

11-8-2012

Strengthening Biblical Historicity vis-à-vis Minimalism, 1992-2008 and Beyond, Part 2.1: The Literature of Perspective, Critique, and Methodology, First Half

Lawrence J. Mykytiuk
Purdue University, larrym@purdue.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/lib_fsdocs



Part of the [History of Religion Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Mykytiuk, Lawrence J., "Strengthening Biblical Historicity vis-à-vis Minimalism, 1992-2008 and Beyond, Part 2.1: The Literature of Perspective, Critique, and Methodology, First Half" (2012). *Libraries Faculty and Staff Scholarship and Research*. Paper 52.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10477845.2012.673111>

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact epubs@purdue.edu for additional information.

**STRENGTHENING BIBLICAL HISTORICITY VIS-À-VIS
MINIMALISM, 1992–2008 AND BEYOND,
PART 2.1: THE LITERATURE OF PERSPECTIVE, CRITIQUE,
AND METHODOLOGY, FIRST HALF**

“A daunting obstacle confronts students who seek to become acquainted with the field of biblical studies—a diverse discipline that is immense, bewildering, and fluid, with no consensus on method.”

(Mathews rev. of *Methods for Exodus* 1)

ABSTRACT

This series of articles covers scholarly works in English which can, at least potentially, be associated with a positive view of biblical historicity regarding the periods preceding the Israelites’ return from exile. Part 2 covers works that treat the concepts and methodological issues at the center of the maximalist-minimalist debate. (Parts 3–5 will cover works on evidences.)

This article, the first half of Part 2, focuses on works that provide a framework in which there exists the realistic possibility for large amounts of Hebrew Scripture to stand as valid historical source material— while still subject to comparison with other sources. These works are by J. Maxwell Miller and John H. Hayes, Megan Bishop Moore, Lester L. Grabbe, James Barr, Bob Becking, Amihai Mazar, Hans M. Barstad, Ronald S. Hendel, and Mark S. Smith. The article leads up to this focus by beginning with bibliographic selections in earlier works, works that offer long-term perspectives, and a summary of good effects and misguided aspects of minimalist publications.

(Part 2.2 will treat works on methodology by authors who espouse biblical historicity unless it is proven wrong.)

KEYWORDS: biblical minimalism, historical methodology, history of Israel, Niels P. Lemche, Philip R. Davies, Thomas L. Thompson

This second article¹ and the coming third article together comprise Part 2 of this series of articles. They treat works from a variety of positions² that offer alternatives to radical historical/biblical minimalism³ in terms of the concepts and methodological issues at the center of the debate. In this series, historicity is defined as correspondence between a written text and the real events and entities of the past to which it purports to refer.

This series of articles employs both standard and unconventional bibliographic research methods⁴ to cover scholarly, non-minimalist works. Part 2.1 is primarily intended to treat non-maximalist works (in section 4a) whose frameworks provide a *real possibility* in current practice for large amounts of Hebrew Scripture to stand by themselves as valid historical source material—while still being subject to comparison with other ancient sources and the historical discernment of modern authors. Part 2.2 will treat maximalist works and will complete Part 2.⁵

The outline of this article, Part 2.1, is: 1. Previous bibliographic selections, 2. Perspectival works, 3. Toward a balanced view of minimalism: a summary of published critiques, and 4. Methodological works (the largest section): 4a. Select approaches that are neither minimalist nor maximalist.

1. Bibliography from Earlier Publications

Bibliography from previous publications edited by subject experts deserves to be mentioned at the outset. In one of these, *Israel's Past in Present Research* (1999), editor V. Philips Long provides discerning bibliographic coverage, mostly from 1990 through 1997, via thirty-three select, reprinted book chapters or journal articles in English (each also having its own bibliography). Eight pieces translated from French, German, or Spanish, about a quarter of the book's selections, give this work international scope.

Long carefully provides separate introductions for each of five sections. These treat how Western understanding of the Bible came to its current lack of consensus, the historical impulse among Israel's neighbors, the complexity of Israel's history writing, the challenge of methodology in the modern writing of Israel's history, and examples showing the historical impulse in each section of the Hebrew canon. Long's selections, representing both minimalist and non-minimalist positions, provide the means to understand the controversy.

Among bibliographies that are relevant to the question of biblical historicity, several that are especially appropriate appear in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Historical Books* (2005), co-edited by Bill T. Arnold and H. G. M. Williamson. As part of a four-volume set, it covers Joshua, Judges, 1–2 Samuel, 1–2 Kings, 1–2 Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah. The editors give substantial emphasis to the question of historicity.⁶ Most relevant to this present article are the following five articles and their bibliographies: Steven M. Ortiz, "Archaeology, Syro-Palestinian" (introductory paragraphs and sections 1.2, 1.3, 2.4, and 3, with corresponding bibliography), Sandra L. Richter, "Deuteronomistic History," Craig G. Bartholomew, "Hermeneutics," Steven L. McKenzie, "Historiography, Old Testament," and Robert D. Miller, II, "Quest of the Historical Israel."

2. Perspectival Works

Centuries-long perspectives on challenges to biblical historicity can help to promote judicious, broad-based reflection. Such perspectives are possible, because challenges to the historical reliability of the Hebrew Bible have occurred for at least two millennia and have occasioned responses as early as that of Josephus in his *Against Apion*, written between 93/94 and 96 CE. During the controversy generated by minimalism since 1992, however, the urgent concerns of the moment seem generally to have crowded out historical reflection rather than fostering it, so that only a few works take the long view.⁷

Articles of continuing relevance that provide perspective include John H. Hayes' set of five diachronic essays,⁸ of which V. Philips Long has selected three essays on the more recent periods to be reprinted in his 1999 edited volume, *Israel's Past in Present Research*

(7–42). These are “The History of the Study of Israelite and Judaeon History: From the Renaissance to the Enlightenment,” “The Nineteenth Century,” and “Current Approaches.”

Also in the way of methodological perspective, Ziony Zevit’s first chapter in his *magnum opus*, *Religions of Ancient Israel* (1–80), surveys the methodological landscape for the humanities, religion, and history. It seems especially important that Zevit considers the phenomenological approach a requirement in comparative religious studies. He describes it in preparation for use in *Religions* (23, 23 n. 28, 24–27). (In a similar vein, James K. Hoffmeier commends the phenomenological approach, because it makes possible fair treatment of biblical historicity [*Ancient Israel in Sinai* 26–33].)

Zevit’s survey of methodology describes and critiques four paradigms. The first paradigm assumes an “original historical reality” that the researcher can access and whose recovered data can be sifted, resulting in an “empirical collection of facts” to “analyze and synthesize.” “Much of what may have been left unreported can be ascertained through reason and the use of analogies . . .” This Enlightenment paradigm breathes optimism (*Religions*, 30). The second paradigm, which, Zevit states, *Religions* uses in reconstructed form (75), is a “refined continuation of the first” (39) that taps into the twentieth century’s vastly expanded amount of information and increased number of methodologies. It assumes a “historical reality” that is not contingent on the historian’s opinion, and it produces “factules” having a nature defined by the content of the available data. Although the resulting collection of evidence is incomplete, by using that evidence, the historian can state observations about past reality which are “partially accurate” (39). The third paradigm is minimalist and postmodern (57–68), and the fourth, which is apparently being formed but has not yet emerged, is influenced by “New Historicism and Cultural Studies” (69).⁹

Kenneth A. Kitchen’s emphatically pro-historicity view, thoroughly set forth in his *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*, regards what the present article series calls radical historical/biblical minimalism, from 1992 onward, as but the latest installment in two centuries of minimalist challenges to biblical historicity. He divides these challenges into three time periods, each with its representative(s). Early minimalists, dating from 1800 to 1890, are represented chiefly by Julius Wellhausen (*On the Reliability*, 484–497). Middle-period minimalists, who appeared in the 1970s, are represented by John Van Seters, Donald B. Redford, J. Maxwell Miller, et al. (475–484). Late-period minimalists, who made their debut during the 1990s, are led by Thomas L. Thompson, Philip R. Davies, Niels Peter Lemche, and Keith Whitelam (449–464). Kitchen includes Israel Finkelstein and Neil A. Silberman in this last group (*On the Reliability* 464–468), but it should be noted that several other scholars see Finkelstein’s and Silberman’s positions as avoiding the extreme views held by minimalists of the 1990s. Kitchen’s critiques do not rely on abstract, conceptual arguments, but rather on concrete historical and especially archaeological and inscriptional examples, as well as ancient chronology, which allow him to speak from his areas of recognized expertise (449–500).

Ernest W. Nicholson provides a mid-to-late-twentieth-century perspective by reviewing the contributions of Hermann Gunkel, Albrecht Alt, Martin Noth, and Gerhard von Rad (notably omitting William F. Albright). He points out how their work provided a pre-exilic background for explaining the origins of much of the literature of the Hebrew Bible (“Current ‘Revisionism’” 1–4). Nicholson goes on to describe the challenges that

arose in the 1960s and onward, from Lothar Perlitt, John Van Seters, Thomas L. Thompson, *et al.* Bit by bit, their revisions undermined the earlier consensus around the views of Alt and Noth (4–5). “These reversals of hitherto widely accepted conclusions seemed drastic enough, and the dating of the Yahwist to such a late [i.e., post-exilic] period . . . was generally viewed as an excessively radical shift” (5). He then describes the minimalism of the 1990s as “a markedly more extreme phase of revision” (5) and spends most of the essay describing and arguing against the positions of Davies and Thompson (5–19; in section 3 below, see the last part: “Regarding Evidence”).

Megan Bishop Moore’s analysis of the mid-twentieth-century schools of Albright and Alt provides a perspective not found elsewhere. She considers them under various general philosophical categories (such as representation, objectivity, and truth), as well as other categories more particularly related to the writing of history (evidence, texts, artifacts), in order to help set the stage for considering minimalism (*Philosophy* 46–69).

3. Toward a Balanced View of Minimalism: A Summary of Published Critiques

Shifting to a contemporary perspective specifically on minimalism during the period since 1992, this section covers publications which have specified helpful and misguided aspects of minimalism.

3.1. George Athas’ lecture

A tactfully composed lecture by George Athas consists partly of an empathetic presentation of minimalism and partly of criticisms of it. It is available as an online, edited, 17-page transcript of his 1999 lecture, “‘Minimalism’: The Copenhagen School of Thought in Biblical Studies.” As part of the explanation for the rise of minimalism, Athas mentions the Bible-confirming discoveries made during the rise of biblical archaeology and the later failures that led to its decline.¹⁰

An empathetic grasp of someone else’s position permits better understanding and can help promote communication. According to Athas’ empathetic view, minimalists were faced with purportedly historical events mentioned in the Hebrew Bible and with archaeological results that overlap with the Hebrew Bible in some areas but not in others. Feeling the need to choose between sources of information, *either* the Hebrew Bible *or* archaeology, they chose archaeology, because they consider it an objective source. (Athas shows this view to be faulty.)

Minimalists do not consider it a good option to weigh both biblical and archaeological data for the best historical material, because they believe the Hebrew Bible to be predominately lacking in reliable historical content. Three reasons for biblical texts being unhistorical, in their estimation, are that they are 1) merely literary works, 2) written “late,” that is, written many centuries after the period of the events as presented in the Bible, and 3) written to serve ideological purposes, not for the purpose of presenting accurate history.¹¹

Athas does not fail to point out the limits and shortcomings of archaeology in general, and of the archaeology of the ancient Near East in particular, as a source for history. His lecture lists points in minimalism’s favor but does not omit a longer catalog of its major errors. Athas’ own conclusion: “So it is a mistake *not* to use the Bible for the reconstruction

of history. Even ideologies are firmly connected with real history and have their place within history” (Athas 14, emphasis mine). Finally, he observes that minimalism is biased but states that all other positions are also biased. Ultimately, he considers it “just one school of thought” among others (Athas 16).

