Finding Myth and History in the Bible

SCHOLARSHIP, SCHOLARS AND ERRORS

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On Finding Myth and History in the Bible: Epistemological and Methodological Observations*

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Introduction

Giovanni Garbini is one of the forerunners of recent critical biblical historiography – if not one of the very first "minimalists" of the late-twentieth century.[1] In the mid-1980s, with the publication of his *Storia e ideologia nell'Israele antico*, he challenged the existence of the United Monarchy of David and Solomon as depicted by the biblical narrative and he proposed to date *the whole* of the Old Testament to the third century BCE, two questions that would later be defended as an essential position of "minimalism."[2] In effect, and despite some reservations regarding his proposals,[3] his provocative views in this book on several topics set forward a number of key issues for Old Testament studies that would fully develop during the 1990s through the so-called "minimalism–maximalism" controversy, although with a much wider scope.

The extensive work of the French school of *les Annales* during a large part of the twentieth century established that creating problems in historiography is to advance our historical knowledge, fostering our historical methodologies and our ways of doing history.[4] In this sense (and without claiming that our author is an *annaliste*!), with *Storia e ideologia* Garbini intervened not that much as a biblical scholar but rather as *a real historian*, in the professional sense of the term: not as someone who simply evokes diachronically the past or narrates it, but as someone who problematizes the knowledge of the past in order to write history.

In what follows, and inspired by the critical spirit of Garbini's *Storia e ideologia*, I will address questions related to how we may interpret biblical stories, or better the intellectual world assumed by biblical

stories; how to understand these sources from a critical epistemological and methodological outlook; and finally how to proceed in order to produce a sound historiography of the world of biblical literature and the past of ancient Palestine. My interest in the present contribution is not to sift history from ideology – as Garbini originally intended in his opus – but rather to investigate whether history can be found behind (or inside) mythical evocations in the Bible or not. From the outset, I make my view on the question explicit: reading the Bible primarily as history is highly problematic since it excludes not only the possibility of grasping the mythic character of ancient Near Eastern stories, but also creates virtual pasts, rationalistic paraphrases of ancient worldviews expressed in those stories. The present contribution, therefore, attempts to establish an epistemological awareness and as such it proposes only critical observations for doing history and interpreting ancient texts.

A terminological caveat before proceeding: the present writer is aware that there is no "Bible" as a single textual artefact. Nonetheless, the term is used in this essay to refer to the biblical corpus in general, for the sake of the epistemological argument advanced, and since it is proposed in the pages which follow that both Old and New Testaments, together with the rest of the biblical writings, are embedded in a mythic discourse that functions as a charter of theology and myth, thus creating many problems for writing history directly out of them.

How to Read the Bible Historically?

In one of his volumes of collected essays, *Mito e storia nella Bibbia*, Garbini addresses a number of biblical stories, looking at their literary nature and the ways they may be read or interpreted.[5] The key concept in this interpretation is "myth" and how we can decode biblical stories, attempting to understand them and the message they convey. Garbini's way of dealing with these stories resembles, and seems to be influenced in some way by, the reading that Thomas L. Thompson has offered in his provocative *The Bible in History*,[6] in which it is proposed to interpret the Bible not as merely reflecting history, but instead as expressing a particular theology and understanding of the divine and human worlds, without distinguishing history from myth in its stories. Even if we concede – as Garbini does – that such mythic interpretation of events have some anchor in real historical situations,[7] what is relevant for the historian from this interpretative perspective is the biblical discourse as a cultural element that must be seriously considered in order to grasp the nature of the biblical sources when attempting to draw data from them.

In effect, the interpretative path proposed by Thompson and Garbini allows indeed for acknowledging a series of considerations related to historical interpretation that transcend the simple use of biblical images as reflecting real historical events from the past.

