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

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Strengthening Biblical Historicity vis-à-vis Minimalism, 1992–2008 and Beyond. Part 2.3: Some Commonalities in Approaches to Writing Ancient Israel’s History

LAWRENCE J. MYKYTIUK
Purdue University Libraries HSSE, West Lafayette, Indiana, USA

This series of articles covers scholarly works in English which can, at least potentially, be associated with a generally positive view of biblical historicity regarding periods preceding the Israelites’ return from exile. Part 2 covers works that treat the methodological issues at the center of the maximalist–minimalist debate. Parts 2.1 and 2.2 selectively survey the works of 24 non-minimalist scholars during two decades. In the absence of consensus, this article analyzes the works in Parts 2.1 and 2.2, tracing elements of approach that are held in common, at least among pluralities of non-minimalists (possible majorities are not noted). The first commonality of approach is that history is provisional, not final. The second is that history should become fully multidisciplinary. The third commonality is that historians should receive all historical evidence on an equal footing before examination and cross-examination. The fourth and last is that historians should become increasingly sensitive to cultural aspects and coding in ancient Near Eastern materials. Parts 3–5 will cover select works on evidences.

KEYWORDS biblical historicity, historical methodology, historical reliability of the Bible, history of Israel, non-minimalists

What does a man get for all the toil and anxious striving with which he labors under the sun?—Ecclesiastes 2:22
This article and the two longer articles that preceded it attempt to answer the question: *What is the profit* to be gained from over two decades of intense scholarly effort focused on method since 1992? Specifically, the present article gathers points from Parts 2.1 and 2.2 that have the support of pluralities of scholars and presents them in organized fashion, with a few brief comments. The intent is to make possible an analytical grasp of much of these two previous, long articles in this series. The hope is that it might facilitate reflection and aid in formulating methodology to help achieve optimal writing of the history of ancient Israel and her neighbors.

The two immediately preceding articles in this series, Mykytiuk *Strengthening Part 2.1* and *Strengthening Part 2.2*, comprise a selective survey of the approaches of 24 scholars since 1992. In the absence of a consensus among historians of ancient Israel and her neighbors, this article seeks commonalities among 24 approaches. Although this article was not part of the original plan envisioned in Part 1 of this series, it falls into exactly the right place in the orderly sequence.

Criteria used to select the 24 scholars are that they are (1) non-minimalists for whom (2) there is a live possibility that much of the Hebrew Bible may contain valid historical data and (3) they have written significantly in a relevant area.

Immediately below, “Where treated in this series” is intended to be a help, because the discussion following simply lists these scholars by their last names. *It is much easier to find the points referred to via the endnotes or by using the “Where treated” column than by using the bibliography.*

The 24 select scholars, whom one may whimsically call “the four and twenty elders,” are as follows. Views of several other scholars are also included where there is commonality or if a salient point seems to deserve mention.

Inevitably, some important views held by worthy scholars, including the select 24, are not included. Rather, this article tracks some elements of approach that are held in common. The common elements are usually found in the parameters within which the approaches operate. The shared aspect promotes credibility and conciseness.

The main question is: What potential lessons in methodology are available for harvest, potential development, and use?

**Regarding standards:**

1. History is provisional, not final. It must be rigorous, yet it has a place for imagination.

- “All reconstructions are provisional” states Grabbe, encapsulating similar views from Hayes and Miller, Brettler, Becking, Frendo, et al. Moore stresses that writing history with the awareness that it is provisional does
not imply any reduction of scholarly rigor.10 The “story” must be historically
grounded (Becking; Klein),11 yet the art of history has a place for imag-
ination (Becking; Vaughn).12 Historical reconstruction is partly subjective
(Becking; Frendo),13 so the goal of dialogue is “intersubjective knowledge
of the past,” as Becking phrases it.14

