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IDEOLOGY AND THE HISTORY OF ANCIENT ISRAEL

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When my “The Old Testament—a Hellenistic Book?” was published for the first time—in Danish¹—my old teacher and mentor, Professor Eduard Nielsen vehemently opposed the idea that the formation of the Old Testament mainly belong to the Hellenistic Period.² Among other things he warned me of the fate of Maurice Vernes, who at the end of the 19th century opted for a very late date of the Hebrew literature and consequently—apart from a note in a short History of ancient Israel by Frants Buhl and a likewise short mentioning in Robert H. Pfeiffer’s introduction³—was completely forgotten. Extremist ideas like that will prepare a graveyard for the scholar who entertains such outrageous opinions. That was the general idea.

My answer to this warning was that Vernes’ example is indeed outrageous and should be considered a memento, not to the members of my circle but to Old Testament scholarship in general. It should remind it of

- 1 “Det gamle Testamente som en hellenistisk bog”, *Dansk Teologisk Tidsskrift* 55 (1992), 81-101. Subsequent revised English edition “The Old Testament-A Hellenistic Book?” *SJOT* 7 (1993), 163-193.
- 2 Eduard Nielsen, “En hellenistisk bog?”, *Dansk Teologisk Tidsskrift* 55 (1992), 161-174.
- 3 Frants Buhl, *Det israelitiske Folks Historie* (1st ed 1892), here quoted according to the 6th printing (Copenhagen, Kristiania, London, Berlin 1922), 12; Robert H. Pfeiffer, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (rev. ed.; New York 1941), 528.

its former bad ways.⁴ I was not surprised that such things have happened within Old Testament scholarship. It goes well with the general impression of the field from many years of experience, leaving the bodies of too critical scholars all along the route, forcing critical as well as apologetic minds to seek refuge in other and greener pastures like assyriology.

It would perhaps not be misleading to see how it works in the present, and the situation within the field today will produce all the necessary material. We will be able to distinguish between a brutal and frontal assault on the integrity of certain critical scholars of the present—this writer included—and a more sophisticated approach throwing suspicions about the motives of the scholars in question. “Ideology” has become a key word, and it is definitely the case that the all too common interpretation in literature in English of ideology as “false or biased conceptions of reality” has caused a lot of confusion.

The reader will probably ask “why another discussion about this? Has enough not already been said, and some of it very nasty, indeed?” It is true that a lot of name-calling has been around for the last ten years, most of it rather ridiculous. On the other hand the situation has changed since the dean of Old Testament scholarship, the respected James Barr has joined the chorus of critics.⁵ We might ignore some of the minor figures in this debate, but can hardly disregard the challenge from a scholar of the status of Barr. In the following commentary, Barr will always loom at the background of the argument, although it will be necessary to pay more attention to his sources for his attack on “revisionist” scholarship, as he claims it to be.

Who Are We? On Name-Calling

In November 1999, the Israeli Newspaper *Haaretz* opened its pages for an article by the Israeli archaeologist Zev Herzog who in a very straightforward way explained to the Israeli public some of the consequences of recent investigations into the history of ancient Israel. It resulted in an outcry from the public. This public seemed quite unprepared and was shocked when it was informed of the non-existence of a number of be-

4 “Det gamle Testamente, David og hellenismen. Svar til Folker Willeesen og Eduard Nielsen”, *Dansk Teologisk Tidsskrift* 57 (1994), 20-39, 35-36.

5 James Barr, *History and Ideology in the Old Testament. Biblical Studies at the End of a Millennium* (Oxford 2000).

loved biblical figures from the past. Worst of all, the historicity of King David was called into question. Somehow David's history is the backbone of the self-perception of the modern Israeli society as illustrated by the enormous painting of King David by Kandinsky preserved in the Knesset in Jerusalem.

Among the responses from the readers to Herzog's article, a letter from Hershel Shanks, the editor of the popular archaeological magazine *Biblical Archaeologist Review*, was especially remarkable. In his letter, Shanks claimed that people who supported views like Herzog's were anti-Bible and anti-Israel, adding "at the extreme, they can even be viewed as anti-Semitic".⁶ In opposition to this sort of name-calling, I may quote James Pasto who stresses his position vis-à-vis the "revisionists" in this way: "This is not to say that Lemche, Thompson, Davies, and others are anti-Zionist, anti-Biblical, or anti-Semitic, and I would defend them against such charges."⁷

Very well, indeed, but why is such a defense necessary at all? The following sample of quotations from the production of the North American archaeologist William G. Dever may throw light on this and will be enough to show us why a defense may be needed.

According to Dever our scholarship can best be described as based on false presuppositions, oversimplifications, undocumented assertions and contradictions—not to mention the ideological overtones—...⁸

Dever adds this commentary:

Not only are the revisionists poorly equipped to deal with any of these disciplines and their data, but their unabashedly anti-theological bias ... and their antipathy to Judaism (akin to Wellhausen's jaundiced view) would seem to preclude even the effort at such a history.⁹

In other contexts, Dever is even more outspoken. In the journal/magazine

6 *Haaretz*, November 5th, 1999.

7 James Pasto, "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", *SJOT* 12 (1998), 157-202, 200.

8 William G. Dever, 'Revisionist Israel Revisited', *Currents in Research: Biblical Studies*, 4, 1996, 36.

9 Same article, 42. I have to add that it has become rather common in some places to accuse Julius Wellhausen of anti-Semitism without reason. In Dever's reference to Wellhausen, the accusation of anti-Semitism is certainly implied.

that used to be the *Biblical Archaeologist* (but recently changed its name to *Near Eastern Archaeology* without changing its content) we find the following remark by Dever:

Anti-Semitism? Finally, several of Whitelam's statements border dangerously on anti-Semitism; they are certainly anti-Jewish and anti-Israel.¹⁰

Also the following quotes are revealing—only slightly better moderated:

Revisionism's minimalist portrait of ancient Israel rests on a skeptical, negative and indeed hostile assessment of the meaning and value of the Hebrew Bible and of the religious and cultural tradition stemming from it...But revisionists typically caricature the Bible and modern biblical scholarship. At its most extreme, revisionism is little more than pseudosophisticated Bible bashing.¹¹

In a recent summary of Keith Whitelam's contribution by Professor Dever, we read:

What does Whitelam add? Nothing, except to substitute an obvious pro-Palestinian bias in modern history and archaeology for the pro-Zionist bias that he alleges of others.¹²

Again Whitelam is accused of anti-semitism:

The irony in all this is that Whitelam, like others in his camp, seems unaware of his own ideological agenda. I leave it to others to speculate as to the source of Whitelam's ideology, but it is clearly pro-Palestinian and consequently anti-Israel. Personally, I think that it borders on anti-Semitism, as other reviewers have implied...¹³

Of course all of this must lead to the conclusion:

In my view, most of the revisionists are no longer honest scholars.¹⁴

Our insufficiency has often been described by Dever:

10 Referring to Keith W. Whitelam, *The Invention of Ancient Israel. The Silencing of Palestinian History* (London 1996), cf W.G. Dever, "Archaeology, Ideology, and the Quest for an 'Ancient' or 'Biblical' Israel", *Near Eastern Archaeology*, 61:1 (1998), 45.

11 W.G. Dever, "Saving Us from Postmodern Malarkey", *BAR* (March/April 2000), 30.

12 W.G. Dever, "Histories and Nonhistories of Ancient Israel", *BASOR* 316 (1999), 94.

13 *BASOR* 316, 100.

14 *BAR*, March/April 2000, 68.

