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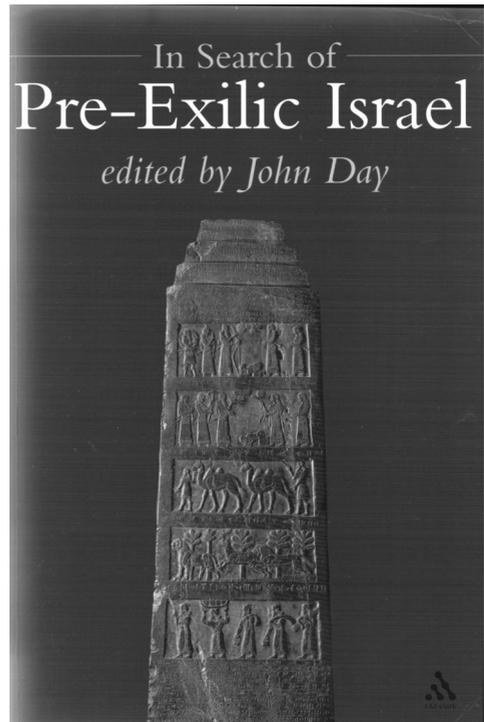
Bibliopolium

In Search of Pre-Exilic Israel

John Day (ed.) London: T & T Clark International A Continuum imprint,
2004, xvi + 432 pages , pb., £ 25.00 , ISBN 0 56708206 7

Tolle, lege! Take it and read it – imperatives, which press upon the reader of this brilliant piece of scholarship to revisit this volume from time to time and be imbued in its impressive treatment of issues pertaining to pre-exilic Israel. The book comprises seventeen seminal articles by seventeen distinguished scholars. The pronounced purpose of the book is to purvey sustainable data and evidence about the intrinsic origins of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament, which finds its roots in the pre-exilic times of Israel. It is intended to be an answer to such claims according to which the scarcity of information about pre-exilic Israel, makes the HB/OT a book that was amassed following the exile or during the Hellenistic period. None of the articles shy away from the fact that the HB/OT was edited during the exile. Nevertheless, the data that can be accumulated regarding the pre-exilic sources of the HB/OT are not insignificant by any means. The data in question is gained not only from the HB/OT but also from archaeology and texts of the ancient Near East.

The volume commences with an article by Nicholson, which outlines present revisionism in the field of HB/OT, neatly summing up its views concerning the emergence of the literature of the HB/OT, underscoring that on the basis of valuable evidence. It is very difficult to maintain the position that the HB/OT was largely written during the Persian period and that



is a result of scribal activity serving political propaganda. G. Davies focuses on the historicity of the 'Exodus event,' emphasizing the fact that it is feasible to proffer a positive appraisal of the historicity of 'some kind' of 'Exodus event.' Moreover, some aspects of the 'Exodus event' point back to circumstances familiar to the period of New Kingdom Egypt. The 'Exodus event' can hardly be viewed as an invention if one also takes into consideration the plethora of internal biblical evidence. Frendo tackles

the difficult question of the installation of the Israelites in the land of Canaan, concluding that early Israel was comprised of various groups of 'hill country villagers' initially native to Canaan, who were coupled by Hebrews liberated from Egypt, who appropriated Yahwism in the desert. Dever marshals significant evidence concerning the existence of a tenth century BCE 'nascent state of Israel' taking issue with such revisionists as Thompson, Finkelstein, Lemche and P. R. Davies. He even tackles revisionism as a possible ideology, which seems to be unable to confront evidence, the continual focus being on race, class and gender. In conclusion, Dever makes a very good case in presenting the archaeological data in order to support the positive case for the United Monarchy against the revisionist theory. Barton, following Friedman and Hannelis Schulte, propounds the groundbreaking view that there existed a 'golden age of Hebrew narrative' before the exile that could have comprised much of the Yahwist and the Succession Narrative. Friedman's reasoning is that J was composed by the same author as the Court History of David. Moreover, apparently the two documents are connected together with some parts of Joshua, Judges and 1 Samuel. All these stem from the same author, so there is only one early historical source in the HB/OT not several, which source is widely known as J. Subsequently, Emerton is concerned with the dating of the Yahwist, noting that the point against a pre-exilic date for J is "weak," since it does not furnish a proper account of parts of the document. In his view, the passages about Jacob's affairs with Esau and Laban witness to a pre-exilic date and to one, which was not "too late" prior the exile. The "matrix" of Israelite history writing was the literary tradition known in North-West Semitic inscriptions of the ninth-seventh centuries with which the composition of J could be "associated."

