TOWARDS A NEW HISTORY OF ISRAEL[1]

by

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I

1.1 In contrast with most publications dealing with the History of Israel nowadays, I will not discuss archaeology, sociology or ethnology, nor the principles of ancient or modern historiography. I will deal only with the literary nature of the one text on which ninety per cent or more of our knowledge of the history of ancient Israel rests, namely Primary History, the books Genesis to 2 Kings at the beginning of the Bible.

1.2 Interestingly, fundamentalists, other orthodox Jews and Christians, adherents of the Documentary Hypothesis and literary students of the Hebrew Bible nearly all agree on one important issue concerning this work. They think that Primary History is a long, relatively amorphous text or rather series of texts which pretend to tell their readers about the history of the people of Israel and related matters in a rather straightforward way. By contrast, I would maintain, firstly, that Primary History is a well-composed unitary text, the complex literary nature of which we have hitherto simply failed to understand. Secondly, I think that only if we truly understand its literary character we will be capable of evaluating it as a historical document.

1.3 True, Primary History has a number of characteristic traits which we usually, and rightly, associate with composite texts and series of independent texts. Everybody

[1] This is a slightly expanded version of a paper read at the First Meeting of the European Association for Biblical Studies in Utrecht, The Netherlands, in August 2000.

knows that each of the nine books (the original number of them) has its own literary and sometimes also linguistic profile. Within the books (sometimes crossing the boundaries between them) distinct literary units can be recognized: the Life of Joseph, the Life of Saul, the Succession History of David and the History of the House of Ahab belong to the most important specimens. Episodes are sometimes told in what look like competing versions: the accounts of Creation, the Flood, the first acquaintance of Saul and David. Finally, there are a fair number of outright inconsistencies and contradictions: Was Joseph sold to Egypt by his brothers or by the Midianites? Was king Saul killed by himself or by the Philistines? Was the giant Goliath killed by David or by the obscure Elhanan? By contrast, it is generally recognized that there are clear and numerous signs of continuity also. These contradictory signs emitted by the text cause that all can defend their favoured theory with considerable justification and very real results, while the co-existence of all these theories, each of which reacts on part of the evidence only, constitutes the crisis in Hebrew Bible scholarship experienced by many today.[2]

II

2.1 I propose to consider the literary character of Primary History as described above as the result of a conscious plan of composition for one unitary work dealing with the history of the people of Israel, and on the way also with much of its religious and cultural heritage. It turns out that the important discontinuities and contradictions can be explained as literary phenomena. The resulting work is best described as a *linear literary dossier*, a continuous text which creates the impression of being made up from a number of separate documents – a curious masquerade of the Documentary Hypothesis.

[2] For a good overview of the field, see J. Barton, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Biblical Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

The discontinuous features which naturally go with such a literary form have been carefully compensated in various ways.

2.2 First the global structure. The structure of the literary back-bone of the work, the history of the people of Israel from the patriarch Abraham until their arrival in the Land of Canaan and their conquest of it in the book of Joshua, clearly derives from the *Histories* of Herodotus of Halicarnassus, as I recently demonstrated.[3] We are not dealing, of course, with mere literary parallels between these works, which, however convincing they may look at first sight, can at most lead to ambiguous results, but with a basic identity of the structural framework underlying the flow of the narrative. The genealogy of the family of the patriarchs almost exactly matches that of the Persian royal family in Herodotus' work, especially in connection with their contacts with the land where the Great Campaign of both works starts, Lydia in the *Histories* and Egypt in the Bible. On the one hand this allows us to retrace part of the creative process underlying the writing of Primary History: application of the narrative framework of Xerxes' great campaign against Greece to the question how Israel came to live in its country almost automatically leads to something much like the Biblical account. If Israel came to Canaan in a similar Great Campaign from another continent, it can only have come from Egypt, in which case they must have gone there for some reason. The combination with the salient features of the early life of Cyrus the Great, Xerxes' grandfather through his mother Atossa, such as the two dreams describing his future power, the family members wanting to kill him, his being hidden from them for a number of years, the fulfilment of the dreams as a result of the actions meant for preventing it, and his