The first one has to do with the epistemological contexts of interpretation: to assume that the Bible was read or understood throughout the last two millennia in some loose and general way as primarily dealing with a real, historical past (especially from Gen 12 on), that is, as we may read it in modern days, is nothing but an ethnocentric assertion that otherwise needs to be proven. Our first methodological duty as historians should be to recognize that, given that the society that produced the biblical stories differs in so many ways from our modern or contemporary society (from a socio-anthropological perspective), the Bible cannot be used as a direct source, a direct testimony of the past, but it must first be culturally decoded. The intellectual revolution brought upon Western society by the Enlightenment since the eighteenth century onwards changed radically ways to understand and explain the universe, natural and human history and the ultimate reality of things; and with that, of course, the Bible. The so-called "triumph of Reason" meant that the biblical narrative was historicized, its contents inscribed in History, and the primeval manner of understanding the biblical stories, as a (theological) myth, was therefore gradually erased and replaced by modern theology and modern biblical scholarship, with German historical-critical methodologies as the key instruments for dissecting the Bible.[8]

This leads us to the second consideration about terminology and conceptual terms. Throughout scholarly literature the dichotomy between "history" and "fiction" is usually found, deeming a negative meaning to the term "fiction." Also the wording of the creation of tradition as "invention" connotes the notion of elaborating something from scratch and perhaps with the intention of deceiving a targeted audience. Of course, when such a deception contains a considerable degree of "historical truth" the notion of propaganda comes immediately to mind.[9] I think instead that the concept of *myth*, as it is used by ethnographical and anthropological research, offers much better analytical outcomes that the perspective created by the dichotomy history/myth, once it is detached from the Western modern and popular connotation of "lie," or something relating precisely to some sort of invention.[10] Actually, the concept of myth has an important heuristic value when it is understood as an explanatory worldview employed by "natives" to process and represent reality, past, present and future. In this context, the notion of myths as having essentially to do with divine beings and their interaction

with humans is secondary. It also should be noted that rationalistic understandings of mythic compositions miss the point when attempting an interpretation without considering the mythic mindset behind those compositions.

Accordingly, to read the Hebrew Bible from Genesis to Ezra–Nehemiah–Chronicles, or the Christian Bible from Genesis to Revelation, *as a myth*, without sifting historical reality from religious imagination or deliberate authorial fiction, means essentially to attempt an understanding of these ancient stories as an ancient Near Eastern audience or readership would, by using ethnographic analogies and through sound scholarly interpretations.[11] This is a key epistemological instance in order to use biblical narrative as a historical source: knowing precisely the characteristics of the source and the historical and intellectual contexts of its production. Unlike the archaeological and the epigraphic records of the South Levant, the Old Testament writings are secondary (or even tertiary) sources for Iron Age Palestine; however, their status is upgraded when we are dealing with the second half of the first millennium BCE to the second century CE, as they certainly represent a primary source for the intellectual history of Jewish communities and their understanding of an ancient past that informs them about their origins and identity,[12] an identity created or invented, with a mythopoetic nature that is at home in the Eastern Mediterranean and ancient Near Eastern cultural world – but that is another question.[13]

A Key Matter: Historical Kernels in Mythic Wrappings?

One particular aspect of Garbini's historical scholarship is his ability to find hidden traces of "history" in the biblical texts. Of course, this ability depends greatly on his philological skills, more than in proper historical criticism.[14] In some ways, this procedure is likened to the "archaeology of the text," widespread in biblical studies for more than a century (i.e. historical-critical studies).[15] In spite of some valuable and progressive results of this method during the last century, an alternative approach can also be pursued. A rather different approach, in fact.

The question is not, indeed, whether the Old Testament may contain historical information, that is, information that can be found in extra-biblical Near Eastern sources,[16] but whether it is possible to retrieve such information from biblical stories beyond a mere historicist "corroboration" and use it directly to write history. This matter, in effect, takes us back some two hundred years, to the foundational work of W. M. L. de Wette (1780–1849), who regarded the Old Testament as a collection of myths and traditions with no historical information in them.[17] Of course,

de Wette wrote in a time when the archaeological research in the "land of the Bible" had not yet occurred. The development of "biblical archaeology" would switch opinions towards a positive attitude regarding biblical historicity in general.[18] In the present, the idea that there is some correspondence between the history of ancient Palestine and the biblical narrative has been dominant and widespread at least since de Wette's death, or better said, since the proper development of "biblical archaeology" and historical-critical studies throughout the nineteenth century. But this conception is not the sole patrimony of traditional European biblical scholarship or American conservative evangelical scholars. Critical scholars such as Garbini (especially in his *Scrivere la storia d'Israele*), Knauf, Liverani and many others who stand at the centre of the historiographical path, between "skeptical minimalism" and "credulist maximalism" – should these representations of scholarly positions be valid – think that it is indeed methodologically possible to write history from the biblical texts after a proper sifting of the textual data.[19]

Yet the quarrel at this stage of the argument in the present study is not with methodology but with epistemology: How can we unwrap a mythic story in order to get to the historical kernel? Is such a cross-epistemological procedure not only possible but valid at all? Distancing myself from the always-complicated procedures of German historical-critical studies,[20] I would argue, on one hand, that we should attempt to interpret biblical narrative as a myth *in toto*, without distinguishing myth from history, and, on the other hand, to produce a history (or histories) of the contexts of creation of such narratives but without crossing lines or mixing information, that is, in a parallel arrangement of the data (see further below).

