Article

Israelite and Judahite History in Contemporary Theoretical Approaches

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Abstract
This article surveys developments in the study of the histories of ancient Israel and Judah with a focus on the last ten years. Over that period there has been an increased focus on extrabiblical evidence, over biblical text, as the primary means of constructing comprehensive histories, and a revival of interest in post-modern and linguistic-turn theories with respect to establishing what kinds of histories should be written. This study offers a general discussion of the last decade's trends; an inquiry into the possibility that Judahite authors only assumed an Israelite identity after the fall of Israel; and an era-by-era investigation of particular developments in how scholars think about the various traditional periods of Israelite and Judahite history. The latter inquiry spans the pre-monarchical period to the Persian period.

Introduction

This article, as prescribed by the aims of the journal, is intended as far as possible to survey recent trends—here the last decade or so—in the study of the history of ancient Israel and Judah. All such surveys encounter problems, and in this case, the problem is how to organize such an inquiry. The issue is that the precise trends under investigation have called into question both the reality of some portions of the traditional periodization of Israelite and Judahite history and the relevance of even some of the more certainly historical eras to the production

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of the biblical past. Yet, taking our cue from the extraordinarily comprehensive 2011 study of Moore and Kelle, this effort will nevertheless proceed through developments in Israelite and Judahite history in traditional fashion—from the pre-monarchical period to the Persian period—for the same reason that work did: namely, because it is precisely this which enables us to see the trend lines that suggest reasonable alternatives. We will begin, however, with a general discussion of the major trends, followed by an investigation of a new idea in the study of biblical history with the potential to be quite disruptive to future efforts to describe Israel's past.

Major Trends in the Study of the Bible and History

To a certain extent, much of what has happened in the field of Israelite and Judahite history in recent years can be understood as an evolution of the debate in the 1990s between 'minimalists' and 'maximalists'. These are designations that refer essentially to the extent the biblical text itself is supposed to be useful to reconstructing history. Whenever references are made to 'minimalists', it is usually scholars such as Davies, Thompson, Lemche, and Whitelam who are being indicated (Davies 1992, 2004, 2007a, 2008; Lemche 1985, 1988, 1998, 2008; Thompson 1974, 1992, 1995, 1999, 2005; Whitelam 1996). Meanwhile, even today, some scholars still pursue what we might call 'maximalist' histories, as in the relatively recent study of Provan, Long, and Longman, *A Biblical History of Israel* (2003).

It is not particularly common to see an explicit defense of the reliability of the biblical account of quite this sort these days, but many scholars certainly do continue to embrace what we might call 'positivist' positions—that biblical traditions generally encode the realities of the periods they describe in *some* way—as in Mazar's suggestion that 'the most justified' view is the one that holds that the Deuteronomistic History 'preserved kernels of ancient texts and realities…components of geo-political and socio-economic *realia*…[and that] the authors and redactors must have utilized early source materials, such as temple and palace libraries and archives' (2010: 29). The minimalist position, by contrast, may be said to be represented by so-called scientific histories of ancient Israel, in which the biblical account at least takes a backseat to the supposedly harder—therefore more 'scientific'—extrabiblical evidence. In these studies, as Knauf recently put it, 'data and theories' take the place of 'histories and sources' (2011: 49). Knauf and Guillaume recently produced a new comprehensive history of Israel along these lines (2016), and most recent histories are at least influenced by the need for external controls. Therefore, it is the case now as it was twenty years ago that the major vectors of inquiry into ancient Israelite history are how much or how little to believe biblical texts, and how to privilege biblical or extrabiblical evidence respectively.

There is, however, now a 'third way', so to speak, in contemporary inquiries into Israelite history that is essentially inspired by post-modern and linguistic-turn related theories of history. To the extent that this is a delayed reaction, which may not be a wholly fair characterization, there are likely three causes. First, fields engaged in the study of ancient history are generally slow in addressing new theoretical developments, no doubt because those scholars are faced with such limited evidence to begin with that whatever calls even that into question represents more of a threat than is the case elsewhere. The second issue is more complicated, and it is that in the now four decades and more that post-modernist approaches have been in vogue, it is easy to confuse what is really only a lessening of post-modernism's most radical claims with the existence of a consensus regarding its overall failure. As Nancy Partner has recently noted, many fields of history are indeed collectively 'taking stock…asking what changes seem permanent, what conceptual instruments became indispensable, and what now looks like ephemeral fashion' (Partner 2009: 81). This, of course, does not in fact mean that post-modern concerns are to be dispensed with, as a whole.