[3] J. W. Wesselius, 'Discontinuity, Congruence and the Making of the Hebrew Bible', *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 13 (1999), pp. 24-77.

attaining power over Lydia, the land where the Great Campaign is to start in the time of his grandson, naturally leads to the life and career of Joseph in Egypt. Finally, the contact of Joseph's great-grandfather Abram with Egypt in Genesis 12 quite naturally derives from the contact of Cyaxares, Cyrus' great-grandfather, with the Lydians. On the other hand the agreement serves as an intentional intertextual link with the *Histories*, which throws some light on the literary and historical profile of the author and his literary and cultural environment in Jerusalem, about which we have hardly any other source of information.[4]

2.3 Maybe it should be pointed out that it is little short of a miracle that nobody has noted previously that the great theme of both works is the same: a tremendous campaign of millions to conquer a rich and fruitful land on another continent, starting with the crossing of the water between the two continents as if on dry land.[5] True, Mandell and Freedman, Whybray and Van Seters, and recently Flemming Nielsen, indicated many possible agreements between Herodotus' work and Primary History, but we have all

[4] 'Discontinuity', pp. 63-64. A summary of the minimal amount of reliable information about the political and cultural situation in the formative period of the Hebrew Bible in L. L. Grabbe, *Judaism from Cyrus to Hadrian. Volume One: The Persian and Greek Periods* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), especially *passim* on pp. 27-170.

[5] Cfr. J. Blenkinsopp, *The Pentateuch. An Introduction to the First Five Books of the Bible* (London: SCM Press, 1992), p. 39: 'Consider … the detailed description of military events leading to the decisive defeat of Xerxes, a description occupying three of the nine books of the *History*. There is nothing remotely resembling this in the Pentateuch.' See my 'Discontinuity', pp. 43-44 and Table 10, for the mirror-like resumption of the contents of the nine books of the *Histories* (1: Origins; 2-6: Ordinary history; 7-9: Great Campaign) in the nine books of Primary History (1: Origins; 2-6: Great Campaign; 7-9: Ordinary history).

been collectively blind for the possibility of a direct literary dependence.[6] The reason for this may well be that we were not yet ready to expect the kind of literary sophistication exhibited by our author.[7]

2.4 Consider what this means for the use of Primary History as a historical source. The date of the work must in any case be after 445 BCE, the earliest possible year for completion or near-completion of the *Histories*, allowing a few years for the dissemination of the work in the East, and before 350 BCE in view of the time needed for the completion of the other books of the Hebrew Bible, unless one would assume that these were composed during a short and hectic period of literary activity of a later date.[8] If, however, the Passover Letter from Elephantine of 419 BCE, which enjoins the

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[6] S. Mandell and D. N. Freedman, *The Relationship between Herodotus'* History *and Primary History* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993); F. A. J. Nielsen, *The Tragedy in History. Herodotus and the Deuteronomistic History* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997); J. Van Seters, *In Search of History* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1983); R. N. Whybray, *The Making of the Pentateuch. A Methodological Study* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1987).

[7] Note that the arguments which Blenkinsopp, *The Pentateuch,* 39-40, brought forward against the ideas of Van Seters and Whybray, stressing the great differences between the two works, do not take into account the eclectic use of an earlier work which a gifted author would make.

[8] As we are basically dealing with a black-box situation, with the major part of the Hebrew canon suddenly emerging around the time of Ben Sira (250 BCE?), it is possible to assume a date of composition anytime before that, but the assumption of a century or more of literary activity for the writing of most of the Hebrew Bible provides a more natural explanation than a composition in a relatively short period of maybe a few decades, though the latter position can be defended. See also N. P. Lemche's arguments for a late date in his 'The Old Testament; a Hellenistic book?', *Scandinavian Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 7 (1993), pp. 163-193.

