

THIRTEEN

On the Manipulation of History for Ideology *A Response to Lester Grabbe*

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LESTER GRABBE SET HIMSELF THE TASK of examining how history has been manipulated for ideological purposes by comparing what he labels “pro-Zionist” and “pro-Palestinian” examples. His choice of case studies is puzzling. The first section on the use of Masada and the Bar Kochba revolt is a rehash of standard treatments of these episodes in collective memory and their use in contemporary Zionist narratives. His two so-called “pro-Palestinian” examples—my *The Invention of Ancient Israel: The Silencing of Palestinian History* and Shlomo Sand’s *The Invention of the Jewish People*¹—can hardly claim to be “foundation narratives” or “foundation myths” in the same sense. Grabbe’s attempt to demonstrate “balance” in his work fails because the examples he has chosen are not comparable. A more meaningful comparison might have been between *The Invention of Ancient Israel* and *The Invention of the Jewish People* and two recent volumes on the history of ancient Israel, for instance.

However, rather than respond to the article as a whole, I will concentrate on his specific criticisms of *The Invention of Ancient Israel* (hereafter *Invention*) since he levels some serious charges against my work. This will also raise more general issues about the nature of history writing and ideology.

Answering the Charge of Antisemitism

I find Grabbe’s opening remarks about my book, however well intended, both puzzling and troubling. He cites an anonymous friend, an American archaeologist, as claiming that *Invention* was “antisemitic.” Why the scare quotes here? What are they meant to

¹ Keith W. Whitelam, *The Invention of Ancient Israel: The Silencing of Palestinian History* (London: Routledge, 1996); Shlomo Sand, *The Invention of the Jewish People* (London: Verso Books, 2010).

signify? Either the friend claimed it was antisemitic or he/she did not. Grabbe's response, though welcome, is hardly a thorough rebuttal of such a charge: "nothing in my experience indicated that Whitelam was in any way antisemitic, and I had known him for quite a few years." The response to the anonymous archaeologist and the anonymous "more conservative Israeli biblical scholars" whom he claims think the book is antisemitic is simple. Prove it! Analyze the text and show where and how it is antisemitic. If not, withdraw the charge.

Until the publication of *Invention*, many of the issues explored in the book had not been raised in print or in academic debate at major conferences. There was never a serious attempt to engage with the book and show how or where it is antisemitic. The charge of antisemitism—usually issued in private conversations, like the one Grabbe reports—only serves to show the bankruptcy of ideas of those who were unable to address the issues. It was part of a whispering campaign to try to vilify, to isolate, to intimidate, and to silence arguments that threaten a consensus narrative. Unfortunately, Grabbe, by prefacing his remarks in this way only adds to that kind of whispering campaign.

The whispering campaign against the book and against me personally is not a serious attempt to combat antisemitism. It is, in my view, an offensive and immoral use of the suffering of Jews to try to silence the debate on how the history of ancient Israel has been constructed and, more importantly, how it has been utilized to support the Israeli government's treatment of the Palestinians and the continued occupation of Palestinian land in contravention of international law and numerous UN resolutions. Its effect has been to warn off others, particularly younger scholars, who might have the audacity to challenge the consensus narrative or question the objectivity of mainstream biblical studies. It is the last resort when the normal means of manufacturing and maintaining consent within the discipline fail.

The Reception of *Invention*

One of the most surprising aspects of Grabbe's paper are the number of errors it contains, especially from someone who is normally so careful. In mentioning briefly the immediate reception of the book, he claims that Israel Finkelstein was more positive in a review in the *Times Higher Education Supplement* (THES) than some conservative Israeli biblical scholars, whom he prefers not to identify. Grabbe does not give any bibliographical details for this review. I am unaware of any such review in the THES.