It is necessary to understand the intellectual development of the last two centuries in order to explain the epistemological matrix of contemporary biblical studies, especially its handling of historical questions. As noted above, the notion of reading history or historical events into biblical stories is a modern Western activity, a cultural setting of the mind after the European Enlightenment that cast anything not inscribed in History to the realm of fantasy, imagination or "myth" (as synonymous with something unreal or even untrue). However, such a rationalistic distinction between "history" and "myth" when evoking reality was non-existent in the ancient Near Eastern *Umwelt* of the biblical stories. The key distinction between what we, from an Enlightened perspective, would call "history" and "myth" was intertwined into one single conception and representation; what we would call "historical events" was understood according to the mythic archetypes that arranged the cosmos

and reality for ancient Near Eastern peoples.[21] It is thus highly doubtful that we can peel away layers of mythic stories in order to find a core of historical truth. Also in this way, unless we have external evidence of a biblical event, it is very difficult to know what is truly "historical" and what is not. Of course, this does not mean the Hebrew Bible/ Old Testament should be left aside when writing a history of Iron Age Palestine; it means, instead, that the biblical narrative is not the first or main source for commencing the production of a critical historical reconstruction.

I leave now this brief epistemological discussion and will propose, then, a methodological procedure for dealing with the writing of ancient Palestine's past and the use of biblical narrative as a historical source.

Myth and History Apart

It is no novelty, especially after some 40 years of criticism within Old Testament historical studies, to claim that the biblical narrative and the archaeological should be kept separated, not comingled. Thompson argued already in his *The Historicity of the Patriarchal Narratives* from 1974 that "[a]rchaeological materials should not be dated or evaluated on the basis of written texts which are independent of these materials; so also written documents should not be interpreted on the basis of archaeological hypotheses."[22] Nonetheless, since pleas or attempts to establish or foster a "dialogue" between both sets of data have been proposed rather frequently in biblical studies and archaeology, evolving from a different epistemological basis and aiming at producing some sort of "corroboration,"[23] the matter has to be addressed once again.

To speak of "corroboration" implies the possibility of relating two sets of different data that refer to *one single past*, in an ontological sense. Yet, since the mythical discourse of the Bible evokes events for theological purposes from a mythic epistemology and the modern historiographical discourse shapes the historical past of ancient Palestine according to rationalistic principles, it is possible to affirm that such dialogue, when offered *on the same epistemological terms*, is utterly erroneous. The Bible and modern history-writing cannot corroborate each other as if both discourses belong to the same epistemological matrix, referring to the same historical past. A more correct insight seems to be that modern historiographical techniques explain why the Bible evokes some events that can be confirmed as historical by archaeological reconstructions and epigraphic finds. The Bible is not a direct witness to the past of Iron Age Palestine, but a much later reflection on

that past. The biblical past is not the same past we, in modern times, seek to reconstruct – even if key events and places appear to be coincident. In the Bible we find a theological myth that uses what we would call "historical events" for conveying a certain message. That does not qualify the Bible as the primary blueprint to write historically about ancient Palestine. *In sum, modern historical research can explain the Bible in its various complexities, but the Bible cannot explain the history of ancient Palestine for us in scientific or realistic terms*.

We can indeed have a biblical and theological myth, going through the stories of the Old Testament, and we can have a history and archaeology of Palestine (or the South Levant, if a less politicized term is preferred); but we cannot have them both as a blend anymore – we cannot inhabit both worlds *at the same time*. The "myth of Israel" that we find in the Bible is food for theology, which is its main matter of concern. In other words, a mythic interpretation of biblical stories is perhaps the most valid path for the relevance of theology as a contemporary intellectual reflection and discourse.[24] But this should not be confused with ancient history. The historical episodes, bits and notices in biblical narrative would better be explained by secular, non-confessional and apart-from-theology histories of the ancient South Levant. The paradigm of "the Bible as history," in the modern sense of the term *history*, has come fully to an end as to its analytical value. This paradigm should then not be perpetuated by attempts to find historical kernels inside the mythic wrappings of ancient stories, for it is not a matter of quantity – how much historical data it is possible to extract from myth, which is at times, and under certain circumstances, actually feasible – but of quality, of different epistemologies setting up different intellectual discourses to refer to the universe and everything inside it (including the notion of past times!) that – again – should not be mixed.

