A Portrait of the Deuteronomistic Historian at Work?

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When I was his student from 1988 to 1991, Richard Nelson described himself as a "traditional" biblical scholar. My approach was far from traditional, yet Rich took me under his wing and mentored me, exposing me to the very best that traditional research can offer. Under Rich's encouragement to think independently and critically, my dissatisfaction with the consensus views of that era gradually pushed me in a direction that was even less traditional than the one with which I had begun. Rich remains an articulate defender of Martin Noth's thesis, but I am not convinced that the earliest evolutionary stages of Deuteronomy and the Former Prophets constitute a "Deuteronomistic History." In my view, the hypothesis fails to construct a convincing portrait of the ancient scribe known as "Dtr."

Part 1: Readers' Response and the Taming of the Tanak's God

Two pious rabbis devoted their lives to the sayings of the ancient sage Hillel. They were fascinated by a particularly enigmatic proverb. The two rabbis agreed that this proverb was one of the keys to unlocking the mystery of divine truth, but they could not agree on what the proverb meant. Each insisted that the other rabbi's interpretation was incorrect. Eventually, both rabbis died and went to heaven, where they met Hillel. So they asked him which of them had been correct about the ambiguous proverb. Hillel said, "My words were copied incorrectly. You've been trying to interpret a scribe's error." The two rabbis considered this news for a moment. Then they agreed that their own two interpretations were far superior to this new interpretation.

Evaluation of a joke always kills the joke, but it is necessary to note that these two rabbis make us laugh because they are not concerned with their own sacred texts, nor do they really care about their venerated sage Hillel. Even if their piety is genuine, these rabbis are concerned exclusively with their own theological conceptualizations, and they have treated the canonical tradition as nothing more than raw material with which to work.

It has been my thesis that the Bible *became* the Bible through the aggressive interpretational methods modeled by our two rabbis.[1] An anthology of Hebrew literature, created by ancient scribes who never intended to produce religiously authoritative scrolls, inadvertently became religiously authoritative as an ever-widening circle of readers brought their own religious agendas to the texts, systematically limiting what each text was permitted to say. The original Hebrew anthology was an eclectic mélange, including dogmatically theological literature, such as Deuteronomy, cleverly impious narratives, such as 1–2 Samuel, and unself-consciously secular texts, such as the Song of Songs. The miscellaneous nature of the anthology demonstrates that only a handful of texts within it gave voice to the religious perspective of the scribes who produced the literature.

After the Hebrew anthology was saddled with its sacred authority, it became impossible for any text to speak for itself. Pious Jewish readers struggled to find ways to make these old scrolls seem sacred, often by producing revised versions (such as the so-called rewritten Torah texts from Qumran; compare some of the later midrashim) or entirely new, alternative texts (such as *Jubilees* or the Qumran *Temple Scroll*). At other times, irrelevant interpretations were imposed (such as Qumran *pesharim* or various Christian Christocentric interpretations) or the texts' plain sense was buried under sophisticated philosophical agendas (for instance, by Philo of Alexandria). All these failed experiments were attempted because the canonical Torah was, in reality, nothing more than a miscellany of sample *mitzvoth* combined with a variety of folktales (and scribal emulations of folktales). It could not become religiously authoritative until exegetes began to construct a fence around it. The Oral Torah evolved as a natural consequence of the written Torah's unanticipated evolution from anthology to sacred authority (as witnessed by 4QMMT; compare the later Mishnah-Gemara). The Prophets and the Writings evolved in the same manner but more gradually.[2]

Although "Spinozan-era" researchers try to remain independent of the religious communities who preserved and transmitted the Bible, much of their research has been infected by the a priori assumptions of these religious com-

1. See, most recently, my "Evolution of Genre in the Hebrew Anthology," in *Early Christian Literature and Intertextuality*, vol. 1: *Thematic Studies* (ed. Craig A. Evans and H. Daniel Zacharias; Library of New Testament Studies 391; London: T. & T. Clark, 2009) 10–23. My thesis is compatible with the thesis presented by Ehud Ben Zvi in this volume, provided everything that Ben Zvi writes about Persian era literati is viewed instead as a description of Hellenistic and early Roman era literati.

