ISRAEL FINKELSTEIN

Essays on Biblical Historiography: From Jeroboam II to John Hyrcanus

Forschungen zum Alten Testament
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Mohr Siebeck

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Abbreviations

AASOR	Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research
ABD	*Anchor Bible Dictionary*
ADAJ	*Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan*
BA	*Biblical Archaeologist*
BAR	*Biblical Archaeology Review*
BASOR	*Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*
BN	*Biblische Notizen*
BZ	*Biblische Zeitschrift*
CBQ	*Catholic Biblical Quarterly*
ErIs	*Eretz-Israel*
HBAI	*Hebrew Bible and Ancient Israel*
IEJ	*Israel Exploration Journal*
JAOS	*Journal of the American Oriental Society*
JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literature*
JHebS	*Journal of Hebrew Scriptures*
JNES	*Journal of Near Eastern Studies*
JSOT	*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*
NEA	*Near Eastern Archaeology*
NEAEHL	*The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land*
OJA	*Oxford Journal of Archaeology*
PEQ	*Palestine Exploration Quarterly*
PJ	*Palästinajahrbuch des Deutschen Evangelischen Instituts für Altertumswissenschaft des Heiligen Landes zu Jerusalem*
PNAS	*Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*
RB	*Revue Biblique*
SJOT	*Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament*
TA	*Tel Aviv*
UF	*Ugarit-Forschungen*
VT	*Vetus Testamentum*
ZAW	*Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*
ZDPV	*Zeitschrift des deutschen Palästina-Vereins*

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Introduction

This book presents my views on biblical historiography. By historiography I mean date of composition of biblical texts that deal with the "history" of Ancient Israel, the stage-setting behind them and the goals of their authors – both ideologically and theologically. I put the term "history" in quotation marks because I use it to refer to the biblical authors' perceptions of the past, which do not correspond to modern scholarship's use of the term. Biblical "history" embraces mythical eras and even for historical periods close to the time of the authors, it is dictated by theology and royal ideology.

The study of the history of Ancient Israel – and hence biblical historiography – is based on three pillars: biblical exegesis, archaeology and the records of the ancient Near East. I was not trained in biblical exegesis; I entered this field gradually, increasingly over the last two decades, almost always from the vantage point of archaeology. The power of archaeology is evident; unlike many of the biblical texts, which were written centuries after events (or alleged events) took place, archaeology – if practiced properly in the field – supplies "real time" evidence. Once the spade is in the ground, and the archeologist is in control of chronology – relative and absolute – the finds speak the economic, social and material culture of the given period.

Twenty years ago, I published my book (together with Neil A. Silberman) *The Bible Unearthed: Archaeology's New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origin of Its Sacred Texts*, which focused on biblical historiography in the days of King Josiah of Judah. Since then, I have taken two significant steps – one backward and one forward. My step backward is that I now see the beginning of biblical historiography as reflecting the realities and ideology of the Northern Kingdom in the first half of the 8th century BCE. This is a major change in my perception both chronologically and thematically. Chronologically, it "closes" the gap between early phases in the history of Israel and Judah and the first composition of biblical texts. Thematically, it explains the incorporation of Northern texts in the Southern Bible and sheds light on the emergence of central concepts in the text, such as the Conquest of Canaan and the United Monarchy. In the step forward I refer to my interest in late biblical historiography – the Books of Ezra, Nehemiah and Chronicles. To differ from the conventional wisdom of recent scholarship, which locates their composition in the Persian and/or early Hellenistic periods, I suggest they be understood as representing the territorial ideology of the Hasmoneans in the late 2nd century BCE. The reader should note that because of my emphasis on early North Israelite and Hasmonean compositions, the most important phase in biblical historiography – Judah of the late 7th century – is somewhat under-represented; this can be remedied by reverting to *The Bible Unearthed*.

