Chapter 1

The Present Moment in Ancient Israelite Perceptions of Historiography

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Abstract

Reflecting the ambiguity of the title, this paper focuses first on some contemporary views about the existence of history writing in ancient Israel, and then on how ancient Israelite use of the concept of the 'present' may actually shed light on what they thought about history. In the first half, therefore, secular rationalism, archaeology, and, in our own 'present moment', postmodern interests in ideology, are seen to have influenced scholarly assessment of the historiographical nature of Old Testament narratives. In the second half, after a brief overview of the centrality of past events for ancient Israelites, their idea of 'history' is presented as the combination of collective memory, anticipation of promise fulfilment, and personal participation in the divine covenant established with past generations. Finally, the paper explores various possible explanations for the common and widespread biblical phrase "until this day", apparently linking the past with the historian's own present moment.

Keywords: historiography, Israel, memory, miracles, postmodernism, prophecy

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It is perhaps somewhat counter-intuitive to present a paper about the writing of history in ancient times that has as its focus 'the present moment'. Surely history excludes the present moment by definition? Alternatively, one might ask, 'Which "present moment" do you mean – present for whom?' The purpose of this paper is essentially historical: to explore how ancient Israelites conceived of the task of writing history, and what role their 'present moment' played in that writing. However, my hope is also that history writing in our own 'present moment' might be affected through conversation with history writers of the past. This stated intent assumes a certain view about the historian's role that will itself be the conclusion of this paper, but then,

perhaps all of history is nothing more than the never-ending effect of the future on the present.

1.1. Introduction to Old Testament historiography[1]

The term 'historiography' in the title means literally 'history writing', and refers not to history itself, but to how we write about it, and why. While we are on the subject of definitions, the historian Richard Evans draws a helpful distinction between 'facts', 'events' and 'evidence', a distinction we will follow in this paper (Evans 2000, 75-79): a 'fact' is an item from the past (such as a building that once stood or a relationship between two individuals or the weight of a spear); an 'event' is a specific type of fact involving cause and effect; and 'evidence' is what a fact becomes when cited in support of a particular interpretation of the past. A collection of facts is not a history, but merely an archive; writing history requires us to select facts to be used as evidence supporting our own understanding of the past. Although we are creating stories about the past, history writing is essentially factual, or 'non-fiction', in the sense that it is built out of items preserved from the past, whether verbally or materially. The way it represents reality is not only imagining 'what might have happened', but always trying to piece together more specific facts from 'what did happen'.

The Old Testament, or Hebrew Bible, has many documents written by ancient Israelites that give the impression of being factual records of the past, that is, historiographical texts. However, in these documents the reader regularly comes across facts that cannot have happened, if our own experience is anything to go by. The biblical interpretation of these facts assumes a religious, or specifically, Yahwistic, world-view. By definition, this allows and even expects supernatural and unrepeatable events to happen within human history, although it is worth noting that they were only considered miraculous because they were so uncommon. For more than two millennia, Old Testament scholars have struggled with this tension between the plausible and the supernatural in Israel's history. However, in the last few centuries the dominance of secular rationalism in the West has given scholars permission to redefine as 'myth' or pious 'fiction' more and more of the biblical narratives that earlier scholars had to struggle with as historical.

It is of course important that we do not retroject modern standards of historiography anachronistically onto ancient cultures. A popular happy medium between the modern extremes of 'factual' and 'fictional' that is often advocated for biblical stories is the concept of 'legend'. This generally refers to material that was probably originally reports of recent events but came to

[1] For many far more thorough and erudite discussions of ancient Israelite historiography, consult Long 1999.

be transformed through retellings over long periods of time, without the restraining effect of written records. Archaic terminology or culturally-specific details may have been 'updated' for the sake of a later audience, and depending on the nature of the material it may have been considered acceptable to elaborate on it without any sources beyond one's own imagination. According to this view, 'legend' would not necessarily be a negative term or an inferior alternative to 'history', but rather functioned in those cultures as a way of appreciating the past as in a way eternally present or archetypal.