2. For a recent overview of the data, see Eugene C. Ulrich, "The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Hebrew Scriptural Texts," in *The Bible and the Dead Sea Scrolls,* vol. 1: *Scripture and the Scrolls* (ed. James H. Charlesworth; Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2006) 77–99; see also Martin S. Jaffee, *Torah in the Mouth: Writing and Oral Tradition in Palestinian Judaism 200 BCE–400 CE* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

munities.[3] Researchers continue to believe that, when a god appears in a biblical narrative or poem, this god was religiously significant (or even authoritative) for the scribe who authored the text as well as the earliest readers of this text. A moment's reflection ought to expose this fallacy. No one ever worshiped the divine buffoon Zeus as he is portrayed in Homer's *Iliad*, and many Greek intellectuals dismissed Homer as a blasphemer.[4] Homer's version of Zeus did and said what the poet required his god to do and say in order to make the plot of the *Iliad* work. Likewise, the Yahweh who speaks and acts in many narratives and poems was not the Yahweh that the scribes (or anyone else) ever worshiped; frequently, this god is nothing more than a narrative necessity that drives the story's plot.

Part 2: A Cartoon Portrait of the Deuteronomistic Historian at Work?

With this thesis about the origins of the Tanak as foundation, I suggest that the continuing popularity of the Deuteronomistic History derives not from the textual data but from the academic community's a priori commitment to the traditional religious assumption that every author of a biblical text intended to proclaim or defend a religious viewpoint. From the days of Jesus ben Sira and his students to the days of Martin Noth and his heirs, religious communities have read the Former Prophets as theological histories, a reading strategy that is not consistent with the literal content of the Former Prophets.[5]

The text for my sermon of protest derives from a cartoon by David Sipress that appeared in a recent edition of *The New Yorker* magazine (see p. 74). Most of us can imagine ourselves in this scene as begging the scribe to ignore his friend's advice and instead corroborate every source carefully! However, once again, I am compelled to kill the humor by stressing the obvious. This cartoon makes us laugh because we are aware of two realities: first, the Bible is not accurate even when it corroborates its sources and, second, far too many people insist on taking the Bible literally in spite of its *literal* sense. Let us consider each of these two realities.

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3. I call the era since 1670 the "Spinozan era" after the father of secular biblical study. For an English translation of Benedict de Spinoza's "Theologico-Political Treatise," see R. H. M. Elwes, ed., *The Chief Works of Benedict de Spinoza* (2 vols.; New York: Dover, 1951) 1:13–266.

4. Robert Garland characterizes Homer as a forerunner to the later satyr dramas and comedies in *Religion and the Greeks* (London: Bristol Classic, 1994) 5; for ancient disapproval of Homer's gods, see Howard W. Clarke, *Homer's Readers: A Historical Introduction to the Iliad and the Odyssey* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1981) 107–8 and passim.

5. Martin Noth's thesis appeared in 1943 and is available in English as *The Deuteronomistic History* (trans. Jane Doull et al.; JSOTSup 15; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1981).



"Quit worrying about corroborating your sources—it's not as if anyone's going to take all this literally."

Cartoon by David Sipress, *The New Yorker*, March 10, 2008, p. 91. © The New Yorker Collection 2008 David Sipress from cartoonbank.com. All rights reserved.

The first observation entails a slight correction: contrary to the cartoon's implication, the Tanak often claims to have corroborated its sources, but most of these citations are questionable. For example, Deuteronomy claims to be the text of a sermon by Moses, but careful study reveals that it is a composite of materials that accumulated over several centuries, at least. Similarly, prophetic voices such as Isaiah and Jeremiah were convenient fictions for organizing layers of literary supplements spanning centuries. 1–2 Chronicles also invokes a variety of written sources, even though the author's primary source was either the books of Samuel–Kings or an early draft of them.[6] It is also doubtful that royal daybooks (which were not royal archives but practical records discarded

6. The consensus favors the former hypothesis, but A. Graeme Auld has advanced a case for the latter: *Kings without Privilege: David and Moses in the Story of the Bible's Kings*

after a brief interval) could have survived long enough to have been available to the scribes who consistently cited such daybooks throughout 1–2 Kings.[7] One can debate the intended function of citations that the ancient reader is likely to have recognized as false, but the fictional nature of these citations appears self-evident.[8]

The Tanak displays a consistent pattern of carelessness with respect to the citation and handling of its sources. For example, MT Josh 10:13 cites the book of Yashar to corroborate a narrated miracle, but it is doubtful that even an ancient reader would have been impressed by the awkward spin placed on the poetic fragment allegedly deriving from the lost source.[9] Moreover, recent scholars suggest that the *actual* sources underlying Joshua 10 have little to do with the book of Yashar, whether or not the Masoretic attribution is correct (it is lacking in the OG). Thomas Römer believes that the battle at Gibeon was constructed from Assyrian literary models, and Nadav Naʾaman identifies the five kings who met their fate at Makkedah as a garbled folk memory of Sennacherib's invasion in the late eighth century B.C.E., filtered through folklore about a possibly historical David, and then recycled as a tale about Joshua.[10] In other words, the current state of knowledge suggests that Joshua 10 was cobbled together from sources that the ancient scribe realized could not provide reliable information about someone named Joshua, who was supposed to have lived centuries before the scribe's own day. He used these sources anyway, revising them to fit the narrative about his fictional hero, and one is justified to suspect that he was not trying to fool anyone into thinking that the narrative represented actual events.

(Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1994); idem, *Samuel at the Threshold: Selected Works of Graeme Auld* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004).

7. On royal daybooks, see Donald B. Redford, *Egypt, Canaan, and Israel in Ancient Times* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992) 330–31.

8. For recent discussion and bibliography, see Katherine M. Stott, *Why Did They Write This Way? References to Written Documents in the Hebrew Bible and Ancient Literature* (LHBOTS 492; New York: T. & T. Clark, 2008); Lester L. Grabbe, "Mighty Oaks from (Genetically Manipulated?) Acorns Grow: *The Chronicle of the Kings of Judah* as a Source of the Deuteronomistic History," in *Reflection and Refraction: Studies in Biblical Historiography in Honour of A. Graeme Auld* (ed. Robert Rezetko, Timothy H. Lim, and W. Brian Aucker; Leiden: Brill, 2007) 155–73. My views were presented in "Is the Book of Kings Deuteronomistic? And Is It a History?" *SJOT* 21 (2007) 49–72.

9. For a succinct summary of the difficulties with Josh 10:13, see our honoree's discussion: Richard D. Nelson, *Joshua: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997) 141–45.

10. Thomas Römer, "On Book-Finding and Other Literary Strategies," *ZAW* 109 (1997) 1–11 (esp. p. 3); Nadav Naʾaman, "The 'Conquest of Canaan' in the Book of Joshua and in History," *Canaan in the Second Millennium B.C.E.—Collected Essays*, vol. 2 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005) 317–92 (esp. pp. 351–53).

In the instances that extrabiblical evidence permits us to check, it is beyond reasonable doubt that Hebrew scribes modified the content of their sources freely. For example, Iron Age Balaam ben Beor was a voice of ʾEl and the Shaddayîn gods at Deir ʿAllā, just a few miles from Jerusalem.[11] Yet, Balaam became a pious Yahwist in Num 22:2–21 and 22:36–24:25 (artificially projected backward to the Bronze Age) and finally evolved into a false prophet by the hypothetical addition of Num 22:22–35 and by later modifications, such as Num 31:8b, 16; compare 2 Pet 2:15–16).[12] Clearly the Hebrew scribes received authentic sources about someone named Balaam, but I doubt that these scribes cared whether he was a real person. Balaam's name was an empty vessel into which a scribe poured whatever was useful at the moment.[13]

Some researchers marvel at portions of the Bible that preserve reliable information, but what is more striking is the Tanak's pattern of consistent inaccuracy, *even in cases where the scribe obviously had access to reliable sources*.[14] The biblical narrative credits King Solomon with oversight of inter-

11. For research on the Tel Deir ʿAllā plaster inscriptions, see the bibliography provided by Choon Leong Seow, "West Semitic Sources," in *Prophets and Prophecy in the Ancient Near East* (ed. M. Nissinen, with contributions by C. L. Seow and R. K. Ritner; SBLWAW 12; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003) 201–18 (esp. pp. 208–9).

12. John Van Seters, "From Faithful Prophet to Villain: Observations on the Tradition History of the Balaam Story," in *A Biblical Itinerary: In Search of Method, Form, and Content—Essays in Honor of George W. Coats* (ed. Eugene E. Carpenter; JSOTSup 240; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997) 126–32.

13. See additional evidence for the deliberate fictionalizing of older sources in my "Evolution of Genre in the Book of Kings: The Story of Sennacherib and Hezekiah as Example," in *The Function of Ancient Historiography in Biblical and Cognate Studies* (ed. Patricia G. Kirkpatrick and Timothy Goltz; London: T. & T. Clark, 2008) 30–56 (esp. pp. 39–46).