The book consists of 30 chapters, most of which were published as articles, mainly in recent years (only three were published before 2010, only seven before 2015; see the

List of First Publications at the end of this volume). I have left the articles and their bibliographies basically as originally published, but they were standardized in terms of style for this volume; in particular, toponyms that occur in the Bible now as a rule follow their spelling in the Revised Standard Version (RSV). I added some cross-references in the notes; in many chapters I have also added an addendum which updates the reader about data from the field and my views on the matters discussed. Seven of these chapters were co-authored and in these cases the name of the co-author appears under the title. One chapter – on the Philistines in the Bible (ch. 27) – was written 20 years ago; I have therefore decided to update it. Two chapters – on Nehemiah (ch. 29) and Chronicles (ch. 30) – present newly written, updated summaries of my views, based on past articles; I decided not to reprint the original papers, as they already appeared in my 2018 SBL book *Hasmonean Realities behind Ezra, Nehemiah, and Chronicles: Archaeological and Historical Perspectives*. In addition to the introduction and summary, two chapters – on writing in Ancient Israel (ch. 2) and the Acts of Solomon in 1 Kings (ch. 26) – were written especially for this book.

In structuring the volume I needed to decide between two options. The first was to follow the biblical concept of the history of Ancient Israel – from Patriarchs to Exodus, the rise of Ancient Israel, the "period" of the Judges, the monarchic era and the events following the destruction of Jerusalem. The second was to adhere to my understanding of biblical historiography – from the Northern Kingdom of the early 8th century, via Judah of the late 8th to late 7th century, to Hasmonean times in the late 2nd century BCE. The second option – the more logical from the scholarly point of view – is difficult to realize, as many of the chapters deal with stratified texts that represent different periods (see, for instance, the chapters on the major judges). I therefore took the middle road: in the first parts of the book (Parts II to V), I follow the biblical notion, starting with Pentateuchal historiography and then move on to the rise of Early Israel, the heroic tales in Judges and the Saul–Benjamin traditions. In the last parts of the book (Parts VI to VIII) I adhere to my understanding of biblical historiographic compositions – from Jeroboam II to John Hyrcanus.

Before I close this short introduction, I wish to thank Oded Lipschits, Thomas Römer, Neil A. Silberman and Lily Singer-Avitz for allowing me to reprint the articles which I co-authored with them. Special thanks go to Thomas Römer, who co-authored four of the articles which appear in this book. My work with Thomas is perceived by many as an example of critical and fruitful cooperation between a biblical scholar and an archaeologist, not to mention that we have recently expanded this cooperation to work in the field – in the excavations of Kiriath-jearim. Many of the views expressed in this book were shaped by discussions with friends, colleagues and students. Among the former I wish to mention Oded Lipschits, Nadav Na'aman and Benjamin Sass. I am also grateful to the editors of the journals and books in which my articles originally appeared for permitting me to reprint them here. Finally, special thanks go to Samuel Arnet for his meticulous, high-quality and uncompromising copyediting, typesetting and indexing.

Part I

Overviews

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History, Historicity and Historiography in Ancient Israel

1. A Brief History of Research

In the reconstruction of Ancient Israel's history, the pendulum has swung back and forth in the last two centuries between the two poles of traditional and critical interpretations. The tense dispute preceded archaeological research. It commenced with Spinoza's critical exegesis over three and half centuries ago and peaked in the 19th century with Wellhausen and others. On the side of archaeology, much of the early work in Palestine, by Sellin and Petrie, for example, had been professional, that is, not subjected to an uncritical reading of the biblical text. This changed with the rise of the Albright-dominated traditional biblical archaeology in the early 1920s, which was aimed at fighting-off critical theories and proving biblical history to be an accurate account of the past. Israeli archaeologists, first and foremost Yadin, joined this camp in the 1950s for cultural rather than theological reasons. Conservative biblical archaeology held the upper hand for much of the 20th century. The reaction has been an ultra-critical ("minimalist") approach that appeared in the 1990s, arguing against the traditional use of archaeology in reconstructing the history of Ancient Israel in the Iron Age and advocating the view that biblical texts which refer to the history of Ancient Israel were all compiled in the Persian and Hellenistic periods and thus have no real value for understanding earlier periods.[1] And since minimalism is about one's approach to the biblical text, "accusing" archaeologists of being minimalists[2] demonstrates a misunderstanding of the entire discipline. Parallel to the work of the minimalists, a school which can be described as promoting a "view from the center" has developed. Members of this school, to which I belong, take a critical attitude toward both text and archaeology, but differ from the minimalists in arguing that a significant number of biblical records date to late-monarchic times, and that some accounts preserve memories of earlier days in the Iron Age.[3] Needless to say, the "view from the center" group is far from being homogeneous.[4]

As could have been expected, the expansion of the critical approach, especially the

[1] E.g., Davies 1992; Thompson 1999.

[2] Garfinkel 2011.