“Provisional” includes letting unknowns be unknowns, without com-
mmitting the reductive error, since absence of evidence is not evidence of
absence. In the lacunae created by unknowns, there is room for imaginative
analogies and perhaps partly grounded scenarios. For example, presumably
in the gap between event and biblical text, A. Mazar and H. G. M. Williamson
posited that temple and palace archives provided source material for the writ-
ing of the history of Israel (Mazar suggested the late monarchic period and
Williamson the time of the United Monarchy).15 Since both the existence
of such libraries and/or archives and their use in writing some of Israel’s
history of Israel are plausible hypotheses, one cannot reasonably disallow
such hypotheses on the grounds that extrabiblical evidence is lacking.
Regarding evidence and archaeology:\(^{16}\)

1. History should become fully multidisciplinary.

Favoring new multidisciplinary breadth in writing history:

- Scholars should attempt a far more comprehensive, demanding, multidisciplinary way of studying ancient Israel’s history than previously attempted, as urged by Hess, Kitchen, and Moore (earlier, Thompson *Early History* had included climate as a factor).\(^{17}\)

**Comment:** An integrated team approach by many coauthors is far more common in the sciences than in the humanities, where the sole-author publication reigns supreme. The closest we humanists usually come is the edited volume of collected, sole-author essays. Can such an academic subculture come to accommodate a truly integrated, team approach?

Conceivably, a more difficult pitfall in multidisciplinary work is the variety of assumptions, methods, and kinds of data involved. Integrated studies should show awareness of real and potential interdisciplinary clashes, whether obvious or subtle, and whether these are harmful or might be used to gain certain advantages.

- A multidisciplinary approach that includes archaeology, epigraphy, sociology, anthropology, etc. implies that the Bible has a referential dimension. This dimension is essential to any biblical claim to historical truth. Part of the contribution of Bartholomew, as well as Kofoed, Andrew P. Norman, and Hoffmeier, is explicit treatment of the referential dimension, whereas many others assume it implicitly.\(^{18}\)

- That the referential dimension necessarily involves present-day theological issues in interpretation is an understanding (possibly a conviction) held by Vaughn, Bartholomew, Meir Sternberg, Becking, et al.\(^{19}\) As Vaughn expressed it, to “jettison history and archaeology” runs “the risk of reducing God to a psychological or rhetorical concept.”\(^{20}\)

- The referential dimension of the Bible, in turn, opens the question of whether meaning is intrinsic in events or in historians’ emplotment. Kofoed and Norman insist, contra Hayden White, that meaning is intrinsic in events.\(^{21}\) Long implies the referential dimension, a constraining factor, by stating that “the task of the historian is to recognize the past’s contours and meaningfully connected features and to represent them in a verbal medium. . . . the historian’s creativity is constrained by the actualities of the subject.”\(^{22}\) R. D. Miller found that White and others “draw attention to a real past that constrains our reconstructions” and that “the aim of research is to gain knowledge that ‘constrains,’” while he seeks to avoid, along with
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“Rankean empiricism,” “naïve Biblicism,” etc., “a postmodernist scepticism about the approachability to any external reality.”

1. Historians should examine and cross-examine all historical evidence on an equal footing.

- Regarding examination and cross-examination, it is methodologically valid to treat biblical data according to the jurisprudence analogy or forensic model (R. D. Miller, Long, Grabbe, Becking). Equal footing includes such things as both la longue durée and relatively brief catalysts that seem to have precipitated change (see below), as well as both archaeological and biblical data. Note also the relevance of Na’aman’s and Finkelstein’s disagreement on the question of whether archaeology should be the “high court” in biblical historical research. If all evidence is received on an equal footing, and evidence is evaluated on a case-to-case basis, is there one area of study that should be the high court?

Favoring inclusion of la longue durée, yet in a balanced way that includes catalysts:

- La longue durée, according to Grabbe, must not be ignored. Williamson found that archaeology is best suited for revealing information about la longue durée but that archaeology sometimes does not indicate catalysts (a set of circumstances, a group, or a specific individual) that precipitate change. Kofoed also sought balance between la longue durée and catalysts; R. D. Miller noted rejection of the loss of importance of the individual in history via Braudel’s three-tier model, even from quarters usually associated with collectivism; and Provan, Long, and Longman protested similar minimalist misuse of that model.