14. A recent example of scholarly appreciation for biblical accuracy is the volume of essays edited by John Day, *In Search of Pre-Exilic Israel* (London: T. & T. Clark, 2004). My discussion in this paragraph and the next summarizes views presented in *Canaan and Israel in Antiquity: An Introduction* (Biblical Seminar 83; London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001) 124–28, 199–237, and passim; idem, "Is the Book of Kings Deuteronomistic?" 57–59, with citations; and idem, "The God Who Is among the Danites," *JSOT* 80 (1998) 3–23. See also Oded Lipschits, *The Fall and Rise of Jerusalem: Judah under Babylonian Rule* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005); Diana V. Edelman, *The Origins of the 'Second' Temple: Persian Imperial Policy and the Rebuilding of Jerusalem* (London: Equinox, 2005); Lisbeth S. Fried, "The High Places (*bāmôt*) and the Reforms of Hezekiah and Josiah: An Archaeological Investigation," *JAOS* 122 (2002) 437–65; Nadav Naʾaman, "The Abandonment of the Cult Places in the Kingdoms of Israel and Judah as Acts of Cult Reform," *UF* 34 (2002) 585–602; Ernst Axel Knauf, "The Glorious Days of Manasseh," in *Good Kings and Bad Kings* (ed. Lester L. Grabbe; London: T. & T. Clark, 2005) 164–88. Additional useful bibliography and recent discussion of these issues can be found in Israel Finkelstein and Amihai Mazar, *The Quest for the Historical Israel: Debating Archaeology and the History of Early Israel* (ed. Brian B. Schmidt; Archaeology and Biblical Studies 17; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007).

national trade routes that, from archaeological data, likely emerged about one hundred years or so later, probably under the Omrides. An Assyrian inscription informs us that King Ahab was a real person and simultaneously suggests that Ahab's biblical battle narratives are largely unhistorical (or, at least, attributed to the wrong king). The Moabite Stone confirms the existence of the Bible's King Mesha while also suggesting historical circumstances that differed from the biblical portrait, and the inscription suggests that an ethnic group known as Gad was, at that time, distinct from Israel. Two biblical kings of Aram, Hazael and Bar-Hadad, appear in the extrabiblical record, but the inscription from Tel Dan suggests that the biblical narratives fail to present a reliable account of that region's fate during the era in which these kings were active.

These examples can be multiplied, but they are sufficient to suggest that the scribes who created, supplemented, and transmitted the Hebrew scrolls prior to Hellenistic times took no interest in matters that we would define as "historical." The scribes display a kind of antiquarianism in the sense that they made use of older sources from time to time, but one should note that these scribes failed to remember events that scribes with an interest in the details of the past were likely to remember—*major events* that had an impact on *entire populations* of Israelites or Judahites. The Hebrew scribes forgot that Egypt once ruled the land in which they lived; that a people called Israel fought a battle with Pharaoh Merneptah; that Pharaoh Sheshonq I's campaign was not (primarily?) directed at Jerusalem; that the House of Omri (unlike the House of David) had achieved international renown; that multiple Yahweh Temples continued to operate throughout the days of the Judahite monarchy; that Assyria's King Sennacherib devastated Lachish, the second largest city of Judah, so that King Manasseh presided over a reduced Judah that was also, paradoxically, Iron Age Jerusalem's most peaceful and prosperous era; that Mizpah remained the political center of the south-central hill region from the early sixth century until about the middle of the fifth century; and that a Yahweh Temple was built on Mount Gerizim at roughly the same time that Jerusalem (and its temple?) was restored in the mid-fifth century.

This casual disregard for accuracy remained endemic to the process of composition from earliest to latest stages. By the Hellenistic and Roman eras, when multiple manuscripts had begun to circulate, details from received sources were handled by the scribes in the same cavalier manner evident from the example of Balaam ben Beor. For example, the king of Judah in 2 Kings 3 is identified as Jehoshaphat in the MT, but Ahaziah in the OG. Likewise, the Old Latin version of the story in 2 Kgs 13:14–19 identifies the king as Jehu rather than the MT's Joash.[15] It does not matter which of these texts (if any)

15. Steven L. McKenzie, *The Trouble with Kings: The Composition of the Book of Kings in the Deuteronomistic History* (Leiden: Brill, 1991) 97–98.

represents the earliest version of each tale; there can be no dispute that ancient scribes, for whatever reason, made significant and quite deliberate changes to their sources. In light of these data, an absence of manuscript variations ought not to inspire trust in the accuracy of the text's content. For example, Sara Japhet believes that the Chronicler depends on but denies the claim made by the book of Kings that Israel suffered exile.[16] If Japhet is correct and if the book of Kings had not survived, the Chronicler's arbitrary revision of his older source would have gone undetected.

