

CONSERVATIVE SCHOLARSHIP ON THE MOVE

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So wenig es gut ist, selbst voreingenommen zu sein, so wenig gut ist es auch, bei anderen eine Voreingenommenheit zu unterstellen. Seitdem W.F. Albright sich einmal in einer Auseinandersetzung mit meiner Auffassung ... des Ausdruck, so nihilistic an attitude' bedient hat (...), ist es mancherorts üblich geworden, die Methode der wissenschaftlichen Arbeiten zur Frühgeschichte Israels von A. Alt und vor allem von mir als 'Nihilismus' zu charakterisieren.

(Martin Noth)¹

Did it all begin here?

The word 'nihilism' has become the slogan probably most used in the ten year long controversy between so-called 'maximalists' and so-called 'minimalists'. The word is not a new one when it comes to a confrontation between different parts of historical-critical scholarship, and the language used against Albrecht Alt and more often, Alt's most important student, Martin Noth, was almost as violent as the language that is today used about the minimalists.² Noth mentions among the people who have been most actively abusing the term, John Bright, William Stinespring, and George E. Wright.³ Somehow it seems that the present minimalists are in the good company of Albrecht Alt and Martin Noth.

Now, it is not my intention primarily to address the maximalist-minimalist controversy. Too much has been written and said, a lot of it not very educating, and many colleagues have rightly been disgusted by the redundancy of this debate. The debate has often been ill-tempered, and malicious, and there is really no need for more repetitions that has nothing new to contribute. Somehow this discussion should be considered dead, and we should as historians move on to the real issues at stake, such as the historicity of King David and King Solomon, the emergence of the states of Israel and Judah in ancient time, the character of the Exile and return from Babylon, etc. None of these issues are settled, but many attempts at a serious debate have been drowned by the shouting.

1. M. Noth, 'Der Beitrag der Archäologie zur Geschichte Israels,' first published in *VTS* 7 (1960), pp. 262-82; reprinted in M. Noth, *Aufsätze zur biblischen Landes- und Altertumskunde*, herausgegeben von Hans Walter Wolff (Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1971), I, pp. 34-51, p. 53 n. 1.

2. I use 'minimalist' and 'minimalism'—although I scorn it—here in the sense as explained by George Athas, in his home page article, 'Minimalism: The Copenhagen School of Thought,' <http://www.pastornet.net.au/jimm/athe/athe0312.htm>, as simply meaning members of the so-called 'Copenhagen School,' i.e., without accepting the bias behind the application of the term in much polemic literature of recent years. As Athas says, the term seems to have come to stay, and although originally derogative, it now only indicates a certain group of biblical scholars as opposed to a dissident group, the maximalists. Personally, I have more problems with the term 'Copenhagen School,' as this has already been used in other fields and probably with more right, about the respective schools of Niels Bohr, the nuclear physicist, and Louis Hjelmslev, the linguist.

3. A sample of such quotations will be presented later in this article.

2: Conservative Scholarship on the Move

The reasons for publishing this contribution to the debate about Israel's history are two: The first reason is that conservative scholarship is on the move. A major conservative contribution on the history of Israel will be published/has just been published by Ian Provan and Victor Long, not by a company known for publishing conservative literature, but by one of the most respected publishing houses within religious studies in America.⁴ Although it is of course important that such a major contribution appears, it is nevertheless a warning to established critical scholarship—to all parts of it, whether maximalist or minimalist—that a traditional forum for critical literature is beginning to publish volumes formerly associated with the most conservative publication institutions. Certainly this problem has to be addressed in a serious way.

The second issue actual here has to do with the debate itself which may for a large part have been a bogus-debate. As the Swedish author Jan Guillou puts it, 'What you see is not what you see.' What may have looked like a debate between two groups of critical scholars, the maximalists and the minimalists—if we still prefer to label scholars in this way and put them into boxes—may not at all be a debate between critical minded persons, but between evangelical conservative scholars, and critical scholarship in general, dressed up as a debate between maximalists and minimalists.

What is Conservative Scholarship?

One of the major confrontations with conservative scholarship was published by James Barr more than twenty-five years ago in his study of fundamentalism.⁵ Barr, himself born into an evangelical community, should know by heart the specific character of this branch of biblical studies. So let us for a while follow Barr's characterization of conservative evangelical scholarship.

Written in 1977, Barr characterises the then contemporary conservative literature as increasingly sophisticated and a far cry from the traditional 'mission-hall-tracts' found in evangelical, non-scholarly condemnations of biblical scholarship. Barr points at a dichotomy between conservative scholarly literature and its reading audience: the audience is not really in the position to understand the argument, neither is it very involved in the minute interest in the ancient Near East often displayed by conservative scholars. However, since these scholars are known as members of evangelical communities, the audience put trust in their writings and follow their lead maybe without fully understanding, what is really going on. Thus it is a major point in Barr's description of conservative scholarship that it is deceiving its audience that may entertain a totally fundamentalist idea about the Bible, without any critical questions at all, while the scholarly literature is fully aware of such questions, and not always fundamentalist in all parts of their investigations.

However, as a principle, conservative scholars write literature that can be trusted, and in this way also literature that substitutes other literature: the motto is: do not read Wellhausen; read (conservative) books about Wellhausen. The moment a student with an evangelical background enters into a direct conversation with the enemy, he or she could be influenced by the thinking of this enemy, something that can only be seen as a menace to the student's continued fundamentalist base. Although non-conservative literature may be cited, it is done within a conservative framework.⁶

4. V. Philip Long, Tremper Longman, and Ian W. Provan, *A Biblical History of Israel* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 2003).

5. James Barr, *Fundamentalism* (London: SCM Press, 1977), pp. 120-59.

6. A recent first-class example of this 'technique' can be found in the conservative review of contemporary Old Testament scholarship, David W. Baker and Bill T. Arnold (eds.), *The Face of Old Testament Studies: A Survey of Contemporary Approaches* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999). Apart from having a clear emphasis on historical studies, the work refers to almost every living scholar of today, including ample references to all the major minimalists.

3: Conservative Scholarship on the Move

Because they at the same time want to be accepted by the academia, conservative scholars are often putting up an image of eruditeness and education, not least when it comes to matters pertaining, not exclusively to the Old Testament but to the ancient Near East at large. The purpose of this imaging is to provide assurance that the results presented in this literature—from a purely scholarly perspective invariably the most conservative possible—can be trusted. It also says that scholars mistrusting their conservative colleagues are led by biased and narrow-minded preconceptions.

It is a mark of conservative scholarship that it mostly concentrates on marginal parts of biblical studies. As Barr says, it is unwilling to become involved with the critical problems, and escapes into the open fields of oriental studies, or—within biblical studies properly—it concentrates on textual criticism, and the like. In Barr's word:

The conservative mind ... when applied in biblical scholarship seems to seek a subject where a natural and purely intellectual attitude is possible, a subject requiring the minimum of actual and direct theological involvement, a subject possessing the maximum possible grade of objectivity, the maximum possible separation from the theological issues that divide conservative studies from modern theology.⁷

This goes very well with another observation of Barr, that conservative scholars do not produce theologies of the Old Testament. This is probably still true, and we may ask for the reason why it is so. Is it because conservative scholarship is far removed from modern theology, or because they understand theology to be something else? We will return to this question below.

As a corollary of this extensive concentration on marginal subjects the conservative scholar divests much interest in the ancient Near East, and it is true that quite a number of prominent scholars in Egyptology and Assyriology have evangelical roots. Probably the best known are the Egyptologist Kenneth A. Kitchen and the Assyriologist Alan R. Millard, both at home in Liverpool, but many other could be mentioned.

In Barr's study of conservative literature, Kitchen is one of his choice victims. Barr simply sees Kitchen's *Ancient Orient and Old Testament* as breathing 'the spirit of total fundamentalism.'⁸ In Kitchen's view, the discoveries from the ancient Near East confirm the historicity of the Bible, but they also show the limitations of historical-critical scholarship: This school of thought developed at a time when little was known about the ancient world—apart from the Old Testament. This observation constitutes the basis of Kitchen attacks on source criticism as founded on irrelevant speculation as opposed to himself and his colleagues in oriental studies who champion an objectivistic intellectual attitude, i.e., an attitude not coloured by bias and speculation.

So far it is the characteristic self-understanding of conservative scholarship that it is open minded—with a look outside the Old Testament to the ancient Near East—non-biased, and intellectually honest; all of this in contrast to historical-critical scholarship which is biased and led by speculation and lack of interest in—not to say that it is simply unwilling to incorporate information from—the ancient Near East.

These points are made clear to the evangelical community at every possible occasion, and has found a fertile ground in the modern world, because the attitude of the conservatives accords well with the expectations of modern western human beings—Barr talks about westerners' 'credulous

Nevertheless, the set-up is conservative—evangelical if we want to characterize it in this way. More from this work below.

7. *Fundamentalism*, p. 129

8. K.A. Kitchen, *Ancient orient and Old Testament* (London: The Tyndale Press, 1966); cf. Barr's verdict, *Fundamentalism*, p. 131.

appetite': longing after something to think of as true.⁹

Therefore, according to conservative scholars, their colleagues in critical scholarship are prejudiced and incompetent, making decisions without the slightest good reason, and run by preconceptions. It is therefore natural that critical scholars are attacked by conservatives because of their philosophical and theological presuppositions. The reader will soon discover that philosophy in this connection mainly means evolutionistic thinking in the post-Darwin world, governed by Hegelianism. As Barr says, the conservative evangelical community probably knows little about Hegel, but 'Hegelianism' is to them simply a 'bad' word.¹⁰

The way it works—or worked when Barr wrote his volume on fundamentalism—is demonstrated by the conservative attacks on Wellhausen as being influenced if not completely dominated by Hegelian philosophy, and that in spite of several German studies by Rudolf Smend (Jr.) and Lothar Perlitt that clearly say that Wellhausen was based in the Romantic Period, probably more influenced by Herder than by any other philosopher of the 18th-19th century. However, just to say that Wellhausen is a Hegelian, is the same as to say that Wellhausen is a bad scholar and therefore not worth reading. We could add that to the conservative evangelical community 'Wellhausian' is simply another bad word.

Consequently, in the arsenal of the conservative scholar, philosophy is another bad word, which he eschews thereby pretending that he is not governed by philosophy, which in his mind is really prejudicing and leading to bias and a narrowness of mind. Since the critical scholar shows little interest in the matter of the ancient Near East and is presumed to be mostly incompetent in these fields, he has not a single clue about what is going on in the Bible.

Barr devotes a special part of his chapter on conservative scholarship to William F. Albright, not because he believes Albright to be a fundamentalist although Albright was in many ways without doubt a very conservatively minded scholar, who was because of his encyclopaedic knowledge extremely respected by conservative as well as critical scholars, and far beyond their circles. Albright's conservatism was displayed in the manner he endeavoured 'to push biblical scholarship into a more conservative orientation...'¹¹ Albright's influence, which could have formed the theme of a whole book,¹² should be—in Barr's eyes—modified by the following concerns:

1. Albright often moved into fields which he did not know very well, such as the New Testament.
2. Albright was not always right in subjects he knew well.
3. He never worked 'on the massive phenomena of the biblical text.'¹³

In spite of such limitations, Albright became a sort of 'guru' to his students, who reacted forcefully, whenever their master was attacked or criticized.¹⁴ To conservative scholars Albright functioned as the legitimization of their own approach to biblical study with their heavy reliance on

9. *Fundamentalism*, p. 139.

10. *Fundamentalism*, p. 148.

11. *Fundamentalism*, p. 150.

12. It was written by Burke Long, *Planting and Reaping Albright: Politics, Ideology, and Interpreting the Bible* (University Park, PN: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997).

13. *Fundamentalism*, p. 151.

14. Thus it is a well-known fact that Thomas L. Thompson could find no employment within the American academia after the publication of his *The Historicity of the Patriarchal Narratives: The Quest for the Historical Abraham* (BZAW 133; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1974), including an extensive settlement with Albright's changing ideas about the patriarchs. Is it a sign of a changing perspective that Thompson's work was republished by an American publishing house in 2002 (Trinity Press International)?

matters belonging to the ancient Near Eastern world at large. It did probably hardly bother them that Albright did not share their uncritical beliefs.

Let Barr have the last word on the subject of conservative scholarship:

Thus the whole elaborate apparatus of conservative apologetic for early date, traditional authorship, avoidance of source divisions, and the like, though we have here done it the courtesy of discussing it, is a waste of time.

which is what critical scholars have been thinking for generations making them blind to further conservative advances against their own position, thus endangering the subject of the history of Israel as a part of critical studies.