Yet I see no indication that Lemche and the revisionists with whom he aligns himself are seriously engaged in this debate, that is, in command of the pertinent literature, especially the extensive discussions in current anthropology and archaeology¹⁵

This is of course an incredible accusation against a person, who some years ago published a very comprehensive study of the importance of sociology and social-anthropology for Old Testament studies in the form of my doctoral thesis from 1985.¹⁶ We should see Dever's evaluation of his colleagues knowledge about sociology in the light of the following statement concerning ethnicity in the ancient Levant:

"But all Syro-Palestinian archaeologists proceed on the assumption that material culture in general reflects ethnicity"¹⁷

This should be read in light of the definition of ethnicity by "Mr. Ethnicity" himself, the noted Norwegian social anthropologist Fredrik Barth. Barth expressly claims that there is no necessary connection between a certain culture and a certain group of people.¹⁸ Besides when it comes to sociology and social anthropology, I do not recall that I have ever seen a reference to Fredrik Barth in Professor Dever's writings.

Now these quotations could be pushed aside as coming from a scholar whose lack of sense of reality might have induced him to a series of unsolicited attacks on his fellow scholars. Such things happen in scholarship, and most are thankfully soon forgotten. The reason to call them into life in this place is the never-ending repetition of the same accusations by

15 *Currents in Research: Biblical Studies* 4 (1996), 40.

16 *Early Israel: Anthropological and Historical Studies on the Israelite Society before the Monarchy* (VTS 37; Leiden 1985).

17 *Near Eastern Archaeology*, 61:1 (1998), 46.

18 In his famous introduction to Fredrik Barth (ed), *Ethnic Group and Boundaries* (Oslo 1969), 9-37, a piece that has to be read by any person who intends to engage the discussion about ethnicity in any serious way. I summarized Barth's ideas in this way in my *The Israelites in History and Tradition* (London, Louisville, KY 1998), 16: "According to Barth, ethnicity is a social way of organizing cultural difference. He says that ethnicity basically consists of two elements, on the one hand a social group, and on the other a cultural unit. However, since both may develop independently, there is no necessary connection between a certain culture and a certain group of people. The relations are dynamic and always changing."

other scholars, mostly coming from North America.¹⁹ Thus Gary Rendsburg recently in a paper given at a conference in Chicago in 1999 and made public on an official McGill homepage includes the following extensive characterization of what he calls the revisionist party:

How could we possibly have come to this present state in the field of biblical studies? And who are these people, these minimalists? As I stated earlier, the pendulum of intellectual ideologies is constantly shifting, and the last thirty years have seen the decline of positive historicism and the rise of relativism and skepticism. In my estimation, what began as a healthy and constructive enterprise, questioning the teachings of our teachers, exploring new methods, and in many cases demanding more explicit evidence before jumping to conclusions, soon devolved into an unhealthy and deconstructive project, resulting in a classic case of throwing out the baby with the bath water. It is now clear that Albright overstated the case, but just because his vision of the conquest no longer holds that water, we need not discard the Israelite baby therewith. There clearly was an entity called Israel in the Early Iron Age, and there still is plenty of evidence to support that claim. To answer my second question, who are these people, these revisionists, these nihilists? What drives them? To give you the names of the four best known among them, they are Thomas Thompson, Philip Davies, Niels Lemche, and Keith Whitelam. Some of them are driven, as I indicated above, by Marxism and leftist politics. Some of them are former evangelical Christians who now see the evils of their former ways. Some of them are counterculture people, left over from the 60s and 70s, whose personality includes the questioning of authority in all aspects of their lives. But the two most important elements in the profile of these scholars are the following. First, almost without exception, these individuals have no expertise in the larger world of ancient Near Eastern studies. The luminaries whom I mentioned at the outset all had masterful control over a wide variety of languages and literatures, or they were the leading field archaeologists of their day. They made major contributions in the fields of Ugaritic studies, Assyriology, Egyptology, pottery analysis, stratigraphy, and so on. That is to say, their firsthand experience working with “real life” texts and “real life” material culture from the ancient world allowed these scholars to develop a true sense of how biblical texts were cut from the same cloth as ancient Near Eastern texts. True, this

19 Additional quotations can be found together with a commentary in the popular book by Amy Dockser Marcus, *The View from Nebo. How Archaeology Is Rewriting the Bible and Reshaping the Middle East* (Boston, New York, London 2000), 117-123.

group later would come under attack by what their detractors would term “parallelomania,” and true some of these great scholars often went too far in making connections between the Bible and the ancient world. But at the same time, their extensive and direct familiarity with the history, religion, literature, and scribal traditions of the ancient Near East in general allowed them to see, correctly in my view, that the inner workings of the Bible correlate perfectly into this picture. By contrast, as my colleague Anson Rainey of Tel Aviv University has noted, Thompson, Davies, Lemche, and Whitelam have never excavated an Israelite or any other archaeological site and they have no experience in dealing with an archive of ancient Near Eastern texts such as those of Ebla, Mari, Nuzi, Amarna, Ugarit, and so on. In short, the academy has created an intellectual environment which permits the untrained to operate on an equal par with the trained.

Second, as you may have gathered, almost without exception, the scholars of this group are not Jewish. (Note that I do not call them Christians either, for most of them, I believe, would not classify themselves as such. Rather, they are part of the general secular world.) Now, at first glance, one might think that one’s religious or ideological identification would have no effect on one’s scholarship, and I too once naively thought this to be true. Frankly, I feel a bit of discomfort even mentioning the religious affiliations of individual scholars. For one would have hoped that such issues no longer mattered. But with the current group of revisionists, as I intimated earlier, ideology, not objective scholarship, governs. If it is not actual Marxism, it is leftist politics in general. If it is not revolution against the sins of one’s youth, the sin being once having identified as an evangelical Christian, then the issue is anti-authority culture in general. Furthermore, and I do not hesitate to use the terms, these scholars are driven by anti-Zionism approaching anti-Semitism. By denuding Israel of any ethnic identity, and by denying the existence of Israel in the land at an early time, and by reading the Bible as a Zionist plot by 6th century Jews in Babylonia, the picture is very clear. Ironically, the world has shown signs of progressing away from the anti-Zionism ideology that dominated U.N. politics in the 1970s, but these scholars are stuck in that several-decades-old mud.²⁰

I see no need to discuss this characterization of the revisionists in detail. It is eloquent, devious, and includes several lies and unsubstantiated rumors: These people are incompetent. They do not know anything about

20 Gary A. Rendsburg, “Down with History, Up with Reading: The Current State of Biblical Studies”, <http://www.arts.mcgill.ca/programs/jewish/30yrs/rendersburg/index.html>. The quotation can found on pp 6-7.

the ancient Near East, and have never contributed to the study of the ancient Near East. Furthermore, they are close to being anti-Semites. Of course aside from being ridiculous, none of these accusations are substantiated by evidence, if not for the negative one, that nothing is quoted by them when it comes to literature about the ancient Near East, in spite of several publications in this field by at least Lemche and Thompson.²¹

The issue of quoting and not quoting is, however, interesting, because it seems to be the general politics of such criticism that it never addresses the discussion found in any part of our productions, but only deals with its victims in a condescending manner.

