There has been a lively discussion concerning the redaction history of the Deuteronomistic History (DH [= Deuteronomy–Kings]) for more than a generation. Martin Noth set the stage for the current directions of the debate in 1943, when he presented a strong case for a single exilic redaction of this extended narrative block. This “Deuteronomistic redactor” (Dtr) utilized the law code of Deuteronomy as his impetus and guide in presenting the subsequent history of Israel-Judah. Approximately twenty-five years after the publication of Noth’s study, two alternative schools of interpretation emerged that provided the dominant modifications to Noth’s theory. Frank Moore Cross has led the way (primarily in the U.S.) in reviving and strengthening an older dual redaction theory of redaction. He argues that most of the DH was composed in preexilic Judah, during or shortly after the reign of King Josiah, with minor expansions and revisions during the exile. Rudolf Smend has spearheaded a competing interpretation that maintains Noth’s exilic date, but he and the other members of this “Göttingen school” identify three discernible redactions in the production of the DH. Variant members of the former school of interpretation recognize redaction layers stemming from the days of Hezekiah or earlier, while some adherents to the latter school push the redaction process well into the postexilic Persian Empire. A few recent researchers have reasserted Noth’s original thesis of a single redactor for the entire history, and others have lumped the whole redaction process of these works together with the redaction of the Tetrateuch/Pentateuch.
Geoghegan enters into this increasingly complex discussion by examining a new phrase that appears several dozen times in the DH. This phrase, “until this day,” naturally suggests that any writer using it in a text is speaking of a phenomenon, situation, or physical feature that has existed for some time and still persists into the time of that text’s composition. Geoghegan devotes the first chapter of his work to a survey of comments from the past two millennia that appeal to this phrase in attempts to confirm or challenge existing ideas about a text’s author and date of composition. Precritical opinions assumed that there were separate authors and dates for each book, and so this phrase was ascribed to multiple authors from multiple historical occasions. Similar conclusions have persisted in more recent studies, which attribute the phrase to various sources and redactions in the DH.

The next two chapters lay out the forty-three instances of this phrase in the DH, first according to its use in geographic, demographic, political, and cultic contexts, then according to the deduced temporal and social location of the redactor. Geoghegan determines that the phrase appears within every major source of the DH that source critics have identified; yet in almost every example, the phrase stands within a redaction layer of the text, not in the earlier layers of the sources themselves. Geoghegan also points to several instances when the phrase runs in tandem with other phrases that are recognized as being “Deuteronomistic.” Several passages containing this phrase reflect an interest in matters that assume a late preexilic date and a southern perspective (Judah). The occasions for other passages are more ambiguous, but Geoghegan shows how many of them could be interpreted as reflections of the same southern and preexilic historical perspective. This perspective includes a time when the Jerusalem temple was still standing, the ark was known to be resting in it, and there was a great concern for cult purification/centralization reforms. This perspective accords well with what we are told of the reign of Josiah.

It is on the basis of these findings that Geoghegan turns directly to the recent scholarly discussions regarding the redaction(s) of the DH. In two chapters he summarizes the main contributions of more than twenty authors whose works have shaped the field, then evaluates them collectively in light of his own findings regarding the phrase “until this day.” His resulting characterization of Dtr turns out to be a rather nuanced version of Cross’s Josianic redactor (Dtr1). This redactor is not afraid to incorporate sources whose perspectives compete or even conflict with one another or with the ultimate aims of the redactor himself. His goal is to write “history,” not as religious “propaganda” for Josiah or his subsequent sympathizers, but as “a sermon to a disobedient nation” (136, 161). He is quite possibly a Levite, and he promotes the authority of priestly/prophetic persons over that of the king. A final, concluding chapter allows Geoghegan to bring these points together and then give some preliminary thoughts on a couple of speculative ideas. One is
to suggest that, because the same phrase is present in Genesis, Dtr could have had a hand in a preexilic version of the Tetrateuch. Based on similar considerations, Geoghegan closes by arguing for the old theory that someone closely associated with the prophet Jeremiah was the compiler of the DH.