The Minimalists and Conservative Scholarship: Ian W. Provan

According to the present rhetoric of their adversaries, minimalist scholars ‘are driven by Marxism and leftist politics ... some of them are counterculture people ... almost without exception, these individuals have no expertise in the larger world of ancient Near Eastern studies...’¹⁵ This quotation comes from the American scholar Gary Rendsburg. Although the language of his criticism is extreme, he by no way stands alone; a selection of quotations from the American archaeologist William G. Dever will show that the minimalists’s approach is based on ‘false presuppositions, oversimplifications, undocumented assertions and contradictions—not to mention the ideological overtones—...’ showing ‘their unabashedly anti-theological bias...’, all of this leading to the final verdict of minimalists: ‘In my view, most of the revisionists are no longer honest scholars.’¹⁶

How did it come so far, and what is the basis of such a devastating criticism? Maybe a good starting point will be, not Dever’s tirades against minimalism, but a better moderated and probably better founded settlement with minimalist scholars such as Thomas L. Thompson and Philip R. Davies as found in contributions by the British scholar Ian W. Provan.¹⁷

In 1995 Provan’s opening question in his often quoted article in the *Journal of Biblical Literature*, ‘Why at this point in the history of our discipline are story and history found, in so much scholarship to be heading at speed in opposite directions, torn apart with sometimes violent force?’¹⁸ sounded reasonable to most members of the international scholarly community in the light of the sharpening tone in the discussion about Israel’s history, at least when scholars moved to the time of King David and the periods following him. Really, who were those scholars who created such disturbance, violated the rules of scholarly communication, and troubled many more traditionally minded critical scholars? If we could nail them, we could probably fight them better, and if we were able to show that they were governed by more or less idiosyncratic ideologies of their own, it would be so much easier to dismiss them as irrelevant—this is probably the impact of Provan’s attack as

15. Gary Rendsburg, ‘Down with History, Up with Reading: The Current State of Biblical Studies,’ <http://www.arts.mcgill.ca/programs/jewish/30yrs/rendersburg/index.htm>.

16. For full bibliographical references and a discussion, see my ‘Ideology and the History of Ancient Israel,’ *SJOT* 14 (2000), pp. 165-93.

17. The basis of my dealing with Provan are his articles, ‘Ideologies, Literary and Critical Reflections on Recent Writing on the History of Israel,’ *JBL* 114 (1995), pp. 585-606, and ‘In the Stable with the Dwarves: Testimony, Interpretation, Faith, and the History of Israel,’ originally published in André Lemaire and Magne Sæbø (eds.), *Congress Volume Oslo (VTS ; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2000)*, pp. 281-319, and republished in V. Philip Long, David W. Baker, and Gordon J. Wenham, *Windows into Old Testament History: Evidence, Argument, and the Crisis of “Biblical Israel”* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. B. Eerdmans, 2002), pp. 161-197. The quotes from the second article will follow the pagination in Long, Baker and Wenham.

18. *JBL* 114, p. 585.

seen by most scholars at the end of the twentieth century.

However, scholars—including Davies and Thompson, who answered Provan in an irate way, showing their contempt and frustration because of an attack along such lines¹⁹—should have studied the opening of Provan’s first article more carefully:

It was one of the more interesting of the various punishments known to the ancients that a guilty part should be tied by arms and legs to two horses, which might then be sent off jointly at a gallop into the blue beyond. The consequences for the person thus attached to his equine companions were ultimately rather bloody, as each horse turned independently to seek pastures new. Those who care about the integrity of biblical narrative might well ask what it has done in recent times to deserve a similar ghastly fate.²⁰

What is Provan talking about? Minimalism? It is hardly so, since the minimalists have done little in the way of dissecting the biblical texts in the manner of more traditional historical-critical research. It sounds more like the traditional *conservative* criticism of source criticism in the Pentateuch as experienced, e.g., in the works of Kitchen or in R.K. Harrison’s evangelical introduction to the Old Testament.²¹ There is no reason to use this remark about historical-critical scholarship in general to address the question of minimalism—or is there a reason? I believe so. It displays Provan’s basic conservative status as a scholar and animosity towards critical scholarship and shows that he belongs to a scholarly community nourished by literature like Harrison’s introduction.

Let me—in order to illustrate my point—quote from Harrison’s introduction, a paragraph that follows a settlement with Wellhausen:

Many professional students of the Old Testament, including some scholars of the highest intellectual calibre, have come to the conclusion that it is becoming increasingly impossible to ignore or dismiss the results of *honest* scholarship and research no longer. Accordingly they have begun to devote themselves to the task of ascertaining as far as it is possible the actual facts of the ancient Near Eastern cultural situation, and against such a background are making a strenuous attempt to interpret the literary and other phenomena of the Old Testament.²²

This quotation that is followed by is probably of decisive importance when we turn to his more detailed criticism. Here he opens with a definition of minimalism as highlighting narrative artistry and dating late, which is certainly true but not really important. The proposal of a late date for the composition of a biblical text cannot in itself be offensive. It can be met with counter-arguments and disproved or rejected because of scholarly considerations, but it cannot be condemned in advance. Or in the words of James Barr:

Take the idea that some of the biblical Psalms originated in the Maccabaeen period, a view that is sometimes quoted as a prime example of hyper-criticism ... But there is not the slightest reason why a Maccabaeen date for biblical Psalms should not be considered, and there is no valid reason at all

19. Philip R. Davies, 'Method and Madness: Some Remarks on Doing History with the Bible,' *JBL* 114 (1995), pp. 699-705; Thomas L. Thompson, 'A Neo-Albrightean School in History and Biblical Scholarship?' *JBL* 114 (1995), pp. 683-98.

20. *JBL* 114, p. 585.

21. On Kitchen attitude to pentateuchal criticism, cf. his *Ancient Orient and Old Testament*, Chapter 6, 'The Question of Literary Criticisms,' pp. 112-38. R.K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (London: Tyndale Press, 1970).

22. *Introduction to the Old Testament*, p. 81 (emphasis mine). The next paragraph includes an appraisal of the Albright school and C.H. Gordon, and a rejection of Noth's *nihilism*: The creative appeal of critical study in Germany has long since terminated, and the naturalism and nihilism of scholars such as Noth militate against any realistic progress towards a more assured methodology, also this citation sounds familiar when we review the recent debate.

why such a dating should be considered shocking or hyper-critical.²³

Then Provan asks—after having pointed out that the minimalist may not be speaking about fictionalized history but historicized fiction’:

‘But why assume that the narrative thus portrayed has anything to do with the ‘real’ world of the past? Why not regard it as a ‘fictive’ world,’ an ideological construct?²⁴

From this Provan jumps directly to the main points of his critique:

1. *History is played off against ideology.*
2. *Ideology is played off against objectivity.*

As to the first issue—which is really the same as the second—history cannot in Provan’s view exist side by side with ideology. The story of ‘David’s Rise’ (1 Sam 16-2 Sam 7) cannot, in the eyes of Niels Peter Lemche be history because it is ideologically coloured. This reference is later used by Provan as an example of the bias of hyper-criticism against the biblical historical texts when Provan argues that Lemche does not show the same critical mind when he turns to other ancient texts, although the argument is from the beginning false and misleading and based on an (intentional?) misprision of the argument it represents.

Now, I have in another context made the complaint that Provan has never studied his subject in an exhaustive way, and that he knows nothing about the analytical process that led to present-day minimalism.²⁵ If he possessed an adequate knowledge when he addressed this subject, he would have known, 1) that this idea about ideological motives for writing not only the story about David’s Rise, but also the ‘Succession Narrative’ (2 Sam 8-20; 1 Kgs 1-2) is not something the minimalists invented; it has been there since the existence of these works was first acknowledged, in the case of the Succession Narrative by Leonhard Rost in 1926,²⁶ and of David’s Rise, forcefully by, e.g., Jakob H. Grønbaek in 1971,²⁷ and 2) that the meaning he attributes to a statement by this author was written in a non-minimalist context, based on ideas about David’s Rise proposed as early as 1975, and published in Danish in 1975, and in English in 1979,²⁸ in essence and methodology not different from the ideas that have found a fertile ground in Baruch Halpern’s recent book on David.²⁹ As a matter of fact, my remarks about ideology and the story of David’s Rise was very much a traditional-critical conclusion, based on methods squarely shared by the fraternity of critical scholars. James Barr, following Provan plays off the view of David Gunn on this story of David’s Rise as narrative against my original interpretation.³⁰ Nothing could bother me less, writing almost

23. *Fundamentalism*, p. 134.

24. *JBL* 114, p. 586.

25. *SJOT* 14, p. 176 f.

26. L. Rost, *Die Überlieferung von der Thronnachfolge Davids* (BWANT III:6; Stuttgart; W. Kohlhammer Verlag, 1926), reprinted in L. Rost, *Das kleine Credo und andere Studien zum Alten Testament* (Heidelberg: Quelle & Meyer, 1965), pp. 119-253.

27. J.H. Grønbaek, *Die Geschichte vom Aufstieg Davids (1. Sam. 15-2. Sam. 5): Tradition und Komposition* (*Acta Theologica Danica*, X; Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1971).

28. N.P. Lemche, ‘Davids vej til tronen,’ *Dansk Teologisk Tidsskrift* 38 (1975), pp. 241-63, translated as ‘David’s Rise,’ *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 10 (1978), pp. 2-25. Provan does not seem to know this article, which is excusable, but bases his criticism on remarks in my *Ancient Israel: A New History of Israelite Society* (*The Biblical Seminar*, 5; Sheffield, JSOT Press, 1988), p. 53, which for the sake of history is a translation from my Danish original, *Det Gamle Israel: Det Israelitiske samfund fra sammenbruddet af bronzealderkulturen til hellenistisk tid* (Århus: ANIS, 1984), p. 48-9.

29. B. Halpern, *David’s Secret Demons: Messiah, Murderer, Traitor, King* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2001).

30. James Barr, *History and ideology in the Old Testament: Biblical Studies at the End of a Millennium* (Oxford:

thirty years after the appearance of the original article in a quite different scholarly situation. However, Provan—and Barr—should have paid more attention to the argument in my *Ancient Israel* about the fairy-tale character of David's Rise, as this argument represents something new, although it was inaugurated as early as 1962 by Giovanni Buccellati, in no respect a minimalist.³¹

However, a closer look at my discussion of David's Rise in *Ancient Israel* indicates exactly the opposite of what Provan says: playing history off against ideology. It is a classical historical-critical procedure that intends to sift the propaganda from this biblical narrative in order to be able to use it as a historical source. It has been the basic procedure of historians for more than 200 years. It can therefore be said that Provan's choice of example of a minimalist playing down history by appealing to ideology was indeed a very bad one. It proves exactly the opposite, although it does not really concern the issues discussed here—belonging to a pre-minimalist stage of research. There is no way that history is played out against ideology here.

In Provan's second line, ideology is played off against objectivity. This time Provan aims his critique against the late Gösta Ahlström who maintained: 'Because the authors of the Bible were historiographers and used stylistic patterns to create a "dogmatic" and as such, tendentious literature, one may question the reliability of their product.'³² His criticism of Ahlström goes further, because of the following sentence from Ahlström's hand: 'Biblical historiography is not a product built on facts. It reflects the narrator's outlook and ideology rather than known facts,'³³ and Provan adds: Ideology is played off against facts. And finally from Ahlström—however from a different context—, 'the biblical narrators were not really concerned about historical truth. Their goal was not that of a modern historian—the ideal of "objectivity" had not yet been invented.'³⁴ Does Ahlström really play off ideology against facts? Or against objectivity?

Provan showed his inability to grasp and present the correct context when it came to this writer's evaluation of the story about David's Rise as a historical source. Is he better off dealing with Ahlström? Barr thinks not, because he does not consider Ahlström to belong among the minimalists.³⁵ Basically this is a matter of chronology, as Ahlström suddenly died in January 1992, just before the maximalist-minimalist controversy came out in the open. His magnificent history of Palestine could also be said to belong among the more traditional histories of Israel. It was written in the 1980s and reflect a stage in the advance of scholarship very much the same as found in my *Ancient Israel*, and in J. Maxwell Miller and John H. Hayes, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah*.³⁶ It is apparent that Ahlström's history is heterogeneous in content and intention and changes character when it comes to the Period of the Hebrew Kingdoms. It should, however, be realized that

University Press, 2000, pp. 65 f., quoting with approval as I would probably also do—today—David M. Gunn, *The Story of King David (JSOT Sup. 6; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1978)*, p. 26.

31. G. Buccellati, 'La "carriera" di David e quella di Idrimi, re di Alalac,' *Bibbia e Oriente* 4 (1962), pp. 95-9. And for the records, it is true as suggested by someone that I was heavily influenced by the Italian Assyriologist Mario Liverani in the 1980s, when I for the benefit of my Danish students translated a comprehensive selection of Liverani's articles into Danish, among them his 'Partire sul carro, per il deserto,' *Annali dell'Istituto Universitario Orientale di Napoli N.S.* 22 (1972), pp. 403-15. In this article Liverani shows that King Idrimi formed the story of his career on the basis of the well-known (also in the ancient Near East) fairy-tale about the young prince who wins the princess and half the kingdom, a very rewarding approach when dealing with the very similar story of David's Rise.

32. G.W. Ahlström, 'The Role of Archaeological and Literary Remains in Reconstructing Israel's History,' in Diana Vikander Edelman, *The Fabric of History: Text, Artefact and Israel's Past (JSOT Sup. 127; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991)*, pp. 116-41, p. 118, quoted in Provan, *JBL* 114, p. 586.