It can only be understood as a recommendation from Rendsburg to the reader of his article that he or she should never worry about reading them for they are “no good”! The technique is well-known and never so effectively unmasked as in James Barr’s characterization of conservative scholarship.²² Thus it is characteristic of the exchange a few years ago

21 Like, e.g., my overview of Syrian and Palestinian history, “Syrian-Palestinian History: An Overview”, in Jack M. Sasson et al. (ed), *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*, Vol II (New York 1995), 1195-1218, or my chapters on the history and culture of Syria and Palestine in *Prelude to Israel’s Past. Background and Beginnings of Israelite History and Identity* (Peabody, MA 1998), 66-213. For Thompson and his lack of interest in the ancient Near East, we may compare his *The Historicity of the Patriarchal Narratives. The Quest for the Historical Abraham* (BZAW 133; Berlin, New York 1974). It is sad that James Barr joins this chorus of denouncers by assuming that we do not know Greek (except from New Testament Greek) and Latin either, and therefore have no direct access to Herodotus and other Greek literature (*History and Ideology*, 88). I cannot talk on behalf of my colleagues, but my primary education was the classic line of the traditional continental European gymnasium, including extensive courses in Greek and Latin covering Greek literature—in Greek—from Homer to the Hellenistic Period, and Roman literature from Plautus to Tacitus. The only Semitic language I claim no knowledge of is Ethiopian, and my well-worn private copy of A.H. Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar* (3rd ed; Oxford 1957) has the accession date of May, 1962. In his attack on my reading of EA 151, Anson F. Rainey made a similar mistake by assuming that I am ignorant of Akkadian, (Anson F. Rainey, “Who is a Canaanite? A Review of the textual Evidence”, *BASOR* 304 (1996), 1-15. This opened for my rejoinder that demonstrated that he did not show all his cards but excluded evidence from the Amarna archive that is damaging to his reading (cf N.P. Lemche, “Greater Canaan: The Implications of a Correct Reading of EA 151:49-51”, *BASOR* 310 [1998], 19-24).

22 James Barr, *Fundamentalism* (London 1977), 120-159, see espec. 122-123.

between William G. Dever and this writer in *Currents in Research: Biblical Studies*²³ that Dever in his “answer” to my article never addressed a single issued of that article. Instead he stayed with general and unsubstantiated accusations that I am ignorant even of points that were discussed in my article.²⁴

A few more questions remain. What is the purpose of such repeated accusations? What kind of program gives reasons for such redundant rhetoric? It goes without saying that this writer has problems identifying himself when he reads a caricature of his own background such as the one published by Rendsburg.²⁵ Is this an example of the old advice of propaganda, if you want to lie, make the lie a substantial one, and repeat it until people believe it to be true? I hope not, because people indulging themselves in such activity should know the place of origin of this “technique”; namely, the ministry of propaganda in Germany some sixty years ago.

Who are These Ideologists?

In is within this climate that the following discussion must be seen because there is a continuous line from the often very confused “wild” accusations by a W.G. Dever to the seemingly well-planned and intelligent criticism by a James Barr or a Ian Provan.

- 23 N.P. Lemche, “Early Israel Revisited”, *CR:BS* 4 (1996), 9-34; W.G. Dever, “Revisionist Israel revisited: A Rejoinder to Niels Peter Lemche”, *CR:BS* 4 (1996), 35-50; N.P. Lemche, “Response to William G. Dever, ‘Revisionist Israel Revisited’”, *CR:BS* 5 (1997), 9-14.
- 24 One such example is his accusation of my ignorance of the principles of the historical school of *les annales*, in spite of a section devoted to this school in my original article, compare Dever, *CR:BS* 4, 39 to Lemche, *CR:BS* 4, 20-22.
- 25 When it comes to Rendsburg’s “sketch” of our careers, I cannot recognize anything written here. I do not know the exact background of my colleagues, but I grew up in the wealthiest part of Copenhagen as the oldest son of a business manager. Religion was not a subject at all. The reason I choose theology as my subject was the recommendation that in theology you can do whatever you like—an advice I have followed ever since. As to leftist activities, I have in addition to my academic career had a military career that has lasted for twenty-five years. For the last twenty years I have been an officer in the Danish defense forces. If Rendsburg thinks that everything to the left of the John Birch Society is leftist and spreading Marxist propaganda, I may be classified as a leftist. I cannot think of his characterization of me as anything but a vicious lie.

I have no wish to be complete but since Provan is part of the battery, which Barr launches against the revisionists, it will be useful to concentrate on his criticism. At the center of his criticism, we find Provan's original attack on the position of the minimalists in the *Journal of Biblical Literature* from 1995 and his revision of this attack in his lecture at the IOSOT congress in Oslo in 1998.²⁶

Provan's principal accusation against the revisionists is probably—in his view—their distrust of the biblical narrative in comparison to their blind faith in other texts from the ancient Near East. This point is repeated several times and always with similar arguments.²⁷ Although he accepts that the biblical story was normally written centuries after the event in question, he is of the conviction that it is only the ideology of the historian that decides a preference for contemporary sources over the testimony of later retelling. We might at this point ask Provan to produce his definition of the concept of ideology—but more about this below.

In order to underline that the narratives of the Old Testament should not be pushed aside when compared to a contemporary source from the ANE, Provan includes a section in his IOSOT lecture discussing the attack of Sennacherib on Hezekiah's Judah in 701 BCE.²⁸ He produces an analysis of the biblical evidence that seeks to bridge the difference between this narrative and the annalist report included in Sennacherib's Rassam-cylinder, the principal Assyrian source for the campaign in Sennacherib's third regnal year.²⁹ Thereafter, he attacks Philip R. Davies for assuming that the latter part of the biblical story (the so-called versions B₁ and B₂) is legendary rather than history. Provan sees no reason why

26 Ian W. Provan, "Ideologies, Literary and Critical: Reflections on Recent Writing on the History of Israel", *JBL* 114 (1995), 585-606, followed by the same author's "In the Stable with the Dwarves: Testimony, Interpretation, Faith and the History of Israel", in A. Lemaire and M. Sæbø (eds), *Congress Volume Oslo 1998 (VTS 80; Leiden 2000)*, 281-319.

27 Cf. e.g., *JBL* 114, 602: "The 'favourite thing' of the positivist historians of Israel is this respect, of course, is the biblical text, which is treated with a skepticism quite out of proportion to that which is evident when any of the other data relating to Israel's history are being considered.". Cf. Also *VTS* 80, 286, 301 and other places.

28 *VTS* 80, 309-318.

29 Translations: A Leo Oppenheimer, *ANET*, 287-288; Mordechai Cohen, *COS II*, 302-303.

the Assyrian army might not have experienced a serious setback in front of Jerusalem in 701 BCE, being forced to withdraw in shame.

As a matter of fact, there are several reasons for not accepting the biblical version as historical. The most important is probably the fact that the Assyrian army did not return the following year. Sennacherib's army never came back as long as he reigned over Assyria. Not even Sennacherib's successor Asarhaddon needed to send his army to the west to regulate matters except when he invaded Egypt, evidently from a secured base in Palestine. There can be no doubt that after 701 BCE the Assyrian position was one of strength, not of weakness. Sennacherib was evidently satisfied with the situation in the west after the havoc he wrought on Hezekiah's reign—the destruction of Lachish is only one example among many—and the deal he subsequently struck with Hezekiah and other rulers of the Southern Levant.

