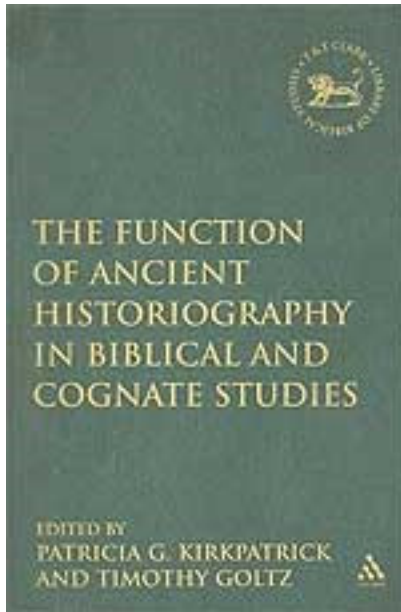


RBL 05/2009



Kirkpatrick, Patricia A., and Timothy Goltz, eds.

The Function of Ancient Historiography in Biblical and Cognate Studies

Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 489

New York: T&T Clark, 2008. Pp. xvi + 172. Cloth.
\$120.00. ISBN 0567027155.

Ernst Axel Knauf
University of Bern
Bern, Switzerland

This is the first of three projected volumes by the Canadian Society of Biblical Studies Ancient Historiography Seminar trying to define what they “mean by history, history writing, and historiography.” As the very first contribution shows, their definition of these terms is very broad. P. G. Kirkpatrick discusses “The Jacob-Esau Narratives: From Form to Function” (1–17). This is not, as the title might promise to some, a structuralist literary study but rather another attempt on the well-trodden path of *Formgeschichte*, “oral tradition,” and “Israelite folklore.” To the author’s credit, she finally concludes that “The original function of these narratives must be sought from within the context of their written form” (17)—without, however, a single reference to E. Blum, *Die Komposition der Vätergeschichte* (WMANT 57, 1984), K. Schmid, *Erzväter und Exodus* (WMANT 81, 1999), and others who gave answers to some of the questions that she raises in the course of her endeavors.

J. Van Seters, “Uses of the Past: The Story of David as a Test Case” (18–29) argues once again for a Persian date of the “Court History” (based on the hardly tenable assumption that all the texts called “Deuteronomistic” in Samuel-Kings predate that period). It is highly doubtful that those who have not been convinced by Van Seters’s arguments so far will agree with him on the basis of this *retractatio*.

K. L. Noll, "The Evolution of Genre in the Book of Kings: The Story of Sennacherib and Hezekiah as Example" (30–56) traces the evolution of the Hezekiah-Isaiah-Sennacherib narrative from the sixth through the third/second centuries B.C.E. within a general concept of "Kings" as neither "Deuteronomistic" nor "historiography," a result to which any *close* reading of the text must inevitably lead. He concludes: "The purpose of the narrative was to impress, to provoke theological thought among, and perhaps even to entertain, other scribes in this narrow peer group. Since the narrative was no longer conceived as the myth of its original form ... or as *Heilsgeschichte* in the later Hellenistic-Roman sense, but rather was intended to be a kind of parable about the ambiguity of prophecy and divine intervention, the deliberate falsification of details was not regarded as problematic" (56). Noll does not, however, address the open questions of whether the Hezekiah-Isaiah narrative originated in the compositional process of Kings or Isaiah (see 74 n. 69) and for which reason(s) it was duplicated in two sequential books of the Hebrew canon.

P. S. Evan's reading of the same texts in "Sennacherib's 701 Invasion into Judah: What Saith the Scriptures?" (57–77) is more traditional in its approach. Nevertheless, he observes that the Hebrew text nowhere speaks of a *siege* of Jerusalem by Sennacherib (73; nor do the Assyrian annals); for him, as for most contemporary scholars, too, "In biblical historiographical narratives it appears that theology is often the primary motive for the recording of the events. Their function was not accurately to portray 'what happened' *per se*, but to promote ideological ends. However, this fact alone does not of itself discount any "real history" contained within its narrative" (76–77). The last statement is a truism and not really helpful, for by which means can I distinguish in a biblical narrative elements referring to a past real world from elements referring to the real world of the narrators' place and time and from figments of individual and collective imagination? Evan stops where the real problem begin. Also, I would rephrase the preceding part of the quote in some not marginally terms: In biblical ... narratives it appears that theology is ... the primary motive for the *representation of figures and plots*. Their function was not accurately to portray "what *might have* happened" or was imagined to have happened *per se* but to promote ideological ends.