Such an understanding of stories does undoubtedly seem to have been common in certain ancient contexts, but it is equally anachronistic to assume that all ancient storytelling in oral cultures followed this pattern. Modern investigation of orality in traditional cultures is becoming increasingly sophisticated, requiring that differences of geography, society, genre and function be given due weight. To give but one example, Finnegan reports certain factors that make verbal accuracy more important in the transmission of an oral tradition, including religious or ritual content, a belief that the composition was created with divine inspiration, the responsibility of an official messenger to deliver an oral message, or the setting of words to music (Finnegan 1988, 96-101, 158, 166, 172-73). The likely existence of 'legends' in ancient Israel does not excuse the scholar from considering the possibility that at the same time, certain stories may well have been considered important to preserve accurately, even in an oral culture. This spectrum of accuracy for 'historical' stories is no less present in modern times than in ancient, with accepted different expectations for personal family legends, dramatisations of history in film or literature, and the work of a journalist or an authorised biographer about a well-known individual.

I must acknowledge here that I am assuming in principle what I will later try to demonstrate from the biblical text itself, namely, that there were authors in ancient Israel who did attempt historiography, composing stories that to the best of their knowledge consisted of facts from the past. At this point I am simply observing that these biblical stories were for many centuries considered to be essentially factual, and that various factors have contributed to the modern scepticism about this assessment.

If secular rationalism affected beliefs about apparently historiographical material in the Old Testament, another more recent influence has been the development of archaeology as a discipline. This has not only turned up comparative documents from ancient Israel's near eastern neighbours, but also uncovered a variety of material facts in the land of ancient Israel. These in turn have been interpreted in various ways by scholars. Initially they were marshalled as evidence supporting the Bible's presentation of Israel's history, in what was known as the 'biblical history'

movement. More recently, some archaeologists have tended to interpret their discoveries as contradicting certain details in the biblical narratives. As a result, a few Old Testament scholars have gone so far as to reject any recorded facts that are not (yet) verified by external archaeological evidence. That is not to say that archaeology has proven them all to be false;[2] rather, the biblical texts have been relegated on principle as a less reliable source of facts than the findings of archaeology. For example, the stories of the Patriarchs are now widely treated as fables, though if one was going to verify or falsify them archaeologically, what sort of facts would one need to find? The *prima facie* text records two centuries worth of nomadic journeys by a handful of tent-dwelling shepherds across great stretches of the Middle East.

One possible explanation for this ideological distrust of biblical historiography is the so-called 'postmodern' trend in contemporary philosophy, which has been having a similar effect in the field of history as well. Postmodernism is a disparate and diffuse phenomenon, defined more by what it denies than what it affirms. It is essentially a reaction against the idealistic certainty and objectivity of a previous generation of scholarship. Postmodernists emphasise how indeterminate language really is, so they view truth claims as essentially trying to assert one's own power over other less dominant discourses. For the purpose of this paper I will focus on one element of this debate between newer and older approaches to the history of ancient Israel, namely, the importance of the present moment.

1.2. The present moment in modern historiography

In Old Testament scholarship, the debate over historiography is often epitomised by the overly simplistic contrast between the traditional 'maximalists' who treat the Bible as a generally reliable source for Israel's history, and postmodern 'minimalists' who do not. The minimalists (being still the minority within biblical scholarship) tend to be far more conscious of the ways in which dominant discourses about the past are used in the present by the more powerful to oppress others with dissenting voices (such as, perhaps, themselves?). The most obvious example of this as regards the biblical 'master narrative' is the way in which the modern State of Israel and her American supporters use the biblical stories to prove the historic claim of the Jewish people to the ancient land of Canaan. This is often in direct opposition to counter-claims by the politically and economically weaker Palestinians. The more vocal minimalists express their concern even in the titles of their books, for example Keith Whitelam's 1996 book *The Invention of Ancient Israel: The Silencing of Palestinian History*, or Gösta Ahlström's

[2] For further discussion see Provan, Long and Longman 2003, 54-56, 79.

1993 book *The History of Ancient Palestine from the Palaeolithic Period to Alexander's Conquest*.