The result of a historical analysis of the available evidence, biblical as well as Assyrian, is accordingly that there is a basic harmony between the Assyrian evidence and the note in 2 Kgs 18,13-16, covering the campaign of the Assyrian king. At the same time there is little room from a historian's point of view for the narratives of 2 Kgs 18,17-19,36.³⁰

So, why should we pay—contrary to Provan's expectations—special attention to the Assyrian evidence in the case of the year 701 BCE? First and foremost, because the Assyrian annalistic report was composed within a year of the event itself, for a historian it is another excellent example of the importance of paying attention to contemporary rather than secondary sources. It is on line with the old distinction made by the noted German historian of the 18th century Gustav Droysen between *Überreste* and *Bericht*. *Überreste* is best translated as “residue”, or “remnant”. Droysen thinks of original information included in a source, not regard-

30 Writing this I am in the privileged situation of having recently participated in the seminar within the European Seminar in Historical Methodology during the 1st Congress of the *European Association of Biblical Studies (EABS)* in Utrecht in August 2000. The theme of the seminar was this campaign of Sennacherib. The only proposal made during that seminar for a historical background for the Rabshake incident (2 Kgs 18,17-19,8) was to place it in connection with a second—earlier—Assyrian attack on Jerusalem. The minutes of the seminar are planned to be published in 2001 in the series *European Seminar in Historical Methodology (= JSOT SS)* in 2001.

ing the age of that source. *Bericht* of course means “narrative” and indicates a secondary source—even a literary composition based on historical events, alleged or real as they may be.

Contrary to Provan’s expectations, his example of Sennacherib’s third campaign is counterproductive and open to a protest against his own idea of leveling out the difference between original, primary sources, and secondary late reconstruction. It is no more than a pious hope of his that this may change. The difference between the value of the primary and secondary source is important in order to understand the development within recent years in the field of historical studies of ancient Israel. Provan’s claim that all sources are principally equal and should be respected is acceptable, but only if he makes it clear what kind of information we can expect to find in texts ancient as well as modern. A primary source still constitutes our best chance of reaching back to something that really happened.

It has rightly been pointed out by Barr and is certainly correct that Provan is closer in his view of literature to a postmodern position than many of his opponents.³¹ In his view of the equal status of all literature and in his attack of the privileged status of certain kinds of evidence—texts—Provan sides with most postmodernists. In this way, his accusation of his adversaries of being positivists seems not too far from the truth and certainly a reason for reevaluating our position which is or at least used to be more modern than we normally accept.

This brings me to the next stage of the argument: the problem of how we reached the seemingly negative view of the usefulness of the Old Testament for the reconstruction of Israelite history in ancient times. Provan, just as his more “rustic” North American colleagues, is of the firm conviction that it started with ideology, an anti-theological bias that decided in advance that the Old Testament could not be trusted as a historical source about the Israelite past.

Somehow this is a mistake that can be excused. After all, Provan was not there when the destruction—not deconstruction which is a postmodern word connected with the work and ideas of Jacques Derrida, meaning something quite different—of ancient Israel as a historical entity began. Paraphrasing God’s answer to Job, we might like to ask Provan: Were

31 Cf. Barr, *History and Ideology*, 69.

you there when we constructed the revised history of Israel, the very feat that “earned” us the honor of being called “revisionists”? The answer is of course in the negative. However, Provan should have done his job and read more extensively the relevant literature dating back to the late 1960s and the 1970s. Maybe he would then have reached a different conclusion about the motives that governed the process of demolishing the traditional picture of Israel’s past.³²

Provan had no part in that process, and, in this connection, his denunciation of the generation of 1968—and it is true, Thompson, Davies, and this writer certainly belong to that generation—as being overly critical against authorities sounds particularly hollow.³³ “1968” has somehow almost become a metaphysical term connected with protest and revolt, partly inspired by Marxist ideas. I will not comment on the merits and deficiencies of that fateful year but only say that it was truly a characteristic of the generation of upcoming scholars of that time to question critically nearly everything handed down to them by their authorities. In addition, it has to be said that this attitude has remained with me ever since and that from a scholar’s view point I consider any other position to be credulous.

A new type of question began to appear that changed many areas of

32 Provan’s knowledge—and as a matter of fact Barr’s—of literature written by this company of revisionist scholar seems very limited. He might be excused for not having read my two volumes from 1998, *The Israelites in History and Tradition* and *Prelude to Israel’s Past*, or Thomas L. Thompson, *The Bible in History. How Writers Create a Past* (London 1999), although it may have helped his argumentation enormously. He cannot, however, be pardoned for paying no attention to the central historical works of this school like Thompson’s *The Historicity of the Patriarchal Narratives* and my *Early Israel*. My elementary history of Israel, *Ancient Israel. A New History of Israelite Society* (Sheffield 1988; Danish original Århus 1984) plays a certain role as does also my *The Canaanites and Their Land: The Tradition of the Canaanites* (JSOT SS 110; Sheffield 1991) and certainly a major work like Thompson’s *Early History of the Israelite People From the Written and Archaeological Sources* (SHANE 4; Leiden 1992). Philip R. Davies is only discussed on behalf of his 1992 book, *In Search of “Ancient Israel”* (JSOT SS 148; Sheffield 1992), while his *Whose Bible is it Anyway?* (JSOT SS 204; Sheffield 1995) is ignored although, in many way it better explains Davies’ position. On top of this, a few randomly selected articles are quoted, all belonging to the literature of the last decade.

33 Cf Provan, *VTS* 80, 304 n 51.

scholarship. It is hardly a coincidence that a comparatively insignificant subject like the Old Testament was also part of this development. That year, the theological faculty at the University of Copenhagen issued the title of a prize thesis for its students: “The conditions for the establishment of David’s empire inside and outside of Israel”. This writer answered the challenge with some success, but his colleague, Heike Friis deservedly received the prize with a thesis that claimed the Deuteronomistic literature and its theology to be exilic in orientation.

In 1968, such answers were absolutely new. Only during the next two decades did it become commonplace to stress the exilic outlook of the Deuteronomistic literature. Heike Friis’ thesis was brilliant and ahead of its time but it was not published before 1986—in German—and it still remains unknown, except within a limited circle of scholars.³⁴

Developments within two areas of research were decisive for her decision to break with the usual idea about the origin of the notion of ancient Israel embedded in the Deuteronomistic literature. On the one hand, George E. Mendenhall’s, at the time, new hypothesis about the “Hebrew Conquest of Palestine” changed the direction of the discussion about the physical origin of Israel in a fundamental way.³⁵ On the other hand, Martin Noth’s model of early Israel as organized in a sacral league of twelve tribes began to crack.³⁶

The very existence of the amphictyony was a prerequisite for the early dating of Israelite tradition. Without the amphictyony the idea that already before the time of the Hebrew kings an Israel existed, consisting of the twelve tribes of the Old Testament, was floating freely in the air. It simply lacked a “Sitz im Leben” in early Israel—whatever this was—and alternatives had to be found. The obvious correct answer by Heike Friis—as well of the related circle of scholars mainly from the University of Heidelberg that created the *Dielheimer Blätter zum Alten Testa-*

34 Heike Friis, *Die Bedingungen für die Errichtung des Davidischen Reichs in Israel und seiner Umwelt* (translation: Bernd Jörg Diebner; *Dielheimer Blätter zum Alten Testament und seiner Rezeption in der Alten Kirche Beiheft* 6; Heidelberg 1986).

35 George E. Mendenhall, “The Hebrew Conquest of Palestine”, *BA* 25 (1962), 66–87.

36 Martin Noth, *Das System der zwölf Stämme Israels* (*BWANT* 4:1; Stuttgart 1930; reprint Darmstadt 1966).

ment³⁷—was definitely too advanced to be accepted by a wider circle of biblical scholars. It was evident at that time that it would be necessary to take a series of intermediate steps before the ideas of these scholars could be vindicated.