3.2 Points in minimalism’s favor, from multiple works

Richard S. Hess’s “Recent Studies in Old Testament History: A Review Article,” published remarkably soon after Thompson’s *Early History* and Davies’ *In Search*, includes the following three positive observations, but, like Athas’ lecture, also warns of a longer list of major flaws:

- **It has provided expanded ecological context.** Thompson’s *Early History* (1992) expands “our methods for investigating ancient Palestine or Israel by bringing to bear data on the Mediterranean climate and its cycles over extended periods of time. Thus the period is given a larger ecological context, both chronologically and geographically.” Immediately, however, Hess cautions, “The danger of this approach is the tendency to focus on one area and to dismiss other evidence” (Hess “Recent” 14).

- **It has led to the prospect of a new, much more comprehensive and demanding way of writing ancient Israel’s history.** Traditional histories of Israel have usually done little more than to paraphrase canonical history and to present relevant background and discoveries. It is of major importance that minimalism’s rejection of such approaches seems to be having a beneficial effect on modern writing of ancient Israel’s history. This rejection by minimalists has led or encouraged some non-minimalists to call for a new, comprehensive, interdisciplinary way of writing Israel’s history.

Hess also clearly indicates the weighty new demands placed on historians of ancient Israel as follows:

If the [1992] studies of Thompson and Davies . . . prove anything, it is that historical conclusions drawn from traditional critical methods applied to the Bible cannot be assumed. It is necessary . . . to master and to orchestrate the expanding quantity of extrabiblical data with methodological rigour

These issues of Israelite history and historiography require . . . scholars . . . to accept the challenge of studying and mastering the academic disciplines of Ancient Near Eastern archaeology, philology, and history, as well as the strengths and weaknesses of social science methodologies and literary approaches.” (“Recent” 14–15)

It may be noted that K. A. Kitchen and Megan Bishop Moore also foresee a new, expansive, interdisciplinary vista for writing the history of ancient Israel.¹²

- **It has instilled a sense of need for greater rigor in the field.** There is no longer a “free pass” for assumptions that in previous decades would likely have gone unchallenged or even for conclusions reached via traditional critical methods. (Hess “Recent” 14; thus also Athas 10)

Marc Brettler commends a cautious, critical attitude toward the Hebrew Bible, and for this reason, he seems a good example of a scholar who can offer some support for a trend in the direction of the rigor it proposes. He states:

Until such time as additional evidence is discovered or developed, these texts [in 1–2 Kings] will remain ‘possibly historically accurate’—no more and no less. How we use these many ‘possible’ texts to reconstruct history may depend . . . on our temperament—how trusting we are, especially of religious traditions. . . . By temperament, I am a cautious minimalist, and favour the former option [that is, “to include only the very likely and certain” rather than include the possible in histories of ancient Israel]. . . . (“Method” 332)

He puts this attitude into practice in accordance with the minimalist approach to Scripture as follows:

I believe the positive contribution of the Copenhagen School is that we no longer believe that biblical traditions are true (minus divine causality) until disproven, as in John Bright’s *A History of Israel* (Bright 1981) and other works from that period. As I see it, there is nothing in DtrH [the Deuteronomistic History] itself to suggest that its primary interest was in recovering the real past. Rather, it seems to be a remarkably theological and ideological document. (“Method” 316)

3.3 Flaws in minimalist theory and practice

One of the two brief publications that most cogently indicate the points on which minimalist methodology is misguided is Sara Japhet, “*In Search of Ancient Israel: Revisionism at All Costs*” (1998), which treats only the book by Philip R. Davies named in the title. She finds that for the writing of the Bible, Davies chose the Persian era by an unconvincing process of elimination (217, 230). After vehemently condemning the use of the Bible as a basis for writing ancient Israel’s history, Davies selectively uses *biblical texts* alone to support his portrayal of Persian-era Israel. He “proceeds to rationalize and rephrase, to add and omit at will, until the data serve his own purposes” (217).

Further, his “historical Israel” is only a kingdom in northern Palestine that existed for less than 150 years until 722 BCE (215). But Japhet states that “all epigraphic material related to Israel discovered until now . . . has . . . supported the biblical evidence” (223), and for a much longer period, from Israel’s presence in the central hill-country ca. 1200 BCE through the Babylonian exile of 586 BCE (224)—and even Balaam. Thus she affirms the continuity of the community of Israel, the severing of which is, according to Barr, “central to Davies’ argument to his anti-theology” (*History and Ideology* 100)¹³

Drawing on Japhet’ expertise regarding the Persian period, her closing peroration finds the biblical literature supposedly produced in that period to be starkly inconsistent with Davies’ newly founded Israelite society on no less than eighteen points (226–230). “The true issue at stake is the denial of authenticity to any biblical evidence related to the history of Israel in the monarchical period or earlier” (230). “[D]eeper issues are at stake than scholarly methodologies. What the book presents in fact is another theology ‘a theology of disbelief’ ([Davies *In Search*] 47 note 22), or even better, ‘a theology of condemnation’” (230).

Certainly as cogent and brief is a journal article by none other than Marc Z. Brettler, “The Copenhagen School: The Historiographical Issues” (2003), which treats works by

Thomas L. Thompson and Niels P. Lemche. To appreciate the balance in Brettler's views, because he is not simply against minimalism, see his affirmation of minimalist attitude in general, and of some of minimalism's approach, a few paragraphs above. It appears that while he is basically sympathetic with its very cautious, critical approach toward Scripture, at the same time he rejects a number of particular, actual practices that he points out in the criticisms listed below.

Several other publications also specify minimalism's defects, viewing a number of them as very serious. For the reader's convenience, this subsection attempts to bring together the facets of the literature in topical summary form, avoiding a scattered, title-by-title treatment. While the intent behind this review is not polemical (Mykytiuk "Strengthening Part 1" 72), some works covered in this subsection offer trenchant criticisms. These are included in order to clarify four main issues: standards for what is to be included in history, the role of archaeology, the significance of a time-gap between event and writing, and the proper handling of evidence. The four headings under which these criticisms appear have the acronym SAGE, for standards, archaeology, gap, and evidence.

Regarding standards for what is to be included in history:

- **Minimalism's standards for recognition of historical data are too stringent for the ancient period.** In fact, they are unrealistic and inappropriate for practically *any ancient history*. For example, Niels P. Lemche thinks King Josiah of Judah is not a historical figure, because no extrabiblical source mentions him.

However, this criterion used to evaluate the historicity of Josiah is too stringent—modern historians of ancient Israel cannot follow the admonition of Deuteronomy 17:6 and 19:15 that two or three witnesses are needed to decide a case. Instead of insisting on direct witnesses, Lemche should consider what indirect internal evidence might help evaluate a text's date or historicity. (Brettler, "Copenhagen School," 10)

Rather than looking for the absolutes insisted upon by the Copenhagen School, other scholars are willing to speak of "tentative history," or to use methods such as "triangulation" [Grabbe "The Exile"] from various sources to recreate history. In the words of Lester Grabbe, "If we accept only what we can be absolutely certain about, we might as well give up the historical task *ab initio* because extremely little falls in that category." Similar observations have been made by classicists concerning the reconstruction of Greek and Roman history. (Brettler "Copenhagen School" 16, quoting Grabbe "Are Historians" 29–30)

- **Some minimalist writings do not meet their own stringent standards for history.** James Barr observes that minimalism demands "[p]roof for the Davidic and Solomonic empire [which] is not available But for the highly conjectural suggestions made by the same historians . . . commonly no such demand for proof is made. . . . Inequality in the application of the demand for proof is a serious fault" (Barr *History and Ideology* 101).

Brettler finds that minimalist writings include much that is “conjectural,” such as Thompson’s “reconstruction of ancient near eastern history, based on archaeology and climate change” (“Copenhagen School” 16, referring to *Mythic Past* 103–225). Lemche reaches the conclusion that the Hebrew Bible is a Hellenistic book, because of certain indications that match Hellenistic conditions (“The Old Testament—A Hellenistic Book?”). But Brettler observes that the shortage of data from other periods prevents him from weighing all alternatives, therefore, to say that it *was* written in that period is a logical impossibility (“Copenhagen School” 8–9).

Kitchen observes that Philip R. Davies’ scenario for the origin of Israel and of the Hebrew Bible during the Persian or Hellenistic era lacks documentation for its major assertions. Seeing this scenario arise from a shortage of data from these periods, he classifies it under the heading “Works of Fantasy” (Kitchen “Egyptians” 114, regarding Davies *In Search*).

It is important that evaluations of minimalists’—or anyone’s—standards in their writings be made *in application to questions of historical method or its application*, as Barr, Brettler, and Kitchen have done in the quotations above, not in a vague, *ad hominem* way, which is unworthy of scholarship. The observations made by these three scholars are useful for supporting and advancing sound methodology.

Regarding the role of archaeology:

• **Minimalism’s main means of historical verification, archaeology, is rarely adequate as the sole tool for writing history.** As Athas points out, no one doubts that William the Conqueror won the Battle of Hastings in 1066, but digging there will not reveal much (11). If archaeology were our only tool, then the name and title of the victor, in what particular year the battle was fought, and its significance would likely go unknown. Minimalists see archaeology as their means to objective history, but they generally ignore its limitations.¹⁴

Further, when confronted with inscriptional data that has historical implications, to use Kitchen’s phrase, minimalists may attempt to “wiggle out” of the historical significance. Thus Thompson now chooses to regard the lengthy inscription of Mesha, king of Moab, discovered in 1868 and now in the Louvre, as purely “literary” (*Mythic Past* 11–14), having no historical meaning, despite its strong connections with an independent work, 2 Kings, at 1:1 and 3:4–27.¹⁵ Yet Lemche, for example, accepts certain ancient inscriptions as evidence.

Regarding the significance of a gap between event and writing:

• **Long gaps between events and the oldest available text are not necessarily a reliable basis for invalidating historicity in ancient texts.** While non-minimalists agree that there is some sense in the view that long periods between events and the oldest available text can bring historicity into question, they insist that “[p]roximity need not assure accuracy, nor need distance assure inaccuracy” (Brettler “Copenhagen School” 5).¹⁶

Norman K. Gottwald has used the term “depth-dimensional sources” to refer to ancient histories which seem to have used or incorporated material from even earlier sources that are no longer extant (“Preface to the Reprint” xxxix). These earlier sources appear to have occupied a middle position between the events being discussed and the ancient writing which is available to present-day historians. Ancient and medieval

manuscripts containing portions of the Bible include what today would be called references or metadata which indicate that they are depth-dimensional sources (Averbeck “Sumer” 106–107). They may also contain other textual indicators pointing to earlier sources.

Brettler points out a parallel: “The earliest complete manuscript of Homer dates from the early tenth century CE” (“Copenhagen School” 19). He observes that most classicists’ approach to Homer’s works as a historical source shares several attitudes in common with non-minimalist approaches to the Bible. These attitudes about the origin(s) and development of the texts are open to historicity. He concludes that

[t]his analogy . . . suggests that those who oppose the methods of the Copenhagen School should not automatically be categorized as fundamentalists or neo-Albrightians, but may well be working from a different notion of how ancient history is created, a notion that is well-accepted within the world of the study of classical antiquity.” (20)

• **These time-gaps between event and writing, which are *made to be unnecessarily long in minimalist works, sometimes appear to be very unlikely.*** For example, Lemche chooses to date the Hebrew Bible very strictly on the basis of the surviving physical manuscript evidence alone, emphatically without further ado. He does not consider 1) that the discovered scrolls are themselves copies of manuscripts that were even earlier, as is clearly suggested by certain corrections in the extant scrolls, and 2) that an ancient scroll could be used over a period of one or even two centuries.

Further, most minimalists give little consideration to the divergent textual traditions that are evident at Qumran,¹⁷ where many of the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered. These distinctly different biblical text-types suggest that considerable time was necessary for scribes to develop them before scrolls representing each type appeared at Qumran.

Brettler observes that minimalists Lemche and Thompson advocate dating the Hebrew Bible so late in the Second Temple era that it becomes a subset of the literature of the New Testament. Not surprisingly, Jewish scholars, as well as others, tend to view such a move with suspicion.

Through his [Thompson’s] re-dating of the Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament is brought closer and closer to the New, and significant continuity is seen between the two. This is the opposite of the type of typical Protestant supersessionism, where significant discontinuities are found between the Old and New Testaments, and thus the Old is superseded by the New; instead, the Old becomes subsumed into the New. (“Copenhagen School” 19).