The counter-ideology of both authors is most noticeable in their anachronistic use of the name 'Palestine' for the land in pre-Roman times. In AD136, the Roman emperor Hadrian finally managed to crush the Bar Kochba revolt, and then punished the Jewish nation with unparalleled severity, not only by the loss of its original ethnic name 'Judaea', but also by the new name he invented for the land – 'Syria Palaestina', or literally 'Philistine Syria' (Eck 1999, 88-89). Israel's ancient enemies the Philistines had ceased to exist as a people or land over five centuries earlier (Lipschits and Oeming 2006, 189, 201), so when Hadrian's insult to the Jews continues to be used anachronistically in modern Old Testament scholarship for the homeland of the ancient Israelites, the psychological effect on their modern-day descendants is just as harsh, and sometimes just as deliberate. Many minimalists understandably want to create alternative narratives about the past that can counteract Israeli aggression in the present. However, when they reject not just traditional interpretations of ancient texts, but also the basic facts of history those texts record, they earn the harsh criticism of mainstream scholarship. New interpretations of the past do not gain credibility simply by virtue of opposing the dominant discourse; knowledge is still founded on facts and cannot be reduced to a power struggle between ideologies.

On the other hand, those who just dismiss the arguments of the minimalists as poor scholarship are in danger of throwing the baby out with the bathwater. In their own emphasis on the facts, they can often forget the valuable reminder from postmodernists that all scholars are unavoidably subjective; any retelling of history supports one ideology or another, however unconsciously that may be. It used to be thought that good historians set aside theory and present moment concerns in researching the past. However, as Richard Evans explains (Evans 2000, 230-31),

> Historians… do not just listen to the evidence, they engage in a dialogue with it, actively interrogating it and bringing to bear on it theories and ideas formulated in the present. … if we abandon our self-consciousness and fail to develop the art of self-criticism to the extent that we imagine we are bringing none, then our prejudices and preconceptions will slip in unnoticed and skew our reading of the evidence.

This is particularly a problem when it comes to the basic secular ideology of naturalism taken for granted by most Western scholars. Although this ideology is most certainly different from that of ancient Yahwists, neither Yahwists nor secularists can claim to be better than the other in principle. Both will obviously support their own ideology in the questions they ask of

the past, selecting some facts and not others, but neither group should avoid those facts that do not seem to fit their ideology. So, for example, the Yahwistic historian found support for his own ideology in the highly unusual event of lightning coming from a clear sky when Elijah prayed. Yet that did not prevent him also recording the inexplicable Israelite defeat in the war with King Mesha of Moab not many years later, contrary to Elisha's prophecy.

Of course, for many modern historians it is precisely those inexplicable 'supernatural' events reported by biblical authors, and by many others since, that are anomalies within their purely naturalist ideology. Understandably, they may suggest explanations for them that differ from those of the Yahwistic historians, such as the idea that it was not 'the angel of the LORD' but a plague that stopped Sennacherib's siege of Jerusalem. It is irresponsible scholarship, however, to move the boundary lines and simply reclassify the source material as 'legends' rather than 'history'; one can disagree with an interpretation and still respect the underlying facts that are reported.

Some minimalists have been so affected by their ideology of secular naturalism that they deny the ancient Israelites were even interested in writing accurate history, that they had an interest in truthful reporting about past events. In effect, they slander those they disagree with to avoid having to debate the evidence recorded by them. In saying this, though, I admit I am assuming conclusions I have not yet demonstrated, and so we must without delay turn to the available evidence to answer the question: How important was history to ancient Israelites? To answer this question, since archaeological facts can tell us little about such perceptions we are forced to rely on the biblical documents as basically trustworthy historical records of what certain ancient Israelites actually thought at certain points in the first millennium BC.

2.1. The importance of history in ancient Israel

As for the documents themselves, the earliest manuscript evidence from Qumran and elsewhere clearly shows that the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible, were considered foundational to ancient Israelite thought and experience. Four of these books describe in detail the events surrounding the creation of the Israelite nation, when a group of tribes escaped slavery in Egypt and were united by a legal constitution in the desert of Sinai, before turning northwards to reclaim the tribal lands of their ancestors. The first book, Genesis, introduces these events with a carefully chronological history stretching over twenty-two centuries, from the arrival of the tribes in Egypt four hundred years earlier back as far as humanity's origins in Mesopotamia. Even within Deuteronomy, Israel's constitutional document, the legal core of the book is introduced with four chapters of historical narrative and concludes

with a law requiring every Israelite to recite a creed about Israel's history up until their entrance into the land (26:1-11).