Favoring the limitation to use historical evidence to answer historical questions rather than allow present-day theological issues affect outcomes:

- Historical questions are to be settled on historical grounds, using historical methods, without attempting to employ current theological doctrines to which the researcher subscribes or a scholar’s religious convictions to make a historical argument (Grabbe; Kitchen). Moore sought objectivity as a regulative ideal, eschewing both faith-based epistemology and epistemology based on scepticism. Likewise, for Barr and Barstad, the absence of extrabiblical information to confirm a biblical assertion or reference is not an adequate reason to doubt it, any more than that one should doubt the countless non-biblical documents that lack support in other ancient documents. R. D. Miller II warned against rejecting the narrative history of the Hebrew Bible as a potential starting-point. For each episode or
event, all data are to be judged on a case-by-case basis, with no default position favoring or rejecting Scripture (Grabbe; Mazar; Smith; Williamson33).163

Comment: With no default position, thus no a priori acceptance, rejection, favoring, or suspicion of biblical texts, those who follow this approach espouse methodological avoidance of both maximalism and minimalism. (This point involves the simple recognition that not all non-minimalists are maximalists.)

It might be seen as a potential difficulty that ancient theology is an integral part of the historical evidence that must be analyzed. The following observation serves as an example: “The ‘theology’ of the composition was simply treated as an essential part of their true ‘history’ (in the sense of historically accurate ‘history writing’)” (Averbeck).34

It would seem helpful, if perhaps not a complete solution, to distinguish between ancient and modern theology. Ancient theology comes as part and parcel of the culture of ancient sources and must be respected as such (see point 4 below on ancient Near Eastern culture). Ancient theological views affected the behavior of people in many areas of life, not least by divinely sanctioned imperatives and prohibitions. If, for example, a deity was understood to have authorized the rule of a particular monarch, then that monarch was normally in a much stronger position than otherwise. Present-day theology, on the other hand, can affect the present-day scholar’s view of the text and might interfere with objectivity in approach.

Favoring, in addition to consideration of archaeological evidence, consideration of biblical evidence—but only that which is historical in nature, and plainly so, not that which is based on current theology:

1. One must be very careful about placing methodological limits on what may be admitted as evidence to be considered. Instead of excluding biblical data (e.g., Banks Writing the History), biblical materials should be included for consideration (Athas35 and all 24 authors listed above who are treated in Mykytiuk Strengthening Part 2.1 and Strengthening Part 2.2), though one holds that a case must still make a case for using these data (Grabbe).36 A biblical text must neither be accepted nor rejected because it is part of a religious and theological collection (Grabbe; Barr37), nor because it has a literary aspect (Barr; Kofoed; Millard38).

Comment: In effect, current theological doctrines (e.g., John Goldingay “acknowledges the theological imperative toward a maximalist position“39) may be permitted to hold open for consideration some historical options that might otherwise have been excluded a priori by views that may be too narrow. Nevertheless, such held-open options are to be explored using historical methods and evidences, which are essentially separate from modern theological and religious beliefs (Grabbe; Kitchen40).
Favoring, specifically, considering biblical data on an equal footing with other historical evidence:

1. Historical data in the Bible are to be received on an equal footing with other historical evidence before being similarly subjected to examination and cross-examination. Halpern argued effectively, for example, that data in the book of Kings fit well with contemporaneous extrabiblical data and should be used to write the history of the period.41 Barr, Barstad, Provan, Long, and Frendo each made a case that the Bible’s ideological aspect, literary forms, and/or religious bias do not lessen its historical value and that it is not to be treated with greater scepticism than any other source of data.42 Therefore, it should not be subjected to a methodology that requires it to validate itself according to an external standard, such as archaeological conclusions, before it even receives a hearing (Provan,43 representing a view generally held by maximalists and some “neither–nors”). One may say that the Bible is not to be treated as guilty until proven innocent.