Houston tackles the question of a possible social crisis in the eighth century Israel and Judah when the economic hardships experienced by the peasantry were unjust enough to be criticized by certain texts in Isaiah, Amos and Micah. Knoppers offers a résumé of the data concerning Samaria after the fall of Israel concluding, that Yahwistic Samaritans of the Persian period may be seen as descendants of the Israelites. Williamson looks at the pre-exilic features of the first part of Isaiah. Reimer offers a treatment of Jeremiah before the exile emphasizing that in Jeremiah and other places of the HB/OT one should postulate a closer connexion between "event" and text. Day furnishes new insights regarding pre-exilic psalms, especially in the first two-thirds of the Psalter. Dell outlines the pre-exilic roots of Proverbs arguing for a "balance of probability." Therefore, one cannot certainly prove that wisdom retains its roots in the pre-exilic period but the balance of probability tilts the balance towards a pre-exilic origin based on the historical echoes of Solomon and Hezekiah, the literary proofs of earlier and later sources and views on social context, and on the theological outlook of Proverbs, connections with other parts of the HB/OT, evolvment of theological ideas and on links with ancient Near Eastern cultures. Levinson proffers an extensive analysis of the question whether the Covenant Code is exilic or not, providing an informed critique of Van Seters. Interestingly, one may conclude, after reading Levinson's treatment, that redaction criticism comes to the help of dating a portion of the HB/OT, i.e. the Covenant Code, pre-exilic. Since the writing of this article by Levinson, Van Seters has produced a significant work entitled *The Edited Bible: The Curious History of the "Editor" in Biblical Criticism*. Van Seters makes a very good case by challenging the idea of the "redactor," which was taken for granted

for such a long time in biblical scholarship. It would be interesting to examine Levinson's arguments in the light of Van Seters new book. Mastin deals with the question of God's Asherah, inclusive monotheism and the problem of dating. He avers that certain inscriptions testify that allusions to Yahweh's Ashera point to an evolvment from polytheism to monotheism, the commencement of which is unknown. The eighth century BCE marks that period, which exhibits the influence of this development, i.e., a movement away from polytheism towards monotheism in Canaan, north and south alike, prior to the Persian and Hellenistic period. Lambert also presumes the influence, in a pejorative sense, of a certain kind of ideology in the works of P. R. Davies and Lemche who postulate that the historical books of the HB/OT are "literary constructs" encapsulating exiguous historical material. He evaluates the Mesopotamian materials that cast light on the names of Israelite kings and their historicity, showing that writing was widespread in Judah and Israel prior to 587. Lemaire lists the Hebrew and West Semitic inscriptions having the question of pre-exilic Israel in its purview. The endeavour to proffer a different date for some of these inscriptions and therefore to

redate them to the Hellenistic era, as suggested concerning the Siloam inscription is "not serious" neither from the perspective of epigraphy nor from that of archaeology. Hebrew inscriptions were not absent in Judah and Israel before 587, any more than other West Semitic inscriptions in other contemporary kingdoms in the Levant. The concluding article is by Fenton, who examines Hebrew poetic structures as grounds for dating proving that the comparison of Hebrew and ancient Canaanite poetic structures corroborates the antiquity of the structures in question and also the historical materials connected to them. "Details of content" display the fact that biblical Hebrew literary tradition commences "at least" from the eleventh century BCE to the Persian era.

The great strength of this volume is that proving a point, in this case the pre-exilic origins of the HB/OT, is not its *Tendenz*. What it manages to achieve is the deployment of serious evidence, which buttress the pre-exilic origins of this complex book in question.

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Martin J. Buss: Biblical Form Criticism in its Context

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512 pages, ISBN 1-85075-876-X

This volume has been fittingly labelled as a "magnum opus," which is not at all an additional catalogue of the form of biblical literature. Moreover, it may be viewed as a "deeply reflected" account of the importance of form itself. Martin J. Buss dilates the topic with his great expertise in Western philosophy and the intricate implication of biblical criticism in philosophical history.

In similar fashion, biblical criticism and the development of notions of form are related to various social contexts, either from the side of aristocracy with its propensity towards generality or of the bourgeois with its tendency towards particularity or of an inclusive society opting for a relational view. Buss deems that form criticism is not a mere formal exercise but the observation