In the 1970s a series of scholars joined in the destruction of the amphictyony. Probably the first monograph published by these scholars was the study on the Period of the Judges, a study in Danish by this author that appeared in 1972, but based on the first part of my thesis from 1968.³⁸ Like others studies from that period, the methodology was the traditional historical-critical one. The destruction of the amphictyony had nothing to do with some preconceived ideology, it was based plainly on historical readings of Old Testament texts, the only evidence about the Period of the Judges that we possess. We were still a far cry from the insights of Friis and her German colleagues and only occasionally moved on to take into account the obvious conclusion that the biblical narrative about the time of the judges reflects the sentiments of a much later time.³⁹ I suppose that the scholar of the present day who approaches these studies would be surprised to see the extent of traditional material included here.

The North American scene of biblical studies had embraced the amphictyony and elaborated on Noth's thesis.⁴⁰ It never discussed the revision of the thesis; it just dropped it when it realized that it had lost its foundations. In North America, the conflict with traditional scholarly ideas about Israel's past began with Mendenhall's study on the Hebrew

37 Published by Bernd Jørg Diebner since the beginning of the 1970s.

38 *Israel i Dommertiden. En oversigt over diskussionen om Martin Noths "Das System der zwölf Stämme Israels" (Tekst og Tolkning. Monografier udgivet af Institut for Bibelsk Eksegese 4; København 1972)*. Other studies include A.D.H. Mayes, *Israel in the Period of the Judges* (SBT SS 29; London 1974) and C.H.J. de Geus, *The Tribes of Israel. An Investigation into Some of the Presuppositions of Martin Noth's Amphictyony Hypothesis* (*Studia Semitica Neerlandica* 18; Assen, Amsterdam 1976).

39 My examples included a literary rather than historical reason for the presence of more than one list of the names of the tribes of Israel, *Israel i Dommertiden*, 106-113, and shows that the enemies of Israel in the Period of the Judges are the traditional ones known from the time of the Hebrew monarchy and therefore probably part of the redactional scheme, *Israel i Dommertiden*, 87.

40 Notably as retold by John Bright, *A History of Israel* (London 1960).

Conquest of Palestine.⁴¹ Mendenhall, a student of William Foxwell Albright, introduced a kind of ideological approach to the question of Israel's origins in Palestine, the idea of a revolutionary background for the process that started when oppressed Canaanite peasants revolted against the abusive system of city-states.

For many years, Mendenhall's study remained in an isolated position having very few supporters. The next attack on long accepted positions came from another angle, when Thomas Thompson and John Van Seters moved in to settle the issue of a patriarchal historical age.

On the continental European stage, the question of the historicity of the patriarchs had already been decided by the end of the 19th century. We still find more traditionally oriented scholars even today who claim that a basic historicity can be allowed to the patriarchal traditions. However, the majority of scholars, following the lead of Wilhelm M.L. de Wette, Julius Wellhausen and Martin Noth, simply assumed that the patriarchal tradition had nothing to do with history. Noth placed the traditions of the patriarchs (together with the exodus tradition and the conquest tradition) among the sacred stories told at the amphictyonic center, wherever we should look for it.⁴²

In North America the situation was very different. That was an environment dominated by the Albright "school" and Albright's firm conviction that the patriarchs were historical figures that really lived in the past. However, two scholars changed the climate. In 1974 Thomas L. Thompson published his study of the patriarchal traditions. In 1975 John Van Seters followed with his study of the Abraham traditions.⁴³

Both studies belong firmly within the historical-critical tradition. However, although they are definitely reaching similar results, they are very different in outline. Thompson's study is mainly concerned with the analysis of Near Eastern sources—Mesopotamian, Syro-Palestinian and

41 Cf above n 35.

42 One of the weaknesses of the amphictyonic hypothesis was the lack of secure evidence about where to look for its central sanctuary. Shechem was the most obvious candidate but it missed the ark of Yahweh that, according to Noth, never stood there. Noth considered the note in Joshua 8,30-35 to be without historical background.

43 Thompson, *The Historicity of the Patriarchal Narratives*; John Van Seters, *Abraham in History and Tradition* (New Haven 1975).

Egyptian.⁴⁴ Biblical texts are included, such as Genesis 14, but the analysis of these does not dominate the study. In John Van Seters' study, the sources from the ancient Near East are discussed, but the main part of the book is devoted to a meticulous analysis of the biblical tradition. Thompson as well as Van Seters both reach the result that the patriarchal narratives are without historical background in Israel's past, Van Seters' claiming that the Yahwist—the assumed oldest part of the Pentateuch—belongs to the exilic period.

None of these studies display any interest in ideological matters. Apart from the last four pages of Thompson's study,⁴⁵ there is not a hint of any interest in theology or ideology. Nor is there a single sign of a theological or ideological influence that governed his research. This research took place in an outspoken historical-critical environment at the Protestant faculty of Theology in Tübingen under the guidance of Kurt Galling, a noted German specialist in the antiquities of Palestine in the middle of the 20th century. Likewise, Van Seters' study is totally devoid of theological or ideological overtones.

The reception of especially Thompson's study within North American scholarship was less than enthusiastic. On the contrary, he was for a series of years prevented from getting a job within the established academy. The reason is obviously that in his study on the patriarchal tradition his primary target was Albright. Since Albright's students dominated the field in North America, they were able, at least for the time being, to block the road for further criticism of their master and to exclude critical voices.⁴⁶ That it is mainly the students of Albright and their students today who raise objections against the revisionists as being directed by ideology is hardly a coincidence. They have inherited the language of the old Albright school that sometimes used a similar, however normally much better moderated phraseology against Albrecht Alt and particularly

44 So much for Rendsburg's claim that we have never published within the field of ancient Near Eastern studies.

45 Chapter 12 B: "Historical and Christian Faith", *The Historicity of the Patriarchal Narratives*, 326-330.

46 On the politics of Albright and his school cf. Burke O. Long, *Planting and Reaping Albright. Politics, Ideology, and Interpreting the Bible* (University Park, Pennsylvania 1997).

Martin Noth and their followers.⁴⁷

The question of the obvious ideologizing of Old Testament studies within the last twenty to thirty years has therefore to take into account the issue of where it began. It was not in continental Europe, but in North America, within a specific circle of scholars who found their own position and beliefs threatened by new critical minds. The crude accusations of William G. Dever and Gary Rendsburg have to be seen in this light, and their interpretation of ideology belongs squarely within a North American milieu and has little to do with how matters developed in Europe. This is important to note when we turn our attention below to the concept of ideology.

The most idealizing “revisionist” study that has appeared is, without doubt, the major work by Norman K. Gottwald on “The Tribes of Yahweh”, published in 1979.⁴⁸ In the case of Gottwald, we may truly speak of a conscious application of a specific and realized ideological perspective of Marxist orientation. Gottwald’s study also included a fair share of Marxist stereotypes, such as the revolt of the poor against oppression, the egalitarian original society where everybody shared everything, etc. Gottwald made no secret of his method and background.

On the other hand, it is interesting to note the direction of the scholarly discussion following this work, because it is evident that a number of scholars found Gottwald’s ideological approach more of an obstacle than a benefit to his study.⁴⁹ While everybody acknowledged his achievement, the ideologically oriented analysis was often dismissed as romanticism.

I believe that I am entitled to say this since I published a comprehen-

47 Cf the following quotation from Long, *Planting and Reaping Albright*, 58: ...As a result—here he [Albright] implied that the German scholars took a misguided turn towards subjectivity—they pursued research “along a priori lines”, lost touch with “archaeological and philological fact... [and] were inclined to discount the evidence of archaeological stratigraphy and to close their eyes to linguistic arguments.” In this quotation, we recognize most of the criticism of Dever and Rensburg.

48 Norman K. Gottwald, *The Tribes of Yahweh: A Sociology of the Religion of Liberated Israel, 1250-1050 B.C.E.* (Maryknoll, NY 1979).

