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Davies, Philip R., and Diana Vikander Edelman, eds.

*The Historian and the Bible: Essays in Honour of Lester L. Grabbe*

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This Festschrift honors Professor Grabbe of the University of Hull in Yorkshire, England, on his sixty-fifth birthday. It contains seventeen essays, focused largely on Grabbe’s own interests in historiography and Second Temple Judaism of the Persian and Hellenistic periods. Unlike some volumes of this sort, the essays are not grouped by subcategories. Given that several of the contributions bring together widely disparate fields and periods, this turns out to have been a wise choice on the part of the editors.

Hans M. Barstad leads off the collection with reflections on the relationship of memory and history in the Hebrew Bible, especially in view of recent “memory studies” by scholars such as Jan Assmann and Maurice Halbwachs. He argues that for the historian memory and history can never be separated and that, in the final analysis, the historian can never escape “what really happened” as the objective of study.

Niels Peter Lemche also invokes the study of “cultural memory” in his investigation of the historicity of Josiah’s reform. Working by triangulation of sources, he holds that, since Chronicles downplays Josiah vis-à-vis Hezekiah and since Jeremiah says nothing of a Josianic reform (neither of which would have been possible, had such a reform been as
epochal as Kings would have it), the reform was invented by late sixth-century Deuteronomists as “cultural memory."

Nadav Na’aman’s essay on the historicity of Nehemiah’s wall around Jerusalem is all the more interesting for its juxtaposition to Lemche’s article. After noting that archaeology reveals no evidence of a Second Temple city wall before the Hasmoneans, Na’aman argues by analogy from what we know both epigraphically and archeologically of the Amarna period that archaeology can lead us to underestimate structures and the importance of cities. Above all, he observes, one must take care in drawing conclusions from the absence of evidence.

What Rainer Albertz writes in many respects parallels the work of Na’aman, only with a focus on the historical evaluation of secondary sources such as the Bible. In dialogue with Grabbe’s claim that no scientific history of Israel in the twelfth through tenth centuries B.C.E. is possible, given the lack of primary epigraphic evidence, Albertz observes that we would have a significant amount of historically accurate information about the confrontation of Hezekiah and Sennacherib, even if we lacked the latter’s famous prism and had to rely solely on the Kings narrative. Mutatis mutandis, he holds, the biblical narrative contains at least three mutually independent testimonies to the division of the monarchy, implying that there must have been a preceding united monarchy to divide.

Thomas L. Thompson distinguishes between biblical minimalists who see in the biblical narratives a reflection of their times of composition (a position he traces from Wellhausen to John Van Seters) and those (such as himself) who see them as pure literary fiction. He then explores how the Abraham narratives may be used to adjudicate between these views, holding that they display intertextuality and deep metaphors, not historical referents.

André Lemaire posits that three kinds of evidence are relevant for the historian of antiquity: archeological remains, epigraphy, and literary sources. Using Hazor in the second half of the tenth century B.C.E. as a case in point, he argues that a historiographic analysis of three passages from 1 Kings depicts the city as having been constructed in Solomon’s reign and destroyed within fifty years in a campaign by the Arameans. Following a review of the debate over this depiction among archaeologists, he believes that nothing counters the description derived from literary (here, biblical) sources.

Mario Liverani explores the usage of the numbers seven and forty in biblical narratives as “fairy tale” symbolic figures, not exact chronology, even in historical texts. After comparing Mesopotamian scribal practices of chronology to those evidenced in the
Deuteronomistic History, he concludes that only with the mid-eighth century can we speak of the writing of “history,” as opposed to “proto-history.”

Ehud Ben Zvi notes that the story of the prophet Micaiah is the only prophetic narrative shared by Kings and Chronicles, testifying to its importance. But what truths does it seek to convey? Ben Zvi believes that the story examples a “safe harbor” exploration of an unsolvable issue—in this case, distinguishing true from false prophecy in real time. (As a side note, one may observe in this article precisely the usage of evidence testifying to historical realities at the time of composition that Thompson had opposed in his article, earlier in the collection.)