Finally, regarding the proper handling of evidence, minimalist treatments reveal poor *practice*:

• **Minimalist claims sometimes rely on theory without evidence.** Thus Ernest W. Nicholson’s essay, “Current ‘Revisionism,’” observes regarding a subsection in Philip R. Davies’ *In Search* under the heading “Common Sense and Credulity” (38–42) that the support he musters for his view of the exilic period “is not an argument, however, but

simply a reiteration of Davies's own theory: the tradition of a return from exile is declared to be 'a piece of ideology' and this proves Davies's theory" (11).

James Barr's objections to minimalism include the following point regarding evidence: "[T]he dominant literary activity in narrative was revision and interpretation." Barr finds no parallel for "anyone in the Second Temple period" writing, particularly "on such a scale," "historical fiction inspired by ideology" (*History and Ideology* 87). This observation, based on evidence, counters the theory-based minimalist claim as to the nature and origin of the Hebrew Bible (87–88).

• **Minimalist practice sometimes clings to theory when evidence tends rather to offer support for the plausibility of other claims.** E. W. Nicholson agrees with and expands on Barr's objection mentioned above in that Nicholson finds no satisfactory explanation for large-scale invention of the Hebrew Bible's narratives and its many other genres, replete with innumerable details ("Current 'Revisionism'" 15, 17–19). Regarding Davies' view of the origin of the Hebrew Bible namely, that it "was commissioned by the intellectual élites of this newly founded state" during the Persian period, in "a quest for 'theological legitimacy' for the state," Nicholson finds it to be "one-dimensional" and "monolithic" rather than doing justice to the wealth of variety in the text (18).¹⁸

Far from being "composed by scribes at their desks and within the context of so-called 'colleges,' or 'schools' of scribes," (18) the Hebrew Bible shows many signs of being "complex in its origins and growth and multiplex in its sources." It exhibits textual development and a rich variety of literary forms which reflect the life of a people (19.) One can observe "many changing circumstances of a people's long history and the response . . . by its religious and theological thinkers and writers, prophets, priests, psalmists and wisdom teachers" (18; cf. Japhet "*In Search: Revisionism*" 228–229 and section 4a below, on Mark S. Smith). It is "much more plausibly explained as the deposit of the living voice" of such persons (19). "Attempts to limit the creation of such a literature to a largely scribal activity carried out in the interests of political propaganda or for the purpose of legitimizing a newly founded state of the Persian period or later are in the face of overwhelming evidence to the contrary" (19).

For a summary of eight other scholars' allied arguments, all based on characteristics of the Hebrew text, see Moore *Philosophy* 123.

• **If data in evidence and non-minimalist scholarly works which assess the data's relevance and strength disagree with a minimalist position, both may go without mention or specific description in minimalist works.** A clear example of ignoring worthy scholarly publications is Philip R. Davies' attempt to bypass earlier studies of linguistic dating of the Hebrew Bible as internal evidence for its great antiquity. Avi Hurvitz's first major point is to observe that Davies almost completely ignores many earlier works by scholars much better qualified than himself.¹⁹

Even if mentioned, evidence and publications contrary to minimalist conclusions often do not receive proper scholarly treatment. For example, regarding data in evidence, Brettler observes, "Thompson admits that sometimes the biblical authors used "old traditions" (*Mythic Past* 189) or included "surviving fragments of the past" (295), but he shows little interest in uncovering which specific fragments these might be" ("Copenhagen School" 17).²⁰

• **Minimalist publications sometimes ignore the possibility of historical data being present in the biblical text.** Brettler observes, for example, that “Lemche ignores the possibility, even the strong likelihood, that in places the Bible does reflect relatively accurate information about the pre-exilic period that deserves to be correlated with archaeological finds” (“Copenhagen School” 13).²¹

• **Minimalist writings sometimes erroneously inveigh against the validity of what cannot be ignored.** The Tel Dan stele fragment which names “the house of David,” excavated in 1993, quickly drew accusations of forgery from Niels P. Lemche, as noted by Brettler (“Copenhagen School” 14), whereas it was verifiably an authentic artifact.

• **Minimalist works tend to succumb to the rhetorical effect of chronological order in treating historical questions from the Bible’s later eras.** Brettler points out, for example, that like many other scholars, minimalists begin by treating very early periods, in which little or no direct extrabiblical evidence is available, such as the completely indirect evidences for the sojourn of the Israelite tribes in Egypt. When they move on to treat periods which have fairly robust, direct evidence for certain episodes, however, minimalists often tend to continue to speak as if those evidences were as few and indirect as those from earlier eras (“Copenhagen School” 13–14).

• **Without considering the biblical portrayal of Israel’s history, some minimalist approaches simply choose modern theoretical models that exclude it.**

In V. Philips Long, ed., *Israel’s Past in Present Research*, a translated conference paper by Siegfried Herrmann, “The Devaluation of the Old Testament as a Historical Source: Notes on a Problem in the History of Ideas,” clearly reveals the scholarly replacement of the biblical portrayal of ancient Israel’s history with theory-based versions of history that contradict it. The biblical presentation is simply bypassed with no rationale for doing so, apparently on the mere assumption that it has no historical value. “Devaluation” also exposes other methodological approaches that would guarantee the separation of the biblical text from any sense of historical veracity while ignoring earlier research that remains sound.

• **Regarding actual, rigorous evaluation of evidence required to write history, it appears that minimalists no longer write histories. They only write brief historical examples in support of their methodological work.** As Moore notes, in publications through 1992, minimalists Thompson and Lemche did historical research involving “sources, evidence, and interpretations,” but she finds that more recently, they have shifted their focus to “persuasive theoretical and methodological prolegomena to history” (*Philosophy* 141). Thompson’s *Early History of the Israelite People* (1992), is currently the last minimalist attempt to write a history of Israel (though its major emphasis on prolegomena, which was necessary for a radically different approach, substantially reduces the space it devotes to history *per se*.) Post-1992 books by minimalist scholars reveal little about Palestine or Israel in the Bronze Age or the Iron Age. Moreover, for the crucial periods which minimalists favor as the time when Israel and the Hebrew Bible originated, “[a] history of Persian or Hellenistic Palestine that utilizes the information that minimalists believe the Bible provides about those time periods has also not been produced” (*Philosophy* 141). Davies and Whitelam have also produced “prolegomena rather than full treatments of the past” (141). “How . . . [Davies] would formulate a history of Iron Age Palestine remains unknown and difficult to imagine” (142). On this

point, H. G. M. Williamson presses farther, stating, “the final proof of the methods adopted will be in the consecutive history that they can come up with” (Rev. of *Philosophy and Practice* 53).

3.4 Concluding thoughts on minimalism

It seems difficult to reconcile the observed flaws of minimalism in theory and practice, as specified above, with the great impact that this radical position has had on the study of the Hebrew Bible. Internationally, it has stimulated widespread, varying responses in non-minimalist circles. It has led some scholars, notably in the European intellectual milieu, to very late dating of biblical texts, presumably because that is in line with some trends in Europe. At the same time, it has led some of the scholars in other intellectual milieux, notably in North America and Israel, to view minimalism as a challenge to be opposed, presumably because of different currents of thought. Still other scholars in North America and in Israel seem to subscribe to some aspects of a minimalist approach while rejecting other aspects of minimalist theory and practice. Also, whether in response to minimalism or in the search for rigorous methods that can surpass, withstand, or refute it, some non-minimalists have begun to envision new, more broadly grounded methods of historical research. Developments among non-minimalist approaches to the historical aspect of the Hebrew Bible are described below.

4. Methodological Works

“[I]n the decade or two since the minimalist-maximalist controversy raged, history has focused on methodological questions and discussions of evidence evaluation and use” This focused attention was “extreme” (Moore, “Beyond” 5). This selection allows glimpses of a variety of understandings of the questions and difficulties that confront inquiry into historicity of the Hebrew Bible and some general methodologies for dealing with these difficulties. Publications on specialized methodologies, such as those for archaeology, anthropology, and linguistics, are not included here.

4a. Select approaches that are neither minimalist nor maximalist²²

J. Maxwell Miller and John H. Hayes

The 2006 second edition of their well-known *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah* both registers and encourages the trend of the field toward greater caution in using the Hebrew Bible as a historical source:

We are especially mindful of the dangers and difficulties involved in attempting to extract historical information from the Hebrew Bible. Even the first edition was characterized by its extremely cautious use of the biblical materials and by its radical departure from previous treatments of Israelite history. If we have learned anything in the meantime, it is that we need to be even more cautious. (82)

This trend appears to be at least partly an effect of minimalism on attitudes toward the Hebrew Bible, as hinted by the authors' immediate clarification of their position, "Yet we do not share the revisionist-minimalist's extreme skepticism . . ." (82).

Miller and Hayes' 2006 edition holds to the 1986 edition's traditional order of presentation of history according to biblical characters and events, while working to discern what is historically reliable and what is not. Thus their approach produces a history of Israel that relates to their conclusions regarding historical reliability in various parts of the Hebrew Bible. They acknowledge that a best-guess approach is sometimes necessary.

They present their procedure openly. For each time period, first they describe and assess the historical value of that period's sources and deal with the historical problems of these sources. They consider it "methodologically crucial" to treat epigraphy, archaeology, and the Hebrew Bible separately, "each on its own terms" (Hayes and Miller *History* 81). Only after they have arrived at what each of the three kinds of sources reveal do they attempt to interrelate the evidence from each of the three in a narrative history.

Megan Bishop Moore

Apparently the only work on minimalist and non-minimalist positions that consistently employs *philosophical* questions throughout is Megan Bishop Moore's published dissertation, *Philosophy and Practice in Writing a History of Ancient Israel*. It considers such things as "the definition and goals of history; empiricism; objectivity; subject; explanation, including the roles of narrative and the social sciences in history; the type of truth history seeks to convey; how historians evaluate and use evidence, including texts and artifacts; and how they combine the two" (*Philosophy* 136). In Moore's book, both minimalist and non-minimalist publications and positions receive their share of favorable observations and also "brickbats" (Williamson Rev. of *Philosophy and Practice* 53). Moore is careful to affirm the importance of the issues raised by minimalists. Still, in her evaluations, non-minimalist works and positions generally fare, while not completely well, at least less badly than those of minimalists.

In short, while minimalists are firm in their convictions, non-minimalists appear to be in the process of exploring and coming to terms with many of the philosophical and methodological issues raised by the minimalists and by postmodernism. . . . In addition non-minimalists . . . are at the forefront of the struggle to understand and use ancient texts in history writing and to integrate conclusions drawn from them with information provided by artifacts. Their engagement with these issues and their unwillingness to make general statements about many of these topics stand in contrast to the decidedness of the minimalists on many issues. (*Philosophy*, 135)

After summarizing opposing examples of "a faith-based epistemology" and "a skeptical epistemology," Moore eschews both and advocates objectivity. She finds that

[i]n the absence of potential verification or other proof that evidence is likely reliable, neither automatic skepticism nor faith is appropriate. Rather, some of

both is needed, measured out as conclusions are drawn from further investigation of the evidence at hand. . . .

In short, historians cannot choose between faith and skepticism—it is not an either-or proposition, but indeed a false dichotomy that oversimplifies naturally complex philosophical and psychological processes. . . . Nevertheless, instead of positioning themselves on one side or the other of this manufactured divide, historians should continue to pursue questions of evidence using objectivity as a regulative ideal. . . . (*Philosophy*, 160–161)²³

Commenting favorably on this approach of Moore’s, Ernst Axel Knauf observes, “she come [*sic*] close (but does not spell out) what I would call suspending both belief and disbelief when looking at the evidence” (Rev. of *Philosophy*, 3).

Although there are difficult challenges involved in writing the history of ancient Israel, these “need not disqualify efforts to describe what actually happened in the past and why” (*Philosophy*, 183). In response to these challenges, Moore states, “a new version of truth in Israel’s history appears to be emerging, especially among non-minimalists,” which she calls “qualified correspondent truth.” It is

a practical approach that frees historical truth from the task of portraying past reality with the impression of near-total certainty. . . . [It aims at] objectivity and correspondence [to past reality] without surrendering to the notion that history is nothing but a subjective interpretation or a fictional story. (*Philosophy*, 183)

The important point about this conclusion is that Moore has provided philosophical undergirding for this approach and has set it forth at a time when minimalists have been demanding that biblical scholars arrive at “near-total certainty” before crediting any biblical text with historical reliability—a requirement for a level of evidence which, for most of Scripture, and most ancient history, is impossible to meet.