The datum of interest in these details is not the *fact* that the Bible tends to be inaccurate, but the *nature* of the inaccuracies. They are as blatant as they are ubiquitous and are perpetrated by scribes who, we can assume from the evidence, had some reasonable knowledge of the facts. A number of these examples were known already in the days of Martin Noth, which should have motivated Noth to revisit his notion of an Iron Age Deuteronomistic *Historian*. Clearly the men who compiled the narratives now contained in the Tanak were *not* historians, not even by ancient definitions of history.[17]

The *New Yorker* cartoon makes us laugh as well because we are aware of a second reality: far too many people insist on taking the Bible literally in spite of its *literal* sense, which is an anomaly that requires explanation. Today, a variety of religious communities promote the phrase "biblical literalism" and define it as belief that the Bible's words are inerrant with respect to all matters of faith, history, and even science. This definition of literalism has nothing to do with a literal reading of the Bible. I doubt, for example, that the scribe(s) who juxtaposed Genesis 1 with Genesis 2–3 believed that the two tales were inerrant. Rather, the scroll of Genesis was designed to be an anthology of variant origin stories. The scribe(s) involved knew that the tales were not religiously authoritative accounts, or even theologically complementary narratives. The quasi-chronological framework with which Genesis is constructed served as a series of file folders (these scribes had not invented chapter and verse divisions). Artificial chronologies were useful especially because they could accommodate lists of all varieties, and lists (whether old or freshly invented was a matter of indifference) were a favorite genre among ancient scribes.[18] In

16. Sara Japhet, "Exile and Restoration in the Book of Chronicles," in *The Crisis of Israelite Religion: Transformation of Religious Tradition in Exilic and Post-Exilic Times* (ed. Bob Becking and Marjo C. A. Korpel; Leiden: Brill, 1999) 33–44 (esp. p. 40).

17. I discuss definitions of the history genre, ancient and modern, in "Is the Book of Kings Deuteronomistic?" and idem, *Canaan and Israel in Antiquity*, 31–82.

18. My comments about Genesis presuppose that the scroll existed independently from other scrolls for many human generations. See, for example, Konrad Schmid, "The So-Called Yahwist and the Literary Gap between Genesis and Exodus," in *A Farewell to the Yahwist? The Composition of the Pentateuch in Recent European Interpretation* (ed. Thomas B. Dozeman and Konrad Schmid; SBLSymS 34; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006) 29–50. The incorporation of this "secular" anthology of origin myths into

sum, Genesis exists in tension with itself in the same way that Chronicles and Samuel–Kings exist in tension with one another. Therefore, a *genuinely* literal interpretation perceives the Hebrew anthology as a kind of library, not a history and certainly not an attempt to proclaim religious truths.[19]

Spinozan-era scholarship congratulates itself for rejecting biblical literalism but inadvertently ingests a parasitic companion of this literalism. The biblical literalist imposes not one but two a priori assumptions: (a) the Bible has been divinely revealed, and (b) this revelation derives from a deity who happens to be a historian, as opposed to, say, a teller of tall tales.[20] Although secular researchers dismiss the former assumption, they unconsciously accept a modified version of the latter by viewing the ancient Hebrew scribe as an individual who consistently pressed a theological interpretation on the past. In other words, instead of attributing the Bible to a divine historian, scholars assign it to human historians, but the notion that the Bible was designed to proclaim a theological history remains the a priori assumption, and alternative possibilities are not entertained. This anachronism is apparent in the thesis of Martin Noth and, in modified form, continues among his heirs.

Noth's portrait of the scribe whom he called "Dtr" is a projection onto ancient times of a twentieth-century biblical theologian. "Since [Dtr] valued all his sources equally as historical documents and it therefore did not occur to him to examine them critically, he had simply to add together the information at his disposal and, as a result, he used one source to supply what appeared to be lacking in another."[21] These words describe any religiously conservative theologian of Noth's own generation, such as William Foxwell Albright. Like Albright and his students, Noth's Dtr was comfortable with incompatible sources because he had discovered a religious ideology that made room for diverse voices of faith, provided that these voices pointed generally toward the *same* faith. Although Noth had the good sense to avoid characterizing Dtr as a fundamentalist, his model of the ancient scribe is nevertheless entirely incompatible with data demonstrating the eclectic manner by which the Hebrew scribes created these scrolls.

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the evolving Torah and its transformation into sacred Scripture took place quite late. My position is not far from that of Reinhard G. Kratz, who argues for Hasmonean appropriation, though I am less convinced by Kratz's notion of an officially sanctioned text Kratz, "Temple and Torah: Reflections on the Legal Status of the Pentateuch between Elephantine and Qumran," in *The Pentateuch as Torah: New Models for Understanding Its Promulgation and Acceptance* [ed. Gary N. Knoppers and Bernard M. Levinson; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2007] 77–103).