The third issue, however, is the most important of all. Reading contemporary approaches to Israelite history of all sorts, one gets the impression that many suppose the post-modern critique and the minimalist critique are largely the same: that the biblical account is not a reliable source of data, and that first-person narrative accounts are generally too subjective to serve the aims of historians. Certainly, this is a feature of both approaches but in fact scholars influenced by minimalist concerns are explicitly *not* post-modernists because, as both Moore and Kim have noted, minimalists and maximalists share the same goal, they simply differ in how best to achieve it (Moore 2006: 106; Kim 2005: 76). So, as Barstad suggests, minimalists may really be best considered 'the first of the last modernists' instead (1997: 51).

By contrast, post-modern theories suggest, in a term specifically used by Moore, Barstad, and Becking, that writing a conventional history of Israel might actually be 'impossible' (Moore 2006: 9; Barstad 2008: 3; Becking 2011: 4). However, as at least Moore and Barstad acknowledge, we must be very specific about what it means to say that writing 'history' may have become impossible, and the use of 'history' rather than 'histories' is instructive to this end. This dictum refers only to the traditional goals of history-writing—that is, the effort to produce objective, comprehensive, and universally valid reflections of what the important theorist Mink called 'past actuality' (Mink 2001: 215). In other words, the distinction is between *history*, as opposed to *histories*. If writing history is impossible, this does not mean that past experiences and knowledge are beyond our reach. Neither, as in the critique of Provan, Long, and Longman, does it mean that past events are meaningless (2003: 81).

Instead past events can absolutely be known and described, and especially for those influenced by the work of White, seem to have many potential meanings.

It is only that no particular meaning is superior to all others (White 1973; 1990). And it must be said that the concern with the objective nature of historical truths displayed here is not merely the product of cerebral debates about the nature of truth. King Hezekiah of Judah would no doubt feature as an important figure in any comprehensive history of Israel and Judah but to whom his reign really happened and how—especially in the days before mass communication and modern nation-states—is by no means a merely academic question.

To put the matter quite simply, caricatures of post-modernism equate it with the rather prosaic point that historical experiences and efforts to relate these are both to some degree inevitably subjective, but even the traditional valence of the notion of subjectivity presumes our failure to achieve objectivity has to do largely with our own flaws. In this, framing objectivity remains, in Moore's term, a 'regulative ideal' that a more perfect historian might plausibly achieve (2006: 9). To the post-modernist, however, subjective accounts are not flawed pictures of a reality that can be partially reconstructed through them; they are accurate pictures of what reality is really like. There is no 'history'; there may yet be 'histories', or at least, narratives containing both accurate facts and historical understandings.

Or, as Barstad puts it, '[t]he fact that the Bible has come much closer to literature…does not necessarily make it less "historical", less representing past reality… No one, hopefully, would deny that from reading D.H. Lawrence, *Sons and Lovers* (1913) we can learn a lot about what it was like to grow up in a mining village in Nottinghamshire around the turn of the century' (Barstad 2008: 22). The issue, such as it is, is that *Sons and Lovers* is nevertheless not essentially an impersonal precipitation of the collective lore of turn-of-the-century Nottinghamshire, as many twentieth-century historians understood the Pentateuch to be for ancient Israel; it is *somebody's* effort to relate the same. Nor is it a particularly careful effort to relate historiographical details, which in any case, as Kim notes, is a rather western and colonialist imagination of the historical arts (Kim 2005). This kind of theorizing also calls into question the basic importance of recovering the 'real' history of ancient Israel, since its presumed importance was based on the relevance of the whole history as the site of the production of biblical texts. Through this lens, there is only one or a few sites of biblical production, even if from the traces of other realities. In that case, in Barstad's words again, 'history is not as important as it used to be. Our obsession with historicity must step down and give way to the recovery of the textual world itself' (Barstad 2008: 21).

At present, then, efforts to refine traditional methods of relating the Israelite past; efforts to retell the Israelite past through 'scientific means'; and efforts to discover alternate kinds of histories within biblical texts collectively provide the geography of contemporary historical approaches. And among them, there is as yet no clear winner. Many scholars, perhaps most, continue to argue that the

basic accessibility of a real vision of the past is still a worthwhile frontier. Many who believe this way today also believe that the biblical text may not be the best way to access it. And many acknowledge the concerns of all three approaches while attempting to offer new but traditionally structured histories. Liverani's effort, which pursues the grand political threads of the various periods but also explores the dimensions of 'invented history' at some length, is an important example of this trend (2005). So is Moore and Kelle's effort, which looks at the traditional periodization largely through the lens of trends in the study of Israelite history (2011).