33. Ahlström, 'The Role of Archaeological and Literary Remains,' p. 134.

34. G.W. Ahlström, *The History of Ancient Palestine from the Palaeolithic Period to Alexander's Conquest* (edited by Diana Edelman; *JSOT Sup* 146; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), p. 50.

35. Barr, *History and ideology*, p. 66 n. 15.

36. J. M. Miller John H. Hayes, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986).

he only managed to revise the first parts before his untimely death. People who knew him well, will be able to tell about a scholar who was to the last moment of his life revising old and accepting new ideas, such as the ones proposed in this writer's book about the Canaanites,³⁷ a book whose appearance in print he strongly supported. Whether or not Ahlström would have developed into a minimalist is impossible to say. My guess is that he probably would, but only as far as he saw this direction based on facts.

But let us have a second look at Provan's dealing with the quotations from Ahlström. The first one appears as part of a more complex argument:

Biblical historiography is a literary phenomenon whose primary goal is not to create a record of factual events. Rather, it is a form of writing steered by the writer's idea that the events being described were expressions of the divine will. The biblical material has been organized thematically so that its ideological point comes through. In other words is dogmatic in character. Therefore, a 'biblical' historian is a scholar who does not deal primarily with empirical events, but who analyzes the Bible's historiography. Because the authors of the Bible were historiographers and used stylistic patterns to create a 'dogmatic' and, as such, tendentious literature, one may question the reliability of their product.'

This is not a case of playing off ideology against facts. It is not a minimalist (in Provan's sense) who speaks here. It is the case of a historian trained in classical historical-critical methodology who approaches his source material and presents an estimation of it as a historical source—based on an analysis of the material, not on preconceived scepticism. Neither was Ahlström blind to the importance of ancient near eastern parallels, as he immediately after this quotation introduced a comparison with ways of writing political and religious propaganda in the ancient Near East, especially Egypt—after which he continued with a discussion about using archaeology in biblical studies.

The second quote from Ahlström follows a discussion about Pharaoh Shishak's campaign to Palestine, and the reflections of it in biblical tradition (1 Kgs 14.25-28; 2 Chron 12.9-10). After having shown the discrepancy between Shishak's own record of the campaign, and its reflection in the Old Testament, Ahlström concludes that 'biblical historiography is not built on facts.' And then he continues with A.J. Huizinga's conclusion that 'every civilization creates its own form of history' and with the historiography about the early kingdom in the Old Testament.³⁸ To cut it short, Ahlström is not playing off ideology against facts, he is drawing a conclusion about his material based on an analysis of available 'facts': documents in the Bible, *and* documents from the ancient Near East.

The third quotation, from Ahlström's history, about playing off ideology against objectivity, follows a discussion of writing propaganda in the ancient Near East which leads to the following conclusion:

In such matters the biblical narrators were not really concerned about historical truth. Their goal was not that of a modern historian—the ideal of 'objectivity' had not yet been invented. In writing their 'historiography' they maintained that their view of the past corresponded to Yahweh's view. Sometimes their historical novels are no more than that: novels.³⁹

The quotation from Ahlström in Provan's article is removed from its context which includes an extensive discussion of the character of ancient historiography, not limited to the biblical

37 N.P. Lemche, *The Canaanites in History and Tradition: The Tradition of the Canaanites* (JSOT Sup, 110; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991—2nd edition with an epilogue 1999).

38. Ahlström, 'Role of Archaeological and Literary Remains,' pp. 134 f.

39. Ahlström, *History of Palestine*, p. 50.

examples. It is used in a sense that distort Ahlström's much more sophisticated ideas about history writing and the use of ancient sources in historical reconstruction, and it covers up the case that the victim of Provan's attack is not a member of a narrowly defined group of minimalists, but a historical-critical scholar in the classical sense of the word. One may begin to speculate about the status of Provan's attack. Is he really addressing the issue of minimalism as opposed to, e.g., maximalism, or is he expressing traditional conservative, i.e., evangelical discontent with historical-critical study in general? Is his simply a bogus discussion using the minimalists as scapegoats and easy victims obscuring his real intentions: to propagate an evangelical understanding of research?

Now we have already seen what sorts of weapons we may expect to find in the arsenal of a conservative scholar, addressing the issues of critical scholarship. So let us return to Provan's article from 1995, where he accuses Philip R. Davies of playing 'literary artistry ... off against historical referentiality.'

Again the argument in Provan's article is garbled. He quotes from Davies:

Biblical historians assume an 'ancient Israel' after the manner of the biblical story, and then seek rationalistic explanations for it, instead of asking themselves what is *really* there ... Here is where the increasing role of literary criticism ... is making a valuable contribution to historical research, by ... pointing out that the reason why many things are told in the biblical literature, and the way they are told, has virtually everything to do with literary artistry and virtually nothing to do with anything that might have happened.⁴⁰

In the way the quotation is arranged, it may be seen as a support for Provan's argument. The omissions are, however, significant, so let us repeat the quotation, this time without the cuts:

Biblical historians assume an 'ancient Israel' after the manner of the biblical story, and then seek rationalistic explanations for it, instead of asking themselves what is *really* there. Instead of trying to understand what is literary in literary terms, they try to give historical explanations for what are literary problems. Here is where the increasing role of literary criticism in biblical scholarship, however, is making a valuable contribution to historical research, by recognizing and pointing out that the reason why many things are told in the biblical literature, and the way they are told, has virtually everything to do with literary artistry and virtually nothing to do with anything that might have happened.

It is obvious that Philip Davies does not play literary artistry off against historical referentiality. He is weighing and sifting his sources; in short, he is dealing with them very much in a historical-critical fashion that endeavours to present the nature of the available sources before proceeding to draft historical information from them. This is not new, only the context in which it happens is new, when new ways of reading and understanding texts are included as well as older ones, the ones dear to classical literary criticism.

Some examples: A reading of David's Rise that finds out that it is following a *literary* pattern borrowed from folk literature such as fairy tales, does not remove the story of David from a historical analysis, but it changes the conditions for the historical analysis that has to take into consideration the importance of the literary structure for its usefulness as a testimony about the past as it may have been. How much belong to historical remembrance, and how much owes its existence to literary invention necessary to embed a narrative about the past in a pre-existing structure of narrative, i.e., its setting within a tradition of telling fairy tales?

Another example has to do with the ideology of good kings versus bad kings. Good kings have long reigns, bad kings short reigns. Good king construct temples, or repair broken down

40. Provan, *JBL* 114, p. 587, quoting from Philip R. Davies, *In Search of 'Ancient Israel'* (*JSOT Sup*, 148; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992, p. 29.

temples, bad kings neglect the cult. Critical scholars has for a long time accepted that it goes on like this in Chronicles—one of the reasons for scholars to reduce the value of Chronicles as a historical source.⁴¹ Nobody has objected to an observation of this kind when it comes to Chronicles, but the moment the argument is transferred to the Books of Samuel and Kings, hands are raised in protest all over the academia, although it is easy to show that these books in their description of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah—at least until a certain point—employ exactly the same pattern, long reigns and activities to the benefit of the temple, versus short reigns and neglect of the temple and its institutions.⁴² Such analyses do not say, e.g., that Solomon never built the temple of Jerusalem, but it raises our level of scepticism, when it is announced that David was accorded a reign of forty years and introduced the cult of Yahweh to Jerusalem, or that Solomon was accorded another forty years and built the temple of Jerusalem, while it also told that Asa was endowed with a long reign of forty (to be honest, the text says forty-one) years and repaired the temple, while Joash was blessed with still another forty years and also repaired the temple. We are certainly entitled to ask: did this really happen? Or are we talking about ideologically arranged literature, ideological in the sense that *good kings reign for a long time and provide for the temple and the cult*.

This has nothing to do with minimalism in the often abusive meaning of the word, it has to do with a historical-critical assessment of the available source material, but it is—probably to the surprise of Provan—the kind of arguments that have been decisive for the choices made by the minimalists and helped them reaching their present battle positions. So far it seems that Provan is attacking a straw-man: He is not aiming at the minimalists in particular, he is aiming at critical scholarship in general. So let us move to the next step and see how his description of the ideology mates with the impression already gained, that he is not presenting an honest case, he is not targeting minimalism *per se* but something else.⁴³

After his selection of quotations from Ahlström, Davies, and Thomas L. Thompson, Provan insinuates:

What these quotations perhaps do not illustrate fully, however, is the extent to which it is not simply the ideologies of the biblical *texts* that are seen as problematic by these authors but the ideologies also of many of their *colleagues* in the academy as well.⁴⁴

41. This is the argument in, e.g., Peter Welten, *Geschichte und Geschichtsdarstellung in den Chronikbüchern* (*WMANT*, 42; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag des Erziehungsvereins, 1973).

42. Cf. N.P. Lemche, 'Prægnant tid i Det Gamle Testamente,' in Geert Hallbäck and Niels Peter Lemche (eds.), *"Tiden" i bibelsk belysning* (*Forum for Bibelsk Eksegese*, 11; Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum, 2001), pp. 29-47. An English translation will hopefully soon be available.

43. In his 'anthology' of citations, he also includes one from Thomas L. Thompson, *Early History of the Israelite People from the Written and Archaeological Sources* (*SHANE*, 4; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1992), p. 29. I will leave it here. It displays the same lack of precise quotation as in the other cases already mentioned, and it totally misses the points made by Thompson in this quotation.

44. Provan, *JBL* 114, p. 588.

Now it would be interesting to find a definition of the word ‘ideology’ in Provan’s article. It is not there. When he talks of the ideology of the minimalists as different from other critical scholars, then we are entitled to ask: is he talking about a totally different concept of the world or about different critical evaluations of the biblical texts that all belongs within one and the same accepted spectre of scholarly communality?⁴⁵ In Provan’s words, Davies is accusing his opponents of a different ideology, when he argues that scholars’ impression of ‘ancient Israel’⁴⁶ is directed by a particular religious ideology.⁴⁷ It is the arguments of Provan, that also Thompson intends to portray the opposition as corrupted by ideology. ‘He distinguishes between academic scholarship and religiously and theologically motivated biblical interpretation....’⁴⁸ In spite of this, we still have to ask, how does Provan define ideology? And who are Davies’ and Thompson’s opponents?

Reviewing Provan’s article, it is revealing that, if we substitute the word ‘ideology’ with ‘methodology,’ it all begins to make sense. Davies and Thompson are not accusing their opponents of false ideology, but of deficient methodology that does not in a sufficient way takes into the account how important the basic religious convictions of the biblical historiographers are for the formation of their stories about the past. This is really a discussion between critical scholars, but when the argument turns into a general accusation of the minimalist for being ideologists—ideologues as Dever would put it⁴⁹—the minimalists are said to be different in nature from other critical scholars, which they are not, and sharing a different scholarly (or theological or religious) ideology, which they do not, at least not as far as critical scholars are involved. However, if the real opposition here is the opposition between conservative evangelical scholars on one side and historical-critical scholars on the other—and it is the argument in this article that this is really the case—then matters are different. Then we are talking about two distinct worlds with two distinct ideologies, on one side critical scholarship led by the principles of critical scholarship, and on the other evangelical scholars who will include supercessionist arguments in their historical and analytical reasoning. And it is true: here is a real difference of ideology, of religion, and theology.

So, who are the two parties in this conflict, if we were to follow Provan strictly? It would be critical scholarship embodied by Davies and Thompson on one hand, and scholars directed by religious beliefs and ideologies on the other. Is this actually the difference between minimalism and maximalism? Hardly, it is the difference between conservative evangelical scholarship and historical-critical scholarship in general, and Provan is in fact repeating the age-old complaints of conservative evangelical scholarship. By postulating that a dichotomy exists between the

45. Remember my definition of ideology in *Ancient Israel* (p. 34 n. 1): By ‘ideology’ I intend that set of opinions which dominated Israelite society and which made up the ‘system’ of values with which the Israelites’ actions corresponded. In an oriental society like Israel’s one should furthermore be aware that *ideology*, *religion*, and *theology* are to a large extent synonyms, since the separation between the sacral and the profane realms which characterizes our contemporary European culture was unknown in antiquity—a definition which James Barr found ‘suggestive and potentially creative’, *History and ideology*, p. 115. Transferred into contemporary terms, it says exactly the same, ‘ideology’ denotes the set of opinions which dominate western society in the twentieth-twenty-first centuries, and which make up the ‘system’ of values with which the actions of western societies correspond.

46. One must in this connection remember Davies’ distinction between three types of Israel, 1) historical Israel, i.e., the Israel that once upon a time existed in Palestine in Antiquity, 2) biblical Israel, the Israel of the biblical historiographers, and 3) ancient Israel, the Israel constructed by modern historians on the basis of information about Israel in the Old Testament and outside the Old Testament.

47. Provan, *JBL* 114, p. 588.

48. Provan, *ibid.*

49. E.g., in his *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: William B. Eerdmans, 2001), p. 28. In Dever’s definition, ‘Ideologues’ are people ‘who espouse a particular ideology, often uncritically examined, to the exclusion of others, and who are obsessed with visionary ideas,’ which is of course—like the word itself—his home-made definition.

minimalists and other critical scholars, Provan has succeeded in blurring the issues, by asserting that he is actually on the side of the maximalists, i.e., *critical* scholars with different *critical* ideas about the usefulness of the biblical narrative for historical reconstruction—as a matter of fact a difference consisting not of categories and different ideologies but resulting from different critical analyses of the biblical texts and other available evidence. It is simply a matter of degree within the total spectrum of historical-critical scholarship, but because it has been so easy to build upon the confrontation between different parts of the critical academia in religious studies, it has been so much easier to create a room for Provan's own ideas about history, some of them useful, other absolutely removed from critical scholarship. More about this later.