celebration of the Festival of Unleavened Bread on the Jewish community there, reflects the same movement of reform as the writing of Primary History, it must have been written between 440 and 420 BCE.[9] Though the festival of Passover is probably older than the writing of Primary History (note its occurrence on what are probably early fifth-century ostraca from Elephantine)[10], its connection with the vital Exodus from Egypt in all likelihood is not, and additional emphasis on the right way to celebrate it would hardly be unexpected.[11]

2.5 This date means that the work usually describes a rather remote past, so that everything depends on its sources and their use. The outline of the tale of origin of the people of Israel follows more or less automatically from the use of the genealogical and narrative framework of the *Histories* and, whether or not our author made them out of whole cloth, the stories about patriarchs, Exodus, the stay at Mt Sinai and the Conquest of the

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[9] See about the Passover Letter and the identity of its author Hananiah (who may be identical with Nehemiah's brother Hanani of Neh. 1:2 and 7:2): B. Porten, *Archives from Elephantine* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), pp. 128-133 and 279-282. See also P. Schäfer, *Judeophobia. Attitudes Toward the Jews in the Ancient World* (Cambridge, Mass. & London: Harvard University Press, 1997), pp. 124-128, with newer literature on the subject.

[10] B. Porten and A. Yardeni, *Textbook of Aramaic Documents from Ancient Egypt 4: Ostraca and Assorted Inscriptions* (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University, 1999), text 7.6 lines 9-10; text 7.24 line 5. Cf. T. Prosic, 'Origin of Passover', *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 13 (1999), pp. 78-94.

[11] Of course, all this also bears on the problem of the origins of the Samaritans, who have only the first five books of Primary History. For the moment, one can only guess at the status gained by Jerusalem Judaism in the Persian and the Greek world from the possession of this wonderful Primary History, and the possibility that the Samaritans wanted to emulate this by accepting the part where the stress on the southern traditions is implicit only or could be modified with small changes in the text. See on this subject also I. Hjelm, *The Samaritans and Early Judaism. A Literary Analysis* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000).

Promised Land contain only what we may perhaps call *empty information*: the literary parallel is sufficient to explain the course of the narrative and any likeness to historical persons or situations is by definition accidental only.

2.6 This makes it almost certain, by the way, that all works which give considerable attention to these elements, in fact most of the books of the Hebrew Bible, postdate Primary History and depend on it. This is not to say that they may not contain older material as well, but that they went through a rather fine sieve of agreement with the work.

2.7 I think we may safely conclude that the author did not intend to mislead his potential public about the status of his account, as the smallest of changes would have destroyed the intertextual link with the *Histories*; by contrast, he would not let it stick out in an unnatural way and, to mention only one example, hid the highly problematic descent of Moses (the great-grandson of the ancestor of all those millions which he led to the Promised Land) through spreading it over three different passages (Exodus 2:1; 6:13-26 and Numbers 26:58-59) and leaving out the names of Moses' direct family in the crucial chapter Exodus 2 (see also below), while making it extremely clear at the same time. In other words, he did not use the form of the linear literary dossier to deceive his readers, but because he valued it as a literary form in its own right. We will see that there are also internal indications that the author did not intend to present his account as an authoritative account of history only.

III

3.1 By itself the method of working described above indicates that we are dealing with a highly capable and gifted author, and it seems wise to attempt a description of his entire work as a deliberate and well-considered composition. The derivation of the structure of

one work from another one is, in fact, a well-attested literary strategy both outside of the Hebrew Bible, the classic example being the relationship between Virgil's *Aeneid* and Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*[12], and within it, where the agreement between the books of Nehemiah, Ezra and Daniel is especially notable and allows us to sketch their historical relationship very clearly.[13] There is an additional literary feature, however, which seems to be unique to Primary History within the literature of the Hebrew Bible.