19. The "library" analogy derives from Thomas L. Thompson, *Early History of the Israelite People from the Written and Archaeological Sources* (Leiden: Brill, 1992) 389.

20. Noll, *Canaan and Israel in Antiquity*, 69.

21. Noth, *Deuteronomistic History*, 86.

In light of the evidence, most defenders of the Deuteronomistic History hypothesis have abandoned Noth's portrait of Dtr as a conscientious historian.[22] An alternative option is to impose qualifications on the word *history*, so that Dtr can be called a historian even though he was not conscientious about sources or accuracy. For example, John Van Seters compares Dtr to Herodotus, among others, to demonstrate that free invention was not uncommon in ancient historiography.[23] A variant is the thesis of Ziony Zevit, who views Dtr as "an opinionated, bookish person" who molded details to fit his theological agenda and even "determined for himself what constituted an event."[24] Each of these variants of the comparative model is reasonable but unpersuasive because a wide variety of narratives in the Former Prophets are inconsistent with the model. Van Seters is compelled to designate many narratives secondary supplements (for example, most of 2 Samuel), while Zevit ignores this problem by narrowing his focus to only the portions of the text that fit his model (primarily selected portions from 1 Kings 12–2 Kings 24).[25]

Even though researchers concede that Dtr was not a historian in Noth's sense of an "honest broker," Noth's thesis nevertheless remains popular because his disciples resolutely retain Noth's portrait of Dtr as a theologian.[26] "The meaning which [Dtr] discovered was that God was recognisably at work in this history, continuously meeting the accelerating moral decline with warnings and punishments and, finally, when these proved fruitless, with total annihilation."[27] It is safe to say that, because biblical scholarship is dominated by individuals with a keen personal interest in theology, this portrait of Dtr as theologian is the key to the longevity of the hypothesis, yet it creates an incongruous portrait of the ancient scribe.

The most common portrait of Dtr is as a theologically motivated *propagandist* who ignored the facts when they were inconvenient. Frank Cross describes the original Deuteronomistic History as "a propaganda work" for an "imperial program," in which the past was conformed to a rigidly schematic

22. A rare exception is Baruch Halpern, *The First Historians: The Hebrew Bible and History* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), whose anachronistic model I have evaluated in "Is the Book of Kings Deuteronomistic?"

23. John Van Seters, *In Search of History: Historiography in the Ancient World and the Origins of Biblical History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1983; repr. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1997).

24. Ziony Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel: A Synthesis of Parallactic Approaches* (London: Continuum, 2001) 439–48 (quotations from pp. 439, 440, respectively).

25. An additional criticism is the failure of researchers to pay attention to explicit rhetorical markers (or the lack of these markers), a point I discuss in "Is the Book of Kings Deuteronomistic?"

26. Noth describes Dtr as an "honest broker" who "had no intention of fabricating the history of the Israelite people" (*Deuteronomistic History*, 84).

27. Ibid., 89.

pattern supporting the king's political agenda.[28] Thomas Römer believes these royal scribes provided a "Judean answer to Neo-Assyrian rhetoric of power and propaganda," and this agenda included the construction of entire historical episodes that are "complete fiction."[29] "It goes without saying," writes Nadav Naʾaman, "that ideological considerations played an important role in [Dtr's] description of the history of Israel" so that theological lessons were "far more important to him than historical accuracy."[30] Marc Zvi Brettler asserts, "The Deuteronomist's belief in how the world works was more important than what his sources claimed."[31] This conceptualization of Dtr is realistic in the sense that, *if* one accepts the a priori assumption that the narratives were intended to be accepted as accurate interpretations of the past, *then* the incontrovertible evidence for free manipulation of sources implies that the scribes valued ideology over reality.

Although the portrait of a theological propagandist remains dominant, it effectively reduces the biblical narratives to a set of pious fictions designed to deceive pious readers, a point that is usually quietly ignored or carefully glossed.[32] Among the hundreds of examples that could be cited, the best known is the Cross thesis that an original Dtr^1 presented King Josiah as a savior who had restored Judah to its state of grace before Yahweh (2 Kgs 22:1–23:25a), but a later Dtr^2 introduced an arbitrary change in which Yahweh declared that

28. Frank Moore Cross, "The Themes of the Book of Kings and the Structure of the Deuteronomistic History," *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973) 274–89 (quotation from p. 284).

29. Thomas Römer, *The So-Called Deuteronomistic History: A Sociological, Historical and Literary Introduction* (London: T. & T. Clark, 2007), quotations from pp. 105 and 99, respectively.