There was an article in the THES (January 19, 1996) by Simon Taggart shortly after the publication of the book, entitled "The Bible Bashers," which was based on an interview with me, his reading of the book and reactions from various scholars. In a side panel under the title of "Reality of Ancient Israel," Israel Finkelstein disagreed with two of the main theses of the book.² He claimed that ancient Israel could not have been invented because it "is a real and important historical, political, social and ideological

² Simon Taggart, "The Bible Bashers," THES, Jan 19, 1996.

phenomenon” for which there is ample evidence. I assume that this was a misunderstanding of my point that Western scholarship has “invented” ancient Israel in the image of the European nation state: I was not claiming that some entity called “Israel” did not exist in the ancient past. Finkelstein also disagreed with the view that Palestinian history has been silenced claiming that “the torrent of recent work on the history of medieval Palestine and the Palestinian peasantry (including works by Israeli deconstructionists) disprove Whitelam.” Although again I think that Finkelstein misses the point, this is not the issue in the current context. Finkelstein did not offer a positive review of the book as Grabbe claims. Unless there is a more positive review of *Invention* in a later issue of *THES* of which I am unaware—and I am happy to be corrected on this—then it brings into question the accuracy of Grabbe’s representation of scholarly views. In an article in which he claims that I have manipulated scholarship, this is not an auspicious opening.

In a further brief comment on the reception of the book, Grabbe claims that his knowledge of Palestinian reactions are only indirect, though he understands it was welcomed by some. What exactly is this meant to prove? Is this supposed to show that the book is a new Palestinian foundation myth? Although it might have received a favourable reaction from some Palestinians, Grabbe questions how far it might have been read by “knowledgeable professionals in the field.” What conclusion is the reader to draw from this? That those Palestinians who might have welcomed the book were not part of the high priesthood of biblical studies and so unable to have an informed opinion of their own?

Such comments at the opening of this section hardly give the reader confidence that they are about to be presented with a critically informed and insightful analysis of the book.

The Manipulation of Scholarship

Grabbe’s most serious charge is that I have manipulated scholarship to support a political cause. This is different from his declared intention at the opening of the article where he claims to be examining the manipulation of history. The charge has now become the manipulation of scholarship. He focuses his criticisms on three areas, supposedly “from a purely historical point of view.”³

³ This phrase—“from a purely historical point of view”—is meaningless in the context. A number of the examples he chooses are about my use and representation of various scholarly views (Said, Alt, Noth, and Albright) not about the way I reconstruct (or manipulate) history. The only one to which such a phrase might apply is his discussion of the use of the term “Palestinians.” It is not clear to me what the phrase is meant to signify, unless he is trying to claim that he is not making any “political” judgements and again trying to demonstrate “balance” in his comments.

Edward Said

Grabbe complains that I cite the work of Edward Said as a proof-text rather than laying out his arguments and critiquing them. Grabbe's own contribution to scholarship in recent years has tended to focus on summarizing a wide range of scholarly views before adding a few comments of his own. However, *Invention* is a very different type of work. As a research monograph, it was arguing a particular case by analysing how biblical studies as a discipline had developed its model of historical scholarship. I had assumed an intelligent reader—whether Palestinian or non-Palestinian, biblical specialist or non-biblical specialist—who is capable of assessing Said's views for themselves.

He claims that “in such a controversial field, no one can defend his or her position by simply citing a disputed argument.” I used the work of Said, amongst others, to set out some of the theory and underlying principles behind my analysis of biblical studies throughout the rest of the book. Said's classic work on Orientalism had been published in 1978, nearly 20 years before, was well known, even though it had not been used extensively in biblical studies. The idea that I should not have used Said because his work is controversial and some people disagree with him is astonishing. Does Grabbe believe that I was unaware of the academic industry generated by Said's work or had not read this material? I also cite the work of Fernand Braudel, Franz Fanon, Robert Young, Aimé Césaire, and even Philip Davies, among many others. Are they to be excluded as well because their views are controversial and not universally accepted? I make no apologies for using the work of someone I consider to be one of the most important intellectuals of the late twentieth century.

Grabbe's lengthy footnote n. 27, which lists various criticisms of Said, properly deserves the description “proof-texting.” In the first place, Grabbe's list ignores many of the more substantive and engaged criticisms of Said, while cataloguing a number of populist reviews and responses in newspapers, magazines, and online sources. But perhaps the majority of academic engagements with Said have, rather than rejecting his thesis outright, added their own refinements or other developments to it. For example, subsequent studies have demonstrated that Orientalism was a significant ideology outside of the great colonial powers France and Britain, to which Said largely confined his analysis in *Orientalism* (e.g., Russia,⁴ the Netherlands,⁵ and Germany⁶). Such developments in scholarship, while critiquing the particular form of Said's thesis, also serve to demonstrate its generative power—which is a measure of *Orientalism's* fundamental legitimacy.