3.2 An important issue in our author's way of writing history apparently was the desire to express uncertainty about historical events, and the difficulty of expressing it in his linear account told by an anonymous narrator, without entirely discrediting its reliability. For this purpose he used various techniques of ambiguity, the result of which looks somewhat perplexing at first sight, and quite naturally leads one to doubt the unity or the reliability of the text and to attempt various historical explanations. The proof for the existence of this strategy, however, is to be found in its standardized set-up. A common pattern is the occurrence of two alternative courses of narrated history, which are closely associated through the use of identical or supplementary words or expressions, and which can also, often through the use of ambiguous phrases, with some difficulty be read as subsequent rather than alternative. The story usually continues along the lines of the second alternative, but near the end of the larger unit which it is part of, the author in fact collapses the entire story by either disproving the second

[12] J. W. Wesselius, 'Discontinuity' (n. 3), pp. 50-51, esp. n. 41. Note that the phenomenon of the mirroring of the parts of the earlier work (see n. 5 above) is found there also: the first half of the *Aeneid* reflects the *Odyssey*, the second part the *Iliad*.

[13] 'Discontinuity', p. 61 and Table 12; J. W. Wesselius, 'The Writing of the Book of Daniel', in: J. J. Collins and P. W. Flint (eds.), *The Book of Daniel: Composition and Reception* (Leiden: Brill, in the press).

alternative or strongly affirming the first one. This collapse is, by the way, usually found in a context which seemingly has no connection at all with the two alternatives, occasionally in a seemingly very mundane text such as a list of persons.[14] Most of these intriguing cases of *alternative realities* and *collapse of the narrative* are not just a kind of embellishment of the narration, but deal with elements which are of vital importance for the history of Israel as presented in the Bible, and they may therefore well be of equally vital importance for the way in which the author perceived the status of his own work. All of these cases are well known to researchers and laymen alike, but only when taken together they reveal a systematic pattern. A common feature is that they are traditionally taken to be a kind of litmus test for the historical dimension underlying the text. If such a literary pattern can be discerned, however, the need to suppose an involved history of the Masoretic text of these episodes, which would otherwise be the perfectly normal way to explain the situation, suddenly and entirely disappears.

3.3 Two important and famous cases are the selling of Joseph to the Ishmaelites who brought him to Egypt in Genesis 37:28 in connection with the advice of Reuben and Judah (vs. 21-22 and 26-27), and the way in which David came to king Saul's court in 1

[14] The function of collapse of the narrative has been noted for the chapters at the end of 2 Samuel, see for example D. M. Gunn, 'Reading Right: Reliable and Omniscient Narrator, Omniscient God, and Foolproof Composition in the Hebrew Bible', in: D. A. J. Clines a.o. (eds.), *The Bible in Three Dimensions: Essays in Celebration of Forty Years of Biblical Studies in the University of Sheffield* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990), pp. 53-64, especially p. 57 n. 1: 'the levelling of the narrator and a summary ironic treatment of David'; id., 'New Directions in the Study of Biblical Hebrew Narrative', *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 39 (1987), pp. 65-75: 71: '… an engineered collapse of reader confidence'; W. Brueggemann, '2 Samuel 21-24: An Appendix of Deconstruction?', *CBQ* 50 (1988), pp. 383-397.

Samuel 16 and 17. In 1 Samuel 16 David arrives at court because of his especial talent for making music which can soften king Saul's depressions, in chapter 17 he comes under the attention of the king when he defeats and kills the Philistine giant Goliath. In both cases the two versions can be read either as alternatives or as two subsequent episodes because of some brilliantly conceived ambiguous sentences, for example 'but David went back and forth from Saul to feed his father's sheep at Bethlehem' (1 Sam. 17:15, either from his service at court or from the army where his brothers served) and 'Then Midianite traders passed by; and they drew Joseph up and lifted him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty shekels of silver; and they took Joseph to Egypt.' (Gen. 37:28, either the Midianites or his brothers being the subject of the last clauses, corresponding with the advice of Reuben and Judah, respectively).
Furthermore, the two versions are characterized as parallel through the use of the same words and expressions in both. In the case of David, note for example the number and names of his brothers (1 Sam. 16:6-11; 17:12-15), and the description of his features (16:12; 17:42). With Joseph, the advice of Reuben and Judah has the same structure, with an inclusion in both cases, and the mention of 'hand' and 'blood' in the clauses surrounding the advice:

Gen. 37:21 But when Reuben heard it, he delivered him out of their hands, saying, 'Let us
not take his life.'
22 And Reuben said to them, 'Shed no blood;
cast him into this pit here in the wilderness,
but lay no hand upon him'
that he might deliver (*RSV* rescue) him out of their hand, to restore him to his father.

