additional tradition not found in the Septuagint, and their visual presentation of the text clearly reflects this. However, the volume would profit from more discussions of such text-critical contributions to the redaction history of the DH and an explicit discussion of the limitations inherent in the choice of using the MT as a base text and the NRSV as the base translation. I would therefore recommend that instructors supplement the volume by requiring students to work also with English translations of other textual traditions, especially the Septuagint and the Dead Sea Scrolls, and compare them carefully to selected texts in the volume.

Respect for the Intelligence and Skill of the Biblical Editors

Although I am skeptical of the specifics of Campbell and O'Brien's redactional arguments concerning the identification of the various editors, the respect that they demonstrate for the biblical editors is something that is far too often lacking in higher-critical work. Too often redactional arguments imply that the ancient biblical editors did not understand the texts they were editing and that the modern scholar understands the text far better. The approach Campbell and O'Brien take here will help all students understand the ancient world with the respect all academics should require of all cross-cultural study. The approach will also help students who have personal faith commitments see that higher-critical biblical study can be respectful of the biblical text and the historical processes that brought it into existence.

*Acceptance of the Possibility That on Occasion These Biblical Editors
Used the Present Text As a Vehicle to Express or Preserve Other Views,
Variant Versions, and Contrary or Even Contradictory Traditions*

Campbell and O'Brien's perspective here is also helpful. Their discussion of the text clearly demonstrates how there are varying traditions preserved in the text. For example, their discussion of how Joshua and Judges differ in the portrayal of the conquest is excellent. However, if they had included discussions of additional text-critical variant traditions, they would have been able to make this point even more clearly, especially to the many students who remain particularly skeptical of any scholarly approach to the Bible. The empirical evidence of differing textual traditions is an extremely useful tool for overcoming such skepticism on the part of students.

*Acceptance That the Text Is Often to Be Understood As
Reporting the Gist of Stories, Rather Than Narrating Their Performance*

For this aspect, Campbell and O'Brien explicitly note they are drawing from the book by Susan Niditch, *Oral World and Written Word*.¹ I too find Niditch's work significant and understand that biblical scholars should strive to understand how texts were understood differently in the primarily oral world of ancient Israel. Although I am in general agreement with this stated objective, problems present themselves concerning this topic when one reads beyond Campbell and O'Brien's introduction. First, I found no places where they discuss this aspect in relationship to a specific book or passage. Second, their understanding of a text that has been produced by numerous redactional expansions seems contradictory: for example, in the books of Samuel the Deuteronomistic Revision is an expansion of the Josianic DH, which is an expansion of the Prophetic Record, which is an expansion of the Story of David's Rise. This appears to me to be an extremely literary process involving written texts, even though such literary processes may have been influenced by an oral aesthetics. Third, the references in the books of Kings to "the Book of the Acts of Solomon" (1 Kgs 11:42), "the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel" (e.g., 1 Kgs 14:19), and "the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Judah" (e.g., 1 Kgs 14:29) support the idea that the DH was not written to be comprehensive in its reporting; however, since these are references to written sources, they contradict the notion that the text is simply "reporting the gist of [oral] stories." Thus, this significant

¹ Susan Niditch, *Oral World and Written Word: Ancient Israelite Literature* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996).

observation by Niditch has not been incorporated well into the main text of the volume so that the introduction promises something that the body of the work does not deliver.

In conclusion, despite some weaknesses Campbell and O'Brien have provided us with a useful pedagogical tool for helping students learn about how redaction criticism is generally attempted by most scholars. However, I doubt that many instructors will want to require their students to work through the entire volume. If students read carefully the introduction, the chapter on Deuteronomy, and one of the other chapters, the students will have interacted enough with the text to understand Campbell and O'Brien's approach so that further reading could be unnecessarily redundant. At the same time, reading this much of the volume would be a good introduction to many of the redaction-critical approaches to the DH, if instructors and students are willing to put the amount of time and energy into reading the volume that the complicated visual presentation of their results require.