On the other hand, her conclusion is not to be misinterpreted as grounds for lack of intellectual rigor. She observes that besides being “a noble goal,” “[s]triving to make history writing ‘better argued’ also leaves room for new evidence and new methods of interpreting evidence” (*Philosophy*, 183).

Lester L. Grabbe

In an early essay, Grabbe points out that “the comments [on historical methodology] which follow come not from ivory-tower, armchair, arms-length theorizing but from the bleary-eyed, battle-weary perspective of having wrestled with the problems of actually trying to write history” (“Are Historians” 19). Evidently because of that process, in several publications Grabbe presents his methodological points as conclusions following substantial discussion, rather than as *a priori* principles stated in order to begin. Thus, case-by-case evaluation at each step, following methods rooted in actual practice, is the hallmark of Grabbe’s descriptions of proper historical methodology. He has written several tersely stated lists of conclusions about historical method in point-by-point format. Here these are further shortened as follows:

1. One can write a history of ancient Israel, and the basic task is no different from writing histories of other periods (“Are Historians” 35) (likewise “The Exile” 98).

2. One “can and must” use the Bible to write a history of ancient Israel. “We should accept all the help we can get, and the text can give us information we cannot get elsewhere (“Are Historians” 35). “The biblical text must not be ignored. Its authors/editors sometimes had considerable accurate information” (“The Exile” 96).

3. “The difficulties of using the biblical text should not, however, be underestimated. The use of the text needs to be argued for in each case, not just accepted without further comment” (“Are Historians” 35).²⁴ “The biblical text should not be rejected just because it is part of a theological/religious document—nor should it be accepted for the same reasons. It has to be evaluated, carefully and critically, in each individual situation. A case needs to be made for whatever position one takes, and the case needs to be made for each individual text. Generalized judgments, whether pro or con, will not do” (“The Exile” 97).

4. “The various types of sources [e.g., textual and archaeological] need to be evaluated each in its own right before attempting a synthesis” (“Are Historians” 35).

5. “An effort should be made to indicate the probabilities of any reconstruction. There is nothing wrong with speculation and imaginative reconstruction, but this should be admitted and clearly labelled” (“Are Historians” 36). “It is perfectly legitimate to draw conclusions and to make reconstructions from the data available, even if these are very few. The fact that we cannot be certain is no reason to dismiss a reconstruction or hypothesis” (“The Exile” 97). “The nature of any reconstruction or hypothesis needs to be made plain. The more assured the data, the more assured the hypothesis. . . .” (“The Exile” 97).

In his *Ancient Israel: What Do We Know and How Do We Know It?* in the introductory chapter, titled “The Principles and Methods of Investigating the History of Ancient Israel” (1–36), that Grabbe lays out one of his lengthier lists of methodological conclusions. Characteristically, this list of “Principles of Historical Method Used in This Book” comes at the end of a concise, well-rounded, up-to-date discussion on method. Since the book is not a history, these “do not form a full list of principles for writing a full history” (35):

1. All potential sources should be considered. . . .” (35).²⁵
2. Preference should be given to primary sources” (35).
3. The context of the *longue duree* must always be recognized and given an essential part in the interpretation” (35).
4. Each episode or event has to be judged on its own merits. . . . Historical reconstruction requires all data to be used, critically scrutinized, evaluated and a judgement made as to the most likely scenario in the light of all that is known” (36).
5. All reconstructions are provisional. New data, new perspectives, new theories may suggest other—better—ways to interpret the data” (36).

6. All reconstructions have to be argued for. There can be no default position. You cannot just follow the text unless it can be disproved (. . . if there is a forensic analogy, the text is a witness, whose veracity must be probed and tested.) The only valid arguments are historical ones. Ideology, utility, theology, morality, politics, authority—none of these has a place in judging how to reconstruct an event” (36).

This introductory chapter’s discussion of methodology is preparation for a tripartite treatment of each historical period in the rest of the book: 1) original sources (archaeology, inscriptions, and the biblical text), 2) analysis (critical discussion on specific topics), and 3) synthesis. The synthesis section draws conclusions in terms of four kinds of evaluation of biblical data: a) confirmed, b) not confirmed (though they may be correct), c) biblical picture incorrect (or is most likely incorrect); and d) biblical picture omits/has gaps.

Grabbe’s most elegant approach to historical principles and method makes up most of the introductory chapter to the first volume, *Yehud*, of his multivolume work, *A History of the Jews and Judaism in the Second Temple Period*. Here his presentation begins with very general “Principles of Historical Method: The Current Debate among Historians” and telescopes down, first to “Principles of Historical Method: The Current Debate among Biblical Scholars,” then to “Principles of Historical Method: Those Assumed in this Book,” (1–16). Perhaps because this last section largely derives from the methodological discussion and conclusions in his earlier books quoted above, this chapter presents an *a priori* list. At least one of Grabbe’s five principles largely agrees with Moore: “Although objectivity in the scientific sense is not possible, ‘qualified objectivity’ or some similar position is still possible in historical study” (14). Also, an additional principle that he does not mention as such elsewhere is “4. *The ultimate goal is a total history, which takes into account all aspects of the past*” (15, emphasis his).

Another list of Grabbe’s methodological conclusions appears in *Good Kings and Bad Kings* (114–116). It includes his views on the general historical reliability of several books of the Hebrew Bible.

James Barr

Barr’s *History and Ideology in the Old Testament: Biblical Studies at the End of a Millennium* (2000) is intended “more to inform readers about the state of the questions than to tell them what the answers are.” On the other hand, Barr sets forth “a distinct, if not a final, assessment” on some issues (Barr 179).

The most relevant chapter is “History of Israel,” 59–101, much of which is taken up with critiques of Ian Provan’s arguments²⁶ against minimalism offered as if coaching him (66–69, 74–82) and Barr’s own disagreements with minimalism (61, 69–74, 82–90, 99–101). Although the chapter contains no point-by-point formulation on historical methodology, it espouses and briefly argues for the view that biblical texts can contain accurate historical data, even if they are ideological (82) and have a literary aspect (83–84).

It is also significant that Barr takes the following position on whether extrabiblical confirmation is needed to establish the historicity of a biblical event:

. . . Provan’s argument that the revisionist view displays a degree of skepticism towards the biblical narrative that is not shown towards other comparable sources seems to me to be very likely valid. There may well be no extra-biblical information to confirm this or that event referred to in the narrative. This in itself, however, does not seem to me to be in itself adequate ground for doubting the reality of the event. I would have thought that there are thousands of incidents related in ancient historical documents for which no definite external confirmation exists. (79)²⁷

Bob Becking

In his essay titled “Inscribed Seals” (1997), in dealing with the question of whether the Old Testament can be used to write a history of ancient Israel, Becking answers in the affirmative, provided that his understandings of three features of the question apply to it. First he clarifies the meaning of the term *Israel*. Agreeing with Philip R. Davies that political and ethnic definitions are confusing, Becking can answer the main question with a yes if the term *Israel* is defined geographically to mean Palestine (65).

Second, Becking can answer yes if “history writing” means that “historical reconstruction . . . [is] carried out normally as if it were a historical reconstruction of whatever period or people” (65). He finds Huizinga’s definition of history too ambiguous to be helpful²⁸ and instead turns to R. G. Collingwood’s distinction between realism and scepticism in his *The Idea of History*. “‘Realism’ supposes that the past is an objective reality.” In a realistic approach, one can arrive at knowledge of the past in a way that is analogous to knowledge of the present. “‘Scepticism’ is related to a basic mistrust in the knowability of the past” (67).

Becking considers historical reconstructions to be personal and subjective. They involve models, imagination, and unrepeatable events, so that “history writing is not an objective science” (68). First critiquing Gerhard von Rad as a model for historical reconstruction, Becking observes that von Rad “fails . . . to see that the only thing that is certain is the available evidence” (67). Indeed, von Rad’s historical sketch of Yahwistic faith “is much more than a mere exposition of evidence; it is a historical reconstruction in which von Rad’s own faith often operates as a model for understanding” (67).

Becking then critiques his other model, Philip Davies’ *In Search of ‘Ancient Israel.’* To be sure, Davies correctly “sees ‘ancient Israel’ as a product of the mind of biblical scholars.” In Davies’ view, some mix an archaeologically based historical Israel and a textually based biblical Israel into a strange, unacceptable amalgam called ancient Israel. Davies “fails to see, however, that what he calls ‘historical Israel’ is a product of the mind, too” (68). Although Davies’ approach involves realism and evidence, he is, nonetheless, building his own reconstruction.

What saves historical reconstructions from an “anything goes” ethos is that “History writing should be based on an ongoing discussion or even debate that has as its aim intersubjective knowledge of the past” (68). One must be able to defend one’s view by relating it to “the rules of the game, so that other scholars can at least react to it.” These rules include: “(1) proper classification of evidence” (such as primary vs. secondary source material) (68) “(2) appropriate treatment of archaeological and epigraphic material” giving such things as stratigraphic and paleographic analyses (68–69), and “(3) making explicitly [*sic*] the implicit suppositions on time, space, and society” (69).

Third, regarding “the Old Testament text as a historical source,” Becking finds the term *source* to be “misleading,” because in his view, its text “should be treated as evidence” (69). The content of that text provides traces of the past, reflecting it in various ways. Differences in the ways in which various historians treat its content “is mostly related to the ideology of the historian, be it minimalistic or maximalistic or something in between” (69). Regarding the subjective aspect implicit in each person’s treatment of the text, Becking offers the insight, “I do not think that a theoretical discussion is fruitful here” (69).

Becking’s detailed examination of the evidence in 2 Kings chapter 25 and in chapters 40–41 of the book of Jeremiah leads him to observe a reliance on human memory during a gap of at least fifty years between event and writing, with the result that “details have to be confirmed by other sources” (73). His treatment of three impressions made by personal seals concludes that (despite initial appearances) identifications of biblical persons in these three seal impressions have higher or lower chances of being correct, and they are “not 100% certain” (83). His example of detailed examination of such epigraphic and biblical evidence supports his conclusion that “the writing of such a reconstruction of a part of the past requires a discussion on a multitude of evidence in minute detail . . .” (83). He also finds that “a balanced philosophy of history” is necessary “to supply us with the rules of the game of historical reconstruction” of which he names just three (83). A later essay by Becking further develops his views on historical methodology.²⁹

Amihai Mazar

In view of the significance of archaeological discoveries and their interpretation to all sides in the minimalist controversy, it is important to include published statements on methodology by a distinguished Israeli archaeologist that are relevant to methodology and perspective.³⁰

At the beginning of a chapter titled “The Spade and the Text: The Interaction between Archaeology and Israelite History Relating to the Tenth–Ninth Centuries BCE” (2007), Mazar lists five major options for approaching his archaeological work (143–144). Of these, he chooses the last:

5. Claiming that the biblical sources retain important kernels of ancient history in spite of the comparatively late time of writing and editing. Archaeology can be utilized, in addition to the goals in point 3 above [namely, “. . . the reconstruction of social and economic changes based on the study of material culture alone . . .”], to examine biblical data in the light of archaeology and judge critically the validity of each biblical episode.

I chose the last approach [namely, 5 above], and in so doing I join those who claim that the Pentateuch, the Deuteronomistic History (DtrH), and large parts of the prophetic and wisdom literature were written at some time during the late monarchy (eighth–early sixth centuries BCE.), and that during the exile and post-exilic periods they went through stages of editing, additions and changes. I also accept the view of many scholars that the late monarchic authors and redactors used early materials such as temple and palace libraries and archives, monumental inscriptions perhaps centuries old, oral transmissions of ancient poetry, folk

stories rooted in a remote historical past, and perhaps even some earlier historiographic writings³¹

. . . . Thus my working hypothesis is that the DtrH and other biblical texts may include valuable historical information, in spite of the distortions, exaggerations, theological dispositions and literary creativity of the authors.” (144)

Hans M. Barstad

The best overall publication by Barstad that relates to biblical historicity with a concern for the issues raised by minimalism is his collection of seven essays that were all revised for publication in *History and the Hebrew Bible* (2008).³² All seven began as conference papers (vii) and were published individually from 1996 through 2002. Previous publications included five of them, acknowledged and cited on 161–162. The focus of this volume is on the development and application of critical approaches to be used in the modern writing of ancient Israel’s history. The strongest chapters for biblical historicity and against minimalism are 3, 4, and 5, summarized below. In commending narrative history, chapter 1 seems ultimately to come down on both sides of the question of historical reliability, as does chapter 2. Chapters 6 and 7 have little relevance to the present article.