The following section of Provan's attack on minimalism deals with the concept of history. Here he argues for a multitude of historical approaches, and is as a matter of fact himself approaching a post-modernist position, playing with the subjectivity of the matter. The following quotation is revealing:

Scientific theories come and go, argue the philosophers and sociologists of knowledge. ... Scientist cannot, any more than other human beings, escape from this matter of 'interests.' There is no such thing as value-free academic endeavour.⁵⁰

as is this description of historical theorizing:

There can be no attempt at understanding the past that does not involve these things [theorizing and guesswork]. There is no history writing without them. And in the process of doing all these things, one is inevitably bringing one's own worldview to bear, in terms of fundamental beliefs and prejudices, in terms of ideology. One is inevitably engaged not only in *Wissenschaft* but also, quite clearly, in metaphysics.⁵¹

The implications of this last quotation may go in different directions. On one hand, nobody can deny the correctness of the first axiom: no history—ancient as well as modern—can be told without somebody to tell it, and the narrative will always be flavoured by the story-teller, ancient as well as modern. Most modern historians will agree on this. As the French historian and member of the *les annals* school Lucien Febvre is said to have addressed this problem: 'We know nothing about history, we always reconstruct it!' But does this exclude historical research as it has been practised for ages along lines, e.g., as laid out by Ernst Troeltsch in the nineteenth century? That is indeed the question. Does such an attitude open for metaphysical history writing? What is in fact the essence of this argument?

Although Provan never in his 1995-article explains the implications of this last sentence, it may open up for a better appraisal of *his* approach to history. Because, when he argues, 'history is story. It is a narrative about the past,'⁵² who can alienate him- or herself from such an attitude, probably also shared by most critical scholars today. Probably it is no more than a platitude; at least it is commonly accepted and an idea shared also by Davies, Thompson and this writer.

Basically this could lead to a view that sees all history writing as on one and the same level, irrespective of approaches and so-called ideologies, including also naive, fundamentalist retelling of the Bible as being just as valuable as critically constructed histories. This is hardly a positive road to travel. Maybe it is more rewarding to accept the distinction made by Mario Liverani, who distinguishes between two stories pertaining to Israel's past: one a never completed hypertext, representing a continuous rewriting of the biblical version of Israel's history, something that has been going on forever since these stories were first completed, and the other a new history that

50. Provan, *JBL* 114, p. 590.

51. Provan, *JBL* 114, p. 591.

52. Provan, *JBL* 114, p. 592.

creates its own independent historical narrative about the past.⁵³ Provan's argument, because it allows for everything, probably at the same time allows for nothing in the way of critical history writing. The last one is in his eyes absolutely no more valuable than an evangelical retelling of the beloved stories of the Old Testament and certainly not in a privileged position compared to other narratives about ancient Israel.

Towards the end of his article, he becomes a bit more outspoken.

A particular way of doing history, then, based on a particular philosophy—that is what we have here. On what grounds is this particular approach now to be pronounced the only legitimate one for scholars to embrace?⁵⁴

When raised exclusively against the minimalists such a view may make sense to many scholars, including James Barr, who declares his approval of much written by Provan in his article, where he prefers a number of issues raised by Provan from the ones of the minimalists.⁵⁵ But is the critique only or primarily targeting minimalists? I very much doubt it, and it is clear that Barr also very much doubts it or was moved to doubt it, when he turned to other contributions by Provan.⁵⁶

Seen in this light we can understand Provan's attack as a defence of an evangelical position. The accusation against Gösta W. Ahlström of being a minimalist now makes perfect sense, although it was repudiated by, e.g., James Barr,⁵⁷ as it does when Provan broadens his attack to also include a non-minimalist scholars like K.A.D. Smelik.⁵⁸ Provan rightly has to admit that Smelik's ideas are shared by many critical scholars. Take the following citation from Provan:

Then again, many scholars argue that it is precisely the presumed lateness of the biblical narratives in their present form that makes them so problematic...⁵⁹

which is, of course exactly what members of the minimalist circle have been arguing for years, and something most historians since Gustav Droysen will agree on, when evaluating the value of their sources: when distinguishing between literary sources, contemporary documents are always to be considered *primary* sources; later documents are always *secondary* sources, although this does not say that important information cannot be included in a secondary source.⁶⁰ It is of no help that Provan argues that the biblical narrative, because it is more than 2,000 years old, should take

53. M. Liverani, 'Nuovi sviluppi nello studio della storia dell'Israele biblica,' *Biblica* 81 (1999), pp. 488-505 (also on the internet: <http://www.bsw.org/project/biblia/bibl80/Comm12.htm>). This writer has sometimes been accused of presenting a new history of ancient Israel, different from the biblical one but not necessarily a better one (an accusation based on my *Ancient History*), e.g., by the late Siegfried Herrmann, 'Die Abwertung des Alten Testaments als Geschichtsquelle: Bemerkungen zu einem geistesgeschichtlichen Problem,' in H.H. Schmid and J. Mehlhausen (eds.), *Sola Scriptura* (VII. *Europäischer Theologen-Kongress, Dresden 1990*; Gütersloh, 1993), pp. 156-165. My answer to this is: It is correct; there is no way to tell that my story is better than the one of the biblical historiographers, but it is at least mine, and not just another paraphrase of the biblical story, cf. my 'Is It Still Possible to Write a History of Ancient Israel?' *SJOT* 8 (1994), pp. 163-188, p. 170 n. 13.

54. Provan, *JBL* 114, p. 602.

55. Barr, *History and Ideology*, p. 68.

56. Barr, *History and Ideology*, p. 69-82. Barr is here referring to the additional articles by Ian Provan, most notably 'The Historical Books of the Old Testament,' in J. Barton (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Biblical Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 198-211. Provan lecture at the IOSOT Conference in Oslo in 1998, 'In the Stable with the Dwarves: Testimony, Interpretation, Faith, and the History of Israel' (cf. n. 17 above), appeared too late for inclusion in Barr's *History and Ideology*.

57. *History and Ideology*, pp. 90 f.

58. *JBL* 114, p. 596.

59. *JBL* 114, p. 597.

60. For a more extensive discussion of this obvious fact, cf. my *Ancient Israel*, chapter 2, 'Text and History,' pp. 29-73. For a shorter version, one should consult this writer's 'Israel, History of,' *ABD* III, pp. 526-545, pp. 527-529.

precedence over modern historical narratives such as the critical histories of ancient Israel. The historiography in the Old Testament is not a modern critical reconstruction, it is an ancient source dominated by the supercessionist opinions of its authorship and used selectively by critical scholars of today to construct a history of ancient Israel.⁶¹ Because it is an old document, the Old Testament will always remain a source, and as a written source it should be dealt carefully with in order to see if there is any information in it about the past. Such an eventuality can never be excluded in advance. However, in comparison with a contemporary source, it is always a *secondary* literary source—also in the case of Sennacherib *ante muros*, where Sennacherib's own report, biased as it may be and under the influence of Assyrian royal ideology and propaganda, must take precedence, simply because it was written within a year of the events of 701 B.C.E.⁶²

However, if one accepts a supercessionist approach to history—as Provan obviously does—things may look different, but this is certainly not a view shared by historical-critical scholarship in general!

Summing up Provan's criticism, we may best do it by quoting Provan again. In his view the minimalists represent:

a particular way of doing history, then, based on a particular philosophy—that is what we have here. On what grounds is this particular approach now to be pronounced the only legitimate one for scholars to embrace?

Because the basic ideas about history is not something exclusively limited to the minimalists but shared by the historical-critical scholars of the last two hundred years, it can only mean that the use of the word 'philosophy' here means the philosophy of critical scholarship, i.e., its basic *methodological* assumptions, and this methodology is under attack—which leads to my total agreement with Barr, when he says that

The trouble, I feel, is that some of his [Provan's] arguments, though directed against the revisionists, would in fact have the same effect on the moderate critical position: and if that is the case, then he has been misleading us somewhat, for his argument would then be a more completely anti-critical one, for which the irritation of the revisionists would be only a catalyst.⁶³

The soundness of the argument against Provan presented here is substantiated by a reading of other parts of Provan's production, such as his IOSOT-lecture from 1998, 'In the Stable with the Dwarves...'⁶⁴ In order to substantiate this claim, I only have to quote from the first part of this lecture:

So it is that we have journeyed from implicit trust in, to explicit distrust of, the Bible as providing access to Israel's past. Scholars that tend towards such principled distrust are apt to perceive themselves as the champions of truth and justice over against the focus of obscurantism and oppression. Their distrust is addressed not just towards the Bible, but often towards those who differ in their attitude to and use of the Bible, who are characterised as motivated more by religious or political commitment than by the pursuit of truth and justice.⁶⁵

61. Provan, *JBL* 114, pp. 598. Cf. My answer to Abraham Malamat, 'On the Problem of Studying Israelite History—Apropos Abraham Malamat's View on Historical Research,' *Biblishe Notizen* 24 (1984), 94-124, which argues exactly this point.

62. Further on this in my 'Om historisk erindring i Det Gamle Testaments historiefortællinger,' in Geert Hallbäck and John Strange (eds.), *Bibel og historieskrivning (Forum for Bibelsk Eksegese, 10; Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum, 1999)*, pp. 11-28 (English translation pending).

63. *History and Ideology*, pp. 81 f.

64. In Long, Baker, and Wenham, *Windows into Old Testament History*, pp. 161-197

65. 'In the Stable with the Dwarves...', p. 162. It was a journey a long time concluded, as we find exactly this view on the biblical history—at least until the time of David and Solomon—in Wilhelm Martin Leberecht de Wette, *Beiträge*

which has primarily to do with critical scholarship and its attitude to evangelical scholarship over the last many generations and only secondarily with the peculiar case of the minimalists. The lecture is full of this kind of arguments, which it should be unnecessary to quote in this place. It is in fact a typical evangelical tirade against the principles of critical scholarship and thus very revealing when it comes to the evaluation of Provan's original contribution in the *Journal of Biblical Literature*. It is therefore not a surprise when Provan moves on to attacking such critical assessments of the history of Israel as the ones published by J. Maxwell Miller and J. Alberto Soggin,⁶⁶ and talks about critical scholarship as a 'headlong rush to scepticism,' one of the key arguments in evangelical settlements with critical scholarship.⁶⁷

In this lecture Provan also tries to obscure the real target of his attack by directing his guns exclusively against the minimalists, and he even dares to question this writer's description of how minimalism started—on the basis of rather traditional critical ideas shared by all original members of the circle of minimalists, although he was not there when it started.⁶⁸ Doing this—which in a critical historical assessment would be called bad historiography; in Provan's eyes probably only an example of biased historiography in the post-modern sense—Provan deliberately confounds the issues and hides what is apparent, that the minimalists originated as traditional historical-critical scholars, and probably never left this position of theirs and of critical scholarship in general.

Another quotation from Provan's lecture shows clearly what is, really, his problem:

It is one of the remarkable (if also tragicomic) aspects of recent writing on the history of Israel that a number of its practitioners seem to imagine that it is an advance in knowledge as a result of empirical research that has led to the end of 'ancient Israel', when in fact it is only an advance in ignorance as a result of the quasi-consistent application of the verification principle.⁶⁹

zur Einleitung in das Alte Testament, I-II (Halle: bey Schimmelpfennig und Compagnie, 1806-7 [reprinted in Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1971], II, p. 396: Unsere Untersuchungen haben gezeigt, daß der Pentateuch von Anfang bis zu Ende eines Theils Mythen enthält, d.h. durch Dichter und Tradition ins wunderbare und uebernaturliche gebildete, oft ganz erdichtete Geschichten, und andern Theils unsichere, schwankende, sich oft widersprechende alte Sagen ... (p. 397) als Ganzes aber hat er [der Pentateuch] lediglich eine mythische Bedeutung... nirgends gewinnen wir einen festen geschichtlichen Punkt; Abraham, Jakob, Joseph, der Auszug aus Aegypten, die Gesetzgebung, alle die wichtigsten Momente sind, von der Mythe in Besitz genommen und ihren Gesetzen unterworfen. Which leads to de Wette's final judgment of his sources (p. 397): Die Geschichte thue daher Verzicht auf diesen Theil ihres Gebiets. If only English-speaking scholars did read German, as Philip Davies has said once!

66. J. Maxwell Miller and John H. Hayes, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986), J. Alberto Soggin, *A History of Israel From the Beginnings to the Bar Kochba Revolt, AD 135* (London: SCM Press, 1984), revised with a significant change of title as *An Introduction to the History of Israel and Judah*. (Second, completely revised and updated edition; London: SCM Press, 1993). A third edition—in Italian—is going to be published in 2003.

67. 'In the Stable with the Dwarves...', p. 171.