[3] For this approach, which has recently been ingeniously described by Jean-Marie Durand in French as *deconstruction positive*, see, e.g., Finkelstein and Silberman 2001; Liverani 2005; Miller and Hayes 2006; Na'aman 2006; Knauf 2013.

[4] See, e.g., Na'aman 2010a; Finkelstein 2010.

one "from the center," which has been conceived, in a way, as posing a greater threat, brought about a series of attempts to prove it wrong and to re-establish a conservative reconstruction of the history of Ancient Israel. Ironically, though the neo-traditionalists are all archaeologists, their interpretation is text-based; their advances can be seen as a revival of the Albright school's assault on late 19th/early 20th century developments in critical biblical research in Europe and yet again, they come from different cultural milieus. The current conservative trend is best demonstrated by recent claims that:

- The palace of King David has been found in the City of David in Jerusalem;[5]
- Finds at Khirbet Qeiyafa in the Shephelah provide evidence for a developed kingdom in Judah in the 10th century BCE and can be read against the background of biblical texts ostensibly describing events which had taken place at that time;[6] the ostracon retrieved there demonstrates the possibility of composition of biblical texts as early as the 10th century BCE;[7]
- Copper production at Khirbet en-Naḥas and Timnaʿ in the Arabah is connected to the economic endeavors of King Solomon.[8]

More subtle but no less misleading are interpretations of sets of data from past excavations, for instance regarding the "Israelite fortresses" in the Negev Highlands,[9] and concerning an ostensible change in the settlement patterns of the 10th century BCE which was interpreted as indicating the organization of a developed kingdom in Ancient Israel.[10] Both examples demonstrate incorrect methodology, because they select and set the data in a way that leads to the requested result.[11]

2. How to "View from the Center"?

Traditional biblical archaeology and reconstruction of the history of Ancient Israel are based on accepting the most basic perception of the author of the text – that the history of Ancient Israel from the patriarchs in Genesis to the Return in Ezra and Nehemiah is a genuine description of a *sequential* history of the nation. This is not the case;[12] I tend to look at biblical history from a point of view once described by the

[5] E. Mazar 2007; 2009; rejoinder in Finkelstein et al. 2007.

[6] E.g., Garfinkel, Kreimerman, and Zilberg 2016; rejoinders in Na'aman 2012a; Finkelstein and Fantalkin 2012; Fantalkin and Finkelstein 2017; Finkelstein and Piasetzky 2015.

[7] Galil 2009; Puech 2010; rejoinders in Rollston 2011; Millard 2011.

[8] E.g., Levy et al. 2008; Ben Yosef 2016, returning to Glueck's 1940s ideas about Solomon the copper king.

[9] Faust 2006, proven wrong by recent radiocarbon dates that put the sites in the 9th century BCE, see Boaretto et al. 2010.

[10] Faust 2006.

[11] Finkelstein 2005.

[12] Römer 2014.

French *annals* scholar Marc Bloch as *histoire regressive*. The idea is that in a situation of uncertainty (and stories such as the patriarchs, Exodus and conquest clearly belong to this category) the researcher must base him/herself in a period for which the testimony – historical, economic, social and material culture – is well-defined, and only then start reconstructing back, step by step. In the case of Ancient Israel, the safest period to serve as a point of departure is the time of the first authors in Jerusalem, that is, in late-monarchic days (more below). Keeping to the "rules" I will describe below, this reconstruction must be done with as reliable a grip as possible over the question of transmission of traditions, oral and/or written and the ideological/theological goals of the authors.

In certain cases, intuitively traditional biblical archaeologists and historians inherited another concept from the authors – that episodes in the history of Ancient Israel were unique in the chronicles of the Levant. Yet the history of Canaan/Israel cannot be detached from events and processes in the surrounding lands in the ancient Near East and the eastern Mediterranean. The most obvious example is the necessity of dealing with the destructions at the end of the Late Bronze Age not as singular local ("conquest") occurrence, but rather as part of the broader phenomenon of the "Crisis Years" in the eastern Mediterranean.[13] I believe that archaeology – especially what it tells us about settlement history, forces the researcher to view the history of Canaan/Israel along the lines of another French *annals* concept, that of the *longue durée*. According to this notion, many of the processes that characterize the region in the Bronze and Iron Ages – at least until the Assyrian takeover – were of a cyclical nature, influenced by geographical conditions. This is true for waves of settlement and periods of decline in the highlands and the arid zones, as well as cycles of urban growth and collapse in the lowlands.

