Review of Megan Bishop Moore, *Philosophy and Practice in Writing a History of Ancient Israel*. Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 435. New York & London: T&T Clark, 2006.

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In this book, Megan Bishop Moore surveys the changing dynamics of the way "biblical history" or the "history of Ancient Israel" has been done from roughly the mid-20th century to the present. In particular she examines the challenges raised by "minimalist" approaches to the reliability of both the biblical narrative as a guide to, and the biblical texts as sources for, any history of "Ancient Israel"/Iron Age Palestine. However, Moore locates this conflict over the reliability and use of the biblical narratives in a broader context of "related philosophical and practical concerns" (p. 2). These concerns relate to the key concepts of "empiricism, objectivity, representation and language, subject, explanation, truth, and evidence evaluation and use" (loc. cit.). The book's six chapters analyse the ways these concerns have been brought to bear on the changing approaches to doing histories of Ancient Israel. Moore provides a particularly good account of the challenges raised by minimalists in the late 1980s and 1990s to a whole suite of assumptions that had underpinned biblical/Ancient Israel history writing up until then.

The first two chapters discuss the key philosophical issues underpinning the practice of history and the relationship between history and archaeology, text and artefact. The role of archaeology is a hotly contested question between the minimalists and their opponents. Chapter 1 is structured around the key concepts of empiricism, objectivity, etc. (listed above), and discusses the changing approaches to doing history as a whole in the 20th century. Moore points out that not only did "theoreticians' ideas about these topics vary" but that postmodernism opened up a reappraisal of what had been the dominant approaches to and "presuppositions about" history (p. 7). History can no longer be defined simply "as a narrative account of past human behavior" or as a "scientific, objective, law-giving study of past human behavior" (p. 32). Instead it is now much more of an amalgam of a variety of approaches and concerns. The second chapter, "Evaluating and Using Evidence", focuses mainly on ancient historians, examining methodologies and presuppositions in relation to the use of texts and artefacts as evidence. She reviews the way historians understood ancient texts, the strategies used to evaluate them and the new challenges postmodernism has raised in understanding texts. Her discussion of archaeology is brief but concise. Moore charts how archaeological approaches have changed through the 20th century with the rise of processual and then postprocessual archaeology, somewhat analogous to structuralism and poststructuralism. She concludes the chapter discussing the relationship of text and artefact for the purposes of history. Here she draws primarily on the poststructural model of Guy Halsall. Nevertheless she concludes that there is no easy resolution to the question of the relative value of text and artefact for writing history.

By the mid-20th century, text and artefact/archaeology were the basis of two approaches to doing the history of "Ancient Israel". Moore refers to them as schools, and they are the subject of the third chapter, "Assumptions and Practices of Historians of Ancient Israel in the Mid-Twentieth Century". She starts her account with the US-based biblical archaeology "school" of Albright and Bright who were mainly interested in digging in the (Palestinian/Israeli) soil to recover and elucidate the history of Ancient Israel. While these archaeologists had great confidence in the overall historicity of the biblical accounts, theirs was nevertheless a genuinely scholarly approach, unlike the ark hunters and

other Christian fundamentalist so-called archaeologists of today (e.g. the late Ron Wyatt). Moore then turns from biblical archaeology of the soil to the predominantly European text-focused approach, represented by Albrecht Alt and his "school". Like Albright and his followers, Alt and his colleagues had as their goal the reconstruction and elucidation of the history of Ancient Israel. Rather than digging in the soil they chose to go digging in the text. Alt and his colleagues were engaging in the standard historical critical approach of biblical interpretation and analysis and one criticism I have of this chapter is that Moore doesn't fully locate the Altian school in its historical critical framework: there is no mention whatsoever of Wellhausen, for example. As with the US biblical archaeology school, Alt and his colleagues followed a genuinely scholarly approach to their work with texts. Both schools were positivist, empirical in their approach, and committed to objectivity in the way they did history.

I think several factors undermined both these approaches. By the 1970s archaeology was starting to put in doubt some of the presumed historicity of the biblical narrative. At the same time, more broadly, changes in philosophy and practice for both archaeology and for history, outlined by Moore in her first two chapters, put increasing pressure on the validity of historical critical methodology in particular. Inasmuch as biblical studies had been conflated with doing history, the rise of minimalism was necessary and inevitable. The minimalists could be seen as calling people to more rigorous standards of doing history. Or even more importantly, asking just what was the point of all this history of Ancient Israel work in the first place. How much was the interest in the states/statelets of Iron Age Palestine due to theological rather than straightforward historical concerns? And, given their later provenance, how relevant were the biblical texts to reconstructing a history of Palestine in the Iron Age? Is placing reliance on the biblical version of events evidence of theological bias, especially if artefacts and other data don't give support to that version? These issues and more are discussed in Moore's fourth chapter, "Assumptions and Practices of Minimalist Historians of Ancient Israel".

Moore then turns to the "opposition", which she terms non-minimalist, in Chapter 5, "Non-Minimalist Historians of Ancient Israel". This is a rather awkward term because it implies an oppositional binary, whereas the reality is more like a continuum at (or towards) one end of which sit the minimalists, while the non-minimalists stretch along most of the rest of the continuum. Some, such as Iain Provan (and his colleagues Long and Longman), would appear to sit right down towards the other "maximalist" end of the of the continuum, at least in accepting the reliability of the biblical narrative, accepting everything from the Abraham/Sarah story onwards as a history (alas Moore doesn't report why Provan, Long, and Longman don't accord the primordial "history" - Adam to Babel - the same sort of reliability) (p. 124). The problem with such an approach is that especially with no other data, artefactual or textual, for verification, what is produced is not so much history as scholarly paraphrases of biblical narrative. So much of the older history of Ancient Israel really is nothing more than biblical paraphrase.

Moore's final chapter, prosaically titled "Summary and Conclusions", assesses the current state of the discipline. It seems that for many if not most non-minimalists, there is a new consensus in approach, one in which results are understood to be more contingent and in which there can be a greater variety of reconstructions and consequent discussion and debate. As a biblical scholar, rather than an ancient historian, I am most interested in what we can learn about the religious world of Iron Age Palestine and how much continuity it had with the older "Canaanite" world of the Bronze Age and the subsequent Persian and Hellenistic periods. I am also interested in the religious interactions between Palestine and its neighbours, in Egypt and Mesopotamia, for example. However what I would really like to know more about is Palestine in the Persian and Hellenistic periods, and not just Palestine but the communities of YHWH worshippers beyond Palestine as well. We get a glimpse from the Elephantine papyri and can get further glimpses by reading some of the biblical texts such as Isaiah and The Twelve. Biblical history for me is, in part, the history of the religious ideas found in the Old Testament and related texts, how they fit into the broader religious

world of the ancient Middle East and beyond. Whether or not there was a Samson or a Saul or a Solomon is nowhere near as important.

I have to say this book is pretty good in the way it surveys how "biblical" history or the history of "Ancient Israel" has been done from mid-last century to the present. Moore provides a particularly good account of the philosophical and methodological concerns raised by the "minimalists" in the late 80s and 90s and locates them within the broader sweep of philosophical debates within the humanities. Several years ago, I taught a course at University of Queensland, "Bible: Fact or Fiction", which introduced students to the rapidly changing scholarly understandings of Bible and history. Moore's book would have been an invaluable resource for that course then and would likewise be invaluable for any courses today on the relationship between history and the biblical texts.