68. 'In the Stable with the Dwarves...', p. 174 n. 31. Here he essentially questions my description of this development in 'Clio is Also Among the Muses. Keith W. Whitelam and the History of Palestine: A Review and a Commentary, *SJOT* 10 (1996), pp. 88-114 (republished in L.L. Grabbe (ed.), *Can a History of Israel Be Written?* [*JSOT* Sup, 245; *European Seminar in Historical Methodology*, 1; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997], pp. 123-155). I have already answered Provan once, in 'Ideology and the History of Ancient Israel,' *SJOT* 14 (2000), pp. 165-194, pp. 176 f. A more comprehensive review was published by this writer as 'Hvad er det vi har lavet, og hvor går vi hen?' in Mogens Müller and Niels Peter Lemche (eds.), *Fra dybet. Festskrift til John Strange i anledning af 60 års fødselsdagen den 20 juli 1994 (Forum for Bibelsk Eksegese, 5; Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum, 1994)*, pp. 139-143 (English translation pending). I think that the only case of false historiography in that article is the inexcusable downplaying of the role of Bernd Jörg Diebner and his Dielheimer circle of scholars who already in the 1970s promoted such views as the abandonment of the traditional critical source analysis of the Pentateuch, and the late dating of the historiographic compositions to the Hellenistic Period, otherwise connected to this writer. Provan seems not even to know the name of Diebner.

69. 'In the Stable with the Dwarves...', p. 174.

The greatest problem with much traditional historical-critical scholarship has been that it perhaps pretended to know *too much*, not too little. At this point it is probably timely to reintroduce the maxims from 1985, published towards the end of my *Early Israel*:

- (1) Our most important duty is to acknowledge our ignorance.
- (2) Once we have acknowledged the state of our ignorance we are in a position to acknowledge what we really do know.
- (3) A saga or legend is ahistorical until the opposite has been proved; it is not historical until its ‘historical’ contents have been proven.⁷⁰

I believe that these maxims, following a 400-pages long discussion about the origins of Israel that joined the chorus of scholars—including among others Albrecht Alt, Martin Noth, George E. Mendenhall, and Norman K. Gottwald—simply stated what most critical scholars at the time agreed on: that the biblical traditions about Israel’s origins have little to do with what happened in Palestine back at the end of the Late Bronze Age and in the beginning of the Early Iron Age. Nothing in the way of critical scholarship that has been published since 1985 questions this conclusion, including as the most important contribution Israel Finkelstein’s *The Archaeology of the Israelite Settlement*.⁷¹ Critical scholarship accepted this and simply moved on, as the history of critical scholarship during the last fifteen to twenty years clearly shows. Provan may opt for a different approach, but, then, his approach must be seen as a settlement with critical scholarship in general, not as a settlement with the minimalists who represent only one branch of critical scholarship.

Most of the remaining part of Provan’s lecture—read in this light—consists of a conventional evangelical diatribe against critical scholarship in general, only verbally different from attacks such as found in K.A. Kitchen’s and R.K. Harrison’s production. Thus in a section with the heading ‘Faith and Knowledge’⁷² Provan states:

...Nor is there any good reason to think that any testimony and interpretation can be prejudged either positively or negatively by ‘method’ rather than being listened to on its own terms.⁷³

This implies that we should listen to the Bible’s testimony without any preconceived ideas about its historicity, and judge it as a testimony among others and to be taken seriously, which is in fact what critical scholarship has been doing for more than two hundred years. But if it comes to substitute the testimony of critical scholarship with the one of the Bible, meaning writing a new—probably uncritical—hypertext of Israel’s ancient history, then I believe that all historical-critically educated scholars will disagree with Provan.

70. N.P. Lemche, *Early Israel. Anthropological and Historical Studies on the Israelite Society before the Monarchy* (VTS, 37; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1985), pp. 414, 416. The third maxim was mistranslated. In *Early Israel*, it ends in this way, which is of course nonsense: ... it is not historical until its ‘historical’ contents have been disproved.

71. Israel Finkelstein, *The Archaeology of the Israelite Settlement* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society Jerusalem 1988

72. ‘In the Stable with the dwarves...,’ pp. 181-7.

73. ‘In the Stable with the dwarves...,’ p. 181.

The Minimalists and Conservative Scholarship: Other Contributors

The suspicion, which has been aired here, that Provan's original attack in 1995 on the positions of the minimalists is not against the minimalists as such but against established historical-critical scholarship in general, seems to be substantiated by more recent developments. Provan's recent attack on minimalism is included in a volume published by three conservative scholars, V. Philip Long, David W. Baker and Gordon J. Wenham,⁷⁴ and includes contributions apart from a trio of established evangelical scholars such as R.S. Hess, K.A. Kitchen and A.R. Millard, also from two Danish scholars from the two Lutheran faculties of theology in Denmark—very much apropos as the minimalist approach has been identified as the 'Copenhagen School'—Jens Bruun Kofoed and Nicolai Winther-Nielsen.⁷⁵

Thus it is to be expected that this volume will include conservative, i.e., evangelical viewpoints, and it should be easy to identify such ideas when compared to James Barr's description of conservative scholarship already reviewed here.

Only one of the editors has contributed to *Windows into the Old Testament History*, V. Philip Long,⁷⁶ who wrote the introduction to the book. Long is an established and respected scholar who has already published extensively, and edited a valuable collection of articles bearing on the study of Israelite history, including also a contribution by this author.⁷⁷ It is to be expected that his words should carry some weight in a discussion about the merits and deficits of the minimalists.

He opens with the following statement:

Indeed, scepticism toward the historical value of the OT is very fashionable in some scholarly circles today. In the universities of Copenhagen and Sheffield ... it is argued not only that the premonarchical traditions from Abraham to the judges are essential fictional but also that the accounts of monarchical times are likewise inventions of Persian- and Hellenistic-period novelists.⁷⁸

and then he continues:

74. *Windows into Old Testament History* (2002).

75. Since it is mentioned in Kofoed's contribution, a word of clarification is proper in this place: The official theological education in Denmark is placed at two state-sponsored faculties of theology, respectively (since 1479) at the University of Copenhagen, and (since 1944) at the University of Aarhus. This study is the only mean to obtain the right to apply for a position within the Danish 'Folks church' (Folkekirken), a quasi-independent, but at the same time official institution of the state (a rather unique arrangement). As state-sponsored, the faculties are in principle no more confession bound than, e.g., American religious departments at state universities. Any person, evangelical, radical, whoever—also Catholics—, can follow the courses in theology at these two faculties. Their authority has been questioned over the last twenty-five years by two independent schools of definite evangelical orientation, in Copenhagen *Dansk Bibelinstitut* and in Aarhus *Menighedsfakultetet*. However, their education which is confessional, has not received any official recognition from the state, and cannot qualify for positions within the official church. Of course, the politics of the two independent institutions is to obtain official recognition—so far without any luck—and the two articles of Kofoed and Winther-Nielsen can be seen as part of this policy.

76. 'Minimalism, Maximalism, and the Crisis in Old Testament Studies,' *Windows into Old Testament History*, pp. 1-22. If anyone should think of the characterization of Long as evangelical as unfair, they must understand that he as well as Ian Provan are employed by an institution that among its spiritual fathers includes Michael Green. For more information the reader is recommended to consult the home page of Regents College, Vancouver.

77. Cf. the two monographs by V.P. Long, *The reign and Rejection of King Saul. A Case for Literary and Theological Coherence* (SBL Diss Ser., 118; Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1989), *The Art of Biblical History* (Foundations of Contemporary Interpretation, 5; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), and the volume edited by him, *Israel's Past in Present Research: Essays on Ancient Israelite Historiography* (Sources for Biblical and Theological Study, 7; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1999).

78. 'Minimalism, Maximalism...', p. 1.

Most OT scholars stop well short of such extremes.⁷⁹

which is probably true, but it is included as a part of an argument that intends to place evangelical scholarship on line with ‘maximalist’ historical-critical scholarship, and here I believe that few historical-critical scholars will follow him—even among the maximalists. The strategy is, however, the same as in Provan’s contribution to the *Journal of Biblical Literature*, to play off the so-called maximalist *critical* scholars against the so-called minimalist *critical* scholars. The difference between the minimalists and the maximalists among critical scholars is one of degree. They certainly agree on the basic principles of historical analysis, but, sometimes, reach different results.

Then Long finds his clue to a title for his book in the following quotation by this writer:

In the eyes of many ‘scholars’ of the past who have never looked out the window to perceive the world outside it, this biblical Israel was believed to have existed once.⁸⁰

and he adds the following interpretation of what I intend to say:

In other words, those who believe that ‘biblical Israel’ once existed simply have not bothered to look out of the window to see the reality of the ancient Near Eastern world in which biblical Israel is supposed to have existed.⁸¹

This is a totally misplaced interpretation intended to discredit the author and his general knowledge of the ancient Near East, and it is certainly not a correct interpretation of my original text that turns up at the end of a long discussion of historical-critical scholarship as following in the footsteps of the classical discipline of history, represented in my discussion by Leopold von Ranke and Gustav Droysen, both of the nineteenth century.⁸²

The sentence is lifted out of its context, where it is placed at the end of a discussion about ethnicity, accusing many scholars, who have been dealing with the question of Israelite identity, of not having based their arguments on the debate about this topic among social anthropologists and accordingly ignoring the ‘real’ world, i.e., how ethnicity can be seen to function outside the Old Testament, not in ancient cultures (at least not primarily in ancient cultures) but in traditional societies of the present age. It could also be said that the quotation has to do with applying principles of social history to biblical studies, something scorned by the majority of biblical scholars for generations as pointed out more than twenty years ago by Norman K. Gottwald.⁸³

Because of his misprision, Long feels free to introduce the usual conservative attack on critical scholars—often heard before—that they are ignorants when it comes to matters of the ancient Near East, a point illustrated, according to Long, in another quotation from the conservative evangelical scholar J.K. Hoffmeier, who on line with K.A. Kitchen still argues for the historicity of the Exodus, and at the same time accuses—like Kitchen has done so many times—critical scholars

79. *Ibid.*, p. 2.

80. *Ibid.* Cf. N.P. Lemche, *The Israelites in History and Tradition* (Library of Ancient Israel; Louisville, KY: Westminster, 1998), p. 21.

81. Long, ‘Minimalism, Maximalism...,’ p. 2.

82. The quotation appears at the end of a chapter titled ‘Prolegomena: Inventing the Past. Ancient Israel—Ethnicity, Nation, and History as a mode of Interpreting Ancient Cultures,’ *The Israelites in History and Tradition*, p. 1-21.

83. Cf. Norman K. Gottwald, *The Tribes of Yahweh: A Sociology of the Religion of Liberated Israel 1250-1050 B.C.E.* (Maryknoll, NT: Orbis Books, 1979), Chapter 2.1, ‘The Scandal of Sociological Method,’ pp. 5-7.

for ignoring the facts from the ancient Near East.⁸⁴

Hoffmeier's text—which I only know from Long's quotation of it—is, however, much more revealing and ought to be included here:

One reason for the disparity between historical maximalists and minimalists is that the former tend to be trained in Near Eastern languages, history, and archaeology with the Hebrew Bible as a cognate discipline, whereas the latter are largely trained in Old Testament studies in the nineteenth-century European mold and treat cognate languages and sources as ancillary rather than central to their discipline.

I very much doubt that, e.g., William G. Dever and Baruch Halpern, both self-acclaimed maximalists, would like to be identified with evangelical scholarship of this kind, and I very much doubt that any of them would stand up for the historical Exodus in the way a Kitchen or Hoffmeier would do.⁸⁵ However, by making this kind of links, conservative evangelical scholars evidently try to be identified as *the* maximalists in the controversy between maximalists and minimalists. Then, we may be entitled to ask, who are the maximalists really, Dever or Halpern and scholars who accept their basically critical approach to biblical studies, or evangelical students of the Bible? I think that a line by two evangelical conservative scholars, Mark W. Chavalas and Murray R. Adamthwaite, may illustrate my point, when they say about a by now famous tête-à-tête between Dever, P. Kyle McCarter, Thomas L. Thompson and this writer in New Orleans in 1996: '... where N.P. Lemche, T.L. Thompson, W. Dever, and P. Kyle McCarter Jr. expound their minimalist views.'⁸⁶ More about this below.

Apart from this, the argument is false, when we review the contributions actually made by the leading minimalists in oriental studies. Without being exhaustive, the entire dissertation of Thomas L. Thompson about the quest for the historicity of the patriarchs was devoted to the ancient Near East—more than 300 pages.⁸⁷ Philip R. Davies has not published within ancient near eastern studies in general, but his interest is definitely not related only to the Bible in a narrow sense, as he has the status as a prominent expert in matters of the Dead Sea Scrolls.⁸⁸ This writer has since his early days as an Old Testament scholar occasionally found time also to publish within ancient near eastern studies.⁸⁹ We may also mention the Italian Assyriologist Mario Liverani, who although not a

84. Long, 'Minimalism, Maximalism...', p. 2.

85. For an appraisal of Kitchen's and Hoffmeier's present ideas about the Exodus, one may consult the internet at <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/8ta/8ta044.html>, an article by Kevin D. Miller, 'Did the Exodus Never Happen? How two Egyptologists are countering scholars who want to turn the Old Testament into myth.' On Dever's view of the Exodus, cf his 'Is There Any Archaeological Evidence for the Exodus?' In Ernest S. Frerichs and Leonard H. Lesko (eds.), *Exodus: The Egyptian Evidence* (Winona Lake, IN: 1997), pp. 67-86.