30. Nadav Naʾaman, "Updating the Messages: Hezekiah's Second Prophetic Story (2 Kings 19.9b–35) and the Community of Babylonian Deportees," in *"Like a Bird in a Cage": The Invasion of Sennacherib in 701 BCE* (ed. Lester L. Grabbe; JSOTSup 363; New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003) 201–20 (quotation from p. 219).

31. Marc Zvi Brettler, *The Creation of History in Ancient Israel* (London: Routledge, 1995) 78.

32. With tongue in cheek, I have borrowed William G. Dever's polemical term, "pious fiction," which was meant to attack scholars with whom Dever *agrees* more often than not. Although Dever's publications reduce the discussion to caricature, they highlight the ironic reality that the majority of researchers believe the biblical narratives are pious fictions, but most (like Dever) are reluctant to say so unambiguously, preferring euphemisms such as "testimony," "faith perspective," or Dever's catchphrase "overriding theological framework" (Dever, *What Did the Biblical Writers Know and When Did They Know It? What Archaeology Can Tell Us About the Reality of Ancient Israel* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001] 4, 97, and passim). For a response to Dever, see Keith W. Whitelam, "Representing Minimalism: The Rhetoric and Reality of Revisionism," in *Sense and Sensitivity: Essays on Reading the Bible in Memory of Robert Carroll* (ed. Alastair G. Hunter and Philip R. Davies; JSOTSup 348; London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002) 194–223 esp. p. 210 and passim).

King Manasseh's sins were too much for even Josiah to overcome (2 Kgs 23:25b–27 and additional revisions to 2 Kings 21–23).[33] Cross and his followers believe (but never stress the implications of their belief) that the first scribe was a spin doctor for a minor king with suicidal ambitions of imperial grandeur, and the second scribe desperately tried to salvage this hopeless ideology with ad hoc additions and revisions, through which he introduced a divine prediction of doom that he knew was sheer invention, a *vaticinium ex eventu*. To cut through the subtle formulations one usually encounters in the scholarship, the first Dtr was a liar and the second a fool. I have suggested elsewhere that these portraits are not realistic, for they gloss over the enormous complexity of the narratives compiled in the Former Prophets.[34]

The thesis that Dtr was a propagandist logically entails a corollary that the Deuteronomistic History was designed for wide dissemination, for what good is propaganda that is not addressed to an audience? This also is unrealistic. First, effective propaganda must provide a message that is easy for the average intellect to understand, inculcate, and transmit, but Dtr's alleged propaganda is so complex that modern scholars are unable to achieve a consensus on its basic theological message(s).[35] Second, defenders of the Deuteronomistic History rarely explain how this propaganda was disseminated. Usually, one reads vague assertions that the literature was a "preached history," though the context for this preaching is undefined. Or the narratives are viewed as part of some entity called "Yahwism" or "Israel's faith" or the like, as though ideology can be absorbed by *hoi polloi* through a kind of collective consciousness. I have criticized these tendencies elsewhere and will not pursue the issue here, except to emphasize that the physical evidence undermines the propaganda thesis; rather, it suggests that both the Former Prophets and their contents remained unknown to almost everyone until well into the Hellenistic era, so that it is quite simply impossible to believe that the pre-Hellenistic authors of the narratives were trying to create either political propaganda or some form of publicly disseminated "Yahweh-alone" theology.[36]

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33. Cross, "Themes of the Book of Kings," 283–87.

34. K. L. Noll, "Deuteronomistic History or Deuteronomic Debate? (A Thought Experiment)," *JSOT* 31 (2007) 311–45. (I would like to correct an error in n. 76, p. 337: "Of the four chapters . . . [chs. 2; 5; 9; 24]" should read "Of the five chapters . . . [chs. 2; 4; 5; 9; 24].")

35. For a history of scholarship, see Römer, *So-Called Deuteronomistic History*, 13–43; Thomas Römer and Albert de Pury, "Deuteronomistic Historiography (DH): History of Research and Debated Issues," in *Israel Constructs Its History: Deuteronomistic Historiography in Recent Research* (ed. Albert de Pury, Thomas Römer, and Jean-Daniel Macchi; JSOTSup 306; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000) 24–141.

36. K. L. Noll, "Was There Doctrinal Dissemination in Early Yahweh Religion?" *BibInt* 16 (2008) 395–427; idem, "Evolution of Genre in the Book of Kings," 33–38.

In sum, the longevity of the Deuteronomistic History has nothing to do with the textual evidence upon which it is said to rest, for the common portraits of Dtr are not consistent with those data. Widespread devotion to the Deuteronomistic History derives from a desire to retain the traditional a priori assumption that biblical narratives are theological histories. Because most advocates of Noth's thesis have been more interested in theology than history, it did not even trouble them when the evidence compelled replacement of Noth's historian with a propagandist. This stress on theology paints an unrealistic portrait of Dtr at work.