In other cases, however, would-be-historians influenced by post-modern concerns have indeed begun to focus quite directly on *whose* history is encoded in biblical texts and what that means—a distinctly post-modern concern. A 2013 study by Reinhard Kratz, for example, translated into English in 2016, explores the ramifications of the status of biblical history as 'sacred history', produced for reasons based in specific sacred contexts (2013; 2016). A slightly earlier collection of essays by Garbini also explores the meaning of the possibility that the roots of the biblical vision of history lie in the post-exilic period (2003). Wilson's recent investigation of *Kingship and Memory in Ancient Judah* plots this course by explicitly addressing the nature of the Persian-period memory project as a force in creating the biblical vision of the past, while Pioske's study, *David's Jerusalem: Between Memory and History*, explores what the relationship between physical space and memory over time means for our appreciation of past realities (Wilson 2016; Pioske 2015). Others, as in Meyers's inquiry into ancient Israelite women or Kessler's study of Israelite social history, continue to pursue histories that have not yet been adequately told and that have habitually been obscured by traditional approaches to the Israelite past (Meyers 2013; Kessler 2006; 2008).

Panisraeliteism and the Pre-Monarchical Period

As noted above, we will start our chronological discussion of developments in the study of the Bible and the past with a relatively new but potentially quite disruptive proposal that has begun to gather a fair share of adherents. This is the idea that Judahites never considered themselves to be ethnically Israelite while Israel still existed, or at least for most of the time that Israel existed, but instead appropriated Israelite identity at some point after Israel fell. This quite radical proposal has been advanced by scholars from rather diverse backgrounds and at the very least we can say that it is remarkably difficult to disprove. From an extrabiblical perspective, as both Fleming and Schneider have noted, no inscriptional material clearly describes a relationship between the independent kingdoms of Israel and Judah (Fleming 2012: xii; Schneider 2002). This is particularly surprising in

the case of the Neo-Assyrian materials because, as Schneider notes, they were closely 'engaged in the area for more than 130 years' (2002: 14).

It also seems as if most biblical material dated to periods prior to the fall of Israel exhibits a similar lack of clear statements in this regard. What this should be understood to mean depends, of course, on where we decide to put the burden of proof, and the issue is made terribly complex by ongoing disputes about the dating of biblical texts. A scholar espousing the view that the History of David's Rise is essentially a ninth-century text, for example, would be unlikely to embrace this reconstructed history of ethnic sentiments. Still, in prophetic materials there seems to be a notable difference between how and how frequently the relationship between Judah and Israel is described in texts usually presumed to be early and how those things are presented in the books of Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and later parts of Isaiah (Kratz 2006: 115; Davies 2006: 146; Fleming 2012: 49-51; J. Miller 2008: 194). This contrast is particularly important since we might dismiss the absence of clear representations of an ethnic relationship between the two kingdoms in early materials more easily as an argument from silence if we did not have to explain, in that case, how frequently and clearly they appear later on (Tobolowsky 2017: 27-38). I and others have referred to the possible assumption of Israelite identity by Judahites as the development of 'Panisraelite sentiment' and in my opinion the term is valuable for its ready comparison with Panhellenism—the rather slow building of the familiar, embracing the concept of Greek identity out of originally independent regional identities, often through narrative expansion.

As with many ideas of this sort, the concept of 'Panisraeliteism' has its origins in the work of Philip Davies, who has used it at various points to evolve his conception of the way the biblical text 'invents' his so-called Ancient Israel (1992). However, for the most part, Davies's proposal, updated throughout the last decade and a half, places the origins of Israelite ethnic sentiment in Judah at a much later point than most contemporary proposals. In his formulation, Israelite traditions and ethnic ideas were kept alive in the region of Benjamin well after the fall of the north, but separately from the rest of the south, and were not in fact adopted into Judahite literature for the most part until after the exile (2007a: 168-71). This is also, roughly, the argument of Knauf (2006: 316-19). Hong has also praised Davies's argument, but cautiously, and ultimately advances what is currently the much more common position—'that Judeans' identity reconfiguration all began with reflections on their northern neighbor's fall and their own miraculous survival' (2013: 288; 2011). Most scholars who embrace the Panisraelite possibility believe at least an early form of the concept appeared in the immediate aftermath of Israel's destruction.

This is very much an emerging topic of interest and there is as yet little consensus on the particulars. In addition to the approaches described above, some argue that while full-blown Panisraeliteism was indeed a post-Israel development, it

had its roots in certain aspects of the historical relationship between the two kingdoms (Williamson 2001: 90; Kratz 2005: 306; Fleming 2012: 45). Some suppose the crucial development originating Panisraeliteism was the arrival in the south of northern refugees (Finkelstein and Silberman 2001: 243-44; Finkelstein and Silberman 2006: 129-38) and some have denied even the existence of such refugees (Na'aman 2014a; Guillaume 2008). Some have suggested the first Panisraelite story—that is, the first composition to provide a charter myth for Judah's claim on Israelite identity—is the result of the interweaving of northern traditions about Saul with southern traditions abut David (Finkelstein 2013: 153; Wright 2014), while Na'aman has focused on the Jacob story, and Hong on the patriarchal stories more generally (Na'aman 2014b; Hong 2011; 2013). Indeed, in Na'aman's opinion, Saul and Benjamin were both originally southern entities (2009a; 2009b). Tobolowsky (2017) argues that both the united monarchical and patriarchal narratives, as well as the exodus narrative, were originally produced as independent charter myths explaining the origins of Panisraeliteism. However, this work also suggests that they appeared in familiar biblical form only after the development of the concept of the tribes as the 'sons of Jacob', which provided a complex genealogical framework within which they could be made coherent with each other.