The fact that the title of chapter 1, “History and the Hebrew Bible,” later became that of the entire volume signals its importance. It is an intense plea to apply new historical theory to the narratives of biblical histories. The chapter moves from the crisis in history precipitated by postmodernism to a more severe crisis in the study of ancient Israelite historiography. Barstad accurately comments in the Preface that “Quite often, scholars who write about method and theory do not take an interest in history writing—and vice versa” (vii). In chapter 1, he goes on, justifiably, to decry the ignorance of and lack of actual engagement with earthshaking developments in historical theory during the past three decades on the part of Bible scholars, historians, and biblical historians (9–11).

Although Barstad generally allows for considerable historicity in the Hebrew Bible, in chapter 1 he expresses a deep concern that “modernism,” which includes both the “total history” approach of the *Annales* and the scientific, historical-critical work of minimalists T. L. Thompson and N. P. Lemche, “has not yet realized that there is a crisis within its walls and that the building is about to collapse” (12). Presumably, such a collapse will also mean the minimizing or downplaying of questions regarding historicity, for which modernism has a stubborn penchant! Barstad foresees an irreversible change to a drastically less scientific form of history that inhabits the realm of culture and is susceptible to numerous methods.

Postmodernism’s renewed interest in pre-modern, narrative history, such as that in the Hebrew Bible, makes this foreseen change a promising prospect. Barstad thinks the tendency to “classify all written material in categories of true = historical and not true = fictional” (14) will eventually yield to “narrative truth” in much, though probably not all, of our thinking about biblical narratives (15).

“Narrative history is not pure fiction, but contains a mixture of history and fiction” (21, 23). On the question of extrabiblical confirmation, Barstad finds, for example, that “Even if we do not have at our disposal extra-biblical texts . . . for David and Solomon, there is no reason to deny the historicity of David and Solomon or the divided monarchy” (19). Further, when such events as temple-building are presented in culturally determined

literary patterns, “[e]ven if specific genres are used, this does not mean that we are dealing with ‘pure fiction’” (20). Still, the stereotypical nature of at least some historical presentations of the Hebrew Bible keeps us from recovering “what really happened” (19, 20).

In chapter 2, “Issues in the Narrative Truth Debate,” after raising certain philosophical and theoretical issues, Barstad finds that the biblical writers aimed “to make a point for [their] contemporary society, rather than attempting to find out ‘what happened’ in the past. This, however, does not imply that these texts do not yield a lot of historical information.” Still, we learn “much less than we thought we could” (37).

In chapter 3, “‘Bibliophobia’ in Ancient Israelite Historiography,” Barstad holds that, “the use of the Hebrew Bible for historical (re)construction is highly uncertain (to say the least)” (39). Still, “[a]s an historical source, the Hebrew Bible is of the ‘same’ nature and quality as other ancient Near Eastern literary texts.” Consequently, to reject the use of it as an historical source would require the rejection of “most of the ancient sources” (45). Barstad apparently sees no other reasonable course than to accept them, and with them, “the Hebrew Bible, not only as necessary, but also as the by far most important source for our knowledge of the history of Iron Age Palestine” (45).

Chapter 4, “The Dating of the Israelite Tradition,” and chapter 5, “Is the Hebrew Bible a Hellenistic Book?” argue against the recent tendency to date large portions of the Hebrew Bible to the Hellenistic period. In chapter 4, the agreement of Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic History with the common theology of the ancient Near East (54–63), signifying Israel’s participation in that common tradition stream (63–65), lead Barstad to conclude that “we shall have to reckon with a strong possibility that also the biblical traditions may go back a long time” (63).

In chapter 5, Barstad topples Niels P. Lemche’s four arguments for assigning a Hellenistic date to the Hebrew Bible, exposing the first two as little more than claims and dealing at greater length with the last two. To refute the third argument, he points out that rather than Hebrew historiography being modeled on the pattern of Greek histories, “much evidence today points to strong oriental influence on Greek culture,” making influence in that direction much more likely (78). He then points out the idiosyncrasies of the fourth argument, such as unproven or illogical premises, mistaken perception of scholarly confidence in certain books of the Bible, and misuse of a report in Xenophon’s *Anabasis* to make a sweeping characterization of the entire Persian Empire (80–85).

Ronald S. Hendel

Like Barstad, Hendel sees and deals with the problem of a mixture of history and fiction in biblical narratives. His *Remembering Abraham: Culture, Memory, and History in the Hebrew Bible* (2005), is an example of a broad, cultural approach of the sort that Barstad encourages and foresees as becoming dominant (“History and the Hebrew Bible” 21; originally published in 1997).³³

Because cultural memory approaches are not necessarily concerned with the actual past, but rather give major or exclusive emphasis to how the past is remembered, it is fair to ask why books that take a cultural memory approach are included in the present article, which focuses on biblical historicity.

In the view of the present author, the field of history and the field of memory overlap. The inseparability of the two which Barstad asserts³⁴ and the multifaceted relationship

between history and memory are such that, depending on the situation, each can sometimes perform well regarding certain questions in the realm of the other. Among the historical uses of memory, for example, Hendel finds that by treating biblical texts as cultural artifacts, he can, in some instances, date them in relation to other such artifacts. Thus Hendel substantiates the dating of certain elements of the patriarchal traditions in the Bible to the tenth century (if not earlier), by philological examination of the Karnak victory inscription of Sheshonq I, patriarchal names, and references to Abraham's ancestral homeland (47–53). To exclude memory from treatment here would seem to arbitrarily deprive the reader of its usefulness in the domain of history.

While introducing the biblical presentation of the exodus as a cultural memory, Hendel states, “Cultural memories tend to be a mixture of historical truth and fiction, composed of “authentic” historical details, folklore motifs, ethnic self-fashioning, ideological claims, and narrative imagination” (*Remembering* 58). He owns the view that “history does not come neat or plain in these writings; the Hebrew Bible consists in large part of interpretations and reflections on history—more a midrash on the times than the times themselves” (*Remembering* 6; *Smith Memoirs of God*, described below, agrees).

Hendel's response to the complex nature of biblical narratives is not to try to “prove or falsify the . . . narratives” (*Remembering* 46), but to treat biblical texts as cultural artifacts. His method usually takes a comparative philological approach within a framework of cultural memory. He does not agree with scholars who think that folk traditions cannot be used as material from which to draw historical conclusions. Rather, he finds the exodus, for example, *in cultural memory* to be susceptible to “critical historiography” (*Remembering* 58). In the instance of the exodus, he employs an approach to cultural memories called mnemohistory, which he defines (*Remembering* 58) using a quotation from Jan Assmann. It “is concerned not with the past as such, but only with the past as it is remembered. . . . Mnemohistory is not the opposite of history, but rather is one of its branches. . . . Mnemohistory is reception theory applied to history” (*Moses the Egyptian*, 8–9). Hendel observes, “The data for mnemohistory are texts, artifacts, and other evidence of cultural discourse about the remembered past, and its object is to discern how such discourses are constituted and how they serve to inform and influence the cultural present” (*Remembering* 58).

Chapters 3, 4, and 5 of the book apply cultural memory approaches to two old battlegrounds and a current one, namely, the patriarchal traditions, the exodus, and the united monarchy, respectively. Some results are very useful for historical study, such as a well-reasoned case for an early first-millennium date of the patriarchal traditions.

Mark S. Smith

Among the thoughtful discussions in his *The Memoirs of God* (2004) is a part of the first chapter under the heading “Introduction: The Bible and the Task of History” (7–18). In that section, Smith considers the date, composition, and purposes primarily of the Torah and the Deuteronomistic History, along with questions about historicity. Such questions include the gap between events and the writing of texts that mention the events and the difficulty that the Bible is “mediated by thousands of years of religious tradition.”

Smith finds both the view “that the Bible's representation of the past is historical unless shown otherwise” and the view that it is to be “given the benefit of the doubt” to

be passé (13). He agrees with Grabbe’s methodological approach, discussed above, in saying that

[f]or any given event or development, biblical evidence—like any other source about the past—is to be scrutinized for its historical reliability. For historians, confirmation or verification of any witness, wherever possible, is the preferred mode of operating. The biblical witness is considered and weighed along with archaeological evidence and extra-biblical texts after these have separately been assessed for their historical value.” (13)

Such assessment involves the difficulty that even archaeological data “are mediated by the process of archaeological preservation and discovery as well as subsequent interpretation” (13). Archaeologists disagree and argue about the number and dating of stratigraphic levels, as well as the interpretation of artifacts. Moreover,

Any description of the biblical past operates at three levels: the events themselves and their larger cultural context in the past; the texts that describe and interpret those events and that context, as well as other artifacts that reflect that context; and the modern historical inquiry that attempts to sort through the texts and other evidence in order to get at that past. . . . The sources available in the Bible are largely snapshots of the past, with later narrators superimposing their own interpretations on these older pictures. These narratives have been supplemented and interpreted by yet later narrators The large historical-looking works of the Bible contain several levels or stages of composition, and these various stages are themselves responses to different challenges (14)

The “biblical backdrop” really combines Israel’s later memories of its past with actual events and conditions of that past. (15)

In short, later crises generated new memories of Israel’s earlier periods. (18)

Similarly, in his “Preface to the Second Edition” (2002) of his *Early History of God*, seeing Joshua–Kings and Chronicles affected by “the degree to which biblical presentations of the past shape the past to conform to [then] present concerns,” Smith has his doubts about the “scope” of history in these books. He “probably would put history and collective memory in narrative forms on a spectrum” (xxviii).

Smith’s *Memoirs of God* reflects the growing literature that deals with memory in relation to history in general. Regarding memory, Barstad finds “relatively modest interest among biblical researchers for the moment,” but sees indications that there will be an “explosion in the production of [such] literature in relation to the Hebrew Bible” (“History and Memory” 1).

(Part 2.2 will continue this article with sections 4b. Select maximalist approaches, 5. The Personal and Interpersonal Element, and 6. Concluding Remarks on Part 2.)