49 Most notably George E. Mendenhall in his notorious attack on Gottwald, “Ancient Israel’s Hyphenated History”, in David Noel Freedman and David Frank Graf (eds), *Palestine in Transition. The Emergence of Ancient Israel* (SWBAS 2; Sheffield 1983), 95-103.

sive settlement with both Mendenhall's and Gottwald's ideas about the revolutionary Canaanite peasants in the shape of my *Early Israel* from 1985.⁵⁰ I doubt very much that the critics of the revisionists who claim us to be guided by ideological motives can find much of interest in that study, which includes a multifaceted demolition of the revolution hypothesis including its ideological background. It is a down-to-the-earth study, attacking its opponents on the basis of their application of sociology, their reading of biblical texts, and their idea of history.

It includes extensive sections dealing with the various parts of Middle Eastern society, and destroys the impression that egalitarian communities dominated the tribal society in this part of the world.⁵¹ At the end, it proposed a new model for understanding the processes that took and take place in Middle Eastern societies. According to this model, Middle Eastern society is not dimorphic as assumed by, among others, Gottwald but *polymorphous* covering a social *continuum* stretching from the free roaming nomads of the Arabian Desert to the sophisticated inhabitants of the major Middle Eastern cities. The model was subsequently accepted and successfully put into practical use by the Israeli archaeologist Israel Finkelstein.⁵²

Although the revolution hypothesis of Mendenhall and Gottwald cannot be substantiated, their main trust, that early Israel emerged as the result of a socio-political process within Palestine turns out to be correct, as far as the evidence from the Late Bronze Age and the Early Iron Age is concerned. Faced with the evidence of these periods, the biblical impression of the conquest has to yield and leave the battlefield to orientalists and archaeologists. There is no way that the biblical imagery of the period can be reconciled with the contemporary evidence.

This has nothing to do with privileging one kind of evidence at the cost of other evidence. It is the consequence of a balanced comparison between different corpora of evidence. If Provan had read that study of mine, he would know that he got it totally wrong. We did not start with

50 *Early Israel*.

51 *Early Israel*, 84-244.

52 Cf Israel Finkelstein, *The Archaeology of the Israelite Settlement* (Jerusalem 1988), *Living on the Fringe. The Archaeology and History of the Negev, Sinai and Neighbouring Regions in the Bronze and Iron Ages* (Monographs in Mediterranean Archaeology 6; Sheffield 1995), 26-27.

the impression that the biblical picture of the past is faulty. We started trying to reconcile the biblical imagery with other sources, and the comparison repeatedly lead to the conclusion that such a harmonization is impossible.

It was only when recognizing this state of affairs that the assumed general distrust in the value of the Old Testament as a historical source about Israel's past began to emerge among a wider circle of scholars. The problem can be described in this way: the biblical picture of the patriarchal age has no historical background in Israel's past. It comes out of the imagination of later historiographers. The exodus and the conquest have little or nothing to do with what happened in the history of the Southern Levant. The demolition of the amphictyonic hypothesis has removed the possibility that the traditions about early Israel in the Old Testament can be traced back to Israel's unknown past. We will have to accept that whatever the Old Testament has to tell about the early periods has little to do with that history of the past. From a historian's point of view, it has proved itself not to be history. It is something else.

We did not distrust the historical value of the biblical text in advance, we simply reached that conclusion by experience, and the experience was based on traditional historical-critical investigations as carried out for more than two hundred years.

Interest therefore began to concentrate on the character of the biblical tradition. Where and when did it originate and for what purpose? At the beginning of that process, we looked for an early date. That date could well be the period of the united monarchy under David and Solomon, as this provided the last possibility of a pre-exilic anchor for the tradition of an Israel consisting of the twelve tribes of the north and south. When serious discussion about the united monarchy began, it became evident that the assumption that the Old Testament paints a correct picture of the 10th century—the period where most scholars traditionally placed this monarchy—was without any solid foundation. Again ideology did not guide us; it was the result of the confrontation between biblical evidence and other types of evidence.⁵³

53 To illustrate my point, I would like to draw attention to two very different approaches, yet with similar results. In 1993, Michael Niemann published a study on the early history of the Monarchy in Israel, *Herrschaft, Königtum und Staat. Skizzen zur soziokulturellen Entwicklung im monarchischen Israel* (FAT 6;

Again ideology was not a major issue. The serious blow to the theory of a major Hebrew kingdom in the 10th century did not occur when Giovanni Garbini published his "History and ideology in Ancient Israel",⁵⁴ questioning the historical relevance of the biblical tradition about David and Solomon when compared to other ancient Near Eastern evidence. It began in the moment when archaeologists began to question the very existence of a Jerusalem in the 10th century BCE. The discussion about the archaeology of Jerusalem in this period is still going on and it would be premature to believe that it has reached a conclusion accepted by all scholars involved. It is mainly a highly technical discussion about dating potsherds and traces of walls, and has little to do with ideological approaches to the Bible.⁵⁵ On the other hand, it has shown that even if there

Tübingen). It is basically a traditional historical-critical investigation that analyses the biblical sources about the early monarchy thoroughly. His conclusion is that the biblical sources are not coherent when they describe the 10th century in Israel as a period of imperial greatness. The notes about the administration indicates a much smaller and insignificant political organization. Evidently he analyses his sources according to the principles of Droysen as *Überreste* embedded within the framework of a secondary *Bericht*. The second study was published by David Jamieson-Drake, *Scribes and Schools in Monarchic Judah* (SWBAS 9/JSOT SS 109; Sheffield 1991). It includes an archaeological analysis of the physical remains and concludes that it would be premature to speak about a state within the territory of Judah as early as the 10th century. Jamieson-Drake's study was not well-received by his fellow archaeologists. Yet, it has recently been largely vindicated by Israel Finkelstein, in his "State Formation in Israel and Judah: A Contrast in Context, A Contrast in Trajectory", *Near Eastern Archaeology* 62 (1999), 35-52.

54 Giovanni Garbini, *History & Ideology in Ancient Israel* (London 1988; Italian original Padova 1986), Ch. 2, 21-32.

55 So far the main opponents have been the archaeologists from Tel Aviv University, notably Israel Finkelstein, on one side, and, on the other, their colleagues at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, including Amihai Mazar. Cf among other articles, Israel Finkelstein, "The Archaeology of the United Monarchy: An Alternative View", *Levant* 28 (1996), 177-187, and Amihai Mazar, "Iron Age Chronology: A Reply to I. Finkelstein", *Levant* 29 (1997), 157-167. A major study by Margreet Steiner, representing the English translation of her dissertation (Dutch titel *Jeruzalem in de brons- en ijzertijd. De opgravingen van de "British School of Archaeology in Jerusalem", 1961-1967*, Leiden 1994) is scheduled to appear in 2001 (CIS/JSOT SS; Sheffield). Her conclusions seem closer to the position of Finkelstein than to the one of Mazar. Cf, until the publication of her the-

was a Jerusalem in those days, it was a far cry from being the capital of an extended empire, covering the southern Levant and maybe large stretches of Syria as well.

In my *Early Israel* I described the history of Old Testament scholarship as a history of trench warfare, where the trench—the actual position of the majority of scholars—is vigorously defended against attacks from revisionists. When a trench was shot to pieces and overrun, the scholarly community moved back to the next line of defenses and the process started afresh. This happened over and over again until we reached the period of David. Now the defense hardened because this is the last line of trenches, if we intend to keep at least a part of the biblical idea about an early united Israel. After Solomon, the united monarchy went apart and there is no more a basis for assuming that the united Israel of the twelve tribes, as described by the biblical tradition, is founded on historical facts.