Geoghegan is to be commended for turning our attention again to this significant internal clue to the date of the composition of the DH. There are many, many other clues that deserve fresh examination as well. It is always helpful to step back and look at clues such as this one, because they cut across the spectrum of a complex work like the DH. Many have foundered by making generalizations based on evidence limited to a single text or a single book. There are often multiple explanations for literary phenomena that are possible, and this approach offers one way to weigh the relative strengths of those possibilities. By the same token, there is an inherent vulnerability in this approach: it will inevitably lend support to a more synchronic reading of a text, one that minimizes the ambiguities and simplifies complex issues. This is the nature of Geoghegan’s thesis. The big question that remains is whether his conclusions for the whole will withstand close scrutiny on a passage-by-passage basis.

I start my own questioning with a peripheral example that comes at the end of Geoghegan’s book. He points to Jer 7:25 as a passage using “until this day” “in a manner paralleling its use elsewhere in Jeremiah and in the DH” (161). His brief discussion places this verse within Jeremiah’s temple sermon, which he dates to the fourth year of the reign of Jehoiakim on the basis of Jer 26:1, and which then lends additional support to the late preexilic date for the use of this phrase. However, a glance at any commentary on Jeremiah would reveal that the temple sermon does not extend into verse 25 (it ends with 7:15); instead, verse 25 is part of an originally independent oracle that an exilic redactor has placed within a series of oracles that begins with the temple sermon. It is true that the oracle in which verse 25 stands probably reflects a preexilic origin, but this tells us about the date of the source, not the date of the redaction of that source into the final book. This is significant for Geoghegan’s thesis because he rather easily concludes that the use of this phrase in the DH stems from the redactor and not his sources. There must be much more attention given to this question in relation to each passage—and more dialogue with previous scholarly studies—before one makes such sweeping claims.

There are many examples that show the need for further examination of this one question, but I will mention just three. These three fall within sections of 1 and 2 Samuel that are generally attributed to the ark narrative (1 Sam 5:5; 6:18; 2 Sam 6:8). The first speaks of a tradition regarding the temple of Dagon in Ashdod, the second mentions a memorial stone standing at Beth-shemesh, and the third explains the origin of the place name Perez-uzzah. Each of these is an editorial aside within the context of the story that is

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being told, but there is nothing that unambiguously places these comments in late preexilic Judah. We do not know how long the temple of Dagon was in use or how long the stone in Beth-shemesh stood or how long they continued to call the site Perez-uzzah. Each statement could have been made by someone living in the days of Hezekiah, or each could have been made by someone living after the exile, based on our limited knowledge of these places. Just regarding the final instance, why would people living in Judah need to be told that a place (Perez-uzzah) in their small nation still bears the name it has borne for centuries? Geoghegan argues that the author is using it so that his readers can confirm or deny his story. This is only one possible explanation, and it does not hold up well in the light of the evidence from Chronicles.

A quick survey of Chronicles reveals that a redactor would not necessarily remove anachronistic comments from his sources. There are several instances where Chronicles retains this phrase (“until this day”) from Kings, even though it is clear that the situation, phenomenon, or feature does not actually persist until the time of the Chronicler. A crucial example of this comes from 2 Chr 5:9, which retains the phrase “until this day” in reference to the poles of the ark being visible in the temple. Geoghegan holds this up in Kings (1 Kgs 8:8) as proof of a late preexilic date of redaction, but it is inconceivable that he would make the same contention for Chronicles (see also 1 Chr 4:43; 2 Chr 10:19; 21:10). The Chronicler is merely copying from his source. How do we know that the redactor of Kings is not doing the same thing?

This brings me to one other observation. Geoghegan speaks consistently through his study of Dtr as a preexilic redactor, but it is clear from the ending of Kings that the final redaction of the DH is exilic or later. It would be helpful if Geoghegan could address the relationship between this preexilic redactor and the redactor of the final version of the DH. Perhaps further reflection on the prophecies of Jeremiah would help. The example mentioned earlier (Jer 7:25) shows that a statement that reflects a preexilic orientation could be incorporated unaltered into an exilic work. Some reflection on how the production of such literature might function in an exilic (or postexilic) setting would be helpful in considering the intent behind the production of the DH.

These criticisms are not meant to indicate that Geoghegan is wrong in his conclusions. It is quite possible that the use of “until this day” in the DH comes from a preexilic redactor whose work was then expanded following the fall of Jerusalem, but there is much more work that needs to be done in order to prove or disprove this thesis. I, for one, am hopeful that researchers will take up this line of investigation as a challenge to reexamine the evidence.