86. Cf. Mark W. Chavalas and Murray R. Adamthwaite, 'Archaeological Light on the Old Testament,' in David W. Baker and Bill T. Arnold (eds.), *The Face of Old Testament Studies: A Survey of Contemporary Approaches*, pp. 59-96, p. 80 n. 97. The discussion was sponsored and published by Hershel Shanks, 'Biblical Minimalists meet Their Challenger,' *BAR* 23.4 (1997), pp. 26-42.

87. *The Historicity of the Patriarchal Narratives*, 1974.

88. Cf., e.g., his *The Damascus Covenant. An Interpretation of the 'Damascus Document'* (JSOT Sup, 25; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1983). Davies' participation in the campaign in favour of a speedier and more open publication process of the Dead Sea Scrolls is well known among specialists in this field.

89. Cf. N.P. Lemche, 'Andurarum and Misharum. Comments on the Problem of Social Edicts and their Application in the Ancient Near East,' *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 38 (1979), pp. 11-22; *The Canaanites in History and Tradition: The Tradition of the Canaanites* (JSOT Sup, 110; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991—2nd edition with an epilogue 1999); 'Syrian-Palestinian History: An Overview,' in J.M. Sasson (ed.), *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*, II (New York: Scribners, 1995), pp. 1195-1218; *Prelude to Israel's Past: Background and beginnings of Israelite History and Identity* (Peabody, MA: Heendrickson, 1998), part II and III, pp. 66-213; 'Greater Canaan: The Implications of a Correct Reading of EA 151:49-51,' *BASOR* 310 (1998), pp. 19-24, the last article directed against Anson F. Rainey who had in another publication made the mistake to believe that I am ignorant of Akkadian.

minimalist *stricto sensu*, is favourable to many of the basic ideas directing so-called minimalists, and whose history of Israel is scheduled to appear late 2003.⁹⁰ There is no basis for any assumption that the minimalist know nothing about the ancient Near East and there is no basis for the claim that scholars trained in the study of ancient Near East need to be conservative or evangelical scholars. It is a perversion of facts. We need not address this topic any further but should see the argument of Long as just another example of the age-old evangelical diatribe against critical scholars. And the verdict of Long, that ‘it is unlikely that the minimalist approach will find a wide following among today’s scholars—at least of all among those who have spent much time “looking out the window”,’ is totally unconvincing although some may think that it is promising!

The following section of Long’s introduction deals with postmodernism and the subjectivity of knowledge, and nobody can disagree here, that a postmodern view with an open agenda has brought home to the majority of scholars that no such thing as ‘objective’ science exist. Today it is a truism that probably hits back in the face of the evangelical scholar, who among his beloved arguments against critical scholarship entertains the idea that they could never agree on anything—which is probably also true, although the reason for this state of affairs was more difficult to explain in pre-postmodern times, i.e., in the period of modernism from the Romantic Period to the second half of the twentieth century.

This argument—should we in the present situation say banality—is followed up with an attack on philosophy, resembling the likewise age-old hoax of conservative scholarship that critical scholars have for many generations been lead by philosophical assumptions, and personified in Long’s introduction, in his claim that Thomas L. Thompson is governed by a materialistic and positivistic philosophy—very much the same attack as launched by Ian Provan. Like Provan, who evidently understood his opponent’s choice of method to represent ideology (however, not his own ideology), Long obviously sees the philosophy of his opponents as expressing bias and prejudice, while it is in fact the same ideology as shared by generations of historical-critical scholars who have left out of consideration the divine—supercessionalist—argument from their historical reconstructions.

Long, like Provan finally challenges the establishment of historical-critical scholarship by questioning

the ‘rules of the game’ by which so much historical study since the Enlightenment has been pursued and asks to what degree, if at all, they are capable of doing justice to reality.⁹¹

which clearly shows that he follows the lead from the previous generation of evangelical scholars who did exactly the same. The minimalists are the straw-men, representing historical-critical scholarship in general.

Long’s position will be even more clear by including his chapter on the development of historical studies of the Old Testament in Baker’s and Arnold’s *The Face of Old Testament Studies*, definitely a conservative work.⁹² Thus he identifies a number of stages in the development of these

90. An early example of Liverani’s attitude to biblical studies is his ‘Le “origine” d’Israele progetto irrealizzabile di ricerca etnogenetica,’ *Rivista Biblica Italiana* 28 (1980), pp. 9-31, and we should not forget his marvellous analysis of Judges 19-21, ‘Messaggi, donne, ospilità. Comunicazione intertribale in Giud. 19-21,’ *Studi Storico-Religiosi* III (1979), pp. 303-341. For a more recent example of Liverani handling biblical matters we may refer to his ‘Nuovi sviluppi nello studio delle storia dell’Israele biblica,’ *Biblica* 81 (1999), pp. 488-505. It is not a secret that Liverani has contributed immensely to Soggin’s ideas as espoused in his history books (cf. n. ... above), and—as already said—has been a life-long inspiration to this author.

91. ‘Minimalism, Maximalism,’ p. 20.

92. V. Philip Long, ‘Historiography of the Old Testament,’ in Baker and Arnold (eds.), *The Face of the Old Testament*, pp. 145-75.

studies, always played off against conservative positions. We may speak of

- 1)Nineteenth-century-style liberalism, challenged by neo-orthodoxy and neoevangelicalism.
- 2)Positivistic history under considerable strain.
- 3)A new world of comparative studies from Egypt and Mesopotamia.
- 4)Archaeological and geographical advances.
- 5)Documentary hypothesis rigorously challenged.⁹³

Did we hear of this view of the history of historical-critical research before? Certainly we did, and we only have to read the introduction in Kenneth A. Kitchen's *Ancient orient and Old Testament* from 1966 to see that nothing is new in the conservative attitude to historical-critical positions. The critical scholars are directed by old-fashioned philosophy—now obsolete—, and the positivistic historical method is leading to nothing because of its lack of interest and subsequently understanding of the wonderful discoveries from the ancient Near East, and because of its practitioners' lack of proper archaeological training, while at the same time the hallmark of critical scholarship, the documentary hypothesis, has been totally discredited.

Of course none of this is true. It was the argument of Kitchen a generation ago, and as Barr said the futile hope of conservative scholarship that critical scholarship should soon disappear.⁹⁴ Now it is after twenty-five years repeated by Long, and it is certainly perhaps even less true than it used to be twenty-five years ago.

We may add:

1. *Nineteenth century liberalism, challenged by neo-orthodoxy.* This is certainly true, and if it was not the case, this article would never have been written. It, however, does not change the predominance—almost exclusivity—within critical historical scholarship of the principles of historical research proposed by German scholars of the nineteenth century, some of them preceding Troeltsch, embodied in Ernst Troeltsch's principles of historical research, criticism, analogy, and correlation.
2. *Positivistic history under strain* is certainly also true, as few critical scholars of today will entertain the same assuredness of their own ideas and analyses as perhaps the founding fathers of critical study. This is a banality that does not, really, pose any threat to critical scholarship.
3. *The ancient Near East and the Old Testament.* While it is true that biblical studies have benefited immensely from the study of surrounding areas, it is no way true that this is a problem to critical study. Enough has already been said about this.
4. *Archaeological advances.* Here exactly the same can be said, and critical scholarship has made immense advances because of archaeological result, however, often not the results expected or hoped for by conservative scholars.

93. 'Historiography of the Old Testament,' p. 150.

94. Barr, *Fundamentalism*, pp. 126, 127.

5. *The documentary hypothesis is rigorously criticized.* This is also true, but it certainly holds its stands within large parts of critical scholarship—irrespective of the kinds of results pertaining to the literary production of biblical historiography this scholarship may propose. We only have to look at studies by, e.g., John Van Seters,⁹⁵ Erhard Blum,⁹⁶ and other scholars in order to appreciate the continuous importance of the documentary hypothesis. It is only among post-modern readers it can be said to have lost ground. If evangelical scholarship is postmodern—and it is certainly sometimes behaves as if it was—one may understand this claim but I am not sure that historical-critical scholars will agree.

Following a discussion of David Friedrich Strauss, Long concludes: One what grounds does one assume that ‘God never disturbs the natural course of events? Now it is time to move the sun around the earth! One can only be grateful that conservative scholarship comes out in the open in this way and shows its real face but it hardly qualifies as critical scholarship. Thus it is refreshing that Long so openly states:

...traditional historical criticism of the Old Testament has tended to understand ‘criticism’ in terms of presupposed scepticism towards one’s sources, ‘analogy’ in a more or less narrow sense whereby human experience limits what can qualify as ‘historical’ in the past, and ‘correlation’ as limiting historical causation to either natural forces or human agency.

This quotation may be backed up with another from the same source:

...the standard historical-critical approach leaves little or no room for God in history, social science approaches often have little room for the Old Testament texts themselves, and modern literary approaches sometimes show little interest in historical concerns at all.

One cannot argue with God, nor can we use or abuse God within a scholarly context that leaves no room for the supernatural. Long’s claim is a hundred percent fundamentalist one, and although it may seem as if it is backed by some sorts of postmodern relativism, it is totally irrelevant to an academic pursuit for historical knowledge.

The inclusion of Jens Bruun Kofoed’s article in Long, Baker and Wenham, *Windows into Old Testament History*⁹⁷ will function as the final control of the results obtained so far, that conservative evangelical scholarship is pushing its way into the arena formerly dominated by historical-critical scholarship by setting up a bogus discussion: maximalists versus minimalists, which is an ongoing controversy among critical scholars, pretending that the maximalists carry the day in this controversy while the conservatives at the same time put on the mantle of maximalist critical scholarship and are propagating a view of history that can be defined as traditional evangelical. Here very little—if anything—has changed since the time when James Barr wrote his work on

95. See the many influential books by John Van Seters, *Abraham in History and Tradition* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1975); *The Life of Moses: The Yahwist as a Historian in Exodus-Numbers* (Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1994); *Prologue to History: The Yahwist as Historian in Genesis* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992); and *The Pentateuch: A Social-Science Commentary (Trajectories, 1)* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999). Although Van Seters is sometimes identified as a minimalist, he would certainly not subscribe to this naming. On the other is it impossible to question his knowledge of the Ancient Near East as displayed in his *The Hyksos. A New Investigation* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1966), and *In Search of History. Historiography in the Ancient World and the Origins of Biblical History* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1983).

96. See E. Blum, *Die Komposition der Vätergeschichte (WMANT, 57)* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag des Erziehungsvereins, 1984); *Studien zur Komposition des Pentateuch (BZAW, 189)* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1990).

97. Jens Bruun Kofoed, ‘Epistemology, Historiographical Method, and the “Copenhagen School”,’ in Long, Baker, and Wenham (eds.). *Windows into the Old Testament History*, pp. 23-43.

fundamentalism.

In his article, Kofoed opens with a few encouraging remarks about the Copenhagen School because it, in Kofoed's words, have allowed some fundamental questions concerning historiographical method to surface in the scholarly debate,⁹⁸ but he soon turns to a criticism of Thomas Thompson's methodology disputing Thompson's prioritising of the source material for the study of Israel, 1) archaeology, 2) ancient documents pertaining to Palestine, and 3) the biblical traditions.

He opposes Thompson's use of ideas borrowed from the historical school of *les annals*, and of disregarding the biblical testimony in this context, and he summarizes in this fashion:

The question still answered, however, is on what basis Thompson writes off the biblical 'traditions' in favour of the archaeological realia.⁹⁹

which is of course nonsense, if Kofoed surveys the progress of minimalism from its beginning more than thirty years ago. Minimalist authors have argued time after time: we did not start with a disrespect of the biblical tradition; we were gradually forced into an increasingly critical position vis-à-vis the value of the biblical historiography as a source for the periods preceding its composition. I have somewhere (forgot where) compared biblical historical studies to the trench warfare of the First World War. The community of critical scholars would stick to their trenches under fire, and only when the position was hopeless, they would retreat to the next line of trenches, and here the fight would start all over again. And so it went on for decades of critical analysis. The difference between critical scholarship and conservative evangelical scholarship is that the conservative scholars remained in their demolished trenches and pretended that they were not overrun at all. Hardly a very recommendable strategy.

The trench warfare is still going on, and to Kofoed's and others surprise, the present first line of defence is the time of David, a matter not yet settled, although the minimalists mostly side with scholars who are critical to the biblical idea of a Davidic empire. At the same time, the picture is more complicated as other fights are still going on in other places, such as in the discussion about the idea of the Exile in the Old Testament, where some critical scholars are seriously beginning to question the image of the Exile presented by biblical historiography and putting emphasis on the Exile's importance as a great divider between the ancient Israelites, the people of the covenant of Sinai, and the Israelites who make up the people of the new covenant of Jeremiah 31. None of this is new to Kofoed, or so I presume. Therefore his claim that there has never been presented a proper case for the distrust in the Old Testament as a historical source *about the past* is simply nonsense.