In the end, however, the question also depends on the discursive realms we all inhabit: conservative evangelical scholarship regards this methodology as destructive, leaving little to work with, preferring instead to use the Old Testament as a key source for understanding and reconstructing the past of ancient Israel – which is conceptualized as the same thing as biblical and/or historical Israel.[25] But the problem with this choice is that conservative evangelical scholarship's attempts to write history does not live up to the standards of the professional historical discipline. It is rather dictated by the confessional need of having the Bible as a *historical* narrative – meaning an evocation of events that actually happened more than two millennia ago – in order to support and legitimate the relevance of a particular theological discourse in the

present. Once this strategy is dismantled, it is easy to realize that the importance of writing modern "biblical histories of Israel" resides not in what may be discovered, in a truly scientific spirit, but actually in what can be confirmed (*ergo historia ancilla theologiae!*). Conservative evangelical scholarship builds on a confessional transference of textual (biblical) realities into the archaeological and historical records, creating a rationalized yet bogus image of ancient Palestine's past. It is thus not only misleading but essentially wrong in historical terms to speak, for instance, of a "biblical period" in the history of the South Levant, or of a time of a United Monarchy, or even of David and Solomon – as it would equally be to refer to an "Odyssey period" or the time of Ulysses and Achilles when addressing the history of ancient Greece. Such references have no historical support and appear to be valid only within the boundaries of a conservative evangelical approach to ancient Palestine's past, or a "biblical archaeology" discourse, blending myth and history into one final outcome, or a nationalist (Zionist) retelling of ancient foundational events and scenarios.[26]

A Final Comment

Hyper-critical or extremely radical as it may seem, my stand in this essay is concerned not with having eventually a minimal history of ancient Palestine written, but rather with securing a sound basis for writing history and understanding biblical narrative in its ancient intellectual context, without retrojecting theological (or political) readings of the present into the past. Concerning the historian's task, the challenge for the future is to write histories of the South Levant without the biblical narrative or "ancient Israel" as the leading sketch for such historiography, which seems to be the proper outcome of some four decades of challenging thinking in biblical historical studies.[27] This is precisely the general disposition defended in the preceding: that biblical narrative should not dictate how the history of ancient Palestine is to be understood and written anymore. Dealing historically with ancient Palestine should not start with the Bible, but – as already suggested – the Bible should be explained and understood after an evaluation, among other aspects, of the political, economic, social, religious, demographic, ecological situation of Palestine in its own right. If the Old Testament's stories can indeed shed some light on Iron Age Palestine, it will be only after sketching such a past historically, basing our reconstructions on primary sources, and only then proceeding with secondary sources.

Notes

* It is a pleasure to dedicate this paper to Professor Garbini, whose work and scholarly attitude have been so inspiring to me.

1. The other candidate would be Bernd Jørg Diebner from the University of Heidelberg (see, for instance, his essay "'Es lässt sich nicht beweisen, Tatsache aber ist…': Sprachfigur statt Methode in der kritischen Erforschung des AT," *DBAT* 18 [1984], pp. 138–46), but he kept himself within the confines of German-speaking biblical scholarship, resulting in an almost complete lack of awareness of this scholar's writings among English-speaking members of the scholarly guild. For sure, Garbini would have met the same fate, were his works not translated into English.

2. G. Garbini, *Storia e ideologia nell'Israele antico* (Biblioteca di storia e storiografia dei tempi biblici 3; Brescia: Paideia, 1986). Of course, these theses became more widely known in the scholarly world after the English translation of this work: *History and Ideology in Ancient Israel* (London: SCM, 1988).

3. See, to name but a couple of examples of constructive criticism, M. Liverani's review in *Oriens Antiquus* 27 (1988), pp. 303–309; T. L. Thompson, *Early History of the Israelite Peoples: From the Written and Archaeological Sources* (SHANE 4; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1992), pp. 117–26.