37:26Then Judah said to his brothers, 'What profit is it if we slay our brother
and conceal his blood?
27Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites,
and let not our hand be upon him,
for he is our brother, our own flesh.'

In both cases an important issue is brought up in the second alternative and in its sequel, which is finally completely denied at the end of the episode, totally collapsing the story which we have been reading along the way. In the first case it is the image of David as the strong hero who slew the giant Goliath, in the second one probably the ancestry of king David from Judah's illegitimate union with Tamar in Genesis 38, which serves as a sequel to Judah's advice in the preceding chapter.[15] In the sequel there are strong implicit and explicit attachments for the second version, more so than for the first one. Judah's speech in Genesis 44:18-34 becomes especially meaningful in the light of his proposal to sell Joseph in Genesis 37 and his subsequent experience in the next chapter, and directly after that Joseph explicitly tells his brothers: 'I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt' (Gen. 45:4)[16], and David's defeat of Goliath is explicitly, and somewhat unexpectedly, referred to in the verse 'And the priest [Ahimelech] said, "The sword of Goliath the Philistine, whom you killed in the valley of Elah, behold, it is here wrapped in a cloth behind the ephod; if you will take that, take it, for there is none but that here." And David said, "There is none like that;

[15] This connection is well known, see for example R. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), pp. 10-11.

give it to me." ' (1 Sam 21:9). The collapse is caused by the ascription of Goliath's slaying to another person (2 Samuel 21:19), and by the chronology of the list in Genesis 46, which gives the exact names of the main persons of Genesis 38 (but without Tamar) with the addition of the two sons of Perez, while leaving no time at all for the events which take place in that chapter, as the 22 years between Genesis 37 and 46 are completely used (Genesis 46:12: 1 for the birth of Er, 1 for Onan, 1 for Shelah, 1 for Perez, 16 until he is an adult, 1 each for his sons Hezron and Hamul).[17]

3.4 As an aside, we can note that such a literary strategy seems to confirm the reliability of the Masoretic text of Primary History in comparison with, for example, its reflection in Chronicles, with the Septuagint and with some Biblical texts among the Dead Sea Scrolls. Not because of internal evidence, theological view or theoretical considerations about studying only or especially the final or canonical form of texts, but simply because it turns out to be that way. One can easily imagine a situation where this would have been completely different and the Masoretic text would have been corrupted to a large degree, but in most cases this apparently is not the case. A document with such evident discontinuities and contradictions can only be preserved undamaged in a context where its text is closely guarded, and conversely the mere preserving of them in one text-type in a situation where changes have been introduced in nearly all other text-types indicates that such a care has indeed been taken for it. The reason that even a truly balanced expert weighing of the evidence does not attain certainty about the originality or superiority of any of the versions probably lies in the fact that in cases such as those

[16] As noted, for example, by Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative,* pp. 173-175.

[17] See about these cases also my article 'Collapsing the Narrative Bridge' (to appear).

discussed here the Masoretic text runs counter to our aesthetic and logical intuition.[18] If we take the Masoretic text of Primary History very seriously, even where it seems to cause great problems, we are not taking a naïve viewpoint, but we are treating it like the well-composed and well-preserved literary work which it is.