Works Cited

- Amit, Yairah. "Looking at History through Literary Glasses Too." *Essays on Ancient Israel in Its Near Eastern Context: A Tribute to Nadav Na'aman*. Ed. Yairah Amit et al. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2006. 1–15.
- Arnold, Bill T., and H. G. M. Williamson, eds. *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Historical Books*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005.
- Assmann, Jan. *Moses the Egyptian: The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1997.
- Athas, George. 'Minimalism': *The Copenhagen School of Thought in Biblical Studies: Edited Transcript of Lecture, 3rd ed., University of Sydney, 29 Apr. 1999*. John Mark Ministries. 5 Jan. 2003. Web. 6 Aug. 2009.
- Averbeck, Richard E. "Sumer, the Bible, and Comparative Method: Historiography and Temple Building." *Mesopotamia and the Bible: Comparative Explorations*. Ed. Mark W. Chavalas and K. Lawson Younger, Jr. London: Sheffield Academic, 2002. 88–125. *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supp. Ser.* 341.
- Banks, Diane Nunn. *Writing the History of Israel*. Diss. Vanderbilt U, 2004. New York: Clark, 2006. *Lib. of Heb. Bible/Old Testament Studies* 438.
- Barr, James. *History and Ideology in the Old Testament: Biblical Studies at the End of a Millennium: The Hensley Henson Lectures for 1997 Delivered to the University of Oxford*. New York: Oxford UP, 2000.
- Barstad, Hans M. "'Bibliophobia' in Ancient Israelite Historiography." 1998. Barstad *History and the Hebrew Bible*. 39–45.
- Barstad, Hans M. "The Dating of the Israelite Tradition." 2001. Barstad *History and the Hebrew Bible*. 46–69.
- Barstad, Hans M. "History and Memory." *The Historian and the Bible: Essays in Honour of Lester L. Grabbe*. Ed. Philip R. Davies and Diana V. Edelman. New York: Clark, 2010. 1–10. *Lib. of Heb. Bible/Old Testament Studies* 530.
- Barstad, Hans M. "History and the Hebrew Bible." 1997. Barstad *History and the Hebrew Bible*. 1–24.
- Barstad, Hans M. *History and the Hebrew Bible: Studies in Ancient Israelite and Ancient Near Eastern Historiography*. Tübingen: Mohr, 2008. *Forschungen zum Alten Testament* 61.
- Barstad, Hans M. "The History of Ancient Israel: What Directions Should We Take?" Williamson *Understanding* 25–48.
- Barstad, Hans M. "Issues in the Narrative Truth Debate." 2002. Barstad *History and the Hebrew Bible*. 25–38.
- Barstad, Hans M. "Is the Hebrew Bible a Hellenistic Book?" 2002. Barstad *History and the Hebrew Bible*. 70–89.
- Bartholomew, Craig G. "Hermeneutics." Arnold and Williamson 392–407.
- Becking, Bob. "David between Ideology and Evidence." Becking and Grabbe 1–30.
- Becking, Bob. "Inscribed Seals as Evidence for Biblical Israel? Jeremiah 40.7–41.15 *par exemple*." Grabbe *Can a 'History'* 65–83.
- Becking, Bob, and Lester L. Grabbe, eds. *Between Evidence and Ideology: Essays on the History of Ancient Israel read at the Joint Meeting of the Society for Old Testament*

- Study and the Oud Testamentisch Werkgezelschap, Lincoln, July 2009.* Leiden: Brill, 2011. Oudtestamentische Studien 59.
- Brettler, Marc Zvi. "The Copenhagen School: The Historiographical Issues." *AJS Review* 27 (2003): 1–21.
- Brettler, Marc Zvi. *The Creation of History in Ancient Israel*. London: Routledge, 1995.
- Brettler, Marc Zvi. "Method in the Application of Biblical Source Material to Historical Writing (with Particular Reference to the Ninth Century BCE)." *Williamson Understanding* 305–33.
- Bright, John. *A History of Israel*. 3rd ed. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1981.
- Collingwood, R. G. *The Idea of History*. Oxford, Eng.: Oxford UP, 1946.
- Cubitt, Geoffrey. *History and Memory*. Manchester, Eng.: Manchester UP, 2007. Historical Approaches.
- Davies, Philip R. *In Search of 'Ancient Israel.'* 1992. 2nd ed. Sheffield, Eng.: Sheffield Academic, 1995. Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supp. Ser. 148.
- Davies, Philip R. *Memories of Ancient Israel: An Introduction to Biblical History—Ancient and Modern*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2008.
- Davies, Philip R. "What Separates a Minimalist from a Maximalist? Not Much." *Biblical Archaeology Review* 26, no. 2 (March/April 2000): 24–27, 72–73.
- Davis, Thomas W. *Shifting Sands: The Rise and Fall of Biblical Archaeology*. Diss. U Arizona 1987. New York: Oxford UP, 2004.
- Finkelstein, Israel. "Archaeology as a High Court in Ancient Israelite History: A Reply to Nadav Na'aman." *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* 10 (2010): article 19. DOI:10.5508/jbs.2010.v10.a19
- Finkelstein, Israel, and Amihai Mazar. *The Quest for the Historical Israel: Debating Archaeology and the History of Early Israel*. Ed. Brian B. Schmidt. Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007.
- Gossman, Lionel. "The Rationality of History." *Between History and Literature*. By Lionel Gossman. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1990. 285–324.
- Gottwald, Norman K. "Preface to the Reprint." *The Tribes of Yahweh: A Sociology of the Religion of Liberated Israel, 1250–1050 B.C.E.* 1979. Sheffield, Eng.: Sheffield Academic, 1999. xxvi–l. The Biblical Seminar 66.
- Grabbe, Lester L. *Ancient Israel: What Do We Know and How Do We Know It?* New York: Clark, 2007.
- Grabbe, Lester L. "Are Historians of Ancient Palestine Fellow Creatures—or Different Animals?" *Grabbe Can a 'History' 19–36*.
- Grabbe, Lester L., ed. *Can a 'History of Israel' Be Written?* Sheffield, Eng.: Sheffield Academic, 1997. Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supp. Ser. 245. European Seminar in Historical Methodology 1.
- Grabbe, Lester L. "'The Exile' under the Theodolite: Historiography as Triangulation." *Leading Captivity Captive: 'The Exile' as History and Ideology*. Ed. Lester L. Grabbe. Sheffield, Eng.: Sheffield Academic, 1998. 80–100. Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supp. Ser. 278. European Seminar in Historical Methodology 2.
- Grabbe, Lester L. "The Kingdom of Judah from Sennacherib's Invasion to the Fall of Jerusalem: If We Had Only the Bible . . ." *Good Kings and Bad Kings: The Kingdom*

- of Judah in the Seventh Century BCE*. 2005. Ed. Lester L. Grabbe, New York: Clark, 2007. 78–122.
- Grabbe, Lester L. *Yehud: A History of the Persian Province of Judah*. 2004. London: Clark, 2006. Vol. 1 of *A History of the Jews and Judaism in the Second Temple Period*. 2004–. Library of Second Temple Studies 47.
- Hallo, William W. *Origins: The Ancient Near Eastern Background of Some Modern Western Institutions*. Leiden: Brill, 1996. Studies in the History of the Ancient Near East 6.
- Hayes, John H. “The History of the Study of Israelite and Judaeon History: From the Renaissance to the Enlightenment.” “The Nineteenth Century.” “Current Approaches.” 1977. *Long Israel’s Past* 7–42.
- Hayes, John H., and J. Maxwell Miller, eds. *Israelite and Judaeon History*. London: SCM, 1977.
- Hendel, Ronald S. *Remembering Abraham: Culture, Memory, and History in the Hebrew Bible*. New York: Oxford UP, 2005.
- Herrmann, Siegfried. “The Devaluation of the Old Testament as a Historical Source: Notes on a Problem in the History of Ideas.” *Long Israel’s Past* 346–355.
- Hess, Richard S. “Recent Studies in Old Testament History: A Review Article.” *Themelios* 19 (1994): 9–15.
- Hoffmeier, James K. *Ancient Israel in Sinai: The Evidence for the Authenticity of the Wilderness Tradition*. New York: Oxford UP, 2005.
- Huizinga, Johan. “A Definition of the Concept of History.” *Philosophy and History: Essays Presented to Ernst Cassirer*. Edited by Raymond Klibansky and H. J. Paton. Oxford: Clarendon, 1936. 1–10.
- Hurvitz, Avi. “The Historical Quest for ‘Ancient Israel’ and the Linguistic Evidence of the Hebrew Bible: Some Methodological Observations.” *Vetus Testamentum* 47 (1997): 301–315.
- Ilgen, Karl David. *Die Urkunden des ersten Buchs von Moses in ihre Urgestalt*. Halle: Hemmerde und Schwetschke, 1798.
- Japhet, Sara. “In Search of Ancient Israel: Revisionism at All Costs.” *The Jewish Past Revisited: Reflections on Modern Jewish Historians*. Ed. David N. Myers and David B. Ruderman. New Haven: Yale UP, 1998. 212–233. Studies in Jewish Culture and Society.
- Josephus, Flavius. “Against Apion.” *Josephus: With an English Translation*. Trans. Henry St. John Thackeray. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1956. 162–411.
- Kitchen, Kenneth A. “Egyptians and Hebrews, from Ra‘amses to Jericho.” *The Origin of Early Israel—Current Debate: Biblical, Historical and Archaeological Perspectives: Irene Levi-Sala Seminar, 1997*. Ed. Shmuel A□ituv and Eliezer D. Oren. Beer-Sheva: Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, 1998. 65–131. Beer-Sheva Studies by the Department of Bible and Ancient Near East 12.
- Kitchen, Kenneth A. “The Hebrew Bible and its Critics—a Verdict from the Ancient Near East [summary of lecture].” *Bulletin of the Anglo-Israel Society* 26 (2008): 149–150.
- Kitchen, Kenneth A. *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003.

- Klein, Ralph W. Rev. of *1–2 Kings*, by Gina Hens-Piazza. *Review of Biblical Literature*. Dec. 2007. Web. 1 Dec. 2007.
- Knauf, Ernst Axel. Rev. of *Philosophy and Practice in Writing a History of Ancient Israel*, by Megan Bishop Moore. *Review of Biblical Literature*. Sept. 2007. Web. 7 Sept. 2007.
- Lemche, Niels Peter. *The Israelites in History and Tradition*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1998.
- Lemche, Niels Peter. “The Old Testament—A Hellenistic Book?” *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 7 (1993): 163–193.
- Levine, Lee I., and Amihai Mazar, eds. *ha-Pulmus □al ha-’emet ha-his□orit ba-Mi□ra* [The Controversy over the Historicity of the Bible]. Jerusalem: Yitshak Ben Tsvi: Merkaz Dinur. 2001. In Hebrew.
- Long, V. Philips. “How Reliable Are Biblical Reports? Repeating Lester Grabbe’s Comparative Experiment.” *Vetus Testamentum* 52 (2002): 367–384.
- Long, V. Philips, ed. *Israel’s Past in Present Research: Essays on Ancient Israelite Historiography*. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1999. Sources for Biblical and Theological Study 7.
- Maeir, Aren. Rev. of *Shifting Sands*, by Thomas W. Davis. *Near Eastern Archaeology* 67.4 (2004): 235–236.
- Manetho. “The Aegyptiaca of Manetho: Manetho’s History of Egypt.” *Manetho*. Trans. William G. Waddell. 1940. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1980. 1–187. Loeb Classical Library 350.
- Mathews, Danny. Rev. of *Methods for Exodus*, ed. Thomas B. Dozeman. *Review of Biblical Literature*. August 2011. Web. 16 August 2011.
- Mazar, Amihai. “The Spade and the Text: The Interaction between Archaeology and Israelite History Relating to the Tenth–Ninth Centuries BCE.” *Williamson Understanding* 143–171.
- McKenzie, Steven L. “Historiography, Old Testament.” *Arnold and Williamson* 418–425.
- Miller, J. Maxwell. “Is It Possible to Write a History of Israel without Relying on the Hebrew Bible?” *The Fabric of History: Text, Artifact, and Israel’s Past*. Ed. Diana Vikander Edelman. Sheffield, Eng.: Sheffield Academic, 1991. 93–102. *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supp. Ser.* 127.
- Miller, J. Maxwell, and John H. Hayes. *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah*. 1986. 2nd ed. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2006.
- Miller, Robert D., II. *Once More: Minimalism, Maximalism, and Objectivity*. *The Bible and Interpretation*. May 2010. Web. 29 July 2010.
- Miller, Robert D., II. “Quest of the Historical Israel.” *Arnold and Williamson* 830–837.
- Momigliano, Arnaldo. “Ancient History and the Antiquarian.” *Journal of the Warburg Institute* 13 (1950): 285–315.
- Moore, Megan Bishop. *Beyond Minimalism*. *The Bible and Interpretation*. Mar. 2010. Web. 24 May 2010.
- Moore, Megan Bishop. *Philosophy and Practice in Writing a History of Ancient Israel*. Diss. Emory U, 2004. New York: Clark, 2006. *Lib. of Heb. Bible/Old Testament Studies* 435.