4. See the now-classic works of the first generation of *les Annales*: M. Bloch, *Apologie pour l'histoire, ou Métier d'historien* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1949); and L. Febvre, *Combats pour l'histoire* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2nd edn, 1965), where the concept *histoire-problème* ("problem-oriented history") was coined. F. Braudel, a second-generation historian of this school, presented his views in *Écrits sur l'histoire* (Paris: Flammarion, 1969). A representative collection of the third generation's historiographical concerns is J. Le Goff and P. Nora (eds.), *Faire de l'histoire* (3 vols.; Bibliothèque des Histoires; Paris: Gallimard, 1974). Cf. also the evaluation in P. Burke, *The French Historical Revolution: The* Annales *School, 1929–89* (Cambridge: Polity, 1990).

5. G. Garbini, *Mito e storia nella Bibbia* (Studi Biblici 137; Brescia: Paideia, 2003); ET: *Myth and History in the Bible* (JSOTSup 362; London: Sheffield Academic, 2003). Another notable anthology of studies by Garbini is *Letteratura e politica nell'Israele antico* (Studi Biblici 162; Brescia: Paideia, 2010).

6. T. L. Thompson, *The Bible in History: How Writers Create the Past* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1999).

7. Garbini, *Mito e storia*, p. 9.

8. The whole question can in fact be traced back to the appearance of Humanism during the Renaissance and also to the Reformation; cf. P. Gibert, *L'invention critique de la Bible, XVe–XVIIIe siècle* (Bibliothèque des Histoires; Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 2010); and M. Legaspi, *The Death of Scripture and the Rise of Biblical Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); H. Spieckermann, "From Biblical Exegesis to Reception History," *Hebrew Bible and Ancient Israel* 1 (2012), pp. 327–50. See also N. P. Lemche, *The Old Testament Between Theology and History: A Critical Survey* (LAI; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2008), pp. 31–98.

9. Cf. the critical address of this concept in M. Liverani, "Propaganda," in *ABD*, V, pp. 474–77.

10. Many authors and works could be referred to in this regard; see, among others: B. Malinowski, *Magic, Science and Religion* (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1948), especially pp. 72–124; C. Lévi-Strauss, "The Structural Study of Myth," *Journal of American Folklore* 78 (1955), pp. 428–44; idem, *La pensée sauvage* (Paris: Plon, 1962); M. Eliade, *Myth and Reality* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963); C. Geertz (ed.), *Myth, Symbol, and Culture* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1974). In Old Testament studies, N. Wyatt has produced some important works related to this perspective: see his "The Mythic Mind," *SJOT* 15 (2001), pp. 3–56, and further his important anthology *The Mythic Mind: Essays on Cosmology and Religion in Ugaritic and Old Testament Literature* (BibleWorld; London: Equinox, 2005).

11. A point already made by N. P. Lemche in "Are We Europeans Really Good Readers of Biblical Texts and Interpreters of Biblical History?," *JNSL* 25 (1999), pp. 185–99; and also addressed, although from a different (more historiographical) perspective, by E. Ben Zvi, "General Observations on Ancient Israelite Histories in Their Ancient Contexts," in L. L. Grabbe (ed.), *Enquire of the Former Age: Ancient Historiography and Writing the History of Israel* (ESHM 9; LHBOTS 554; London: T&T Clark International, 2011), pp. 21–39, especially pp. 23–24.

12. Primary sources are not necessarily more "historical" than secondary ones; both categories are meaningful only within an interpretative framework or hypothesis that relates their relevance; cf. R. G. Kratz, *Historisches und biblisches Israel: Drei Überblicke zum Alten Testament* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), pp. 5–9. The question is one of method, not of epistemology in this regard.

13. Garbini, *Mito e storia*, pp. 21–22. On the question of history and ancient historiography, a recent collective treatment is K.-P. Adam (ed.), *Historiographie in der Antike* (BZAW 373; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008); a useful survey focussed on the Hebrew Bible is T. M. Bolin, "History, Historiography, and the Use of the Past in the Hebrew Bible," in C. Shuttleworth Kraus (ed.), *The Limits of Historiography: Genre and Narrative in Ancient Historical Texts* (Mnemosyne Supplement 191; Leiden: Brill, 1999), pp. 113–40; but cf. also E. Pfoh, "Ancient Historiography, Biblical Stories and Hellenism," in T. L. Thompson and P. Wajdenbaum (eds.), *The Bible and Hellenism: Greek Influence on Jewish and Early Christian Literature* (CIS; Durham: Acumen, 2014), pp. 19–35.