Israeli and Christian identity and self-perception felt threatened. It is exactly at this point that the talk about ideologizing Old Testament scholarship began in earnest, accusing the revisionists of dismissing the tradition about David because of ideological motivations.

Provan, followed by Barr, provides an example of this tendency when he attacks this writer for dismissing the history about David for ideological reasons.⁵⁶ The passage in question, quoted twice by Provan and repeated also by Barr, runs like this—in Provan's version:⁵⁷

It is, of course, this perspective that dominates much of the recent writing on the history of Israel. Niels Peter Lemche, for example, claims that “the traditional materials about David cannot be regarded as an attempt to write *history*, as such. Rather, they represent an ideological programmatical composition which defends the assumption of power by the Davidic dynasty.” History is played off against ideology.

sis, her “It's Not There: Archaeology Proves a Negative”, *BAR* JUL/AUG 1998, 26-33, 62-63. According to the politics of the *BAR*, Steiner's article was immediately countered by two other contributors, Jane Cahill, “It Is There: The Archaeological Evidence Proves It”, *BAR* JUL/AUG 1998, 34-61, 63, and Nadav Na'aman, “It Is There: Ancient Texts Prove It”, *BAR* JUL/AUG 1998, 42-44.

56 *JBL* 114, 586; *VTS* 80, 299 n 43; cf. Barr, *History and Ideology*, 65, cf p 83.

57 Contrary to Provan's self-assuredness, his technique of quoting his opponents is far from impeccable. An example of his style can be found in *JBL* 114, 590, where he believes that he quotes Thompson but, as a matter of fact, is quoting Manfred Weippert, whose merits Thompson discusses in the relevant passage.

The quotation comes from my history of ancient Israel,⁵⁸ however, removed from its context. The said passage in *Ancient Israel* opens with a discussion of traditional scholarship that has seen the story of David's ascension of the throne (1 Sam 15 [or 16]-2 Sam 6 [or 7]) to constitute a defense of his doing away with the house of Saul. Most of this scholarship has included extensive paraphrase of the biblical tradition, accepting it as historical in essence although distorted in favor of David's position.⁵⁹ Instead of this paraphrasing attitude, another approach to the stories about David is recommended—an approach that takes into account the literary pattern of the narrative.

When the stories are digested in this way, it shows a different image of David. I quote from *Ancient Israel*:

“Instead of being an innocent but hotly-pursued victim of royal jealousy, David emerges as a cynical power politician who avoided neither treachery nor murder in the pursuit of his goal.”

It is true that this reading of the story as pro-Davidic propaganda has been seriously questioned by David Gunn.⁶⁰ Both Provan and Barr accept Gunn's analysis and use it against my evaluation of the story (although Gunn as little as Provan and Barr refers to my original study on “David's Rise”). Gunn is excused, because it appeared for the first time in English at the same time as the publication of his monograph.⁶¹ Provan and Barr overlook the fact that Gunn does not say that the David narrative is history. His work on the David tradition ends in this way:

This is the work of no propagandist pamphleteer nor moralizing teacher: the vision is artistic, the author, above all, a fine teller of tales.

which is—apart from the idea that it is a piece of pro-Davidic propaganda—very much the same as I say. Provan has overlooked the context in which Gunn's study was written. He has misrepresented its conclusion and seems to believe that Gunn is interested in the historical content of

58 *Ancient Israel*, 53.

59 Most of this discussion belongs to the past. The major historical-critical study of the ascension story of David is Jakob H. Grønbaek, *Die Geschichte vom Aufstieg Davids (1. Sam. 15-2. Sam.5): Tradition und Komposition (Acta Theologica Danica X; Copenhagen 1971)*.

60 David Gunn, *The Story of King David: Genre and Interpretation (JSOT SS 6; Sheffield 1978)*.

61 David's Rise. *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 10 (1978), 2-25.

the narrative. He has finally overlooked the reason for my conclusion, that this is an artistic piece of literature based on a pre-existing literary pattern. This is explained in the next section of my discussion of the David tradition in *Ancient Israel*, where he will find a comparison between the David story and the story of King Idrimi's ascension to the Throne of Alalach.⁶² Provan evidently does not read Italian. Otherwise he would know that this comparison between Idrimi and David is not a new one. It appeared as early as 1962 in an article by the Italian assyriologist Giovanni Buccellati.⁶³

Contrary to Provan's—and Barr's—opinion, this discussion about the David tradition has little to do with historicity. It is mostly about literary matters, and here, there is space for divergent views and ideas. And it is certainly not a matter of playing ideology out against history. The historical consequences of the analysis was not, e.g., that David never existed but that he and his dynasty construed a story about his ascension to the throne that was deemed the best suited to forward their claims. Whether or not the analysis is correct is a different matter. From a methodological perspective it represents a commonplace procedure among historians who ask questions about the intentions of their sources. Not even Provan will object to this—I hope. As a matter of fact, his example has nothing to do with the discussion about ideologizing the discussion about the historicity of ancient Israel.

So far Provan, Barr and other critics have not been able to show that the destruction of the traditional image of ancient Israel caused by the work of the revisionists was directed by ideological motives. Provan claims that we have been privileging ancient Near Eastern texts at the expense of the biblical narrative. On the contrary, the demolition of the tradition history of Israel as found in most text books of the past is based on meticulous comparative analyses of both the biblical material and the ancient Near Eastern evidence. This also includes my recent study of the early tradition of Israel. Here a comparison between the biblical narrative and practically all other kinds of evidence shows that the biblical story is not a report from the past but, in David Gunn's words, the artistic work of

62 *Ancient Israel*, 54.

63 Giovanni Buccellati, "La 'carriera' di David e quella di Idrimi, re di Alalach", *Bibbia e Oriente* 4 (1962), 95-99.

“a fine teller of tales”.⁶⁴

Evidently the many “negative” results concerning the historicity of the biblical tales have consequences for our general attitude towards the Old Testament as a historical source book. When you have been “disappointed” so many times looking for history in this piece of literature, it is only natural to begin asking questions about what kind of literature the Old Testament represents. That has mostly been our concern lately and has led to a series of studies about the theology or ideology of the texts, the place of this theology or ideology.⁶⁵ One Side effect has, of course, been the lowering of the date of this text into the Persian and Hellenistic periods. Another effect has been the distrust in the correctness of the version of Palestinian history in the Iron Age provided by the biblical historiographers. This history concentrates on only two parts of Palestine and leaves the impression of a country run by the Israelites, although sometimes in conflict with some minor city-states along the Mediterranean coast. Another impression from this historiography concerns Yahwism that is seen as exclusively a concern for the Israelites.⁶⁶

64 *Prelude to Israel's Past*, 1-65.

65 But even a—according to the opinion of many critics—highly ideologizing work like my *The Canaanites and Their Land: The Tradition of the Canaanites* (JSOT SS 110; Sheffield 1991) shows that the conclusion pointing at an ideologically determined use of the Canaanites in the Old Testament is dependant on an extensive analysis of the material from the ANE and from the OT. Provan may not believe it, but I did not write the conclusion before I had finished the analytic parts!

66 We might be entitled to say that we are not the people who privileged a certain version of the history of ancient Palestine. The biblical historiographers were the people who choose to almost ignore the existence of other policies than Israel and Judah in the Iron Age. They were later followed by their modern paraphraser. When it comes to Yahwism, we should not be unduly convinced that this deity was in the Iron Age exclusively Israelite. The king of Askelon in 701 was named Šidqia—clearly a Yahwistic name. He could be of Judaeen descent, but it is just as likely that he was a native of Askelon, and that Yahweh had also been accepted as God outside of the two kingdoms of Israel and Judah. Carrying a Yahwistic name need not—in the Iron Age—have anything to do with a specific “Israelite” or Jewish identity. The new translation by Mordechai Cohen overlooks the problem by naming this king Sidqa (COS II, 303), but A. Leo Oppenheim in his translation (ANET p. 287) gets it right: Šidqia (the name is written *šid-qa-a-a* in cuneiform).