- Moore, Megan Bishop. "Writing Israel's History Using the Prophetic Books." *Israel's Prophets and Israel's Past: Essays on the Relationship of Prophetic Texts and Israelite History in Honor of John H. Hayes*. Ed. Brad E. Kelle and Megan Bishop Moore. New York: Clark, 2006. 23–36. Lib. of Heb. Bible/Old Testament Studies 446.
- Moore, Megan Bishop, and Brad E. Kelle. *Biblical History and Israel's Past: A Guide to Changing Study of the Bible and History*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011.
- Mykytiuk, Lawrence J. "Strengthening Biblical Historicity vis-à-vis Minimalism, 1992–2008, Part 1: Introducing a Bibliographic Essay in Five Parts," *Journal of Religious and Theological Information* 9.3–4 (2010): 71–83.
- Na'aman, Nadav. "Does Archaeology Really Deserve the Status of a 'High Court' in Biblical Historical Research?" Becking and Grabbe 165–183.
- Nicholson, Ernest W. "Current 'Revisionism' and the Literature of the Old Testament." *In Search of Pre-Exilic Israel: Proceedings of the Oxford Old Testament Seminar*. Ed. John Day. London: Clark, 2004. 1–22. *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* Supp. Ser. 406.
- Ortiz, Stephen M. "Archaeology, Syro-Palestinian." Arnold and Williamson 60–79.
- Pasto, James. "When the End is the Beginning? Or When the Biblical Past is the Political Present: Some Thoughts on Ancient Israel, 'Post-Exilic Judaism,' and the Politics of Biblical Scholarship." *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 12 (1998): 157–202.
- Pitkänen, Pekka. "Historical Criticism." *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Wisdom, Poetry, and Writings*. Ed. Tremper Longman III and Peter Enns. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2008. 280–287.
- Rad, Gerhard von. *Old Testament Theology*. 2 vols. 1962–1965. Trans. D. M. G. Stalker. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2001.
- Richter, Sandra L. "Deuteronomistic History." Arnold and Williamson 219–230.
- Rogerson, John W. "Setting the Scene: A Brief Outline of Histories of Israel." Williamson *Understanding* 3–14.
- Ska, Jean-Louis. "Old and New Perspectives in Old Testament Research." *The Exegesis of the Pentateuch: Studies and Basic Questions*. By Jean-Louis Ska. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009. 246–266. *Forschungen zum Alten Testament* 66.
- Smith, Mark S. "Preface to the Second Edition." *The Early History of God: Yahweh and Other Deities in Ancient Israel*. 1990. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002. xii–xxxviii. The Biblical Resources Series.
- Smith, Mark S. *The Memoirs of God: History, Memory, and the Experience of the Divine in Ancient Israel*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2004.
- Thompson, Thomas L. *The Early History of the Israelite People: From the Written and Archaeological Sources*. New York: Brill, 1992. *Studies in the History of the Ancient Near East* 4.
- Thompson, Thomas L. *The Mythic Past: Biblical Archaeology and the Myth of Israel*. [= British ed.: *The Bible in History: How Writers Create a Past*.] New York: Basic Books, 1999.

- Tov, Emanuel. "Scriptures: Texts" *Encyclopedia of the Dead Sea Scrolls*. 2 vols. Ed. Lawrence H. Schiffman and James C. VanderKam. Oxford, Eng.: Oxford UP, 2000. 832–836.
- Uehlinger, Christoph. "Neither Eyewitnesses, Nor Windows to the Past, but Valuable Testimony in its Own Right: Remarks on Iconography, Source Criticism, and Ancient Data-processing." Williamson *Understanding* 173–228.
- Williamson, H. G. M. Rev. of *Philosophy and Practice in Writing a History of Ancient Israel*, by Megan Bishop Moore. *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 31.5 (2007): 53.
- Williamson, H. G. M., ed. *Understanding the History of Ancient Israel*. New York: Oxford UP, 2007. Proc. of the British Academy 143.
- Xenophon. *Anabasis*. Rev. ed. Trans. Carleton L. Brownson. Rev. John Dillery. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1998. Loeb Classical Library 90.
- Zevit, Ziony. *Religions of Ancient Israel: A Synthesis of Parallaxic Approaches*. London: Continuum, 2001.

NOTES

¹ This article is dedicated with deep gratitude to my mentor in academic librarianship, J. Mark Tucker, Dean of Library and Information Resources, Abilene Christian University, and Professor Emeritus, Purdue University.

Sincere thanks to Megan Bishop Moore, who kindly offered her comments on this article at the author's request. (This article's references to her works, which were included much earlier, suggested that her advice would be valuable.) Thanks are also due to this journal's reviewers for their helpful comments. All flaws and shortcomings in this article remain the sole responsibility of the author.

The author gratefully acknowledges Purdue University Libraries' granting him six months' sabbatical leave during 2009 to conduct research for the bibliographic essay that this series of articles comprises. This series treats works in English on the historicity of the biblical content regarding the periods preceding the return from exile soon after 539 BCE.

Because thorough review and selection is guaranteed only through 2008, publications covered from 2009 to 2011 appear in notes and in the list of works cited. They are the "Beyond" in the title.

² Mykytiuk "Strengthening Part 1" 76, which cites Rogerson "Setting the Scene" 12. A convenient classification of twenty books by seventeen authors appears in Finkelstein and Mazar *Quest* 200–201. It sorts these books into the following groupings: "Ultra-Conservative Approaches," "Conservative Approaches," "Moderate-Critical Approaches," and "Revisionist Approaches."

³ For readers who might not have read Part 1 of this series of articles, here the term *minimalism* is a convenient way to refer to radical biblical/historical minimalism, a multi-sided intellectual position which claims that *a significant amount of the Hebrew Bible which has traditionally been viewed for the most part as history has very little historical value for the period up to about 400 BCE* or even later, except for a few, scattered historical references that have archaeological support. Minimalism's other major tenet is that ancient Israel should be de-centered from its position of dominant importance and treated as just one people among many in Palestine (Moore *Philosophy* 75–76; Mykytiuk "Strengthening Part 1" 73–74).

In Part 1, the oversimplification, "The minimalist view that they [i.e., the books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the twelve minor prophets] have no historical basis in the times they purport to address" (Mykytiuk "Strengthening Part 1" 75) should be revised to read: "have almost no historical basis." Minimalism does not close off *all* possibility of historical facts appearing in Scripture.

Other positions even farther down the spectrum hold that the biblical "text should be viewed as fiction, and its possible connection with past events should be ignored" (Amit "Looking" 4). Diane Banks' conclusion regarding "reconstruction of the history of the region, state, and people" is that "[s]uch a reconstruction would have to be made without reference to the Bible. It would have to be based on studies of artifactual remains, descriptions, and documents other than the Bible . . ." (*Writing the History of Israel* 233–234).

Although minimalists differ on some issues, they are united in believing that a substantial amount of the Hebrew Bible as we know it was first written in Palestine during the Persian era (539–332 BCE) or even as late as the Hellenistic era (332–37 BCE). Such dating places the time of its initial writing several centuries to many centuries after the Scriptural time given for most events in the Hebrew Bible. On the basis of that claim, minimalists go on to claim that because of the large gap between events and composition, it cannot be historically accurate. Other reasons that minimalists have for not finding history in the Hebrew Bible are that they find it “biased, ideological, polemical, and largely removed from the actual events and circumstances of ancient Palestine” (Moore *Philosophy* 1).

Minimalists acknowledge only a few, tiny bits of genuine historical recollection in the biblical text. Their method for detecting these bits of historical data is through archaeological discoveries, a term which in some instances includes ancient inscriptions.

As the controversy has raged, the term *minimalist* has sometimes been used in a derogatory, *ad hominem* way. As a result, Lester L. Grabbe opposes the use of the labels *minimalist* and *maximalist* (*Ancient Israel* 23–25; cf. Philip R. Davies, “What Separates a Minimalist from a Maximalist? Not Much”). Despite the present author’s appreciation for Grabbe’s good intentions to promote thought and beneficial communication, these terms suit the necessity for classification in this article series, in which they are intended in a neutral way.

(On the term *maximalist*, see note 5 below.)

⁴ This series of articles should be regarded as very likely the first *bibliographic essay* published on this subject and as the first in a peer-reviewed journal. The author found nothing on which to build directly.

In order to arrive at the selection of materials in these articles, the author gathered and consulted a substantial core of essential works and extended it by means of citations in that core, as well as by subject and author searches in WorldCat and by book reviews in scholarly, online resources, such as Review of Biblical Literature. Also important were searches for articles and book reviews in the electronic editions of *Journal of Biblical Literature*, *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, *Journal of Semitic Studies* and similar journals in English.

A somewhat unconventional means of bibliographic grace has been daily notifications of publications and reviews e-mailed to the Agade listserv by the tireless Jack Sasson. On occasion, initial awareness of monographs came from Eisenbrauns, a bookseller and publisher focused on materials for scholars of the Bible and ancient Near East. The scholarly web site Bible and Interpretation was also helpful.

The author has selected those works which seem most important or distinctive. In this process, graduate-level acculturation in Hebrew Bible, Northwest Semitic philology, and theology has provided a sense of ancient and modern contexts, and also, fortunately, of uncertainties and questions.

In Part 2 of this series, the focus is on monographic literature, first because its quantity of available space in a book tends to allow for more thorough and obligatory treatment of methodology than a journal article. Second, in this subject area, there are many edited collections of essays and apparently fewer journal articles strictly on method. In other areas yet to be covered, however, such as linguistic dating of biblical texts, currently both monographic and journal literature seem required to arrive at the best coverage.

⁵ Approaches which espouse biblical historicity unless the text is proven wrong are called *maximalist*. In practice, the term *maximalism* normally indicates the taking of such an approach to the period from approximately the United Kingdom of Saul, David, and Solomon onward. Some scholars, however, take a maximalist approach to earlier periods, as well.

⁶ Over thirty of the book’s 161 articles (listed on p. 1060) press the concern for the relationship between history and the Hebrew Bible and thus relate to the present series of articles.

⁷ Some noteworthy works fall outside the time frame of this article. Jean-Louis Ska’s book chapter, “Old and New Perspectives in Old Testament Research” (2009), describes the challenges faced by Josephus in the first century and Karl David Ilgen in 1798. The description of biblical studies during Ilgen’s day sounds familiar even in the early twenty-first century.

An excellent older essay, which contains surprising parallels to the present scene, is Arnaldo Momigliano, “Ancient History and the Antiquarian” (1950). It treats intellectual history during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. “Philosophic history,” which flowed from *a priori* reasoning, originally had no use for erudition, but under attack from the extreme skepticism of historical Pyrrhonism, philosophical and other historians eventually made use of the antiquarian’s erudition and method of research. Thus, “[t]he antiquary rescued history from the skeptics, even though he did not write it” (312). If minimalism’s skeptical attitude toward biblical historicity is analogous to historical Pyrrhonism, then

published archaeological evidence, including that presented in publications treated in later articles in this series would seem analogous to the antiquaries' detailed knowledge. I thank my Purdue University Libraries colleague, E. Stewart Saunders, for pointing out this article and its relevance as a parallel.

⁸ These five essays were originally published in 1977 in the edited volume, Hayes and Miller *Israelite and Judaeon History* 1–69.

⁹ Moore summarizes Zevit's overview of paradigms and critiques it in *Philosophy* 69–74.

¹⁰ This scenario is detailed in Thomas W. Davis' dissertation, written under the direction of William G. Dever and published as *Shifting Sands: The Rise and Fall of Biblical Archaeology*. A review by Israeli archaeologist Aren Maeir assesses the positive value of Davis's book but adds that in pronouncing biblical archaeology dead, it is mistaken (Maeir 235–236). For Davis's book compared to other recent books on biblical archaeology, see the first article, Mykytiuk "Strengthening Part 1" 79–80, n. 12.

¹¹ It is revealing to compare the similar point of view but different results of Israeli historian Nadav Na'aman and minimalists. Na'aman finds the historical reliability of the Hebrew Bible to be greatly lessened by the same three factors that the minimalists blame for historical unreliability (long gaps between event and writing, literary purposes, and the intent to teach ideological lessons (Amit "Looking" 5–6). Nevertheless, Na'aman understands the intent of the biblical historians to have been to convey genuine information about the past, not to write historical fiction ("Looking" 4). Moreover, by careful pursuit of history in sources including archaeology and the biblical text, Na'aman finds substantially more history in the Hebrew Bible than minimalists do. (Within the time parameters of this article, Na'aman's writings are primarily concerned with historical questions *per se*, rather than historical methodology.)