1. Historians should become increasingly sensitive to cultural aspects and coding in ancient Near Eastern materials.

- Hoffmeier and Ziony Zevit44 (and indeed, Mircea Eliade45) have a clear philosophical preference for a phenomenological approach. The salient message of Hoffmeier’s six main points describing it46 seems to be that its great virtue is to allow maximum freedom for cultural difference in the context of history, without interference from methodology or from the world view of the modern researcher.

Favoring oral and ritual tradition as transmitters of historical data:

- Kofoed leaned on Blenkinsopp regarding modern analogies47 In working with ancient Hebrew culture, Kofoed pointed out, historians should take into account oral, ritual, and artifactual transmission of the “central thrust” of cultural memory.48

Favoring simultaneous oral and textual traditions:

- Kofoed also understood the Hebrew Bible to be partly based on oral and textual traditions that potentially continued side by side for long time periods. He relied on “a commonplace in contemporary Old Testament research” to support “a prolonged oral transmission … in pre-exilic Israel.”49 Going farther in that direction, Carr, whose work is treated in the Appendix, offers empirical evidence for text-supported memory as an important factor in Israelite scribal practice, along with the apparent results:
diminished modern ability to trace the history of textual transmission and
to date texts linguistically.

Favoring the inclusion of historical origins of biblical texts in literary
treatments:

• Long and Kofoed argued against purely literary treatments of historical
texts, finding that purely literary views ignore crucial questions about the
original understanding of oral and/or written traditions and, as a result,
misread them. “[T]o argue that the historical information present in …
a literary innovation must be considered a literary invention is a non
sequitur.”

History vis-à-vis cultural memory: replacement or coexistence?

• Barstad foresaw the collapse of modernism in scholarship, including the
Annales’ “total history” and minimalism, to be followed by “a drastically
less scientific form of history in the realm of culture.” Other scholars who
work in the area of cultural memory, however, do not forecast a cata-
clysmic shift but imply coexistence, with perhaps more treatments of the
biblical text as cultural memory. Hendel saw cultural memory as a branch
of history, namely, “reception theory applied to history,” capable of reach-
ing historical conclusions about traditions. M. S. Smith finds that “biblical
presentations of the past shape the past to conform to [then] present con-
cerns.” This understanding, which seems to approach the biblical text as
a branch of history, evidently agrees with Hen-
del and also with Barstad’s view that the biblical prophets’ focus was on
preaching, not so much on what actually happened.

Favoring the use of ancient historiographic conventions to understand
history:

• In accord with Bartholomew’s favorable remarks on attempting to discern
ancient conventions in historiographic patterns in early writings of other
ancient Near Eastern cultures, a short essay by Averbeck illustrated the
use of Sumerian formal conventions to narrate the building of a temple. He
observed, “The ancients … did not see this as ‘fiction.’” Barstad made a
similar observation about culturally determined, stereotypical literary pat-
terns. Still, he feels that they can keep us from recovering “what really
happened.” Valuable primary-source resources on ancient Near Eastern
cultures include Sparks’s Ancient Texts.
CONCLUSION

Each of the above four commonalities of approach among some non-minimalists is a call for change. Because history is provisional, not final, it has a built-in restlessness that ever seeks more data, better understanding, and better, more complete, syntheses. The means by which these are generated may include new discoveries, refusing to harmonize sharp disagreements and tensions, and gathering data more broadly, perhaps in meticulous detail, as exemplified in Carr (*Formation*). To be satisfied with traditional views, regardless of intellectual, academic, religious, or theological persuasion, is to diminish historical research and to move in the direction of the death of history.

Because history should become fully multidisciplinary, scholars of the humanities should both expand their research horizons to realize the need for other disciplines in the effort and, as may be needed, should learn to work as contributing members of research teams.

Because historians should receive all historical evidence on an equal footing before examination and cross-examination, maximalist scholars should expect that even after biblical evidence is no longer subjected to verification before being heard, in the analyses of “neither–nor” scholars (neither maximalist nor minimalist), it will often experience “rough-and-tumble” cross-examination along with other kinds of evidence, to which they may wish to respond.