3.5 Primary History starts with one of these cases of alternative realities, and as in the case of many ancient works, the beginning thus can be said to be programmatic for the entire work. The accounts of creation in Genesis 1:1 – 2:4 and 2:4 ff. can be reconciled, although with considerable difficulty, but basically they are completely different, especially as far as the creation of man is concerned. They are continued in the following chapters through the use of the divine names *YHWH,* 'the Lord' (as in Genesis 2, where we find *YHWH ʾᵉlohim*) and *ʾᵉlohim,* 'God' (as in chapter 1). In many passages the *YHWH* and *ʾᵉlohim* episodes are complementary, at times almost duplicates, with a number of small contradictions, as in the story of the Flood. We suddenly realize that what once used to be taken for proof of the Documentary Hypothesis is in reality the literary expression of two versions of the description of God himself. Both the supposed Elohist and the supposed Jahwist are literary *personae* in the text.

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[18] See, for example, the succinct discussion of a number of cases in E. Ulrich, 'The Canonical Process, Textual Criticism, and Latter Stages in the Composition of the Bible', in: M. Fishbane and E. Tov (eds.), *'Sha'arei Talmon'. Studies in the Bible, Qumran, and the Ancient Near East Presented to Shemaryahu Talmon* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1992), pp. 267-291. Interesting attempts to come to terms with unusual literary aspects of the Hebrew Bible in J. Barton, 'What is a Book? Modern Exegesis and the Literary Conventions of Ancient Israel', in: J. C. de Moor (ed.), *Intertextuality in Ugarit and Israel* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), pp. 1 – 14, and G. A. Rendsburg, 'Confused Language as a Deliberate Literary Device in Biblical Hebrew Narrative', *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* 2 (1998-1999), article 6.

3.6 But there is more to it. At the end of the early history before the events of Mt Sinai, the first version receives divine confirmation because God himself declares in the Ten Commandments: 'for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and hallowed it' (Exodus 20:11). But if the account of Genesis 1 is the right one, what is the status of nearly everything which we have been reading up to here? For the genealogy of mankind and of the people of Israel in fact is a sequel of and depends upon the story in Genesis 2. The reader is like someone who has crossed a long bridge, only to be told at the far end that it was a bridge of dreams only…[19]

3.7 This is hardly the place and time to deal with all the instances of alternative accounts and contradictions in Primary History, but the carefully guarded balance of continuity and discontinuity as observed above makes it almost mandatory to check in which cases the same or similar patterns can or cannot be identified.

IV

4.1 One instance, however, must be dealt with separately in view of its importance for the issue under discussion here: a fundamental case of alternatives and collapse of the narrative, which affects a very large part of Primary History. The case, like the others discussed here, is very well known. One of the most intriguing verses of the book of Judges is found in chapter 18, where we are told that the Danites, on their way from the South of Canaan to conquer the city of Laish, which they subsequently rename Dan after their eponymous ancestor, take along a certain Levite and his cultic attributes, and

[19] Note that for our purpose it does not matter what status such a contradiction had for the author or his intended readers. What counts here is that they function in a formal literary pattern, effectively removing the options of accident or sloppy editing.

finally appoint him as their priest there: ‘And the Danites set up the graven image for themselves; and Jonathan the son of Gershom, son of Moses, and his sons were priests to the tribe of the Danites until the day of the captivity of the land’ (Judges 18:30). Of course, critical, literary and fundamentalist scholars have an entire array of methods to get around the embarrassing contradiction between this verse and the description of history up to this point, but if we see Primary History as a unitary literary work such options are no longer open to us. Moses’ son Gershom has been brought to our especial attention in a number of passages (Exodus 2:22 and 18:3, note also the ‘bridegroom of blood’ episode on Moses’ return from Midian to Egypt in Exodus 4:24-26), and if we find here a Levite Jonathan son of Gershom son of Moses within a closely knit literary work, this can only serve as a direct reference. Note, however, that it is impossible to fit this descent in the chronological framework otherwise provided in Exodus – Judges: even if we compress the time needed as much as possible, with Gershom being born just before the Exodus and the events of Judges 13-18 taking place as early as possible in the period of the Judges, there must be at least 130 years between the birth of Gershom and his son being called a ‘young man’ (*na‘ar:* Judges 17:7,11,12; 18:3,15; 40 years in the Wilderness, at least 30 for Joshua in the Promised Land, 40 years of Judges 13:1 (possibly including the 20 or so of Samson’s youth) and 20 of his activities (15:20; 16:31)). Apart from that, as the Israelites started to sin only after the death of Joshua’s generation (Judges 2:10), Jonathan must have been at least 60 at the time of the story (again 40 years of Judges 13:1, including 20 of Samson’s youth, and 20 of his activities) an evident impossibility. As if to attract our attention even more and to balance this discontinuity, both this episode and the story of Moses’ birth in Exodus 2 show us one or more Levites closely related to Moses, whose name is kept from the reader for a long