¹² Without crediting minimalists for opening up new research possibilities, Kitchen calls for a thorough change in the way the history of the ancient Levant is written ("Hebrew Bible" 150). He advocates using the wealth of recovered ancient Near Eastern documents to set standards by which to evaluate modern theories, as well as the content of the Hebrew Bible. Without detailing method, Kitchen insists on the principle:

. . . [T]he dramatic rediscovery of the civilizations of the Ancient Near East . . . [gives] us the *real* context of the biblical writings. For 3000 years before imperial Rome, we now have entire archaeologies of those regions, and many thousands of written documents (often well dated) in over a dozen languages. These give us invaluable external, tangible standards against which to re-examine . . . theories, and the actual structure and contents of the Hebrew Bible, through its entire range . . . It is now time for change. (Kitchen "Hebrew Bible" 150)

Megan Bishop Moore's interest in the direction the field is taking has led her to focus her publications on this new area of growth. Her 2006 "Writing Israel's History Using the Prophetic Books" argues that a new kind of history of ancient Israel . . . would keep Israel as its subject but include in its purview other areas of Palestine and the ancient world. Such a history would also attempt to tie events . . . to the development of ideas and richness of expression found in the Bible and would provide a forum for integrating the Bible . . . with material culture's indications of how the ancients constructed their thought world and ethnic identity (35)

This view is more fully developed in her 2010 online essay, "Beyond Minimalism," partly based on *Biblical History and Israel's Past* (2011), coauthored with Brad E. Kelle. Moore considers "the vast amount of information we have about the past" in comparison to the relatively meager amount that finds its way into histories of ancient Israel (5–6).

If the purpose of Israel's history is broader than illumination of the historical circumstances of the grand narrative of the Bible, and history extends to illuminating such things as how an ancient culture survived in its environments, how it evolved, how it viewed itself, and how it conceived of the supernatural world, the shape of comprehensive histories of this [ancient Israelite] culture will be very different [from traditional treatments up to the present]. (6)

Ultimately, "[r]ather than sound the death knell of the discipline, then, as some feared, minimalism opened up new avenues of research for historians, many of which have immense possibility for the future" (7).

¹³ Barr *History and Ideology* 100. On Israel's continuity, see Pasto "When the End."

¹⁴ "[W]hile declaring the Hebrew Bible an unreliable source and depreciating the relevance of literary-critical research for historical investigation, these colleagues [i.e., minimalists Thomas L. Thompson, Robert B. Coote, and Keith W. Whitlam] ignore the problems and limitations of the other kinds of evidence [i.e., archaeological and inscriptional, as is clear from his preceding discussion] and the alternative

methodologies that they espouse” (J. Maxwell Miller, “Is It Possible to Write a History of Israel without Relying on the Hebrew Bible?” 100).

Miller also makes it clear that archaeology depends on the Hebrew Bible and that books by minimalists Thompson, Coote, Whitelam, and others also depend on the Hebrew Bible but do not recognize this dependence (“Is It Possible?” 95–101).

The question of supremacy of archaeological evidence has also arisen in other contexts. In a 2011 collection of essays, historian Nadav Na’aman addresses this question in “Does Archaeology Really Deserve the Status of a ‘High Court’ in Biblical Historical Research?” Archaeologist Israel Finkelstein responds in “Archaeology as a High Court in Ancient Israelite history: A Reply to Nadav Na’aman” (2010).

¹⁵ Philip R. Davies finds Thompson’s “reservation” unjustified, because of the implicit agreement of “another, presumably independent version.” The latter circumlocution from Davies could hardly refer to anything but the book of Kings in the Hebrew Bible (*Memories* 95).

¹⁶ In another example, Egyptian historian Manetho wrote his treatise *Aegyptiaca* ca. 290–260 BCE. *Aegyptiaca* has not survived, [but] it remains the basis for dynastic sequence (1–30) still used by historians today. Manetho apparently utilized earlier sources . . . [which the modern author specifies]. Sections of these lists . . . , in turn, are based on much earlier texts Thus, as many as two millennia separate Manetho from the earliest periods about which he writes. *Aegyptiaca*, however, is preserved only in quotations by Josephus, Africanus, and Eusebius, who lived 350 to 600 years after him. And the most reliable and complete version of Africanus survives in an Armenian version that dates between . . . 1065 and 1306 [CE]! Despite the great span of time, the transmissions of the texts, and their translations from original Egyptian sources to Greek, historians today take Manetho seriously and follow his dynastic system. (Hoffmeier *Ancient Israel* 17–18).

On such chronological gaps, Pitkänen summarizes Hallo *Origins* 224–228 as follows:

[D]ating considerations are not always as important as might seem at first, as any early material purporting to be historical might nevertheless not be all that reliable, and any later material might be a result of sources transmitted reliably over a long period of time, as is demonstrated by parallels elsewhere in the ancient Near East (e.g., transmission of Sumerian laments from the early second millennium to late first millennium BC). (“Historical Criticism” 286)

¹⁷ See, e.g., Tov “Scriptures: Texts” 832–836.

¹⁸ Similarly, Brettler states that Lemche (*Israelites* 130) offers “too flat a description of the Bible, ignoring its richness and variegation” (“Copenhagen School” 15).

¹⁹ Hurvitz objects:

A long-established practice in our field requires that whenever a new thesis is put forward in the scholarly literature, a review of earlier studies relevant to the issue at hand is offered as well It is to be regretted that this practice is not adopted by Davies Extensive linguistic research, conducted over more than one hundred years . . . is hardly mentioned at all. . . . This disregard of other scholars’ studies . . . is not admissible. . . . [H]e seeks to challenge the validity of some of the most fundamental principles upon which the entire historical-comparative discipline of BH [biblical Hebrew] linguistics rest. How is it possible, then, totally to ignore the views and positions of our best authorities in the field of Hebrew linguistics . . . ?” (“Historical Quest” 305–306).

²⁰ Only rarely do minimalists gather texts to test their historical veracity or cite such research by others. Vague admissions that the text may hold bits of genuine historical material at first seem to be concessive, but by failure to specify and examine such evidence, the net effect becomes *a priori* dismissive of it.

²¹ See note 11 above.

²² See more recent discussion and the references in Robert D. Miller II, *Once More: Minimalism, Maximalism, and Objectivity*, The Bible and Interpretation, May 2010.

²³ Barr observes that much postmodern thought is hostile to the notion of objectivity and uses it to stigmatize what it does not like. He argues for accepting objectivity in some degree (Barr *History and Ideology* 35–36, 40, 50). He also points out that objectivity is precisely the remedy *du jour* for the conflicts occasioned by the minimalist controversy: “[I]f there is a perfect method, if there is a method which can uniquely eliminate all ideology, bias, and presupposition, how does that method differ from objectivity? In fact, it is the very same thing” (71).

Marc Z. Brettler, after discussing “beyond a reasonable doubt” and “the preponderance of evidence” as different criteria for convictions in courtroom proceedings, closes his *The Creation of History in Ancient Israel* with the following:

Much of this discussion might seem to depend on the central issue of whether historical objectivity is possible. I am most disposed to the recent position advocated in Lionel Gossman’s essay, “The Rationality of History” Gossman now argues that history cannot be objective in the sense of “ontologically founded,” but can be “something like rationally justifiable or defensible, not arbitrary, open to criticism. We cannot, according to this position, be certain that we have recreated the actual past, but at the same time, the past is not totally unrecoverable, and we can bring rational arguments that support or topple particular historical restorations. (143–144)²⁴ “Are Historians” finds needed correction in V. Philips Long’s “How Reliable Are Biblical Reports? Repeating Lester Grabbe’s Comparative Experiment.”

²⁵ Christoph Uehlinger treats a very frequently overlooked source of historical data in his “Neither Eyewitnesses, Nor Windows to the Past, but Valuable Testimony in its Own Right: Remarks on Iconography, Source Criticism, and Ancient Data-processing” (2007).

²⁶ On Provan’s arguments, see the next article, Part 2.2.

²⁷ Barr refers only to the event, not to the details in the text, therefore this statement is not necessarily maximalist.

²⁸ In Huizinga’s definition, “History is the intellectual form in which a civilization renders account to itself of its past” (“A Definition of the Concept of History” 5), Becking finds the term “a civilization” to be ambiguous. It could mean ancient Israel, or it could mean European civilization, whose foundations include a “Jewish part” (66).

²⁹ Beyond the time parameters for inclusion in this article, Becking’s “David between Ideology and Evidence” (2011) both echoes some of the methodological points above but also goes on to treat other aspects of “The Problem of Historiography” (3–8). Among these other aspects, perhaps his broadest normative statement is:

In sum, history writing means the construction of the past. This construction, however, is not free to take just any desired form, since it is bound by the existing evidence and needs to take account of as many traces [of the past] as possible. History writing is a *narration* that has the status of a hypothesis. This is my view (“David between”4)

Becking’s essay also treats three traditional theories of truth: the correspondence, coherence, and pragmatic theories. He considers another scholar’s approach to be

a pragmatic choice for two reasons. (1) When there is no other evidence the historian must work with the available sources even when it is clear that they are late and biased. (2) The propositions in the Book of Samuel on the acts of David especially when sifted by the process of interpretation are haphazard, contested and unconnected data: [punctuation: *sic*] The historian is in need of some more general framework within which the ‘data’ can have their pragmatic function. (“David between”6)

This same essay goes on to treat “The Idea of Narrativism,” which “consciously selects and connects ‘events’ from the past into a narrative” (6) and which demands both “internal consistency and evidence relatedness” (6). The essay’s last methodological section is “History Writing as Re-enactment based on Evidence,” which in application to the history of David calls for discussion of “five dimensions”: “1. Landscape; 2. Climate; 3. Archaeology; 4. Epigraphy, 5. Hebrew Bible” (8). This essay arrives at a list of briefly stated “elements” (29–30) that can be integrated into a story of David. The historically grounded use of the word “story” in this section finds affirmation in Ralph Klein’s statement about another author’s opposite use of the term “story”: “While the author contends that ‘story’ rather than ‘history’ is the operative genre in the books of Kings . . . , I doubt if one can really understand that story if one brackets out what we no[w] know today about the biblical world” (Rev. of *1–2 Kings* by Gina Hens-Piazza 2).

³⁰ Besides works in English, Mazar’s interest in questions regarding biblical historicity led him to join Lee I. Levine (in Hebrew, his name appears as the equivalent of Israel L. Levine) in co-editing a volume of essays in Hebrew titled *ha-Pulmus al ha-’emet ha-hisorit ba-Miḳra* [*The Controversy over the Historicity of the Bible*] (2001). It presents fifteen scholarly essays, all in Hebrew.

³¹ Mazar describes these categories of ancient sources in greater detail in Finkelstein and Mazar *Quest for the Historical Israel* 29–30. In this book, his views specifically on biblical historicity appear in 28–31.

³² Some of the content of the essays in this title is harnessed for a different, unifying goal in Barstad's "The History of Ancient Israel: What Directions Should We Take?" (2007).

³³ Davies *Memories of Ancient Israel* (2008) argues for adoption of the same approach in a chapter titled "Cultural Memory" (105–123), following a few years after the publication of the book by Hendel (2005) and another by Mark S. Smith (2004, treated in the next section below).

³⁴ In his 2010 article, "History and Memory: Some Reflections on the 'Memory Debate' in Relation to the Hebrew Bible," Barstad observes,

When dealing with "memory" in the Hebrew Bible, history, in one form or another, lurks always in the background. The apparently most important question, however, is whether "history" can, or should be replaced by "memory." Davies, too, when referring to Assmann, seems to want to replace "history" with "memory" (Davies 2008 [*Memories of Ancient Israel*], 106, 113, 122). However, that history cannot be separated from memory when dealing with texts from the past is (indirectly) demonstrated by Davies, whose book is full of historiographical reflections (Davies 2008). ("History and Memory" 1–2)

Barstad then ventures to define history in the context of memory as "an attempt to get access to past memory subsequent to the occurrence of the historical event" (8). His meaning will resonate well with those who have a positivistic bent when he states, "If we want to retain the term 'history' at all, we cannot refrain from discussing whether or not past events are 'true' in a positivistic sense" (8). He closes with a credo:

It is my strong conviction that to give up the history project altogether represents a kind of reductionism that is dangerous to the quality of our scholarly work. History and memory belong together and cannot be separated. It is the task of each and every scholar who wants to engage in memory studies to attempt to work out possible relations between the two. ("History and Memory" 8)