

Arnold, Bill T. & Richard S. Hess (Eds.), *Ancient Israel's History: An Introduction to Issues and Sources* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2014), pp. v + 560. ISBN: 9781540960948.

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This book is a reissue of a 2014 publication which aimed to be a preparatory guide to Ancient Israel's history. Whilst this volume represents some degree of plurality, it can still be located within the moderate conservative spectrum mainly focused on the Anglo speaking audience, which is closer to *A Biblical History of Israel* written by Iain Provan, V. Philips Long and Tremper Longman III than J. Alberto Soggin's *Storia D'Israele: Introduzione alla Storia d'Israele e Giuda dale Origini ala Rivolta di Bar Kochbà*.

Hess' introduction justifies the importance of a history of ancient Israel, providing a selective overview of its research history alongside explanations of central definitions and methods divided into different periods with special attention to the debate between minimalists and maximalists and its implications. This volume presents a collection of 14 essays written by experts in their respective fields and its layout follows the canonical order of the HB/OT with the addition of the apocryphal/pseudo-epigraphical writings, which cover the Hellenistic era. Each author presents a synopsis of biblical and extra-biblical data covering each biblical era. The inclusion of charts and maps makes it accessible to any reader without previous knowledge. Comparative studies between Pentateuchal books and ancient Near Eastern sources are presented by B. T. Arnold, J.

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K. Hoffmeier and S. Greengus. Arnold's essay on 'The Genesis Narrative' in the first chapter compares the stories in Genesis 1–11 with ancient Near Eastern myths, identifying similarities and differences between the seminomadic *modus vivendi* and the tribal confederations which inhabited Mari during the Bronze Age. Hoffmeier's paper on 'The Exodus and the Wilderness Narratives' draws a comparison between the accounts about the Israelite oppression and the iconographic representations of slave drivers supervising brick makers during the Egyptian New Kingdom. Greengus' chapter on 'Covenant and Treaty in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East' explores the distinctive and resembling points between secular and divine covenants and biblical and ancient Near Eastern covenant operation between the second and the first millennia BCE.

The books of Joshua and Judge are assessed by L. G. Stone and R. D. Miller II. Stone's paper on 'Early Israel and Its Appearance in Canaan' deals with the challenges raised by the discrepancies between the rhetoric in the accounts about Joshua's military incursions and archaeological findings from the Late Bronze Age. Miller's chapter on 'The Judges and the Early Iron Age' attempts to use archaeological information to understand sociological problems, such as religion, the Philistine threat and routine, during the period of the Judges.

Chapters 6–12 present essays written by D. Bodi, S. M. Ortiz, J. K. Mead, K. Greenwood, S. Richter, B. E. Kelle and P. van der Veen, covering from the beginning of monarchy to the exilic period. Based on the competition between two tribal rulers in Mari, Bodi's paper on 'The Story of Samuel, Saul, and David' presents an analogy proposing a rivalry between the dynasties of Saul and David. Ortiz's essay on 'United Monarchy: Archaeology and Literary Sources' combines the stories of David and Solomon with archaeological knowledge from the tenth century BCE and with the goal to explain the scope of the narrative regarding the united kingdom in 1 and 2 Samuel. Meads' chapter on 'The Biblical Prophets in Historiography' attempts to advocate the historical credibility of biblical traditions by taking into account the different terms used in the HB/OT with reference to the prophets and drawing comparisons between the character of biblical prophetic writings and ancient Near Eastern prophetic texts. Greenwood's contribution, 'Late Tenth- and Ninth-Century Issues: Ahab Underplayed? Jehosaphat Overplayed?' argues that the books of Kings and Chronicles were composed by authors who had clear theological programs, as there is evidence bias towards particular kings. Richter's essay on 'Eighth-

Century Issues: The World of Jeroboam II, the Fall of Samaria, and Reign of Hezekiah' alongside Kelle's paper on 'Judah in the Seventh Century: From the Aftermath of Sennacherib's Invasion to the Beginning of Jehoiakim's Rebellion' and van der Veen's essay on 'Sixth-Century Issues: The Fall of Jerusalem, The Exile, and the Return' consider relevant biblical texts to their respective period in conjunction with archaeological and epigraphical material available to assess proposed historical reconstructions.

A. Lemaire and D.A. de Silva contribute with the last two papers which deal with the Persian and Hellenistic periods. Lemaire's contribution, 'Fifth- and Fourth-Century Issues: Governorship and Priesthood in Jerusalem', attempts to reconstruct the Jewish life in Judea and the diaspora based on the books of Ezra and Nehemiah alongside Elephantine documents, ostraca and coins. De Silva's essay on 'The Hellenistic Period' tracks the history of Israel until Pompey's conquering in 63 BCE with the insights of Daniel 7–12, First and Second Maccabees and Greek and Latin histories.

Despite the fact that this volume promotes valuable engagement with ancient Near Eastern sources for the interpretation of biblical texts, Chavalas (CHAVALAS, Mark W. 'The comparative use of ancient Near Eastern Texts in the study of the Hebrew Bible', *Religion Compass* 5.5., University of Wisconsin-La Crosse, 2011, pgs. 150-65) also acknowledges the importance of noticing the distinctive nature of ancient Near Eastern literature when compared with the HB/OT. Thus, intertextual methods still need to evaluate the scope of the relationship between both literary corpuses. Another aspect that one may question is whether the pre-disposition to treat the biblical texts as historically reliable, mistakes neutrality with a particular theological view. Here Lessing's so-called 'ugly ditch' (Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Ueber den Beweis des Geistes und der Kraft: an den Herrn Director Schumann, zu Hannover* [Buchhandlung des Waisenhauses, 1777]), according to which it is problematic to attempt to move from a historical evidence to theological affirmation, seems a helpful reminder about the distinction between historical and religious truths. To my mind, Hans Frei's 'history-like' (FREI, Hans W., *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* [New Haven, NY and London: Yale University Press, 1974], 10-16) still seems a helpful tool when dealing with biblical literature.