More technically, Kofoed includes a very relevant criticism of scholarship too mechanically dependent on Ferdinand Braudel's model of the three levels of history, a view not shared by Braudel himself. He says:

If historiographers using Braudel's model discard the human factor as decisive for historical development, or deny textual evidence any possibility of adding much to an overall understanding of the historical development of Iron Age Palestine, it is not so much because of the model itself as it is because of the historiographers' own philosophical presuppositions.¹⁰⁰

This is absolutely correct, and a rigid dependence on the mechanical part of Braudel's model will certainly lead to deterministic history, but the minimalists are hardly the ones to blame for such a view, which has generally played a more vital role within the school of New Archaeology, in their

98. Kofoed, 'Epistemology ...,' p. 25.

99. *Ibid*, p. 27.

100. Kofoed, 'Epistemology...', p. 32.

reconstruction of ancient history.¹⁰¹ It is, however, hardly very relevant in the case of Thompson's dealing with early Israel. A better target would probably be Robert Coote's and Keith Whitelam's study on the emergence of ancient Israel where their use of methods of this kind went so far as to exclude also contemporary texts like the Amarna Letters from their analysis of Late Bronze Age Palestine.¹⁰² But this work would hardly qualify as written by minimalists—except perhaps in the eyes of a true evangelical scholar.

Back to Kofoed, who continues with a discussion of philosophical preconceptions, in Thompson's case with the following remark:

Methodologies are governed by philosophies, in Thompson's case by the view that structures and conjunctures are basic to the understanding of the Iron Age history of Palestine, that the event-oriented textual evidence is to be considered 'secondary' or 'intellectual' history, and that an analysis and interpretation of the artifactual data therefore must serve as the interpretative context for the actual data, not least the 'biblical traditions'.

While Kofoed's remark may be considered relevant on a theoretical level, it is hardly relevant in this case. We have talked enough about the methodologies directing the historians' use of his source material, about his traditional preferences, and his sifting between primary and secondary sources. The trust invested by critical scholars in the biblical text broke down because this historiography presented an impossible picture of the past—and here nothing has changed; the situation is only growing worse, from the viewpoint of a person rooted in an evangelical view of the Bible. This is a valid conclusion for any period preceding the so-called 'United monarchy' of David and Solomon, and probably for more than that. What Thompson has been doing is really nothing except following the advice of mine to look positively, not apologetically, at the historiography in the Old Testament and begin where we know the most, and that is definitely not to be found within the biblical tradition or among biblical historiographers who show so little in the way of knowledge about the Late Bronze Age and the Early Iron Age.¹⁰³

Much of the remaining argument in Kofoed's contribution revolves around this misapprehension of the development of historical criticism of the biblical text as insufficient for the reconstruction of Israelite history, and need not be revised here. Neither do we need to include a discussion of the problem with philosophy when it is so obvious that philosophy simply means the shared philosophical concepts of the modern age. But his conclusion, following a lead from Hans M. Barstad, that the minimalists are moderns, not postmoderns, has something for it.¹⁰⁴

His reconstruction of Thompson's 'Kantian' universe is also of interest. It can be summarized

101. C.L. Redman, *The Rise of Civilization* (San Francisco, 1978) provides a perfect example of such an approach, and of its limitations. Further on Redman, New Archaeology, and Systems approach in social anthropology in my *Early Israel*, pp. 216-8.

102. Robert B. Coote and Keith W. Whitelam, *The Emergence of Early Israel in Historical Perspective (The Social World of Biblical Antiquity Series, 5)*; Sheffield: Almond Press, 1987). For an early appraisal of this work I may refer to my review of it in *Biblica* 69 (1988), 581-584.

103. Cf. *Early Israel*, pp. 415-6. The second part of this sentence refers to the argument in my *Prelude to Israel's Past*: the huge gap between what is told, e.g., about the patriarchal age, and the realities of the Late Bronze Age; that we in the patriarchal stories find fairy-tale and saga, not history writing in any sense that we can identify.

104. In is one of the more hilarious elements of the present controversy that the minimalist are seen by some colleagues as totally absorbed by postmodernism, by other colleagues as soundly rooted in the modern age. Dever includes in his tirades against minimalism clearly the accusation that they are hopeless postmodernist, e.g., in his *What Did the Biblical Writers Know and When Did They Know It?*, pp. 257-66. James Pasto, like Barstad, is of the conviction that we represents the modern age. Cf. his 'When the End is the Beginning? Or When the Biblical Past is the Political Present: Some Thoughts on Ancient Israel, 'Post-Exilic Judaism,' and the Politics of Biblical Scholarship,' *SJOT* 12 (1998), pp. 157-202. Somehow we cannot be both, so our colleagues will at the end have to make up their minds.

in this way. According to Kofoed,¹⁰⁵ Thompson argues that:

(1) The biblical texts are the perceived history, or... the categorized reality of its last known author(s) or redactor(s), namely, in the Hellenistic Period.

(2) As a collection of texts they are ... nothing but an expression of how reliable fragments of the past (oral or written) were used—regardless of their origin and primary context—to express what was considered meaningful and important by a particular author or group of authors.

(3) Such a collection of texts must be considered not prior or normative but parallel to other contemporary collections: Qumran, Samaritan, Maccabean, and the like. They are to be considered variant traditions.

(4) The primary goal of exegesis is, therefore, on the basis of what we ‘know’ about the ‘structures’ and ‘conjunctures’ in Hellenistic Period Palestine, to identify the motives and ideas that have governed the compositions of the biblical authors.

I think that this is a very precise identification of at least a part of the ‘Copenhagen’ program. The interesting thing is that it would fit any critical assessment of biblical historiography as a historical source independently of how scholars may date this historiography. Thus there is no important difference—apart from the dating of the historiography—between Thompson’s and Lemche’s ideas about the principles governing the composition of the biblical narrative in the Hellenistic Period, and Martin Noth’s claim that the traditions from the Exodus to the settlement were the reflection about the past entertained by the amphictyonic community of early Israel;¹⁰⁶ Noth does not even include the patriarchal narratives or the Joseph-story in this review. Critical scholars have for more than two hundred years shared the general ideas about the composition of the historiography and the reasons for it, and have mostly indulged in discussing details.

That Kofoed’s own program is a classic evangelical one becomes clear when one visits his Danish homepage where it becomes obvious that his real problem with Thompson’s approach is that it is placing ‘a wedge between historicity and trustworthiness, and the texts loose completely their *authority*, i.e., the universal ability to speak as the word of God’ (transl. N.P. Lemche).¹⁰⁷ This is a serious problem that has been the subject of discussion also among historical-critical scholars of recent times.¹⁰⁸

The Maximalist-Minimalist Controversy in the Light of the Conservative Take-over

It was made clear above that evangelical scholarship is assuming for itself the prerogative of being maximalism and considers it a name of honour. However, it did not start with evangelical scholarship but originated among American critical scholars, mainly third generation students of Albright. In this way, the conflict could be seen as a parallel to the conflict between Albright and his

105. ‘Epistemology ...,’ pp. 37-8.

106. Martin Noth, *Geschichte Israels* (2. Aufl.; Göttingen, 1954), Chapter 3, ‘Die Traditionen des sakralen Zwölfstämmebundes,’ pp. 105-30.

107. http://www.dbi.edu/Artikler/0802%203n_en_god_historie.htm.

108. Cf., e.g., the discussion between John Strange, ‘Heilsgeschichte und Geschichte: Ein Aspekt der biblischen Theologie,’ *SJOT* 1989/2, pp. 100-13, and N.P. Lemche, ‘Geschichte und Heilsgeschichte,’ *SJOT* 1989/2, pp. 114-135, and between Rainer Albertz, ‘Religionsgeschichte Israels statt Theologie des Alten Testaments! Plädoyer für eine forschungsgeschichtliche Umorientierung,’ *Jahrbuch für biblische Theologie* 10 (1995), pp. 3-24, and *inter alia* N.P. Lemche, ‘Warum die Theologie des Alten Testaments einen Irrweg darstellt,’ *Jahrbuch für biblische Theologie* 10 (1995), pp. 79-92.

students—especially John Bright and George E. Wright—and Martin Noth and Albrecht Alt and their students. Thus the ‘language’ of the recent exchanges to a large degree resembles the one used by these students of Albright a generation ago.

Let me quote two of Albright’s students on Martin Noth:

W.F. Stinespring:

Turning to Noth (treated under the caption ‘The School of Alt and Noth’), Bright finds that Noth uses literary criticism so rigorously that the biblical tradition becomes practically worthless as history, in sharp contrast to Kaufmann. We know next to nothing about the patriarchs, Moses, the Exodus, the covenant, Joshua, or the conquest. History begins with Israel, and Israel did not come into being until the various groups reached Palestine and formed ‘the Twelve-Clan League.’ Curiously enough, Noth, like Kaufmann, gets no help from archaeology, in spite of his membership in the Alt School, famous for its archeological work. The result is, according to Bright, ‘nihilism.’ In effect, Kaufmann rejects literary criticism and archaeology and ends up with tradition; Noth rejects tradition and archaeology and ends up with nothing. If K. can be called ‘gullible’, N. would be ‘a professional skeptic’ (Bright avoids direct application of these terms).¹⁰⁹

George E. Wright writes (after having praised Alt and Noth for the introduction of the Amphictyony as a model for early Israelite society):

Curiously enough, however, Alt and Noth are as negativistic regarding the patriarchal, Exodus, Sinai, and Conquest traditions as was Wellhausen, in these matters refusing completely to use archeological data. Following a rigid form-critical and tradition-history methodology, Noth separates five themes in the Pentateuch...’

This attempt to reconstruct, or rather nihilistically to reduce, the history of early Israel solely by the use of an internal form-critical and tradition-history methodology is so artificial and subjective as to be unconvincing. It raises the question as to the limits of such a methodology in historical reconstruction...

Most curious is Noth’s complete refusal to make use of archeological data. He does not do so because the presuppositions of his methodology will not permit him.¹¹⁰

When William G. Dever characterizes the members of the Copenhagen School as

Philologists—with no pertinent texts;
Historians—with no history,
Theologians—with no empathy with religion;
Ethnographers—with no recognizable ‘ethnic groups’, no training, and no field experience;
Anthropologists—with no theory of culture and cultural change;
Literary critics—with little coherent concept of literary production.
Archaeologists—with no independent knowledge or appreciation of material culture remains,¹¹¹

it should be pretty easy here to recognize most of Wright’s rhetoric from above, only sharpened considerably in tone—which will be clearer if one includes also the ‘exquisite’ selection of labels put on the minimalists in various writings by Dever.¹¹² These include the naming of people governed by false presuppositions, ideology, following Wellhausen, including an anti-theological

109. W.F. Stinespring, in his review of John Bright, *Early Israel in Recent History Writing* (SBT, 19; Naperville, IL: Allenson, 1956), in *JBL* 76 (1957), pp. 249.

110. George E. Wright, ‘Archeology and Old Testament Studies,’ *JBL* 77 (1958), pp. 39-51, pp. 47-8.

111. W.G. Dever, ‘Revisionist Israel Revisited: A Rejoinder to Niels Peter Lemche,’ *CR:BS* 4 (1996), pp. 35-50, p. 43, repeated in his *What Did the Biblical Writers Know and When Did They Know It?*, p. 40.

112. For such a selection, cf. my ‘History and Ideology,’ *SJOT* 14, pp. 167-9.

bias, or simply dishonest scholars.

We met most of these accusations above in the conservative evangelical attack on the minimalists. It is thus not difficult to trace the origins of such language that may, in Barr's terms be called a 'mission-hall-tract.' The essence of the attack comes from Dever's teacher, George E. Wright and the circle of scholars surrounding Wright, but the language belongs to Dever's past, as he has so honestly explained it in the introduction to his *What Did the Biblical Writers Know and When Did They Know It?*¹¹³ Here he describes his background travelling around with his father, a layman preacher, and admits that his language comes from this experience.

Essentially this means that we probably should bypass the language in silence and look at the essence of Dever's scholarly contribution, which has since his early days revolved around the problem of wrestling with a biblical historiography, the importance of which for historical study he reluctantly had to diminish as the years passed by. It is an evidence of this continuous struggle that he gave up the terminology of George Wright who put pride in calling the archaeology of Palestine *Biblical Archaeology*¹¹⁴ and chose the name 'Syro-Palestinian Archaeology'—probably a strange choice for a person who has never dug in Syria, and probably never visited the country. However, Dever's aim was to liberate archaeology from the Old Testament and making it into an independent discipline—which at the same time means to liberate the Old Testament from archaeology, making biblical studies into an independent discipline!¹¹⁵

The danger, as Dever has to admit it, is certainly that this may make archaeology redundant for theology, which was never his intention but nevertheless happened. Here he shares the fate of the historians. Just as Dever for the benefit of archaeology—and biblical studies—liberated archaeology from the Bible, the critical historians liberated history from the Bible—and the Bible from history—with the same dangers involved and the same consequences. There can be no doubt—one only has to compare, e.g., a volume of *Vetus Testamentum* from the 1960s with a volume of *The Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* from the 1990s to see what has happened. The preponderance of historically oriented contributions has diminished or almost disappeared. Biblical scholars have turned their interest to other fields, definitely literary studies, bringing into biblical studies a much needed update of methods for reading texts, while at the same time probably too often forgetting that they are dealing with an ancient document. At the extreme (to use Dever's language) they simply ignore that the Bible is a document from ancient times, and not a modern literary novel. Finally, it is obvious in many places that this development has weakened especially the role of the Old Testament within theological studies; positions have been eliminated and the curriculum cut down.