Because historians should become increasingly sensitive to cultural aspects and coding in ancient Near Eastern materials, expertise in cultural anthropology and cross-cultural studies should be prized and increasingly applied to the interpretation of artifacts, and ancient Near Eastern texts, whether epigraphic or biblical.

ADDENDA TO PART 2.2

In Mykytiuk *Strengthening Part 2.2* (121–122), the following should be added in chronological order to the list of “Edited Volumes of Essays That Are Maximalist to Largely ‘Positive’ toward the Bible”:


Accordingly, the following bibliographic entries are to be inserted on pp. 148 and 149, respectively, of Mykytiuk *Strengthening Part 2.2*:


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NOTES

1. The year 1992 was chosen, because during that year, two books brought major changes to biblical studies and to the study of ancient Israel’s history: Thompson’s Early History and Davies’s In Search.

2. Rev 4:4, 10; 5:8; 11:16; and 19:4.

3. Here I take the liberty of listing an important non-minimalist not covered in Parts 2.2 and 2.3: David M. Carr. Appended to this article is a summary of Carr’s approach in his book, The Formation of the Hebrew Bible: A New Reconstruction (2011). Carr is substituted for Israel Finkelstein, because the limited coverage of only two of Finkelstein’s minor publications in Mykytiuk Strengthening Part 2.2 (143–144 n. 2) does not add to the list of commonalities, whereas coverage of Carr’s book does.

4. Treatment in an endnote merely signifies that the select works treated were published after 2008, hence covered in the ‘beyond’ of the article title (except for A. Mazar).

5. Mykytiuk Strengthening Part 2.2 (143–144 n. 2), paragraph in parentheses.

6. Treatment in an endnote merely signifies that the select works treated, published after 2008, were covered in the ‘beyond’ of the article title (except for A. Mazar).


9. Hayes and Miller (82); Brettler (16); Becking (68), quoted in Mykytiuk Strengthening Part 2.1 (109, 121, respectively). Frendo (99–100), quoted in Mykytiuk Strengthening Part 2.2 (142 n. 2).


11. Becking (68–69) and Ralph W. Klein’s review of 1–2 Kings by Gina Hens-Piazza (2), both quoted in Mykytiuk Strengthening Part 2.1 (121–122, 132 n. 29, respectively).

12. Becking (68), described in Mykytiuk Strengthening Part 2.1 (121); Vaughn (414), quoted in Mykytiuk Strengthening Part 2.2 (115–116).


15. These two hypotheses relate to the gap between event and writing/editing favoring intermediate sources of historical data mentioned in Mykytiuk Strengthening 2.1 (110–111). Mazar reasonably asserted that at least a kernel of important ancient evidence may exist in a given biblical text, despite a lengthy chronological gap between the time to which the text purports to refer and the time of writing and/or editing. ‘Late monarchic authors and redactors used early materials, such as temple and palace libraries and archives’ (A. Mazar Spade and the Text 144, quoted in Mykytiuk Strengthening 2.1 123).

16. Williamson made a case for archival sources during the united monarchy and for that period as the most appropriate time for the growth of a strictly political history of Israel. Israel’s national consciousness
looked back from the standpoint of the monarchy (Williamson 148–149, described in Mykytiuk Strengthening Part 2.2 119). On the likelihood that such archives or libraries existed in the Hebrew kingdoms and on their possible role in relation to the Hebrew Bible, cf., du Toit, Lowisch, review of du Toit Textual Memory.