M. L. Mitchell, in "Reflecting on Catastrophe: Lamentations 4 as Historiography" (78–90), takes the notion of "historiography" one step too far, at least for my taste. From a purely historical point of view, her introductory paragraph already provokes dissent: "When Jerusalem fell to Babylon in 586 B.C.E. the survivors experienced this defeat as a catastrophic loss.... The poems of Lamentations illustrate how survivors interpret the fall of Jerusalem" (78). Not all survivors experienced "catastrophe" (see Ph. Guillaume, "Jerusalem 586 BC: Katastrophal?" *Biblische Notizen* 110 [2001]: 31–32), and the historical background of "Lamentations" is not the sixth century (with the possible exception of Lam 5), but the fast on the ninth of Av in the late Persian and early

Hellenistic period (see O. Kaiser, ATD 16/2, 4th ed., 1992, 91–198). Is it appropriate to discuss “historiography” in cases where the “history” represented by it is already controversial?

T. D. Goltz continues to discuss biblical texts that are regarded to derive from the Persian period in “Transatlantica” but are classified as early Hellenistic by most scholars in “Old Europe.” “The Chronicler as Elite: Establishing an Atmosphere of Perpetuity in Jerusalemite Yehud” (91–110) argues that “the Chronicler” (is there any biblical book that was written by one sole person? Even Qoheleth had editors) was part of the Jerusalem elite of his times. By the very fact that the chroniclers could read and write, the point is already proven. Whether the priestly families of Persian and Hellenistic Judea constituted a “caste” in the Hindu sense of the word is another question, and a question beyond the aspects of historiography.

It is a pleasure to see D. N. Patterson, in “Re-membling the Past: The Purpose of Historical Discourse in the Book of Judith” (111–23), discussing a biblical book that offers bright insights into the Judeans’ “sense of history” at the end of the Bible’s “productive period.” Judith, like Tobit, has close affinities to the Hellenistic novel (111 n. 2) but also to Gen 14, some parts of Kings (e.g., 2 Kgs 1) and Judges, Esther and Ruth, and Chronicles. Admiring Salome Alexandra, the most neglected of the most influential rulers of the Jewish nation, at least as much as the author, the reviewer would nevertheless ask whether the exclusion of Dan and Asher from Judith’s “tribal geography” (123) would not point to origins of the tradition prior to Judas Aristobulus’s annexation of Galilee.

The last three contributions lead beyond the borders not only of the Hebrew Bible but of the Christian Old Testament as well. E.-M. Becker regards “The Gospel of Mark in the Context of Ancient Historiography” (124–34), and F. Wisse, in “The Origin of the Christian Species: Lessons from the Study of Natural History for the Reconstruction of the History of the Earliest Christianity” (135–51), applies the concept of evolution to the first four Christian centuries, as did Noll earlier in the volume with the formation of biblical literature. There is no alternative to this approach, indeed, for those who study the histories of people, religions, languages, and literature as social science of the past.

The last essay is, however, also of interest to Hebrew Bible scholars: G. S. Oegema, “Back to the Future in the Early Church: The Use of the Book of Daniel in Early Patristic Eschatology” (152–61). Finally, there are the usual indices (162–72).

Does the book, at the end, hold what its title promises? Not really; “biblical and cognate studies” has become too wide a field for a focused discussion of anything, if the contributors come from very different theoretical backgrounds (as is the case in this and

many other volumes). But some of its authors make a number of good points that will promote the general discourse alluded to by the title, and that is more than one can say of a number of its congeners.