time: his parents and sister in Exodus, his grandson Jonathan son of Gershom in Judges; note also that the incomplete pun on Gershom's name in Exodus 2:22 *(ger hayiti)* seems to be echoed in a complete form in Judges 17:7 *(hu gar-sham).* And there is even more: the idea that in the stories at the end of the book of Judges the second generation from the leaders of the Exodus is still alive is confirmed by the otherwise completely unexpected mention of the officiating priest in Bethel, Phinehas son of Eleazar son of Aaron, in Judges 20:28, thus completing the literary protection for the mention of Moses in Judges 18:30. Even apart from the arithmetic performed above, the staging of Moses and Aaron as founding fathers of the priestly dynasties in the Northern Israelite sanctuaries of Dan and Bethel in Judges 17-21 is in stark contrast with nearly everything else we are told in Primary History about the history of Israelite religion. It is interesting to note that the genealogy of Moses, the most prominent individual in the Hebrew Bible, which thus encloses the entire account of Exodus and Conquest (for the Danites are the last tribe to take possession of a share of the Land) and which is explicitly presented to the reader, is disregarded almost entirely by most scholars.[20] Returning to Judges 18, our conclusion should be that the pattern which we identified above is found in a different form here: alternative version, characterized by the repetition of the names, and final collapse, indicated through the complete impossibility to fit this family relationship in the chronological framework of the Exodus, the Conquest and the period of the Judges, coincide here. In this unobtrusive passage at the end of the chapters dealing with affairs of the tribe of Dan in Judges 13-18 the entire

[20] See, for example, J. Van Seters, *The Life of Moses. The Yahwist as Historian in Exodus-Numbers* (Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1994), who makes no attempt to deal with the precise genealogical information, and hardly refers to it at all.

founding story of the people of Israel is turned from a dead certainty into a mere possibility.

4.2 Once again, the preservation of the original form of the text, in spite of all the trouble which it must have caused, is a strong argument in favour of the basic reliability of the Masoretic text. That it indeed caused tremendous problems may be inferred from the well-known insertion of a suspended letter *nun* in Moses' name in this verse in the Masoretic text, which turns it into an otherwise unknown Manasseh.[21] Interestingly, the book of Chronicles removes the uncertainty in all the cases mentioned here, which is especially remarkable since none of the stories which contain them is found there itself.[22] Maybe this literary strategy was still recognized, though of course by no means endorsed, by the author of Chronicles.

V

5.1 The indication of such uncertainty about the life and actions of a number of main characters and with it of the narrative in general, thus extends almost uninterrupted through eight of the nine books of Primary History. The reason why the author went to such lengths to place his own account in doubt is probably not that he wanted to diminish its value – he was hardly a post-modern writer, of course – but rather that he wanted to point out that it has other aspects which are not affected by questions of historicity. Thus, to mention only one example, the water which the Israelites are craving for in the desert is indeed both the real H_2O and, more importantly, the divine

[21] See now S. Weitzman, 'Reopening the Case of the Suspiciously Suspended Nun in Judges 18:30', *CBQ* 61 (1999), pp. 448-460, and the literature quoted there.

[22] Creation: 1 Chron. 1:1; the son of Gershom: 1 Chron. 25:4 and 26:24; Judah and Tamar: 1 Chron. 2:4; David: 1 Chron. 20:5.

instruction which they need, as pointed out by various ancient and modern authors.[23] A role may also have been played by the social and cultural context in which he wrote his work. After all, when his account was first published, there were probably other versions of the history of Israel available, which were only later replaced by his authoritative work.