It is evident that a corollary of this deplorable development that has led to the diminishing importance of the Old Testament within established theological academic institutions is the general lack of interest in general history as such. I do not know much about the development in other countries but in Denmark since the 1970s history lost ground in basic as well as high schools, and the idea of general history, i.e., a history that goes from the most ancient times to modern times, almost disappeared. The function of history as national legitimation was mainly given up, and the 'great story' was lost at the same time. This does not mean that history lost every legitimation

113. P. ix.

114. Cf. the difference in title between W.F. Albright's archaeological textbook, *The Archaeology of Palestine* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1949) and G.E. Wright's *Biblical Archaeology* (London: Duckworth, 1957)

115. Dever has presented a careful review of this development in terminology and its implication in an article from *BAR* placed on the internet, 'Why It's So Hard to Name Our Field,' http://www.bib-arch.org/bswb_BAR/bswbba2904f3.html, and article to commended for its uncharacteristic subdued language and fairness of presentation.

among the public that turned to historical novels, and many modern authors have experienced great successes and high sale numbers publishing such novels. It is, however, not history writing, but episodic modern retelling of history as story.¹¹⁶

In theology, the weakened link between history and theology has had consequences that can be seen as both positive and negative. The positive side of the issue is the liberation of the Bible—especially the Old Testament—from history that turned the attention of the scholar from an apologetic position that demanded that the history as told by the Old Testament should be defended at all costs into a more positive position that concentrates on the ethics and theology of the Old Testament, and see its historiography as part of its ethical and theological message. This was a necessary step, as the gap between what was considered historically possible and what is told in the biblical historiography grew wider and wider, as the apologetically oriented scholars had to give up old, now impossible, positions.

It would, then, be possible to subscribe to the theology of salvation history in the meaning Gerhard von Rad gave to it, while at the same time the cruder American version of ‘God who acts’ would be deemed an unnecessary simplification. At least one thing was won, that theologians did not any longer have to play with the intellectual impossible idea of a ‘double truth,’ explaining to laypersons that the Bible is both right and wrong at the same time and at the same level, because what stood in the Bible was historically both true and untrue. Now scholars could turn with fresh ideas to a text that was true, although as a historical testimony it probably failed to be accepted in its minute parts.¹¹⁷

It is, on the other hand, obvious that in the eyes of conservative evangelical scholars this development represents a diminishing importance of the Old Testament, because, as they see it, theology is linked to history as it really was. Accordingly, when they criticize the minimalists—and we have seen that many times when evangelical scholars launch attacks against the establishment of historical-critical scholarship—it is because it has taken away *their* history of the Bible; they are defending an idea of history as theology, and theology as history, that has been shown to be impossible by modern developments not only among the minimalists but all over the spectrum of critical scholarship. No wonder that no conservative, not to say plainly evangelical scholar has been able to appreciate the reorientation as evidenced in Thomas L. Thompson’s recent book on biblical historiography!¹¹⁸

116. The tremendous success of such novels can be reflected in the fate of a series of novels by Jan Guillou about the temple knight Arnd Magnusson who became—in Guillou’s novel—the true founder of Sweden. Now, travelling in the parts of Sweden where many of the episodes are said to have taken place—some of them historical—road signs are put up, pamphlets edited, and books published, that tourist can travel in the footsteps of Arnd Magnusson—although he never lived. We may surmise that people will soon begin to believe that he was really a historical person, and at the end of the day, some will defend his historicity against minimalists who stick to the conviction that he is fictitious. Earlier examples of successful historical inventions could be the development of the Robin Hood myth in England, the traditions about King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table in France and England in the Middle Age, about the glorious heroes of Charlemagne, embodied in the figure of Roland—Torquato Tasso’s *Orlando furioso*, or about the Nibelungen in Germany. In the Nibelungengau in southeastern Germany and northwestern Austria we may find such a thing as a ‘Nibelungen Apotheke’. History thus abounds in examples of invented history—at the end of the day believed by people to represent historical facts. The argument often heard that figures such as David or Solomon of the Old Testament could not have been invented thus carry no weight at all.

117. The reason why a fairly conservative publishing company like Hendrickson published my *Vorgeschichte Israels: Von den Anfängen bis zum Ausgang des 13. Jahrhunderts v. Chr. (Biblische Enzyklopädie, 1; Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1996)* as *Prelude to Israel’s Past* was—as one of their editors informed me—that this liberation from an almost totally absorbing apologetic attitude to a positive reading of biblical texts as *narrated truth* was found helpful.

118. T.L. Thompson, *The Bible in History: How Writers Create a Past* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1999); American edition *The Mythical Past* (New York: Basic Books, 1999). Conservative scholars expected to find either history or theology (their theology alias the real past) in this work. Instead they were confronted with a study of the motives

Dever must have realized this many years ago, and his career represents in a perfect way the agonizing process of having to part with the biblical tradition as a historical tradition. It is not the place to survey this process in detail—J. Maxwell Miller has recently made some pertinent remarks on Dever’s development in his review of Dever’s recent book¹¹⁹—but it is manifest that from being a faithful student of Wright, Dever turned against his master not only in archaeology but also in historical interpretation.

Like all students of the Albright School, Dever defended the historicity of the patriarchs, perhaps not wholehearted, but at least in essence. As late as 1977 and disregarding the studies of Thomas Thompson and John Van Seters on the patriarchal narratives—German scholars had since at least de Wette at the beginning of the 19th century already paved the way—, we find Dever discussing the possible dating of the patriarchs to the Middle Bronze Period (to be precise MB II).¹²⁰ At the end of the discussion we find a remarkable sentence by Dever:

We shall not treat here the view of Thompson and Van Seters that the patriarchal traditions belong in their entirety to the Iron Age, since that rests on the *a priori* assumption that they are late literary inventions. A judgment on this matter should be left to literary and form critics. However, if Thompson and Van Seters are correct, archaeology can reconstruct no ‘historical’ background for the contents of the patriarchal traditions, since by definition there is none.

It is an amazingly candid statement that says that archaeology may have nothing to contribute—if Thompson and Van Seters (and scores of their German predecessors) are correct—to the understanding of a specific period in biblical history—this should be left to literary studies—, and certainly it shows how far Dever had developed away from his very conservative or even fundamentalist origins (as admitted in the preface to *What Did the Biblical Writers Know and When Did They Know It?*). It is obvious that there is more common ground between Dever and Thompson than one can normally read out of the polemics of the 1990s.

How far Dever has developed away from the ideas of the Albright school can be seen in his book on *Recent Archaeological Discoveries and Biblical Research*.¹²¹ In this work he advocates a view of Israelite origins that endeavours to combine the views on the Israelite settlement of Alt and Noth and the ones of George E. Mendenhall and Norman K. Gottwald, while at the same time departing from some of the beloved ideas of the Albright School.

Dever’s problem has been that he never initiated such developments within scholarship, but

employed by biblical historiography to construct the historiographer’s invented past, biblical Israel. The conservative evangelical scholars simply have no methods how to approach a work like this, because it has nothing to do with *their* theology, i.e., *their* history. Much criticism from the part of the conservative scholars of this work has therefore assumed the form of invectives—no footnotes and therefore not a scholarly work—instead of getting at the real issues of this work. On quite a quite different level, this level of misapprehension of the real issues of minimalism—probably because nobody told conservatives that they should read bad things like minimalist literature or try to understand what is going on here, has led to hilarious, if not simply comical misunderstandings, as when conservatives attack for—in an article on the internet to have said that ancient Israel was a monstrous society. William Dever—never missing an opportunity of whipping the minimalists—in this connection even tried to teach me Danish. Now to make my point clear enough so that even the most conservative scholar can understand it: I talked about ‘ancient Israel’, not about ‘historical Israel’ or about ‘biblical Israel.’ Cf. William G. Dever, ‘Contra Davies,’ http://www.bibleinterp.com/articles/Contra_Davies.htm. I follow, as also Dever should know, Davies’ definition of the three different kinds of Israel in his *In Search of ‘Ancient Israel*. So the word ‘monstrous’ was about a construct created by biblical scholars over many years, and had nothing to do with a real society of any time. People simply do not understand or will not understand what the minimalists are talking about; so much easier to criticize them for what-so-ever.

119. In *BASOR* 329 (2003), pp. 84-8.

120. ‘The Patriarchal Tradition,’ (§1), in John H. Hayes and J. Maxwell Miller (eds.), *Israelite and Judaeon History (Old Testament Library)*; London: SCM Press, 1977), pp. 70-120.

121. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1990).

reluctantly followed other scholars who went in front of him. At a certain point he stopped—at least for the time being: at the question about the historicity of the United Monarchy, exactly as many other scholars have done. This is not a problem for historical-critical scholarship; it is an old fashioned historical-critical problem where disagreement is the order of the day. It is more a problem that Dever at this point started a frenetic series of personal attacks on a minor group of scholars and reintroduced from his fundamentalist origins a language normally associated with the ‘mission-hall.’ He should have stayed within the academia where he has so much to offer, and where a sober criticism would have had better chances of being heard.

By using the language of the fundamentalist preachers, he opened the way for truly conservative scholarship that soon embraced his criticism without embracing him—correctly as it may turn out—as one of theirs, and in this way he paved the way for the re-entry of conservative evangelical scholars into the arena of critical studies, where they used to have no home.

A final part of this development has to do with the politicizing of Old Testament studies. This can be surmised from the pejoratives of much recent rhetoric, by Dever, and especially by Gary Rendsburg.¹²² By accusing the minimalists of being anti-Zionists (and worse, ultimately, of being anti-Semites), these scholars assume the mantle of Zionism—willingly or unwillingly—, thereby introducing a foreign element to the discussion; however, an element not to be dismissed lightly.

Pure scholarship is generally seen as the ideal of the academia—for some very good reasons—as political convictions may certainly be damaging to one’s scholarly output. There are too many examples of scholars who turned into political demagogues. Most infamous is perhaps the example of Johannes Hempel, at a time the respected editor of the venerable *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*, who in 1943 closed his Chronicle at the end of his journal with a declaration that he hoped that the coming German victory would bring new life to scholarship, and that he was now marching out to the fight.¹²³ He was later to regret these remarks and opened his journal after the war by candidly admitting that he misbehaved.¹²⁴ It is also certain that it is increasingly difficult for scholars not being involved in the present controversy in the Middle East, whether they like it or not, and it is not certain that we from an ethical point of view should stay out of this conflict at all costs. It is the curse put on Old Testament scholars that they at a decisive point in their life chose a subject that turned out to be politically explosive, and it is part of the *Zeitgeist* that also academics will get their hands dirty because of the concerns of the life outside the academia. And it probably should be so, as we see no merit anymore shutting ourselves up in the proverbial ivory tower.

It is equally true that we are defenceless when other people use or abuse Old Testament scholarship to further their political aims. And at least there is so much substance in Dever’s and Rendsburg’s attack on the minimalists for being anti-Zionists that the names of the minimalists often appear in anti-Zionist propaganda.¹²⁵ But it is also true that such abuses are found also of names of scholars in what may be termed clear Zionist propaganda. That is one of the deficits of the modern era of free communication and the internet.

Rendsburg’s tirade against the minimalists is obviously pro-Zionist propaganda trying to alienate the potential readership from any further acquaintance with minimalist literature. He is here using the age-old technique of conservatives: Do not read Wellhausen; read (conservative) books

122. For details cf. above p. 5 with n. 15.

123. J. Hempel, *ZAW* 59 (1942/3), p. 215.

124. J. Hempel, *ZAW* 61 (1945/8), pp. 231-2.

125. A survey of the entries on this subject on the internet will shown many such examples. Here I have indeed found my name and quotations from me in strange contexts, as also the names of Thompson, and Davies, and of course Whitelam.

about Wellhausen. That he—like Dever—is also employing the other basic tactic of the conservatives pointing out his adversaries as incompetent is another matter of no interest in this place.

Summing up, we may conclude that so-called ‘maximalist’ criticism of so-called ‘minimalism’ has paved the way for a conservative, i.e., evangelical or plainly fundamentalist wave of scholarship trying to take over the field of historical studies. The attacks from obviously conservative evangelical scholars on the minimalists turned out to be attacks on historical-critical scholarship in general. It has been an excellent choice of strategy to use the minimalists as targets, and it made the attack so much more successful because a major part of established critical scholars would be in agreement with this criticism if only studied in a superficial way. The conservatives even tricked James Barr, the renowned specialist in fundamentalist matters, but only for a while. At the end, he evidently looked through the curtain and perceived the criticism for what it was, and nothing had changed since the old days of fundamentalist religious propaganda against critical scholarship.