Rehearsal of Israel's historical origins was not just by individuals in their creed, but also corporately in the temple, singing it in psalms such as Psalms 78, 105 or 136, and hearing it applied in the sermons of the prophets, Hosea, Jeremiah and Ezekiel being of particular note. Subsequent experiences of the Israelite people within the land of Canaan also came to be recorded in historical narratives such as the books of Joshua through Kings, Chronicles, and Ezra-Nehemiah, mirrored in the psalms and the prophets also.

The centrality of history in the religious life and documents of ancient Israelites reflects how fundamentally their Yahwistic theology had been shaped by unrepeatable events they report in their past. These include the birth of Isaac to aged parents, the political and economic success of Joseph in Egypt, being able to cross the Red Sea, a loud voice at Mount Sinai, the collapse of Jericho, the spectacular sacrifice by Elijah on Mount Carmel, and the survival of Jerusalem against Sennacherib. These events were inexplicable apart from being the direct intervention of their god even in the experience of other nations, not just in their own history.[3] Therefore, the unique monotheistic religion the Israelites developed was distinctive in its theological dependence on history, and many scholars believe that history as a discipline in fact owes its origins to Yahwistic theology.[4]

2.2. History as memory in a particular present moment

It is interesting, then, that Hebrew has no word for 'history' as such. Rather, the past is described in terms of 'memory' – 'Remember the days of old…' (Deut. 32:7). Seeing history as collective memory puts the emphasis on the present moment and on those doing the remembering.[5] So when Moses wants to demonstrate that the Exodus from Egypt was an event unparalleled in world history, he urges the Israelites to inquire throughout every nation on earth, evidently assuming that each nation records its own history (Deut. 4:32). That is also why the commanded annihilation of the Amalekites will effectively 'blot out their memory from under heaven' (Deut.

[3] 'I the LORD shall be <u>your</u> god, because I brought <u>you</u> out of Egypt.' (Deut. 5:6; cf. also 4:32-39)

[4] Halpern 1988, 138, 235. For a qualified restatement of this idea, see Van Seters 1997.

[5] One application of the idea of 'collective memory' involves the 'creation' of memory by constructing 'sites of memory', such as the numerous churches built in the Holy Land centuries after the events they commemorate. In ancient Canaan, however, it was apparently quite common for people to set up their own sites of memory; the custom of erecting standing stones is reported in the time of Jacob (Gen. 28:18; 35:20), Moses and Joshua (Deut. 27:4; Jos. 24:26-27), Samuel (1 Sam. 7:12), Absalom (2 Sam 18:18), and Isaiah (Isa. 19:19-20).

25:17-19); in an oral culture, history is only what people remember about their own past.[6] The international perspective of Genesis 1-11 is therefore quite unique, claiming in effect that every nation on earth ought to share a single collective memory, or 'history'.

For most ancient peoples, the present moment was simply the environment in which they shared memory about the past, but for the Israelites it was more than that. Their god was one who made promises and not just threats, so the present moment was also seen as the latest in a series of moments moving toward the fulfilment of those promises, hence the need for chronology. Abraham was promised that his descendants would become slaves in Egypt but would come out with great wealth and return to the land of Canaan, fulfilled in three different generations of Joseph, Moses and Joshua respectively. David was promised that a righteous descendant would succeed him on the throne, fulfilled in part by Solomon and prayed for in every subsequent generation since. King Hezekiah was promised that the Babylonians would come and remove all the wealth of Jerusalem, as they did a century later, but then Jeremiah prophesied further that the people would return from Babylon after seventy years, fulfilled under Zerubbabel, Ezra and others.

In order to be beneficiaries of these promises, however, it was not enough simply to trace one's ancestry back to those who had been given the promise, or else genealogies would have sufficed. Israel's national constitution, the book of Deuteronomy, had been composed in the form of a legal vassal treaty between the nation and their god. Normally, treaties of this type had to be remade every time one of the royal treaty partners died or was replaced, complete with new ceremonies and inscriptions. Deuteronomy therefore commanded that every new Israelite king copy out the entire scroll by hand to keep for personal reference (17:18-20). Even so, the covenant had been made not between Israel's king and their god, but between the whole nation and their god. Moses therefore instructed that the whole nation gather every seventh year to have the whole law read out to them again (31:10-13), thereby renewing the covenant with each generation. Even more frequently, the three annual feasts each commemorated an aspect of Israel's founding story – leaving Egypt, receiving the covenant at Mount Sinai, and wandering in the desert – so every Israelite family could make that story their personal

[6] 'They say you die twice. One time when you stop breathing, and a second time, a bit later on, when somebody says your name for the last time.' Banksy, quoted in *The Sun* (Francis 2010, 13) – perhaps this is the closest we can get to citable oral culture in the UK in the present moment?