17. Hess (14–15), quoted in Mykytiuk Strengthening Part 2.1 (106–107). Kitchen (Hebrew Bible 150) and Moore (Writing 35); Moore (Beyond 5–6, 7) are both quoted in Mykytiuk Strengthening Part 2.1 (130 n. 12). Thompson (Early History 215–221).
18. Bartholomew (404), quoted in Mykytiuk Strengthening Part 2.2 (120). Køfoed (29), quoted Hirsch (70), in turn quoted in Mykytiuk Strengthening Part 2.2 (129). Norman (119–135), described and quoted in Køfoed (13–15); Hoffmeier (22, point 3), described or quoted in Mykytiuk Strengthening Part 2.2 (124, 139, respectively).
19. Killebrew and Vaughn (10); Vaughn (412–416), described in Mykytiuk Strengthening Part 2.2 (115); Bartholomew (404), quoted in Mykytiuk Strengthening Part 2.2 (120); Sternberg (320), described in Mykytiuk Strengthening Part 2.2 (120–121). By apparently espousing Collingwood's view of realism, Becking implies a similar point of view in his Inscribed Seals (67), quoted in Mykytiuk Strengthening Part 2.1 (121).
20. Vaughn (413, 414), quoted in Mykytiuk Strengthening Part 2.2 (115).
22. Long (Narrative and History 84), quoted in Mykytiuk Strengthening Part 2.2 (137).
23. R. D. Miller (157, 160), quoted in Mykytiuk Strengthening Part 2.2 (117, 118, respectively).
24. R. D. Miller (158), quoted in Mykytiuk Strengthening Part 2.2 (118); Long (Israel's Past 581–582), cited by Mykytiuk Strengthening Part 2.2 (118); Grabbe (Are Historians 193); Becking clearly implied cross-examination in discussions among scholars in his Inscribed Seals (68), quoted in Mykytiuk Strengthening Part 2.2 (121–122).
25. Briefly discussed in Mykytiuk Strengthening Part 2.2 (143–144 n. 2).
29. Grabbe (Ancient Israel 36), quoted in Mykytiuk Strengthening Part 2.1 (119, point 6); Kitchen (On the Reliability 3) is quoted in Bartholomew (404), which in turn is quoted in Mykytiuk Strengthening Part 2.2 (120).
31. Barr (79), quoted in Mykytiuk Strengthening Part 2.1 (120–121); similar but only implicit regarding extrabiblical verification is Barstad (Bibliobobia, in its version as chapter 3 of History and the Hebrew Bible, 39, 45), quoted in Mykytiuk Strengthening Part 2.1 (124–125).
32. R. D. Miller (159–160), quoted in Mykytiuk Strengthening Part 2.2 (118).
33. Grabbe (Are Historians 35; The Exile 97; Ancient Israel 36), quoted in Mykytiuk Strengthening Part 2.1 (118, 118–119, 119; the second point 4 plus point 6, respectively). A. Mazur (The Spade and the Text, a chapter in Williamson Understanding, 144) and M. S. Smith (Memories of God 13), both quoted in Mykytiuk Strengthening Part 2.1 (125, 125, respectively). Williamson (145), quoted in Mykytiuk Strengthening Part 2.2 (118), finds that the evidence will not support any “blanket” view, whether dismissal or acceptance “at face value” but still accepts that the Bible has “an historical bedrock.”
34. Averbeck (109).
35. Athas (14), quoted in Mykytiuk Strengthening Part 2.1 (106).
36. Grabbe (Are Historians 35), quoted in Mykytiuk Strengthening Part 2.1 (118, point 3).
37. Grabbe (The Exile 97) and Barr (82), both of which are quoted or described in Mykytiuk Strengthening Part 2.1 (118–119, point 3, and 120, respectively).
38. Barr (83–84), described in Mykytiuk Strengthening Part 2.1 (120). Køfoed (29) and Millard (37–64), described in Køfoed (29, 29 n. 82), both of which are quoted in or cited by Mykytiuk Strengthening Part 2.2 (125, 146 n. 24, respectively).
39. Goldingay (405), quoted in Mykytiuk Strengthening Part 2.2 (120).
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41. Halpern (546–565), described in Mykytiuk Strengthening Part 2.2 (117).

42. Barr (82, 83–84) and Barstad (History and the Hebrew Bible, in its version as chapter 1 in History and the Hebrew Bible, 20, 21, 23), both of which are quoted in Mykytiuk Strengthening Part 2.1 (120, 124, respectively). Provan (Ideologies 588, 605), Long (Biblical History 75, 76, 81), and Frendo (102), all three quoted or described in Mykytiuk Strengthening Part 2.2 (132, 137, 142 n. 2, respectively).