5.2 The absence of such a literary strategy of alternatives and contradiction in large parts of the account of the history of the two Israelite monarchies in the books 1 and 2 Kings (but note that the two accounts of Sennaherib's actions against Hezekiah's Jerusalem in 2 Kings 18:13-16 and 18:17-19:36 may be read as a case of alternative realities, though without the final collapse[24]) may indicate that for the author this had a completely different status, and that he indeed attempted to render the history of this period as faithfully as his sources and his purpose allowed.[25] For this reason, to mention only one example, I think that it is highly significant that the death of the kings Joram of Israel and Ahaziah of Judah around 841 BCE is claimed for one person both in the Bible and in the Tel Dan inscription, and I think that it is indeed very likely that the 'I' of the Tel

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[23] See, for example, D. Boyarin, 'Voices in the Text; Midrash and the Inner Tension of Biblical Narrative', *Revue Biblique* 93 (1986), pp. 581-597.

[24] Unless the mention of the riches of Hezekiah in 2 Kgs 20:13 is to be taken as contradicting the first account, where Hezekiah gives everything as tribute to the king of Assyria (2 Kgs 18:14-16).

[25] In a way, of course, N. P. Lemche is right in stating: '… we should give up the hope that we can reconstruct pre-Hellenistic history on the basis of the Old Testament. It is simply an invented history with only a few referents to things that really happened or existed' (in his 'On the Problems of Reconstructing Pre-Hellenistic Israelite (Palestinian) History', *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* 3 (2000-2001), article 1), but the limited amount of information provided is still much, much more than we have for most countries and nations in the Near East in this period.

Dan inscription is to be identified with Jehu. We are not dealing with a fluid state of affairs in the biblical text which accidentally agrees with a contemporary document, but with a close agreement of a contemporary or near-contemporary inscription with a late, but relatively reliable, historical text, generally speaking hardly a very unusual event, but in this case highly meaningful for the reliability of the biblical text as a historical source for the ninth to sixth centuries BCE.[26]

VI

6.0 The results of our survey can be summarized in the following four conclusions: Primary History is a sophisticated unitary literary work, certainly composed after 440 BCE, probably between 440 and 420, which deliberately used the *Histories* of Herodotus of Halicarnassus both as a blueprint and as an intertextual counterpart.

6.1 The episodes of Exodus, Journey through the Wilderness and Conquest issue autonomously from this literary dependence, and thus contain only empty information as far as history is concerned. The Exodus as recounted in the Bible is most likely a literary-religious fiction invented around 430 BCE.

6.2 Most of the supposed indications for the history of the text of Primary History can be explained far more easily as the result of the author's peculiar literary strategy for

[26] See J. W. Wesselius, 'De eerste koningsinscriptie uit het oude Israël: Een nieuwe visie op de Tel Dan-inscriptie', *Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift* 53 (1999), pp. 177-190 [in Dutch, with an English summary]; 'The First Royal Inscription from Ancient Israel. The Tel Dan Inscription Reconsidered', *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 13 (1999), pp. 163-186; 'The Road to Jezreel. Primary History and the Tel Dan Inscription', to appear in *SJOT* 14 (2000), a reaction on B. Becking, 'Did Jehu Write the Tel Dan Inscription?', *SJOT* 13 (1999), pp. 187-201.

creating a linear literary dossier. There never was a Jahwist, there never was an Elohist, there never was a Deuteronomist. The Documentary Hypothesis is dead.

6.3 The author deliberately indicated uncertainty about vital episodes such as the early history of mankind and of the world, the entire complex of Exodus, Journey through the Wilderness and Conquest, and events during the early monarchy in Israel, by means of giving alternative versions and finally causing a collapse of the narrative. The absence of such an indication for much of the history of the two kingdoms is significant, and probably means that he considered it to a considerable extent a true description of things past.