14. G. Garbini, "Biblical Philology and North-West Semitic Epigraphy: How Do They Contribute to Israelite History Writing?," in M. Liverani (ed.), *Recenti Tendenze nella Ricostruzione della Storia Antica d'Israele* (Rome: Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, 2005), pp. 121–35; idem, *Scrivere la storia d'Israele: Vicende e memorie ebraiche* (Biblioteca di storia e storiografia dei tempi biblici 15; Brescia: Paideia, 2008); cf. my review of Garbini's history of Israel in *Palamedes: A Journal of Ancient History* 4 (2009), pp. 191–95.

15. The most sound example of this methodology, especially as related to historical questions, is probably illustrated by E. A. Knauf's many contributions; see, for instance, E. A. Knauf, "Towards an Archaeology of the Hexateuch," in J. C. Gertz, K. Schmid and M. Witte (eds.), *Abschied vom Jahwisten: Die Komposition des Hexateuch in der jüngsten Diskussion* (BZAW 315; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2002), pp. 275–94. One should not disregard, however, the criticism to this general analytical procedure in B. J. Diebner, "Wider die 'Offenbarungs-Archäologie' in der Wissenschaft vom Alten Testament. Grundsätzliches zum Sinn alttestamentlicher

Forschung im Rahmen der Theologie," *DBAT* 18 (1984), pp. 30–53. Elsewhere, and earlier, Knauf pointed out: "The Old Testament narratives may actually contain as much historical information as the naïve, or fundamentalist, reader expects them to contain, or even more. *But this history is not so much recoverable from the narratives, as it is from the knowledge at the narrators' disposal, and from the linguistic, economic, social and political structures which shaped the narratives*" (E. A. Knauf, "Eglon and Ophrah: Two Toponymic Notes on the Book of Judges," *JSOT* 51 [1991], pp. 25–44 [39, my emphasis]), and one can very much agree with this statement. The matter is how to achieve this goal: how can we know what the knowledge at the narrator's disposal was?

16. See, for instance, the anthology of contributions in L. L. Grabbe (ed.), *"Like a Bird in a Cage": The Invasion of Sennacherib in 701 BCE* (JSOTSup 363; ESHM 4; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2003).

17. In his *Auffoderung zum Studium der hebraischen Sprache und Litteratur* (1805), de Wette wrote: "a complete and thoroughgoing criticism will show that not one of the historical books of the Old Testament has any historical value, and that they all more or less contain myths and traditions; and that we do not have from among any of the books of the Old Testament any real historical witnesses, except for several prophetic books, which, however, yield little historical information." (I reproduce here the translation in J. Rogerson, *W. M. L. de Wette: Founder of Modern Biblical Criticism: An Intellectual Biography* [JSOTSup 126; Sheffield: JSOT, 1992], p. 47.) This understanding is also found in his renowned work *Beiträge zur Einleitung in das Alte Testament* (1806–1807).

18. On the development of "biblical archaeology," see N. A. Silberman, *Digging for God and Country: Exploration, Archaeology, and the Secret Struggle for the Holy Land, 1799–1917* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1982); and T. W. Davis, *Shifting Sands: The Rise and Fall of Biblical Archaeology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

19. To the references in nn. 14–15, one may add: M. Liverani, *Oltre la Bibbia: Storia antica di Israele* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2003), ET: *Israel's History and the History of Israel* (BibleWorld; London: Equinox, 2005); and cf. the review in P. R. Davies, "Way Beyond the Bible – But Far Enough?," in Grabbe (ed.), *Enquire of the Former Age*, pp. 186–93.

20. Cf. further the criticism in T. L. Thompson, "Das Alte Testament als theologische Disziplin," in B. Janowski and N. Lohfink (eds.), *Religionsgeschichte Israels oder Theologie des Alten Testaments?* (JBTh 10; Neukirchen–Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1995), pp. 157–73.

