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Walter Dietrich, *Samuel. Teilband 1: 1 Sam 1–12 (Biblischer Kommentar Altes Testament VIII/1)*, Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2011.

Walter Dietrich is well known for his long-standing scholarship on the Books of Samuel. This commentary tackles the first twelve chapters of 1 Samuel, on 567 pages (including an index, a map and several images). It proposes a twofold approach to the book, – a diachronic and a synchronic reading, which complete each other in a successful manner. The synchronic analysis, informed by narratology, pursues the account of the early period of the monarchy, focusing on the narrative arc and structure of the story, the (sketchy) picturing of the characters, the perspective of the narrative under its spatial, temporal and character-related aspects, the stylistic devices, and on another level, – quite originally – the various images of God, in different narratives. The classical diachronic analysis addresses the textual history and the redaction history (in a reversed chronological order). Dietrich assigns a particular significance to the pre-deuteronomistic stage, more specifically to a “Höfische Erzählwerk” about the first kings, stemming from the post-722 period, from the reign of Hezekiah or Manasseh. This work presupposes earlier traditions about Samuel and Saul (some rooted in the Nord), about the Ark and about David. Dietrich proposes thus a middle path between the radical readings assuming that the entire work is nothing more than a Deuteronomistic creation and the overly confident reconstructions of early historical traditions. The Höfische Erzählwerk came to integrate an originally independent story of Samuel and Saul, coming from the Nord, produced before the fall of the Northern Kingdom. The story of the Ark with its connection with Jerusalem is more recent. Blocks of tradition were handed over independently. The Deuteronomistic redaction is also addressed. The book, argues Dietrich, is the result of a long process of writing and redaction that spans over half a millennium.

The translation and detailed commentary follow closely the Hebrew text, without hurting however the smoothness of the German syntax. The text units are analysed from a synchronic perspective, with a focus on narratological aspects, more manifest here than it is usual in German

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commentaries. Dietrich is very much concerned with the beauty and depth of the biblical text, with the hidden themes and motifs, but also with the intention of each passage. The interpretation is enriched with perspectives from the *Wirkungsgeschichte*. As part of this approach the commentary includes a good number of images from famous or less-known artists (Marc Chagall, Gustave Doré, Frank Topham), representations from the synagogues in Capernaum and Dura Europos as well as several medieval Bible codices. These representations are themselves carefully analysed as part of the reception-history of the text.

The comprehensive literature attests the depths of the work and the wide range of perspectives engaged by the author. It includes a large number of German, English, French and Italian titles, – commentaries and exegetical monographs, but also historical and archaeological approaches, as well as literary-synchronic and theological readings.

The commentary of Walter Dietrich is without a doubt a major work that cannot be bypassed and will become a standard piece of the scholarship on the Books of Samuel.

Korinna Zamfir

James D. G. Dunn, *The Oral Gospel Tradition*, Grand Rapids, MI / Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2013.

James Dunn's collected essays on the oral traditions behind the canonical gospels call attention to the importance of the oral transmission of logia and narratives in the ancient culture that produced the gospels, in a world where the degree of literacy was fairly low. The essays also recap Dunn's earlier work on memory. The volume brings together four decades of scholarship.

The fifteen essays are brought together in three sections, which discuss the oral traditions that came to be incorporated in the gospels, the role of memory and eyewitnesses in the formation and transmission of non-written Jesus-traditions as well as the quest for the historical Jesus and the constitution of the New Testament.

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Dunn picks up in some essays the points and arguments that he had formulated already in the well-known *Jesus Remembered* (vol. 1 of his *Christianity in the Making*, 2003). Thus, Dunn argues, Jesus made a lasting impact on some of those who have listened his teaching, and this contributed to the constitution of a core group of disciples that have transmitted stories and logia of Jesus. These traditions may be tracked and allow us to understand the historical Jesus. The transmission of these traditions shows that early Christians were concerned to remember Jesus, to preserve and transmit memories about his preaching.

Dunn challenges the view that in the writing of the gospels the early Church produced Jesus-sayings with a significant degree of freedom. He attempts to change the literary mindset of contemporary scholarship, pointing to the oral character of Palestinian culture. Oral tradition is an event, a communal performance that on the other hand also requires individuals to perform the traditions. Oral traditions are both stable and fluid. This explains why the similarities and differences between the Synoptic gospels. Thus, Dunn argues that the differences noticed in triple traditions may be explained not only with the two-document theory and the literary interdependence of the gospels (which he does not deny), but also with the phenomenon of oral transmission. A number of essays address the issue of oral traditions focusing on Q.

The volume is a useful reminder of the importance of the oral transmission of the gospel material, even if perhaps some readers might not share the optimism concerning the possibility to reconstruct such oral traditions behind literary works.

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