⁴ Daniel R. Brower and Edward J. Lazzerini, eds, *Russia's Orient: Imperial Borderlands and Peoples, 1700–1917* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1997).

⁵ Michael Laffan, *The Makings of Indonesian Islam: Orientalism and the Narration of a Sufi Past* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).

⁶ Todd C. Kontje, *German Orientalisms* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004); Suzanne L. Marchand, *German Orientalism in the Age of Empire: Religion, Race, and Scholarship* (Washington, DC: German Historical Institute; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

More disturbing is that Grabbe has found at least two of his online sources, according to his citations, from *Campus Watch*, which is a notorious McCarthyite organization responsible for campaigns against academics who are openly critical of Israeli policies. Among other activities, *Campus Watch* has arranged for the sending of hundreds or thousands of emails to academics with whom it disagrees (i.e., “e-mail bombing”), and runs campaigns aimed at stultifying their freedom of speech via government officials, university administrators, and corporate funders. Furthermore, in Grabbe’s attempt to give the impression that the quantity of critiques of Said is overwhelming, he has evidently scoured the internet less than discreetly, even including a paper by Neil Templeton from a source called the *Imperial Archive*. Presumably Grabbe missed the fact that Templeton’s short paper was a class assignment for an MA course at the School of English at the Queen’s University of Belfast.⁷ With all due respect to the student, inclusion of such a source in Grabbe’s list demonstrates either a considerable lack of critical acumen or simple negligence, and makes transparent an attempt to create the appearance of a long list of critiques of Said, all the while neglecting to mention the ongoing value of Said’s influential thesis within genuine scholarship.

In any case, the major point that I was trying to make—the most important aspect of *Invention* as far as I am concerned—is that just as in Said’s analysis of orientalist discourse, we need to be aware of and critically analyze the discourse of biblical studies: “a powerful, interlocking network of ideas and assertions believed by its practitioners to be the reasonable results of objective scholarship while masking the realities of an exercise of power.”⁸ My contention was that the analysis and exposure of this network of ideas, assumptions, and power was preliminary to any attempt to write a history of Palestine.

This is not a manipulation of scholarship. It would have been manipulation if I had misrepresented the work of Said and then used that to try to support my arguments. Said certainly did not think that I had manipulated or misrepresented his views as he chose *Invention* as one of his two books of the year in the *The Times Literary Supplement*. He described it as:

a remarkable work of scholarship, certainly audacious enough, despite its painstaking manner, to undermine many unthinking presuppositions about ancient biblical history.... The book possesses that keen independence of

⁷ Neil Templeton, “Orientalism: A Critique,” *The Imperial Archive* (2007), <https://web.archive.org/web/20081014041348/http://www.qub.ac.uk/schools/SchoolofEnglish/imperial/transnational/Orientalism-critique.html>.

⁸ Whitlam, *Invention of Ancient Israel*, 4. Said acknowledged in a later essay that “Whitlam is quite right to criticize my own work on the modern struggle for Palestine for not paying any attention to the discourse of biblical studies. This discourse he says was really a part of Orientalism, by which Europeans imagined and represented the Orient as they wished to see it, not as it was, or as its natives believed” (“Invention, Memory, Place,” *Critical Inquiry* 26 (2000), 187).

spirit and vision that is so rare and so invigorating when one encounters it.⁹

The Use of the Term “Palestinians”

Grabbe objects to my use of “Palestinians” on the grounds that it is a modern term and that scholars writing about antiquity should be precise and true to their sources. The section from which Grabbe quotes and conflates is part of a discussion of the denial of Palestinian time and space. It is an examination of the ways in which the discourse of biblical studies through its search for ancient Israel has ignored the wider aspects of the history of Palestine. I was using the term to signal the need for a broader regional history of Palestine as opposed to the narrow search for ancient Israel that has skewed the history of this region.