In short, Panisraelite arguments remain a work in progress, and scholarly apprehensions of their plausibility are inevitably rooted in pre-existing stances with respect to the reliability of the biblical narrative itself. It seems clear that there is very little extrabiblical evidence that could even be used in favor of the existence of Israelite self-identification by Judahites prior to the end of the eighth century BCE, but it is also the case that the biblical vision of history is unwavering in its presentation of the same and that the state of the evidence for the crucial period generally is not prepossessing. Obviously, the possibility that Judahites only began to think of themselves in Israelite terms after Israel is capable of fundamentally reinventing how we write history, but what that will mean depends on how plausible the argument continues to seem, and how it is embraced or rejected.

Early Israel and the United Monarchy

Very few scholars suggest that biblical descriptions of the periods prior to the appearance of Israel in Canaan contain more than vague, distorted memories, and potentially nothing of historical value. Discussions of the pre-monarchical period have also been characterized in recent years primarily by a growing hesitance to make concrete assertions about the nature of ethnic realities prior to the monarchy. Few doubt that the Merneptah Stele is hard evidence that a group called Israel existed in the highlands of Canaan already by the beginning of the Iron I, but there is now nearly as universal an agreement that Israel was only one

of many groups active in that region and time (Fleming 2012: 254; Mazar 2007a: 91; K. Sparks 1998: 11; Killebrew 2005). However, while for Fleming, Miller, and others, this and new ways of thinking about ethnicity generally mean that, in Miller's words, a 'pre-monarchic Israel' is 'simply too difficult to reconstruct with any confidence' (J. Miller 2008: 176). For many others, this 'proto-Israel' is clearly related to monarchical Israel in crucial and foundational ways (Faust 2006: 173; R. Miller 2004: 63; Killebrew 2005).

As for the united monarchy, the current controversy began with the 1996 publication of the first major radiocarbon study of key sites by Finkelstein (1996). These findings have particularly to do with the date of the first Iron IIA foundations in the lowlands of Israel, which was traditionally set at around 1000 BCE and attributed to the building programs of David and Solomon (see especially Yadin 1970). Finkelstein and Mazar are perhaps the individuals most associated with what seem currently to be the best accepted rival positions, and a valuable collection of their thoughts on each period has recently been produced by Schmidt (Mazar and Finkelstein 2007).

Mazar and Finkelstein (and others associated with each position) have produced a voluminous body of scholarship over the last ten years that is hard to address for two reasons. First, much of their work has advanced alongside a series of radiocarbon studies, some of which they have been personally involved with and some not, whose science is difficult for the non-specialist to grasp and that in any case can only offer ranges of dates that often start in periods that might suggest one conclusion and end in periods that suggest another. Second, Mazar and Finkelstein frequently agree, at least broadly speaking, on the hard facts, but disagree about their subjective interpretation. For example, while Mazar's analyses of the various radiocarbon studies, often performed with Bronk Ramsey, do suggest earlier dates than Finkelstein's analyses, often performed with Piasetzky, the vast majority of both these and other independent studies place the beginning of the Iron IIA in the second half of the tenth century BCE (Gilboa and Sharon 2001; Mazar 2005; Boaretto *et al.* 2005; Sharon *et al.* 2005, 2007; Mazar and Bronk Ramsey 2008; Finkelstein and Piasetzky 2003, 2010a, 2010b, 2011; Mazar 2011; Gilboa *et al.* 2009). Additionally, both scholars certainly agree that the archaeological profile of tenth-century Jerusalem by no means suggests an impressive capital or even an important town, but Mazar argues that it could nevertheless have been a center comparable to a 'medieval Burg, surrounded by a medium-sized town, and still the centre of a meaningful polity' (2010: 34, 52).

At present, the latest iteration of Finkelstein's 'Low Chronology' suggests that there was no united monarchy, that the crucial Iron IIA period did not begin until around 920 BCE, with a second and larger phase beginning already in the early ninth century, and that the urban foundations associated with David and Solomon were instead built by the Omrides (Finkelstein 2013: 7-8; 2010). Mazar acknowledges much of the same evidence, with slightly earlier radiocarbon

dates, but his 'Modified Conventional Chronology' nevertheless argues for various reasons that the Iron IIA began around 980 BCE, and that the united monarchy was 'a state in an early stage of evolution, far from the rich and widely expanding state portrayed in the biblical narrative', but nevertheless a puissant regional force (Mazar and Finkelstein 2007: 122; Mazar 2010: 52).