'memory'.[7] In the present moment, each generation of Israelites could become treaty partners in the covenant with their god, personally 'remembering' the past events that had formed that covenant, and could therefore receive in the present the fulfilment of the promises made in days gone by. It was precisely the present moment that made stories about the past more than just legends or folktales for the Israelites – these stories and their chronology really mattered, because their god was fulfilling particular promises through his people in each successive generation.

2.3. 'Until this day' and Israelite historiography

If the present moment caused Israelites to value history theologically, what effect did it have practically on their techniques of writing history, that is, historiography? Probably the clearest evidence we have for this is the repeated appearance in the historical books of the phrase *'ad hayyom hazzeh*, 'until this day', and variants such as 'until today' or 'until now'. For example, Joshua 4:9 records that, 'Then Joshua set up twelve stones in the middle of the Jordan … and they are there until this day.' The self-awareness of this phrase is unmistakably historiographical, in that it distinguishes between 'this day' and past events being described, connects the two times with an intervening period of time, assumes a present audience who share the author's own historical setting and perspective, and implies that the audience can verify what the author is pointing to, and thus also the past event it witnesses. Not only is the phrase evidence of a genuine interest in history, but it appears about sixty times, evenly spread throughout the narratives of Genesis, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings and Chronicles.

Is this proof, then, that all ancient Israelite historians shared an interest in recording the past 'as it essentially was'? 'Well,' some have argued, 'maybe people in those days were actually making up history to explain different things in their own time.' Or, 'What if all those comments were just stuck in by scribes copying out the scrolls long after they had been written? The stories themselves might have just been seen as fables to begin with.' Or, 'Perhaps it wasn't scribes, but actually one editor who brought all those stories together centuries later, and left the phrase here and there almost like a signature for his audience?' But then, even if the authors were in fact 'historians', interested in recording stories about the past accurately, 'until this day' could imply different things. For example, 'Maybe the historian was being a bit defensive about all the miracle stories, trying to prove to a sceptical audience that he was not just naïvely recording folktales.' Of

[7] Here it is worth noting the so-called *Kinderfrage*, where Israelite children were taught to treat these past events as personal memories (cf. Exod. 12:26-27; 13:3-8, 14-15; Jos. 4:6-7, 21-24).

course, these are overly simplistic representations of the various suggestions made, exaggerating the nuances of each position for rhetorical effect for the sake of my originally aural audience, helping them to grasp quickly the distinctives of each. In the interests of word limits, the discussion of these different suggestions below will also be necessarily brief, belying the amount of study devoted to each. Even so, I trust it will become clear that the phrase is rather more subtle and informative about the ancient Israelite worldview than any of the alternatives given above.

a) 'Until this day' as aetiology

Early twentieth-century scholars were interested in how the different biblical stories had been used before being linked together in a history, and suggested the traditional genre of 'aetiology' for those stories that mention 'until this day'. An 'aetiology' is a narrative invented to answer the basic question 'Why?', that is, a fable, similar to 'How the leopard got its spots' or 'How humans started walking on two legs'. In response, Brevard Childs and others have pointed out that if a narrative did indeed originate as an aetiology, then one would expect to find the present day detail at the climax of the story written to explain it. In practice, however, 'in a great majority of cases, the formula, 'until this day,' has been secondarily added as a redactional commentary on existing tradition';[8] it is almost always connected to minor or tangential features of the primary narrative. In most if not all uses of the phrase, therefore, its purpose was in fact to comment on an existing story, rather than create one.