43. Provan (Ideologies 601–602; In the Stable 301) and Biblical History (54, 55, 56, 73, 74) are all three quoted or described in Mykytiuk Strengthening Part 2.2 (132, 134, 135, respectively).

44. Zevit (23 n. 19, 24–27).

45. For example, “Our sole aim has been a summary phenomenological analysis of these periodic purification rites…” (Eliade Myth 73); see also his Phenomenology.

46. Hoffman (32–33), quoted in Mykytiuk Strengthening Part 2.2 (141).

47. Blenkinsopp (77–78), quoted in Kofod (78), which in turn is quoted without any direct quotation from Blenkinsopp in Mykytiuk Strengthening Part 2.2 (127).

48. Kofod (77, 88), quoted in Mykytiuk Strengthening Part 2.2 (126, 128, respectively).

49. See note 46.

50. Kofod (29), emphasis his, quoted in Mykytiuk Strengthening Part 2.2 (125).

51. Barstad (History and the Hebrew Bible, in its version as chapter 1 in his History and the Hebrew Bible, 12), quoted in Mykytiuk Strengthening Part 2.1 (124).

52. Hendel (58), quoting Assmann (8–9), in turn quoted in Mykytiuk Strengthening Part 2.1 (126).


55. Barstad (History and the Hebrew Bible, in its version as chapter 1 in his History and the Hebrew Bible, 20), quoted in Mykytiuk Strengthening Part 2.1 (124).

56. Averbeck (109), quoted in Mykytiuk Strengthening Part 2.2 (131).

57. Barstad (History and the Hebrew Bible, in its version as chapter 1 in his History and the Hebrew Bible, 20), quoted in Mykytiuk Strengthening Part 2.1 (124).

58. For example Grabbe (Are Historians), to which Long responded in his How Reliable, both treated in Mykytiuk Strengthening Part 2.2 (137–138).

59. Portions of this summary rely on Erisman’s review of Carr (Formation 1–2). All errors and shortcomings, however, are the present author’s responsibility.

60. For example, as George Foote Moore pointed out, P passages are clearly discernable in the Pentateuch, as are texts from the Gospel of John in the Diatessaron (Carr Formation 109). “Nevertheless,… a return to the clarity and simplicity of the documentary hypothesis is no longer possible,” because the portion of it “relating to the identification of cross-Pentateuchal ‘J’ and ‘E’ sources (even aside from questions of dating them) has proven multiply flawed” (110).

61. Rollston (44).


63. Rather than attempting to gather knowledge from many peoples, the kingdom’s scribal production would have focused on its own heritage; cf., del Toit (138–155, especially 154–155) regarding the model of relatively small, truly national libraries at Sippar and Ebla, rather than the model of “universal” libraries of Ashurbanipal and at Alexandria.

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573 ———. See also under Finkelstein, Israel.
575 Miller, J. Maxwell. See also under Hayes, John H.


Amid the disparate variety of current approaches to study of the Hebrew Bible, Carr analyzed and built on an inescapable pair of elements that contributed to its formation. He set these forth as a modest, stabilizing factor in which scholars can ground their studies. These elements are oral tradition accompanying textual transmission by “scribes/priests/scholars” (Carr 6; cf., Koford 59–60, 83, 88). More specifically, he described the “writing-supported process of memorization” (5). “As I argued in a prior book, Writing on the Tablet of the Heart: Origins of Scripture and Literature, the texts of the Hebrew Bible, like those of many better-documented cultures surrounding it [viz., Egyptian, Greek, and Mesopotamian], were formed in an oral-written context where the masters of literary tradition used texts to memorize certain traditions seen as particularly ancient, holy, and divinely inspired” (Carr Formation 4). The documented ancient Near Eastern phenomenon of memory supported by written texts effectively puts an end to the 20th-century notion that oral transmission was chronologically succeeded by written transmission.

The process was oriented toward oral presentation of the written Torah “and adaptation of it for a community or sub-community” (5). Carr sought to ascertain “how, when, and why scribes in ancient Israel innovated in their written performance of the sacred tradition for their communities, and when and why they moved toward more strict conservation”—two impulses that were often at odds with each other (6–7).