There are, of course, plenty of other scholars who have by now contributed to this debate. We can single out for notice the recent studies of Leonard-Fleckman (2016) and Herzog and Singer-Avitz (2004; 2006). In the former case, Leonard-Fleckman has analyzed the epigraphic evidence, particularly through the lens of Aramaic references to dynastic houses, and offered a dramatic reassessment of David's potential kingdom. She suggests that David ruled before there really was a Judah, and that rather than a united monarchy, his was an Israelite kingdom ruled from Jerusalem. In her view, the rebellion against Rehoboam described in 1 Kings 12, which the biblical authors understood as the event that ended the united monarchy, actually describes the origins of the first separate southern state (Leonard-Fleckman 2016: 14).

Herzog and Singer-Avitz (2004; 2006), archaeologists, are largely responsible for the introduction of the concept of a two-phase Iron IIA, which has authorized for some scholars the belief that the Iron IIA in Israel was considerably more impactful, much earlier, than its floruit in Judah. They have recently argued, *contra* that approach, that in fact state-development in Judah and Israel began at roughly the same time. The early evidence for the Judahite state is, they suggest, simply not where it is expected to be—that is, not in the region of Jerusalem and Bethlehem, but instead in the vicinity of the Shephelah and the Beer-Sheba Valley. If sustained, this argument may turn out to be a truly vital one. While it does suggest that there may have been a southern kingdom at a time when David could have ruled it, it is also the case that little supports the united monarchy today other than its presentation in the biblical literature. The less reliable this account seems, the less reason there is to argue against what the archaeological evidence seems otherwise to describe.

Generally, then, as Moore and Kelle note, it is the case that there is no clear evidence of David or his activity outside the Bible, and it now seems that if he existed, 'the long view of archaeology indicates that David may have been one in a line of many highland chieflike rulers' (2011: 242-43). As they also note, however, while someday David 'may disappear from histories in the same way the patriarchs, the matriarchs, and the exodus have done', at present the vast majority of historians continue to describe David as a real historical figure who did something similar to what the Bible says he did, if most often in rather reduced form (2011: 242-43). The scholars discussed in the previous section are outliers more or less by definition, since the Panisraelite view requires accepting either the absence of a united monarchy, or at least the absence of its importance for the development of early ethnic concepts.

What one might call a 'third way' in contemporary history is, however, well-represented in discussion of David, Jerusalem, and his monarchy as well. The treatments of Wilson and Pioske, *Kingship and Memory in Ancient Judah* and *David's Jerusalem: Between Memory and History*, belong under this heading (Wilson 2016; Pioske 2015). In both cases, as the titles suggest, the question of David's historicity and the historicity of his rule are entertained, but are very much secondary to inquiries into the role memories of both play in biblical literature and beyond, especially in the period in which the biblical account was taking shape. So, for example, Wilson's effort includes discussions of 'David as Character, Plot, Narrative in Samuel-Kings and Judah's Social Memory' and 'Book Endings, Davidic Kingship, and Judean Metanarratives', examining what David does for the biblical story far more intently than what may lay behind it (2016: 135-54, 172-84). In Pioske's study, the question of David's historicity is taken up 'not to recover the history of an individual, but…as a heuristic device to narrow my historical inquiry within a certain era of Jerusalem's past' (2015: 178). In other words, just as the rest of his book is focused on histories of place, he is more interested in excavating the place David could have lived, if there was such a person, than in establishing that person's biography.

John Van Seters's investigation into the biblical story of David's life also deserves mention alongside these (2009). As he notes, seconding many of those above, it seems generally to be the case that 'we now know with a high degree of confidence that the sociohistorical context in the Court History of David cannot be supported by the archaeological evidence for the tenth century and must belong to a much later age' (2009: xii). However, this book is most valuable as an inquiry into the ways David's story may have been utterly reinvented by Persian-period authors, and the reasons they may have done so. Again, little characterizes contemporary historical studies as much as the increasing recognition of the importance of the periods in which stories were first told in biblical form (over the periods in which their earliest forms may have appeared) for the creation of biblical visions of the past.