b) 'Until this day' as gloss

If it was just a comment on an existing story, though, theoretically that comment could have been added at some later point by an unreliable but well-meaning scribe. This sort of accidental inclusion of a marginal comment into the text is termed a 'gloss'. If 'until this day' is a gloss wherever it appears, the scribes certainly thought the narratives were historical, but that does not prove anything about their original purpose. In a 1957 article, Jacob Weingreen pointed out that small comments on the tradition are not necessarily accidental; the writer may have intended them to be read as an integral part of the text (Weingreen 1957). He proposed identifying true glosses by their brevity, ad hoc ideas, and dislocation from the logical sequence of the author's thought. As for the first criterion, though glosses are

[8] Childs 1963, 289-90. Of the few potential aetiologies Childs acknowledges (Gen. 32:33; Jos. 5:9; 7:26; 14:14; 1 Sam. 5:5; 27:6; 2 Sam. 6:8; 2 Kgs. 2:22) he dismisses every one as either 'highly questionable' or at most 'secondary' to the main tradition. See also Long 1968, 94; and especially Westermann 1964, 39ff.

usually brief, not all brief notes are glosses, so brevity cannot be definitive for attributing a parenthetical comment to a later reader of the text. As for being ad hoc, when several so-called 'glosses' in a passage start showing signs of consistency of purpose, one begins to suspect the deliberate work of an author instead. All that remains, therefore, is to determine how dislocated a note is from its wider context and from the author's recognised intentions. My own careful study of every use of 'until this day' has convinced me that in each case it fits closely with what commentators think were the original author's aims. Therefore it is most likely that those who wrote the histories did also make the comments about their own day.

c) 'Until this day' as redactional signpost

However, historians regularly write histories about the distant past, using older sources to write their own narratives. Perhaps a much later historian misunderstood his sources as actual history, adding his own editorial comments to this effect. Ever since Martin Noth's proposal in 1943, many Old Testament scholars have thought that the books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings were probably put together by a single historian writing around the time of the Babylonian Exile in the early sixth century BC, up to eight hundred years after the events in Joshua. This idea is known as the Deuteronomistic History, because the historian seems to have been particularly influenced by the book of Deuteronomy. Even so, because of the diversity of time and interests in the many uses of 'until this day' in these books, scholars have until recently assumed that earlier sources must have already contained the phrase.

Jeffrey Geoghegan has recently tried to argue differently in his doctoral thesis on the phrase 'until this day' (Geoghegan 2006). He evidently wanted to show that the entire Deuteronomistic History was not written later than the Exile, and nor were there any large sections of the History inserted into it after that initial 'publication'. Because the phrase 'until this day' does happen to appear at least once in every main section of the History identified by scholars, he realised that if he could prove the phrases all come from the same pre-exilic author, other scholars would have to accept that the History as a whole was pre-exilic. To prove this, though, needed some special pleading and oversimplified exegesis that frequently missed the point of the verse. Furthermore, several verses mention facts that cannot have still been the case in the sixth century BC.[9] If 'until this day' does in fact indicate that most

[9] For example, Gen. 47:26 (20% income tax in Egypt); Deut. 10:8 (Levites known to carry the ark); Jos. 6:25 (Rahab living among Israelites); 9:27 (Gibeonites only seem to have served prior to Solomon); 13:13 (Israel living among Geshur and Maacath); 16:10 (Gezer still a Canaanite city; cf. 1 Kgs. 9:16); 1 Sam. 5:5 (Ashdod was crushed after trying to stir up mutiny against Assyria); and 2 Kgs. 13:23 (Israel has either not yet or only just been exiled).

books were written at various earlier times, the phrase cannot be evidence for a much later editor showing off his skill to his audience by making his mark on each traditional source. Rather, it must have been used throughout Israel's history by various different historians as a common historiographical convention; that is, those originally recording the different stories believed they were writing history.

d) 'Until this day' as footnote

It seems clear, therefore, that 'until this day' was a comment added to a tradition by the historian recording it, but what was he actually trying to communicate by connecting the story to his own day? Most scholars naturally take this to be a sort of primitive 'footnoting', verifying details of the stories to show that the author is telling the truth. Baruch Halpern takes this for granted when he notes many instances referring to the supernatural, and concludes that historians were certifying their miraculous reports. He therefore detects a certain nervousness and defensiveness about claims of divine intervention in human affairs (Halpern 1988, 241-65). I wonder whether this is less an observation about ancient Israelites, and more a reflection of his own sensitivities as a modern secular historian. If ancient historians were truly so defensive, it is surprising they did not footnote many more of the supernatural events they record, and especially the spectacular ones.