Although it is impossible for a short summary on methodology to do justice to the numerous thoroughgoing, reflective portions of Formation, one can at least describe its three parts and give some indications of its importance and implications for biblical historicity. Part 1 of Mykytiuk documents “the fact that ancient scribes significantly revised the texts that they transmitted and the reality that this process of revision—often by way of
memory—often was too fluid to reconstruct in detail” (7). In support of this proposition, a major strength of Carr’s work is its empirical grounding of scribal practices. He presents many textual examples, whether finely analyzed or simply mentioned. These include differing versions of the Gilgamesh epic, the rewritten Bible of second-Temple times, and the ancient versions. He finds graphic variants (e.g., haplography), aural variants, and, most significantly, memory variants (e.g., use of synonymous words or phrases or similar biblical texts). He avoids the term oral, because memory variants are supported by relatively stable texts, whereas orality is much more fluid and cannot be traced in detail. Internal biblical revisions involve such processes as combining texts, expanding them, preserving only parts of them, and harmonizing them. Thus, vocabulary and style of writing are rendered unreliable indicators of particular sources, and updates in terminology similarly make certain language indications unclear. The results are that (1) linguistic dating is rendered much less reliable and (2) sources, though traceable in some instances, are not as thoroughly traceable as scholars have assumed. It remains true that in cases where a fixed set of distinctive traits appear together in a particular portion of text, they can clearly indicate a particular source (109). The overall result, however, is that our present-day ability to reconstruct transmission history is much more limited than previously thought.

Part 2 of Carr’s book gives a period-by-period, general description of scribal activity and the writing of books of the Hebrew Bible and, as relevant, apocryphal or deuterocanonical books. Reverse chronological order works advantageously, beginning with much documented data to provide a firm start, whereas less plentiful data from earlier periods require a more tentative approach and greater qualification of results. The Hasmonean period involved “emergent standardization of the Hebrew Bible, both in scope and (textual) form” (153). Treating the books of Esther and Daniel as products of the Hellenistic era, Carr found the use of an earlier form of Hebrew to be an archaizing technique. He assigned the origin of books treating the restoration from exile, such as Haggai, Zechariah, Ezra, and Nehemiah, along with Isaiah chapters 56 through 59, to the Persian era. In these books, the good image of Persian rule stands in sharpest contrast with that of previous empires. This exceptional presentation makes it seem likely that it was perpetuated by scribes who favored Persian rule. Also, not attributing a more extensive list to this period is contrary to recent, minimalistic trends.

Observing that the Hebrew Bible is a “Bible for exiles” (226), Carr included among books of exilic-period origin the books of Lamentations and Ezekiel, as well as Deutero-Isaiah, prophetic oracles against Babylon, and priestly versus non-priestly versions of the Hexateuch. Such versions were harmonized in later periods. Works from the neo-Assyrian period include contemporaneous prophetic oracles and other writings that reflect Assyrian literary genres and motifs. For example, after discussing affinities
between Joshua–2 Kings and Assyrian writings, Carr observed, “This background would suggest that the first edition(s) of the broader history of kings in Samuel–Kings probably originated in the late pre-exilic period of Judah’s history...” (312).

Considering Carr’s increasingly cautious approach to earlier and earlier periods, it seems remarkable that part 3 of *Formation* dares to venture into a tentative treatment of the early monarchic period. He considered it reasonable for there to have been a tenth- to ninth-century formation of the Israelite kingdom. It would have standardized the Phoenician script (leading to its distinctively Hebrew development “first attested only in the ninth century”61), instituted scribal education,62 and produced a body of national literature for the purposes of preserving and inculcating Israelite history and culture.63 To the early monarchic period, Carr cautiously assigned the composition of certain royal psalms, proverbs (with indications that some are attributable to Solomon; 410), the Song of Songs (434), the Covenant Code, and the primeval history minus the P version. Thus Carr’s view of the early monarchy partly coincides with Williamson’s proposal that it was a prime period for production of texts that enshrine the national heritage.