The Period of the Dual Monarchies and the Exile

Generally speaking, reservations about the historicity of the united monarchy and the nature and chronology of the Judahite claim to Israelite ethnic identity have had an interesting effect on the study of the period in which Israel and Judah existed as two separate kingdoms. This is a clearly historical period, and perhaps the first such in biblical literature, but it had long been viewed through the lens of the presumption that the biblical traditions were produced in considerable continuity with Israelite traditions by ethnic actors who were Israelite in a rather uncomplicated way. The importance of recognizing the separate aspects of Judah's history and development, then, has also meant the

importance of reassessing what we think we know about Israel. Finkelstein's recent *The Forgotten Kingdom* is an example of this genre, since only contemporary approaches even permit the conclusion that the kingdom of Israel has been 'forgotten' (2013). The same can be said about Fleming's *The Legacy of Israel in Judah's Bible* (2012). The necessity of sorting through 'Judah's Bible' for traces of inherited legacy is a thoroughly contemporary exigency that would hardly have occurred to scholars fifty years ago.

More commonly, the recovery of Israel as a historical place distinct from Judah has found its expression in so-called scientific approaches that pursue the Israelite kingdom through extrabiblical evidence and an outward-looking organizational frame in order to avoid the subjectivity of Judahite memories of Israel. Liverani's treatment certainly reflects more significantly on the imperial background of Israelite history than many earlier histories did (2005: 143-202). Notably, Knauf and Guillaume begin their discussion of the monarchy with sections titled 'Saul to Jeroboam I' and 'Omri to Jeroboam II' but continue, after these, with 'From Tiglath-Pileser to Ashurbanipal' and 'From Nabopolassar to Nebuchadnezzar' (2016: 103-68). The evidentiary issues in the discussion of the Israelite and Judahite kingdoms are implicitly revealed here, since the involvement of the Neo-Assyrian empire in the region also represents the frontier in which copious extra-biblical records first begin to be available to scholars.

Perhaps the most notable result of the growing recognition that we know less about both the dual monarchical period and the Judahite exile is the appearance in recent years of an extraordinary number of volumes of essays, often produced from conference proceedings, aimed in part at revisiting questions that had once seemed settled. For the monarchical period, Grabbe has been a particularly important figure in terms of organizing and publishing these collections (Grabbe 2011; Becking and Grabbe 2011). The volume *Ahab Agonistes* is particularly worthy of note as a contribution to the study of the Omride period (Grabbe 2007a). It includes contributions by Barstad on the dating of prophetic texts, Ben Zvi on Omride descriptions in Chronicles, Grabbe himself on the limits of the biblical account, Knauf on the nature of Omride Israel, Kottsieper on the Tel Dan inscription, Lemaire on the Mesha stele, Na'aman on the relationship between the Mesha Stele and the biblical text, and general discussions by Thompson and others (Barstad 2007a; Ben Zvi 2007; Grabbe 2007b; Knauf 2007; Kottsieper 2007; Lemaire 2007a; Na'aman 2007a; Thompson 2007). Grabbe himself has been particularly interested in how biblical scholars know what they know, what the evidence really allows, and what needs to be reassessed (Grabbe 1997; 2007b; 2007c; 2007d).

Another collection, organized by Williamson, *Understanding the History of Ancient Israel*, also presents a number of valuable contributions particularly towards greater understanding of the tenth and ninth centuries BCE (2007). Notable essays include methodological inquiries by Rogerson, Whitelam,

Barstad, Davies, Grabbe, Uehlinger, Brettler, and Na'aman; archaeological discussions by Ussishkin and Mazar; discussions of inscriptional evidence by Geller and Lemaire, and a presentation of issues relating to the social history of ancient Israel by Albertz (Rogerson 2007; Whitelam 2007; Barstad 2007b; Davies 2007b; Grabbe 2007d; Uehlinger 2007; Brettler 2007; Na'aman 2007b; Ussishkin 2007; Mazar 2007b; Geller 2007; Lemaire 2007b; Albertz 2007). For the seventh century BCE, recent studies by Crouch of the ethnic dynamics of the entire region in that period, and their results especially for considering the formation of deuteronomistic materials, are also worthy of note and provide a counter-weight to the increasing tendency to date most biblical material much later than had previously been supposed (2014a; 2014b).

For the exilic period and beyond, Lipschits has been a crucial figure as editor and author. Specifically, he has collaborated with a number of scholars on the production of a series of volumes, published by Eisenbrauns, dealing sequentially with the state of Judah and Judeans from the Neo-Babylonian period onwards (Lipschits and Blenkinsopp 2003a; Lipschits 2005; Lipschits, Oeming, and Knoppers 2011; Lipschits and Oeming 2006). Other important collections dealing with the exilic period include *Interpreting Exile: Interdisciplinary Studies of Displacement and Deportation in Biblical and Modern Contexts* (Kelle, Ames, and Wright 2011); *Exile and Restoration Revisited: Essays on the Babylonian and Persian Periods in Memory of Peter R. Ackroyd* (Knoppers, Grabbe, and Fulton 2009); and *From Babylon to Eternity: The Exile Remembered and Constructed in Text and Tradition* (Becking, Cannegieter, and van der Pol 2009).