The evidence suggests instead that ancient Israelite historians would have felt little need to verify their accounts. Biblical texts consistently associate historical inquiry not with sages and scribes, but with prophets and prophecy. Not only are prophets regularly portrayed as historians, such as Moses, Samuel, Jeremiah or Ezekiel, but the Chronicler constantly urges his readers to consult the numerous historical writings by the prophets over the centuries.[10] It is no mistake that the traditional Jewish designation of the books of Joshua through Kings is 'the Former Prophets', in distinction to 'the Latter Prophets' from Isaiah through Malachi. Being prophetic would give historians a measure of authority, and their audience may expect to be rebuked, but certainly not deceived or misled about the past. The

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Judges 18:1, 12, 30 and 31 all point to a time of composition for this book shortly after the destruction of Shiloh, when kings had only recently been introduced in Israel. Compare also non-Deuteronomistic ideas in Deut. 2:22 (Edom's divine right to possess their land; contrast 2 Kgs. 8:22, 14:7, 16:6) and Jdg. 6:24 (an altar constructed away from Jerusalem without censure), as well as two pairs of contradictory notices (Deut. 3:14 versus Jdg. 10:4; Jos. 15:63 versus Jdg. 1:21).

[10] At very least, these references demonstrate that our earliest knowledge of history writing in Israel (whether at the time of the Chronicler or much earlier) was associated with the role of the prophet, and that history writing was understood to have been done in the first instance by trustworthy individuals who themselves had witnessed the events they reported.

'hermeneutic of suspicion' about historical sources is quite a modern phenomenon; ancient listeners would instead have come to the historian as pupils, ready to imitate their teacher's beliefs and perspectives. That does not imply, though, that ancient Israelite historians abused this trust; rather, they taught their audience how to interpret history for themselves, using the phrase 'until this day'.

e) 'Until this day' as implicit lesson

Prophets were expected to be provocative and critical of their audiences, confirmed by both their biographies in the Former Prophets and sermons in the Latter. Historians, however, in most cases evidently refrained from directly rebuking their audiences, contenting themselves with pointed observations about the stories they record. In any story, the listener is caught up in the thought-world of the narrative, deliberately suspending disbelief in order to imagine themselves in a different time and place. So when the storyteller interrupts the narrative by calling the listener back to the present moment, for example with the phrase 'until this day', it will naturally have a somewhat jarring effect on them; it functions as a confrontational address to the listener's rational mind as opposed to their imagination, as perhaps some of you who have come across the phrase in your reading can testify.

For the Yahwistic historians, the stories they told were something their audience needed to remember and even experience in the present, as a way of personally encountering their covenant-keeping god. So, imagining being in past events was not enough; they had to consciously accept for themselves the same lessons their ancestors had been taught through those events. It seems that these historians used 'until this day' to interrupt their audience's imagination, and confront them with an implicit lesson from the past event that could be applied in their present moment.

My analysis of 'until this day' verses, throughout the historical narratives, confirmed the idea that these are implicit lessons from the past. While some verses were not as clear as others, as one might expect of ancient texts, four primary themes kept repeating themselves, often all represented in a single book.

Firstly, there is an interesting emphasis on positive relationships with non-Israelite people, including Moabites, Ammonites, Philistines, Edomites, Rahab the Canaanite, Hittites, Caleb the Kenizzite, Gibeonites, Phoenicians, and even by implication the proto-Samaritans.[11] The god Israel worships does not belong to any one nation, and the audience will have to give up their prejudices in order to fulfil their appointed role of blessing the nations.

[11] Gen. 19:37, 38; 26:33; Deut. 2:22; Jos. 6:25; 9:27; 14:14; Jdg. 1:26; 2 Sam. 4:3 (cf. 21:2); 1 Kgs. 9:13; 2 Kgs. 17:34, 41. Cf. also Gen. 35:20 and Jos. 4:9 for inter-tribal harmony.