Co-editor Diana Vikander Edelman investigates two categories of Egyptian religious functionaries, *hm-ntr* and *ḥy-ḥbt*, and suggests an analogy with the Judahite *nābî’*, whereby the latter may be shown to have expanded from a relatively narrow role to a broader function as the sole authorized intermediary of divine messages in the Deuteronomistic History.

H. G. M. Williamson challenges the conventional acceptance of tension between the returning exiles and the “people of the land” as depicted in Ezra-Nehemiah. He observes that we find no evidence of such a division in the books of the contemporaneous prophets Haggai or Zech 1–8 and posits that the idea of such tension arose later with fifth-century reforms in Judah.

Oded Lipschits examines a late-eighth-century jar handle seal bearing the name *šēmah* (“branch” or “scion”). He concludes that the jar handle testifies to usage of the term as a personal name before the exile and suggests that the transition to a messianic title began with *šēmah šaddiq* in Jer 23:5 regarding a Davidic successor to Zedekiah, after which it is picked up in Zeph 3:8, then Zech 6:12, and later by various Qumran texts and the Jewish “Shmoneh Esreh” prayer.

Bob Becking offers a socio-economic reading of Neh 5 to show, based on Nehemiah’s program of redistribution found there, that the Persian period in Judah was not a period of legalism and inwardly focused religion but was rather in full continuity with the spirit of the preexilic prophets.

Joseph Blenkinsopp examines the “Rescript of Artaxerxes” in Ezra 7:11–26 and supports with additional arguments Grabbe’s contention that the document is a later creation to give post facto legitimacy to Ezra and his associates, for the purposes both of controlling the temple and enforcing the law.
Gary N. Knoppers reviews certain inscriptions from Mount Gerazim written in lapidary Aramaic and Neo-Hebrew script. He concludes that they show “many lines of continuity” (170) between Samaria and Yehud in the Hellenistic period and no signs of a split between them, only that each community reached to patriarchal and exodus-era traditions as sources of identity in competition with the other.

Ernst Axel Knauf holds that the book of Joshua was a Persian period composition in Jerusalem, written to support a program of migration from Judea to Galilee, north Transjordan, Idumea, and Nabatea beginning in the fourth century. In part, he believes, this settlement program was intended to expand the tax base for the temple; in part, it provided opportunities for younger sons; in part, settlement in Gilead in particular offered opportunities for real estate investment that were not available in Judea.

The other co-editor, Philip R. Davies, traces the interwoven development of “canon” and “Judaism” beginning in the fourth century, but with special emphasis on the second. He argues that the challenge of the second century was less Hellenization than the true definition of “Jew.” To the latter end, the canon was developed, heavily influenced by the Hasmoneans not as the authors of Genesis–Kings but as its political sponsors and beneficiaries. Another factor in the promotion of the canon, he holds, was linguistic: to promote the knowledge of Hebrew as the national language (which, he believes, was a living language throughout the Second Temple period).

Finally, George J. Brooke considers a set of Dead Sea Scrolls from Cave 4 that have been categorized by prior scholars as “historical.” After looking at them individually, he writes that no Dead Sea Scrolls can be classified as “historical” or “h Lewiographical.” More precisely, he holds, one can call some “historical” in the sense that they are useful to modern historians but in no case “historical” in the ancient sense intended by Herodotus or Lucian.

In sum, this collection of essays provides a stimulating assemblage of specialized studies of a period that has not long and overdue last fully come into its own among biblical scholars. Among the overall impressions with which the book left me was a renewed sense of the limited usefulness of broad-brush categories such as “minimalist.” Although many of the scholars represented might be so labeled, they demonstrate a wide variety of perspectives and approaches, as well as full willingness to differ with one another and even with the honoree—all completely in keeping with the highest traditions of scholarship.

What is also notable is the regularity with which the authors cite their own, earlier work for support (far more, in fact, than they do that of the honoree): only Blenkinsopp lacks...
such a citation, while fully half of the articles do not cite Grabbe. Despite some editorial lapses (e.g., “thrown” for “throne” on 133) and malapropisms (e.g., “Neither ‘canon’ nor ‘Bible’ is of course neither a Hebrew word nor a Jewish concept” on 194), the book is a handsome addition to a distinguished monograph series. I commend it for acquisition by graduate libraries and by specialists in Second Temple period studies.