The crucial question, of course, is what to do when archaeology and the biblical text provide conflicting stories. In such a case, which of the two has the upper hand, and do we need to seek a "winner"?[14] For archaeology, two factors are dominant: (1) intensity of the evidence, including the size of the area exposed and, in the case of a large site, good representation of the different parts of the settlement;[15] (2) good control over the data; only in the case of secure stratigraphy, clear ceramic assemblage and good radiocarbon dates does archaeology provide reliable, unbiased, real-time evidence. Yet, it goes without saying that even in near perfect conditions the archaeological evidence may be open to different cultural and historical interpretations. Regarding the text the most important question is the time span between the ostensible events described and the period of composition. In the case of chronological proximity and texts of a chronistic nature (that is, free of theological stances expressed in, e.g., speeches and prophecies), the text may be regarded as providing

[13] Ward and Sharp Joukowsky 1992; Cline 2015.
[14] See the discussion in Na'aman 2010a; Finkelstein 2010.
[15] For the case of Bethel, see in Na'aman 2010a; Finkelstein 2010.

dependable evidence. When the ostensible events are centuries earlier than the time of authorship, and the account is not chronistic in nature, the text is less likely to provide reliable testimony of the past. All this means that in the case of Ancient Israel we are not dealing with a black-and-white situation and there is no single, checklist attitude to the question of historicity; each case must be dealt with according to its specific circumstances (examples below).

Having set the stage, I now wish to turn to what I see as the basic rules of thumb that must be taken into consideration when dealing with biblical history.

2.1 It's All about Dating

In order to properly use archaeology in historical reconstruction one needs to be in full control of absolute chronology. By "full control" I mean the following inseparable trio: data must come from secure stratigraphic context, with good command of relative chronology, that is, of the ceramic assemblage that originates from this context, which must be radiocarbon dated. In other words, since the association of a historical event with archaeological finds such as destruction layers is a tricky endeavor and because some of the biblical texts on which scholars build their theories cannot be dealt with as straightforward historical accounts, reliable and independent absolute chronology is mandatory. It can be achieved mainly by deploying a rigorous program of radiocarbon dating.

The problem is that radiocarbon dating typically results in an uncertainty of several decades, which – in the case of biblical history – may lead to utterly different historical reconstructions. One obvious example is the dating of the late Iron IIA palaces at Megiddo: a difference of 70–80 years (say, between ca. 940 and 860 BCE) puts them in utterly different settings: either at the time of the supposed United Monarchy or in the days of the Omride Dynasty of the Northern Kingdom. An even tighter situation is the dating of finds in the north to the first or second half of the 9th century (e.g., between ca. 850 and 830 BCE!), the former in the days of the Omrides and the latter in the period of Damascene hegemony in the region. A third example is the dating of activity in the Negev Highlands sites; putting their main period of occupation in the mid-10th century or in the first half to the middle of the 9th century results in a different geopolitical situation vis-à-vis the Sheshonq I campaign, copper production in the Arabah and the period of Damascene hegemony in the southern Levant.[16] Here, then, is what needs to be done in order to deploy radiocarbon dating successfully:

– Only short-lived samples (grain seeds, olive pits, etc.) should be dated. Charcoal is risky because it may lead to "old wood effect," that is, the sample may come from a piece of old timber, reused many decades if not centuries after the tree was felled.

[16] Boaretto et al. 2010; Shahack Gross et al. 2014.

- The sample must include more than a single item (seed, olive pit), which may have been displaced in antiquity.
- Dating according to a single radiocarbon determination is not reliable because a sole result can always be an outlier.
- Dating of a site should preferably be done in a sequence of ceramic phases or strata, because setting the results in a Bayesian model and imposing the stratigraphy on the data can significantly diminish uncertainties. This can be achieved by arranging dates from different (preferably neighboring) sites whose relative sequence can be correlated according to their pottery assemblages,[17] or by deploying data for a dense sequence of well-separated strata at a single site.[18]
- In the case of a single-layer site, the results should best be set into a regional context, with layers representing a sequence of ceramic phases. Note, for example, Khirbet Qeiyafa in the Shephelah: when dated alone, the results fall in the second half of the 11th century;[19] when put in context (especially versus Iron I sites in its vicinity) the site is dated in the first half of the 10th century BCE.[20]
- Averaging of results can be done only when there is reason to believe that the samples represent a short period of no more than a few years in the history of a given settlement. If this is not the case, the results must be plotted rather than averaged.[21]

Diverting from these rules may lead to mistaken dates, that is, erroneous historical settings.