21. A now somewhat dated but still fundamental synthesis of ancient Near Eastern thought is M. Liverani, "La concezione dell'universo," in S. Moscati (ed.), *L'alba della civiltà. Società, economia e pensiero nel Vicino Oriente antico* (Torino: UTET, 1976), III, pp. 437–521. See also B. Albrektson, *History and the Gods: An Essay on the Idea of Historical Events as Divine Manifestations in the Ancient Near East and in Israel* (CBOT 1; Lund: Gleerup, 1967); and H. H. Schmid, *Gerechtigkeit als Weltordnung: Hintergrund und Geschichte der alttestamentischen Gerechtigkeitsbegriffes* (BHT 40; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1968). From anthropology we can get many useful insights in this regard, attending for instance to the debate between Marshall Sahlins and Gananath Obeyesekere regarding how

natives (Hawaiians) interpret events, in this case, the arrival of Captain Cook to Hawaii in 1779; see M. Sahlins, *Historical Metaphors and Mythical Realities* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1981); idem, *Islands of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985); G. Obeyesekere, *The Apotheosis of Captain Cook: European Mythmaking in the Pacific* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992); and Sahlins' response to the criticism in his *How "Natives" Think: About Captain Cook, for Example* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

22. T. L. Thompson, *The Historicity of the Patriarchal Narratives: The Quest for the Historical Abraham* (BZAW 134; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1974), pp. 3–4.

23. B. Halpern, "Text and Artifact: Two Monologues?," in N. A. Silberman and D. B. Small (eds.), *The Archaeology of Israel: Constructing the Past, Interpreting the Present* (JSOTSup 237; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1997), pp. 311–40; as for the finding of corroborations between archaeology (and epigraphy) and texts, see W. G. Dever, *What Did the Biblical Writers Know & When Did They Know It? What Archaeology Can Tell Us About the Reality of Ancient Israel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), pp. 124–31; L. L. Grabbe, *Ancient Israel: What Do We Know and How Do We Know It?* (London: T&T Clark International, 2007), pp. 164–66, 212–15.

24. Cf. the critical considerations in P. R. Davies, "The Intellectual, the Archaeologist and the Bible," in J. A. Dearman and M. P. Graham (eds.), *The Land That I Will Show You: Essays on the History and Archaeology of the Ancient Near East in Honour of J. Maxwell Miller* (JSOTSup 343; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2001), pp. 239–54.

25. See V. P. Long, D. W. Baker, and G. J. Wenham (eds.), *Windows into Old Testament History: Evidence, Argument and the Crisis of "Biblical Israel"* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002); and I. W. Provan, V. P. Long, and T. Longman, III, *A Biblical History of Israel* (LAI; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2003), a book most problematic on methodological grounds (if not ideologically as well), from the perspective of professional history-writing. Cf. the reviews in N. P. Lemche "Conservative Scholarship on the Move," *SJOT* 19 (2005), pp. 203–52; and L. L. Grabbe, "The Big Max: Review of *A Biblical History of Israel* by Iain Provan, V. Philips Long and Tremper Longman, III," in Grabbe (ed.), *Enquire of the Former Age*, pp. 215–33; K. W. Whitelam, "The Death of Biblical History," in D. Burns and J. W. Rogerson (eds.), *Far from Minimal: Celebrating the Work and Influence of Philip R. Davies* (LHBOTS 484; London: T&T Clark International, 2012), pp. 485–504.

26. I am aware that the "biblical archaeology" movement, which was triumphant between the 1920s and the 1970s, entered into difficulties in its later stages (Davis, *Shifting Sands*, pp. 123–44), but it has recently been resuscitated under the name of "new (or historical) biblical archaeology"; see now, for instance, T. E. Levy (ed.), *Historical Biblical Archaeology and the Future: The New Pragmatism* (London: Equinox, 2010). This reappearance expresses, in my view, a change or update in terminology but not in historical epistemology. On "biblical archaeology" as an incompetent reading of the Bible, see Davies, "The Intellectual." On Zionist interpretations of ancient Palestine's past, see now N. Masalha, *The Zionist Bible: Biblical Precedent, Colonialism and the Erasure of Memory* (BibleWorld; Durham: Acumen, 2013).

27. For a sample of more secular, or less Bible-based histories of Palestine, cf. the various proposals in Thompson, *Early History*, passim; K. W. Whitelam, "Sociology or History: Towards a (Human) History of Ancient Palestine," in J. Davis, G. Harvey, and W. G. E. Watson (eds.), *Words Remembered, Texts Renewed: Essays in Honour of John F. A. Sawyer* (JSOTSup 195; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995), pp. 149–66; idem, *Rhythms of Time: Reconnecting Palestine's Past* (Sheffield: BenBlackBooks, 2013); Lemche, *The Old Testament Between Theology and History*, pp. 393–453.