In terms of general trends relating to the exilic period, one issue that seems likely to be of crucial importance going forward is the so-called Myth of the Empty Land—that is, the idea that all Judahites, or even all wealthy and influential Judahites, were exiled to Babylon between 597 and 586 BCE, leaving the land empty. This has been recognized widely as a myth since at least the 1996 study of Hans M. Barstad, but has since received a number of useful treatments by Barstad and others exploring the ramifications (Barstad 1996; Becking, Cannegieter, and van der Pol 2009; Middlemas 2009; Lipschits and Blenkinsopp 2003b; Barstad 2008: 135-60). One new front, which will likely also be of increasing importance, is the recognition that the conquest of Israel in 722 BCE also produced a myth of empty land, as explored in a study by Dijkstra and Vriezen (2014). As they note, while there is little doubt that in both cases an exile occurred, at that time too 'in the area of the former Kingdom of Israel, life and business continued as usual after a while in the provinces of Samerina, Megiddo and Gilead under Assyrian occupation' (2014: 4). At the time of that study, the authors accepted the biblical claim that the actors carrying on this business were largely resettled colonists from other parts of the empire, but one wonders if this, too, will be subject to change.

Finally, in dealing with the monarchical period and the exile generally, Uriah Y. Kim's study, *Decolonizing Josiah: Toward a Postcolonial Reading of the Deuteronomistic History* deserves special mention (2005). This work asks crucial questions about the effects of viewing the Deuteronomistic History, and by extension other aspects of the biblical narrative, through a set of expectations conditioned and produced by western ways of thinking about histories and nations themselves. As he points out in the section titled, 'Whose History Is It Anyway', echoing some of the post-modern concerns described above, the modern discipline of history 'emerged coterminously with modern colonialism' and it has often been the case that 'in searching for ancient Israel in the imagination of the West, biblical scholars inscribed the experience, aspirations, and destiny of the West' (2005: 48).

In this light, for example, the common assumption that the deuteronomistic historian would have diligently pursued archival material because the purpose of the history was to describe the past as accurately as possible is revealed as a projection of western concepts of history. As an alternative, Kim suggests noticing that 'Josiah's kingdom was located in the ideological landscape of Assyrian imperialism where it was viewed as other' (2005: 206). The Deuteronomistic History may have been written in part to assert the subjectivity of Josiah and his court themselves, and the well-known seeming failure of biblical authors to reveal the circumstances of Josiah's death, for example, might instead be part of a deliberate effort by ancient historians to write '"a history of their own" independent from or without always referencing the imperial force' (2005: 222).

The Persian Period and Beyond

No period in the traditional sequence of biblical history has undergone a greater paradigm shift in the last decade than the Persian period. While various more dramatic proposals about it seem to have been largely set aside (e.g., Stern's theory of a 'Religious Revolution' in Yehud and to a certain degree the so-called Persian Imperial Authorization theory [Stern 1999; 2006; 2010; Frevel, Psychny, and Cornelius 2014; Watts 2001]), many of the relevant developments have to do with reassessments of what has actually long been visible. In short, as David Carr put it in a magisterial reassessment of the historical development of biblical texts, we seem to know that the 'major contribution of Persian-period scribes was their ongoing transmission, minor adaptation, and reconstrual of *pre-Persian* period compositions' (2011: 222-23; original emphasis). Yet, it is only through the frame employed by mid-twentieth-century biblical scholars, in which traditions rather inevitably expressed continuity with their earliest formulations, that 'reconstrual' seems a limited ideological activity. It now seems likely that the late Persian period did feature the kind of revival of interest in the ancient Israelite past that might explain its importance as the locus in which

the biblical vision of history finally emerged (Lipschits and Vanderhooft 2006, 2014; Vanderhooft 2011: 540; Frevel and Pyschny 2014; Leith 2014; Bocher and Lipschits 2013; Wyssmann 2014).

There have therefore been a number of studies recently on the Persian period as the crucial site for textual formation of all sorts, including of the Tetrateuch, Pentateuch, Hexateuch, and Enneateuch, as well of other materials focused on the formation of familiar biblical ways of thinking about ethnic identity at that time (Blum 2006; 2011; Gertz 2006; Römer 2009; Schmid 2007, 2012a, 2012b; Römer and Brettler 2000; Ben Zvi 2011a, 2011b; Knoppers 2001, 2003; Vanderhooft 2011; Berquist 2006).

