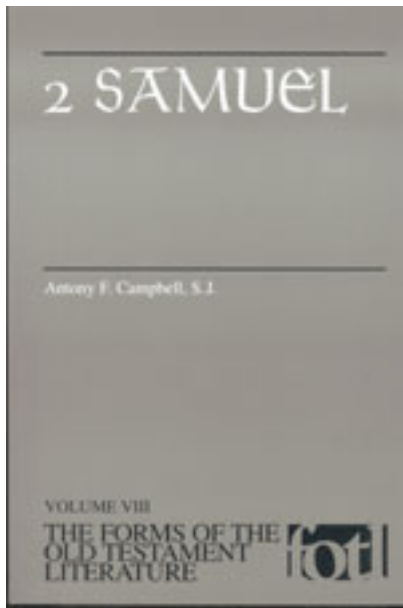


RBL 08/2005



Campbell, Antony F.

2 Samuel

The Forms of the Old Testament Literature 8

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005. Pp. xiv + 242. Paper.
\$50.00. ISBN 0802828132.

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Antony Campbell is to be congratulated on the completion of his two-volume “form-critical” study of the books of Samuel—not least because, like these biblical books, he has told his story well. While starting and finishing with concern for the present text of 2 Samuel, he insists attractively that a “flat text” is like a “flat earth”—a hypothesis and against the evidence—and that “form criticism,” while a “red rag” word like “socialized medicine” (his writing is frequently directed to a U.S. readership), is “as unavoidable as breathing.” His introduction outlines fresh thinking on the nature and extent of the “Story of David’s Rise” and what he calls the “Stories of David’s Middle Years.” The shaping of the commentary conforms to the requirements of the long-familiar series. However, the strength of Campbell’s work throughout resides principally in the sections labeled “Discussion” together with some of the chapter openings, in which he offers and defends his reading of the text in substantial portions—a reading attentive to the skilled ambiguity of so much of these books.

While he insists (7–10), I suspect rightly, that the books of Samuel are more theological writing than historiography, he does locate the origin of much of their material in “the interpretation of the experience of David’s kingship.” Some Davidic traditions “were not given anything like final formulation until well into David’s established reign at the

earliest” (56). Despite it being “the height of temerity to determine a setting for such elusive texts [as 2 Sam 11–20] ... a setting too close to David’s time or too far from David’s time is unlikely” (107). “[T]he Stories of David’s Middle Years might have been useful in the preparation of [royal] counselors.... Jeroboam’s court in the north is far enough away from Davidic influence to allow for criticism of David’s actions” (179–80). Although he does not insist on it, all of this is consistent with his long-standing, though little shared, thesis of a “Prophetic Record” from the court of Jehu that had included much of this material.

The rhetoric is frequently quite powerful; there is an effective, litany-like, repetition of warnings such as “the text does not tell us, and we should not ask.” And yet, although the writing is almost always clear, there are some puzzling (mis-)descriptions. “The Hebrew” (properly MT) is sometimes (as in 130) contrasted with “Qumran” (also Hebrew). In the discussion of the opening of 2 Sam 24 we read (208): “the Hebrew text has YHWH angry with Israel.” Yet the contrast to be drawn is not between the Hebrew text and any other text of 2 Sam 24:1, but between all texts of 2 Sam 24:1 and (all texts of) 1 Chr 21:1. (In “synoptic” portions of Samuel, some LXX readings do agree with Chronicles against Samuel MT, but not here.) The opening sentence of Campbell’s second chapter reads: “There is conceptual unity in the MT that extends from 2 Sam 2:8 to 4:12” (30). Yet such “unity” is no less in LXX or modern translations, and I suspect that the synoptic issue may explain this earlier slip, too, for the next paragraph notes that the civil war described in these three chapters does not feature in Chronicles.

Campbell does pay attention to some synoptic issues. He notes that the actions reported in chapters 2–4 would occupy only some four days out of seven years and that this material is no less biased than Chronicles, which moves straight from Saul’s death to David being made king of all Israel. Again: “The narrative of Chronicles shows how the text might have looked without any of the stories of David’s middle years” (95)—yet against Rost, who viewed 2 Sam 10:6–11:1; 12:26–31 (paralleled in 1 Chr 19:1–20:3) as a source of his “succession document,” Campbell explains the independence from that larger narrative of 2 Sam (9 and) 10 in terms of their being “anticipatory appendices” (a tail worn on the front?). Three of the six elements in “the special collection” (2 Sam 21–24), which he finds “a substantial puzzle” (185), are shared with Chronicles; yet he describes all six as “markedly different from the “received” Davidic traditions that have been enshrined in the preceding text of 1–2 Samuel,” with which “they do not fit very comfortably” (187). I suspect that textual analysis falls prey here to diachronic hypothesis. Why is the unique material within 2 Samuel privileged as “mainstream Davidic traditions” over against what is shared by Samuel and Chronicles?

The important observation of a *hinnēh*-cluster (twenty-two times) illustrating the “visual immediacy” of the narration in 2 Sam 15–19 is lessened by the associated but erroneous claim (139) that *hinnēh* “does not occur at all in chs. 11–14 and 20”—Mandelkern lists ten instances in these neighboring five chapters. The full facts about “look” point me in a different direction. Despite the effect of the cluster to which Campbell rightly draws attention, *hinnēh* is somewhat more frequent in 1 Samuel than 2 Samuel. However, this difference almost disappears if we bracket out the synoptic passages (which begin only in 1 Sam 31), where the only secure instance is in 2 Sam 5:1. The visual is prominent throughout the books of Samuel, with the exception of the (possibly older) synoptic material.

It is hardly surprising that the famed “Stories of David’s Middle Years” are accorded six of the twelve chapters in this commentary. First, the structure of the whole is discussed. Then each of 2 Sam 11–12; 13–14; 15–19; and 20 is separately presented. Finally, Campbell redirects our attention to the whole in terms of genre–setting–meaning. Like the books of Samuel more widely, this material is for reading and pondering and learning from. Space allows mention of just three issues: two points that resonate with me and one that does not. (1) In contrast to other major portions of Samuel, these chapters do not have an external focus: they were not “written with a view to something beyond them.... What they sought to preserve was an understanding that gave meaning to the traditions that encapsulated Israel’s existence” (175). (2) I like the discussion of the role of military commanders alongside monarchs in this acute portrayal of power and its limitations. (3) In light of the ambivalence Campbell finds in David’s dispatch of Tamar to look after her brother, I am surprised at his confidence that, when David left the ten concubines in the Jerusalem, he was vacating; this meant simply that he was sure he would be back.