Concluding Comment (A Viable Alternative)

Patricia Kirkpatrick notes that Hermann Gunkel relied on an incorrect understanding of the Brothers Grimm to formulate his model of an oral tradition behind the literature now contained in the book of Genesis.[37] Gunkel believed that the Grimms had reproduced accurately a series of old, traditional folktales, but this allegedly unfiltered collection was nothing of the kind. The Grimms had selected from what was available and thoroughly revised the tales prior to publication. Moreover, subsequent editions of their work saw additional revisions designed to create greater narrative coherence for each tale. The Grimms also gave names to unnamed characters, added direct discourse, and introduced proverbs.

The process of manufacturing folklore from rudimentary sources is not unique to the Brothers Grimm. Recently, Ruth Bottigheimer has suggested that the selection and revision of allegedly traditional tales or, in many cases, the free invention of them depend on the social, economic, and political interests of the literati engaged in this activity—an activity that in no way can be described as historiographical or theological.[38] Historians should take note, for this also describes the process by which ancient Greek myths became mythological literature, as evaluated by Paul Veyne.[39] The process bears more than a passing resemblance to the activity of Mesopotamian scribes, who frequently constructed new compositions by reconfiguring earlier sources and freely adding their own inventions.[40] Scribes, ancient and modern, are free agents, so

37. Patricia G. Kirkpatrick, "The Jacob-Esau Narratives: From Form to Function," in *The Function of Ancient Historiography in Biblical and Cognate Studies* (ed. P. G. Kirkpatrick and T. Goltz; London: T. & T. Clark, 2008) 1–17 (esp. pp. 3–4).

38. Ruth B. Bottigheimer, *Fairy Tales: A New History* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2009).

39. Paul Veyne, *Did the Greeks Believe in Their Myths? An Essay on the Constitutive Imagination* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

40. Among recent discussions of this topic, see David M. Carr, *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart: Origins of Scripture and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005);

their literature often bears no more than a passing resemblance to its sources, and any oral versions (if they ever existed) are known only locally and by far fewer people than the scribe's written version reaches. Scribes never serve traditions; traditions serve scribes.

The methods by which the Brothers Grimm worked are similar to the methods by which Hebrew scribes constructed the anthology that later became the Tanak. These texts did not derive from a "pan-Israelite" tradition and were not constructed by distinct "schools" of Priestly and Deuteronomistic thought or by rival priesthoods vying for power by distributing revised "histories." There were no old oral traditions carefully preserved without alteration, no disciples of prophets carefully preserving the master's words, no priests codifying priestly practice and lore for active, daily consultation in a temple, no public dissemination of these texts as religious ideology either for the glory of an ambitious king or for the public sociopolitical construction of "Israelite" ethnic identity.

Fragments within the Tanak certainly derive from people (mostly illiterate) who identified themselves as Judean or Israelite (or, in some cases, perhaps, both Judean and Israelite) and who worshiped a local patron god called Yahweh, who differed in no significant sense from the other patron gods of the Syro-Palestinian corridor, but the piety of *hoi polloi* was not preserved unfiltered. It was the Hebrew literati who, in addition to many other activities and ideologies, viewed themselves as the caretakers of a traditional Judean-Israelite identity and therefore gathered to themselves an anthology of literature to rival the likes of a Homer, a Hesiod, the wisdom literatures of Egypt, and the epics of Mesopotamia. From the gradual evolution of that anthology came the revisions that seem to us to be "Priestly" and "Deuteronomistic," as well as the increased complexity of the tales and the deity who inhabits them, but these literary flourishes are akin to the literary revisions in the works of the Brothers Grimm, and they had no impact on Judaism until the scrolls began to circulate during the Hellenistic period. Only then, as the literature became known to increasing numbers of literate Jews did the anthology evolve (almost entirely by accident) into a set of sacred texts and its narratives into a sacred history, so that the literature became part of a public discourse on Judean-Israelite identity. The Deuteronomistic History never existed except as a Greco-Roman era interpretation of the Former Prophets; it was not the literary intention of the scribes who produced these scrolls.

John Van Seters, "The Origins of the Hebrew Bible: Some New Answers to Old Questions, Part Two," *JANER* 7 (2007) 219–37; Karel van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007); John Van Seters, "The Role of the Scribe in the Making of the Hebrew Bible," *JANER* 8 (2008) 99–129. See also Jeffrey H. Tigay, *The Evolution of the Gilgamesh Epic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982).