We did not move from ideology to history. It would be more correct to say that we went from history to literature. The present interest in the narratives of the Old Testament as narratives, and in the historical tradition as expression of the period when it was construed—in short the present interest from our part in literature—was caused by history and not by ideology. Which brings us to the last paragraph of this article.

Ideology

Having demonstrated how he misrepresented the history of recent scholarship in his own way and published a caricature of the ideas and methods of his opponents, it would be timely also to address Provan's use of the word "ideology". We will be able to cut down the extent of this paragraph as James Barr has just published an elaborate paragraph dealing with the problem of ideology.⁶⁷

Once I quoted Mario Liverani, who opened a symposium in Copenhagen many years ago devoted to the question of ideology with the remark that he had studied the subject for twenty years and still had no idea what it was all about. Somehow I can join him in this view of the problem. We don't know what we are speaking about when we use the word "ideology". Lexicons and dictionaries are of little help. Thus my copy of the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* has only this to say: "a set of ideas or beliefs that form the basis of an economic or political theory or that are held by a particular group or person."⁶⁸ This is of course correct but fails to cover the total semantic field of the concept of ideology. Other dictionaries may join in, some referring to ideology as representing a false perception of reality. Of course more subtle definitions exist, but I think that we do not have to discuss them in this place.

In the crude polemics of the successors to the Albright school, ideology is without doubt used about their opponents in a pejorative sense. In this context "governed by ideology", means "lead by false ideas about the world as it is"—whatever that means. If you can nail the other scholar as an ideologist you know that he is wrong from the beginning. Lead by ideology, means lead by false ideas about the world, and such a person will of course never be able to get even close to the truth about the past because his ideas about the present are muddy from the beginning.

67 *History and Ideology*, 102-140.

68 5th edition, 1995, 589.

Of course we are allowed to ask why these people think that their definition of ideology has anything to do with the revisionists. A language like the one found in the quotations from that school of thought presented here falls back on the persons who formulated their criticism in this way. Why did they introduce their concept of ideology in a context that has little to do with it or has a different perception of ideology?

Of course, one answer could be the quasi postmodern one proposed by Provan and stressed by Barr that nobody can escape his own ideology. I believe that most revisionists will agree on this or have been forced—traditional scholars as they may have been—to agree to it. It does not demand an extensive reading of Jürgen Habermass and other notables of the present theory of literature to reach that conclusion.⁶⁹ It is part of the insights of the behavioral sciences of the 20th century—psychology, sociology, and linguistics—that every person is entangled in a network consisting of his private biases, prejudices, and perceptions of the world as well as of his own place in reality. No such thing as objective science exists except perhaps within the Newtonian universe. The universe of Einstein and Bohr is different and does not allow the luxury of a completely undetached scholar or scientist working without any interest in the results to be obtained by an investigation that is only governed by the love to “pure” science.

When all this is said, it is strange to be attacked by Barr for being an ideologist when at the same time he quotes my old definition of ideology from *Ancient Israel* with approval:

By “ideology” I intend that set of opinions which dominated Israelite society and which made up the “system” of values with which the Israelites’ actions corresponded. In an Oriental society like Israel’s one should furthermore be aware that *ideology*, *religion*, and *theology* are to a large extent synonymous,

69 James Barr reproaches us for not quoting Habermass and other of the same caliber. He is evidently right, thereby providing yet another proof that we did not start with ideology but with old fashioned history. Habermass, Ricouer, Derrida and their colleagues had no part in the initial part of the development within historical studies. There can be no doubt that that was a mistake. We would probably have moved faster if we had accepted our place in reality from the beginning. As it happened, our acquaintance with the theoretic literature about literature came after the main historical conclusions were reached. But that acquaintance certainly helped us to understand what was going on, also in the biblical literature.

since the separation between the sacral and the profane realms which characterizes our contemporary European culture was unknown in antiquity.⁷⁰

This quote was introduced by a reference to the extended role that ideology played in my book. This is an important note since it says that my use of “ideology” as a concept is covered by the definition which Barr finds as creating a “potentially creative relationship” between ideology and theology.

If the definition is workable, why does Barr and probably also Provan think that I used “ideology” in any other sense. My definition is probably related to the opinion of Habermass that our interpretation of the world around us is governed by the social construct to which we belong, i.e., according to my definition to the ideological framework of our being?

When it comes to ideology, I cannot talk on behalf of my colleagues. They will have to explain for themselves how they define the word “ideology”. However a review of the way ideology has been used in my production will show that the definition quoted above almost always lurks in the background.

It means that when this author speaks about the exile as forming the mental matrix of large parts of Old Testament literature and probably all of its historiography (apart from Ezra and Nehemiah), this is not a pre-conceived ideologically “biased” verdict. It represents this writer’s evaluation of the home of the specific “worldview” of the literature in question. Of course my evaluation is subjective—in the postmodern sense. It is part of a reader response approach to literature including ancient documents. Of course other scholars will revise, approve or reject it as it may be. Still it is based on one scholar’s evaluation of his source material.

The clearest example of that approach is the chapter on “The People of God”, included in my recent monograph *The Israelites in History and Tradition*.⁷¹ There one will find an extensive use of the concept of ideology, for example, the ideology of the twelve tribes, of the holy war, covenant, the exclusive right to the land of Canaan, of the empty land,

70 Barr, *History and Ideology*, 115-116. The quotation can be found in my *Ancient Israel*, 34 n 1.

71 *The Israelites in History and Tradition*, Ch. 4, “The People of God: The Two Israels in the Old Testament”. The book in its entirety has to do with Israelite ethnicity, and the ancient and modern perception of it.

and the ideology of an Israelite ethnicity. According to this ideology we are all descendants of Abraham, the chosen people who share one God only, and possess the right to a land of our own. We are different from all other peoples of the world, in short the people of God.

Whether we call this theology or ideology, it is an ideology not shared by the scholar who analyses his texts in this way, it is the result of the analysis of the texts. When the ideology that results from such an analysis has been isolated, it is the duty of the historian to find a home for it. Here different voices may be raised considering the ideology to be pre-exilic, exilic or post-exilic. Any answer may of course have something to do with the personal prejudices of the scholar in question, but it is really a rather traditional historical problem. It can be discussed in a learned community and the kudos will be awarded the scholar who presents the best arguments. This has nothing to do with ideology in the sense attached to the concept by Provan or by his North American colleagues who can of course not outrun their own ideology, that is their societal and mental environment. By introducing a concept of ideology that is foreign to his opponents, Provan is attacking a straw man. Alas, Barr is following him here in spite of a much more sophisticated approach to the problem, and in spite of much relevant criticism, not least of Provan. As it turns out, Barr is simply against revisionism. That is his right. I am for it and that is my right.

Abstract

An answer to the recent criticism of Ian Provan and James Barr of the position of the so-called “revisionists” among Old Testament scholars. Provan—as well as Barr—accuses the revisionists for being “ideologists”, i.e., that ideology has governed their research. This is a false accusation. The revisionists originally shared the ideology of the scholarship of the modern age. Only at a later date they adopted, forced by their analyses, an ideological approach to the reading of text that seems more on-line with ideas that are said to be postmodern.