2.2 The Israel–Judah Dichotomy

When reconstructing the history of Ancient Israel, differences between southern and northern traditions embedded in the Bible must be taken into consideration.[22] Of course, the biblical text reflects a southern perspective; this is discernible, for example, in the arrangement of the Book of Genesis: the patriarchal narrative opens with the southern Abraham who is made the grandfather of the northern Jacob. In the so-called Deuteronomistic History all northern kings are evaluated negatively and in the Books of Chronicles the Northern Kingdom is almost totally ignored. This southern reworking of Israelite traditions has influenced scholars, who in many cases "inherited" the southern perspective.

Yet, extra-biblical texts and archaeology both demonstrate that historically, Israel had been the leading force among the Hebrew kingdoms. Israel was demographically and economically developed long before Judah. The northern territories on both sides

[17] E.g., Finkelstein and Piasetzky 2010.
[18] For Megiddo, see Toffolo et al. 2014.
[19] Garfinkel et al. 2012.
[20] Finkelstein and Piasetzky 2015.
[21] Opposing views in Garfinkel et al. 2012; Finkelstein and Piasetzky 2015.
[22] E.g., Fleming 2012.

of the Jordan River had already been densely settled in the Iron I, when the marginal Judean highlands were still depleted demographically. At that time the population ratio between the highlands parts of Israel (including the Gilead) and Judah can be estimated at 25:1! Even in the mid-8th century (that is, before the takeover of the Gilead by Damascus), the demographic ratio between Israel and Judah can be estimated at ca. 4:1.[23] Judah started developing in a significant way in the end-phase of the late Iron IIA (late 9th century),[24] and reached a real peak of prosperity only in the Iron IIB–C, that is, starting in the late 8th century BCE.[25] Population can, of course, be translated to military and economic strength; indeed, the power of Israel in the days of the Omrides is clearly depicted in Shalmaneser III's list of participants in the Battle of Qarqar in 853 BCE and hinted at in the Tel Dan and Mesha inscriptions; it is also portrayed in sparse biblical references to both the reign of the Omrides and the somewhat later days of Joash and Jeroboam II. In addition, Israel controlled more fertile regions, such as the Jezreel Valley, and trade routes, such as the international highway along the coast and northern valleys and the King's Highway in Transjordan. It was also better connected to the coast and other neighboring regions. All this promoted the North's agricultural output and revenues from trade. In short, demographically, economically, militarily and geopolitically Israel was the dominant power during most of the time when the two Hebrew kingdoms existed side by side. These factors must be taken into consideration when analyzing biblical narratives.

2.3 No Evidence for Compilation of Complex Texts before the Early 8th Century

In a recent article Benjamin Sass and I studied afresh the West Semitic alphabetic inscriptions from the Levant that date from the Late Bronze to the early phase of the Iron IIB, that is, until the early 8th century BCE.[26] We concluded that Hebrew inscriptions appear for the first time in the late Iron IIA/1 at Gath in the south and Rehob in the north. But at that time (first half of the 9th century BCE) they are not found in the heartland of Israel and Judah. It is especially significant that not a single Hebrew inscription comes from the major cities of the Omride period, Megiddo, Samaria, Jezreel, Yokneam and Hazor and the inscriptions that do appear in the 9th century do not testify to the ability to compose elaborate texts. Monumental stone inscriptions appear in the late 9th century BCE. But here again, the ability of dynastic scribes to compose royal inscriptions (or, theoretically speaking, of administrators to put together lists of commodities) cannot be compared to authoring complex literary biblical texts. The first significantly long and elaborate inscriptions in a genre which

[23] Broshi and Finkelstein 1992.
[24] Fantalkin and Finkelstein 2006; Fantalkin 2008; Sergi 2013.
[25] Jamieson Drake 1991; Finkelstein and Silberman 2006a.
[26] Finkelstein and Sass 2013; somewhat updated in Sass and Finkelstein 2016.

Scripture Index

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General Index

Page references in *italics* indicate figures.
Page references followed by "n" indicate information contained within footnotes.
For sporadic cross-references to the Scripture Index, see pages 573–576.