Secondly, the Israelites are warned that their god is a holy god who permits them to live in his land only by his grace. Such a lesson was taught to Abraham, Jacob, Israel at Mount Sinai, Israel under Joshua, Gideon, the priests of Dagon, men of Beth-Shemesh, Uzzah, priests in the Temple, and the exiled trans-Jordan tribes and northern kingdom.[12] While the god of Israel does not belong to them, they and their land certainly belong to him, and he is not an optional extra if they want to continue living in his land.

Thirdly, peace with neighbouring peoples does not compromise Israel's divine right to possess the particular territory given to their ancestors. Even so, without holiness and faithful obedience to their god, they can only expect defeat by their enemies, and an insufficient majority even to govern their own land. This is shown negatively by Achan and the battle of Ai, and by persistent non-Israelite majorities in Geshur and Maacath, Jerusalem, Gezer, and Solomon's kingdom, but positively by Yair in Gilead, kings defeated at Makkedah, Caleb in Hebron, the tribe of Dan, Elisha, the Simeonites, and Jehoshaphat.[13] Land is a reward for Israelite obedience to their god, which should prevent them either taking credit for success or being apathetic about failure.

Fourthly, often Israel's leaders seem to be addressed, specifically. Positive examples showing what leadership ought to look like include Joseph, Samson, David, Jehu, Amaziah, and Josiah.[14] Alternatively, God did not allow Moses an honourable burial site; Solomon's legacy was almost entirely negative, whether in purity of religion, foreign diplomacy, or internal affairs, such that even his famous trade routes did not last beyond his own reign; and Joram and Ahaz both lost territory that had been secured by their more righteous fathers.[15] A leader's authority and success is not achieved merely by inheritance or even personal charisma, but rather by obedience to the god of Israel.

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[12] Gen. 22:14; 32:32 (Masoretic Text v. 33); Deut. 10:8 (in context of 9:25–10:5); Jos. 5:9 (in context of 5:13-14 and Exod. 12:12, 48); Jdg. 6:24; 1 Sam. 5:5; 6:18-19; 2 Sam. 6:8; 1 Kgs. 8:8 (poles were a permanent reminder that the ark was only there temporarily – cf. Exod. 25:15; 1 Kgs. 8:27; 9:7); 2 Kgs. 17:23; 1 Chr. 5:26.

[13] Deut. 3:14; Jos. 7:26; 8:28, 29; 10:27; 13:13; 14:14; 15:63; 16:10; Jdg. 1:21; 10:4; 18:12 (passing through on a successful quest for inheritance); 1 Kgs. 9:20-21 (cf. Jos. 23:4-13); 2 Kgs. 2:22 (Elisha as the new Joshua after Baal's defeat); 1 Chr. 4:41-43; 2 Chr. 20:26 (cf. 20:10-12).

[14] Gen. 47:26 (enduring impact on Egypt); Jdg. 15:19 (dependence on God for complete victory; cf. Ps. 110:6-7); 1 Sam. 27:6 & 30:25 (royal behaviour even in exile); 2 Kgs. 10:27; 14:7; 2 Chr. 35:25 (unsurpassed devotion to his god; cf. 24:25; 26:23; 28:27; 32:33; etc.)

[15] Deut. 34:6 (cf. Gen. 35:20); 1 Kgs. 8:8 (cf. 8:20-21; 9:6-9; 11:4-10); 9:13; 9:20-21; 10:12; 12:19; 2 Kgs. 8:22 (cf. 1 Kgs. 22:47); 16:6 (cf. 14:22).

Evidently, the central Yahwistic beliefs in one god over all nations, his choice of Israel and its land, and the central importance of the righteous king, were vital lessons for each generation to learn for themselves. Ancient Israelite historians considered it part of their task in writing history to confront their audiences every now and then with these uncomfortable truths.

Conclusion

To conclude: if history, then, is to be seen as the memory of a collective past, in which we ourselves participate in the present moment, what can we historians in the present learn from the founders of our discipline, the ancient Israelites? First, history was important to them not simply for its antiquarian interest, but because it defined their own present identity as a people. Second, history was important to them because the past does not neatly fit our stereotypes or presuppositions; rather, it confronts us with questions about our own present thoughts and motivations. Perhaps like them, we too ought to question our prejudices, secularism, apathy, and sense of self-entitlement. Finally, history was important to them because by it we can situate ourselves presently within that larger story that constantly anticipates the future. 'These things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come' (1 Cor. 10:11).

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