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## Review of: The Redaction of the Books of Esther: On Reading Composite Texts, by Michael V. Fox.

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*The Redaction of the Books of Esther: On Reading Composite Texts*, by Michael V. Fox. SBLMS 40. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991. Pp. x + 195. \$29.95/18.95 (18.95/12.95 member).

Michael Fox's excellent monograph is an exemplary redaction critical study of several witnesses to the book of Esther. The goal of the study, according to the author, is "to advance our understanding of the redactional process in general by studying the development of two particular representatives of the Esther tradition, the AT (Alpha text) and the MT" (p. 6). Both of these texts, Fox argues, are redactions of previous works: the AT is a redaction of the proto-AT, while the MT is a redaction of proto-Esther. Redaction is defined by Fox, as "The reworking of what an author wrote" (p. 1).

Fox discusses his method in his introduction, outlining the structure of the book and the purpose of each chapter. The book is divided into five chapters, of which chapters 1 and 2 contain the bulk of Fox's research. Chapter 1 "examines the redaction that produced the present form of the AT, seeking to determine its scope, attitudes, and purposes" (p. 6). Chapter 2 investigates the redaction of MT Esther. The results of the studies in chapters 1 and 2 are stated in chapter 3, while chapters 4 and 5 contain more general comments on redaction criticism, including an attempt to provide

a model for future redactional studies. Fox ends the introduction with a helpful diagram of his reconstruction of the history of the Esther texts (p. 9).

Chapter 1, "The Alpha Text and its Redaction," occupies the major part of the book. In it, Fox minutely examines the relationship between the AT and the LXX. He concludes that the present AT is the result of the activity of a redactor (R-AT), who supplemented his receptor text (the proto-AT) from a donor text (the LXX). R-AT also introduced changes (pluses and minuses) into both the proto-AT and the material he extracted from the LXX. R-AT thereby produced a new text, the AT, which was meant to be separate from and different than the LXX.

In chapter 2, "The Massoretic Text of Esther and its Redaction," Fox uses the proto-AT as an aid in recovering the source material that the redactor of the MT used. This is more precarious ground than was covered in chapter 1; Fox admits to "more conjecture and less precision than was attainable in the study of the AT redaction" (p. 96). Therefore, his conclusions are more cautious, but he finds that the redactor of the MT had an Esther text ("proto-Esther") closely resembling the proto-AT. In the MT, chapters 1-7 represent a "close reworking" of proto-Esther, while chapters 8-10 are a "more free composition" that exposes the intention of the redactor, to connect the Esther story with the festival of Purim.

The last three chapters are much briefer. Chapter 3 compares the ideologies of the final forms of the redacted texts and their forerunners: the proto-AT, the AT, and the MT, essentially summarizing the findings of the preceding chapters. Chapter 4, "Models for Redaction Criticism," discusses the application of the results of redaction criticism to the question of "the validity and practicality of literary-historical criticism" (p. 134). Finally, chapter 5 concludes the book with a plea for exegetes and theologians to take seriously the results of redaction criticism, not simply dismissing the various forms of the text uncovered as "not the canonical form." After all, the process of canon is, in some ways, an accident of literary history. As Fox concludes, "the canonical form is not the only one *we* have. We have recovered other forms; now we must learn to read them" (p. 154).

This book is a very well done, clear presentation of the information and conclusions Fox sets out to convey. The first two chapters, which contain a great deal of technical information (supplemented by several helpful appendices, including the Greek text of the AT), will be of particular interest to Esther specialists (Fox's discussion proceeds in dialogue with the work of D.J.A. Clines, *The Esther Scroll* [JSOTSup 30; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1984]). In particular, Fox does an excellent job of laying out the evidence for his conclusions about the relationship of the proto-AT, the AT, and the LXX. Although it seems to me that the dialogue about the relation of these texts to each other and to the MT will continue, Fox has moved that dialogue much farther along. In addition, the book as a whole provides an excellent model for any who are interested in redaction criticism of the Hebrew Bible in general.

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