The phenomenology of Persian-period textuality has also been reassessed in other ways. Scholars are increasingly realizing, for example, the dynamic nature of the Persian-period Chronicles history as a vision of the past. This recognition is to a large degree a consequence of the displacement of the reconstruction of a wholly accurate history of ancient Israel from its position as the sole or nearly sole concern for scholars investigating biblical accounts of the past, even if in some cases only to the point of acknowledging the viability of other interests. Through the lens of the older pre-occupation, as J.T. Sparks notes, the Chronicles history suffered by comparison to the books of Samuel and Kings, but we can now recognize it without difficulty as a discrete effort to relate the Israelite past with its own goals (2008: 1). Indeed, as Ben Zvi (2009: 60) suggests, the composition of Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah may even have been motivated by an explicit desire 'to shape, communicate, and encourage its readers to… vicariously relive through their reading a somewhat different past than the one shaped…through the reading of the deuteronomistic history, and for that matter, the Primary History' (2009: 60). As a composition, it is 'strongly shaped by the powerful sense of "ethnocultural" centrality that characterized the postmonarchic and most likely Persian-period works that eventually became included in the HB' (2009: 77).

Others, in reconstructing the overall shape of Persian-period interactions with the biblical past, have drawn attention to the ramifications of the historiographical errors (and contradictions) in the account of the immediate aftermath of the Persian conquest in the book of Ezra. By contrast, there is also a growing consensus with respect to the plausibly historical character of the so-called 'Nehemiah Memoir', usually located in Neh. 1.1–7.5 and 12–13 (Grabbe 1998: 122-23, 152; Carr 2011: 205-208; Blenkinsopp 2001: 57). The combination of these factors, demonstrating that the late sixth and much of the fifth century BCE were remembered rather poorly by biblical authors and that Jerusalem was apparently still essentially a ruin by the middle of the fifth century, suggests that scholars should look to the late fifth and early fourth centuries BCE—and not the immediate aftermath of Cyrus's conquest—for the major locus of the Yehudite 'recovery' of an Israelite past. The combination also underscores the extent to which the

final construction of the biblical vision in its particulars—with some alterations continuing into the Hellenistic period—was motivated by concerns other than a desire to express a continuous history merely because it had happened.

So, again, the major trends operating in the study of the Persian period today do not have as much to do with the uncovering of new data, although this has also occurred, as they do with the replacement of flawed models of tradition inheritance and re-presentation with approaches more in tune with contemporary theorizing. As Wilson notes, the overall issue is not whether any biblical corpora contain material that dates to the Iron Age, as it seems clear that many do. Instead, it is that nevertheless their repetition in biblical form is primarily 'representative of distinctly postmonarchic discursive formations' (2016: 6). What now seems most necessary in confronting the biblical account of the past—as intimated in this article's introductory discussion of theoretical trends—is the development of a new and more active model of the relationship between the history of biblical traditions and their construction into a comprehensive narrative account within a fairly limited time horizon by a fairly limited number of actors.

In this vein, Noll's (2008) recent discussion of the flaws in typical approaches to doctrinal dissemination is very valuable. As he points out, despite nearly constant assumptions to the contrary, it is actually quite difficult to explain how biblical traditions would ever have reached most of the people who had lived in the region historically, and it now seems increasingly clear that many such traditions had not reached, for example, the Persian garrison at Elephantine. A similar discussion has also been produced by Davies, in a collection dealing generally with crucial issues in the writing of biblical literature (Davies 2014; Davies and Römer 2014). Obviously, what we can say about scribal culture, and when, must determine in large part how we reconstruct the reception of biblical and pre-biblical texts throughout Israelite and Judahite history.

Michael Satlow (2014) has recently drawn attention to how very long it was before the Hebrew Bible was, in his term, 'holy', by which he means not just canonized but treated with the respect appropriate to scripture as an ultimate authority and as something that could no longer be altered. The late frontier of the former has been acknowledged consistently for some time, but the importance of the late date of the latter is just now beginning to be appreciated. Towards that end, Eva Mroczek's (2015; 2016) recent studies of extra-biblical literary culture, demonstrating its considerable creativity with respect to biblical subjects well into periods in which, in her term, the 'hegemony of the biblical' had been presumed, is of special importance. Thomas Römer (2012) has also studied the possibility that biblical narratives were influenced by the wider world of Jewish textuality in later periods. In other words, neither the worlds of biblical textuality nor extrabiblical textuality were closed to each other or clearly dominated by the other until much later than has typically been supposed.

Not only do these studies represent crucial developments with respect to thinking about the Persian period and its literature, they are also intimations of where this field of study is generally likely to go. We will and must keep grappling with what it means that the biblical vision of history was ultimately created in a specific context, for a specific set of reasons; that it would not have matched everyone's vision of the same history at that time or previously; and that, once completed, it did not immediately (or quickly) become the pre-eminent account of Israelite history. What this will do to how we tell the history—rather histories—of Israel is just now coming into view.

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