The early unequivocal identification of the inhabitants of the proliferation of small Iron Age villages as “Israelite” is one illustration of the power of the discourse of biblical studies to determine the shape and outcome of research. In many cases, we do not know how the inhabitants of a town, village, or pastoral group identified themselves. However, despite the fact that scholarship frequently used the terms “Palestine,” “Palestinian coastline,” “Palestinian economy,” even where there is no evidence to suggest a specific identity for the inhabitants of a village or town, the generic term “Palestinian” is never used. It is only ever used of inanimate objects.¹⁰

The growing awareness that the material culture of these villages was indigenous undermined the attempt to impose an ethnic label on their inhabitants. Finkelstein, in recognizing the problems that the new information about the hill country villages raised for the assumption that the inhabitants were “Israelites,” proposed the term “hill country settlers.” The response of Hershel Shanks was that the settlement of the hill country in Palestine in the early Iron Age is of “special interest” only if the inhabitants were Israelite: “if the people were not Israelites, they have as much interest to us as Early Bronze Age IV people. That does not mean that we are uninterested, but it does mean considerably less interest than if they were Israelites.”¹¹ The search for ancient Israel, a key feature of the discourse of biblical studies, has produced a hierarchy of interest, often forcing other aspects of the history of the region to the margins.

The initial response by biblical historians and archaeologists to this growing threat to the consensus narrative was to try to reclaim the villages by describing their inhabitants as “proto-Israelites.” The ensuing debate revealed the ethno-centric view of Israel that

⁹ Edward W. Said, “International Books of the Year,” *The Times Literary Supplement* (Nov 29, 1996).

¹⁰ Strangely, he seems to miss the point that “Palestinian” is being used here to signal the need for a regional history, but is willing to consider “Canaanite” as a geographical term: “the term ‘Canaanite’ probably applies to territory rather than ethnicity; that is, a ‘Canaanite’ seems to be the inhabitant of a region or land rather than the member of an ethnic group”: Lester L. Grabbe, *Ancient Israel: What Do We Know and How Do We Know It?* (London: T&T Clark International), 20, 50–52.

¹¹ Hershel Shanks, “When 5613 Scholars Get Together in One Place: The Annual Meeting,” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 17 (1991), 66. See Whitelam, *Invention of Ancient Israel*, 199 for a critique of this view.

permeated the discourse of biblical studies. In what source do we find this ethnic label? What degree of precision is being utilized when scholars regularly refer to the inhabitants of Iron Age highland villagers as “proto-Israelites”? Grabbe claims that “any scholar who was so careless (or dogmatic) as to refer casually to such different peoples as simply ‘Palestinians’ would be censured by colleagues for imprecision or even ignorance.” I have searched Grabbe’s discussion of ethnicity in *Ancient Israel: What Do We Know and How Do We Know It?* in vain for any censure of carelessness or dogmatism for those who use the term “proto-Israelite.”

Grabbe is mistaken in his claim that I have overlooked that if “Palestinian” is used as a generic designation of all the inhabitants of ancient Palestine, this would include Israelites and Jews, as well as the kingdoms of Israel and Judah.¹² I was arguing for the need for an integrated history of Palestine that stretched from the ancient past to the present. In writing the history of one land, Palestine, that has been inhabited by many different peoples and groups over the centuries, it is the long-term trends—population movements, economic fluctuations, the shifting fortunes of the towns and villages, etc.—that tie such a narrative together. My use of the term “Palestinian” presupposed an inclusivist reading of history. It is opposed to the exclusivist and nationalist historiographies that emphasize difference and separation by insisting on precise ethnic labels being imposed on the past. Unfortunately, all too often, our histories of ancient Israel are presented as though they are histories of Palestine: the history of ancient Israel subsumes the history of the region as a whole. Thus the Iron Age becomes the exclusive property of the history of Israel and thereby detached from Palestinian history. The kingdoms of Israel and Judah, whatever form they took, as well as the modern state of Israel, are threads within that wider history of Palestine.

Similarly, to talk of Palestine’s history as only a modern phenomenon is to curtail chronology artificially, as if the present is not the result of deep-flowing currents from the past. It is this idea which has led to the situation where the past, particularly the Iron Age, seems to be divided from the present and so seemingly does not belong to Palestinian history. It is a curtailing of history that is all too often carried out in the service of modern, ethno-centric nationalism; a history that emphasizes that which is different or separate. When I am out walking in the Peak District outside Sheffield and come across dry stone walls and various field patterns, are they not the result of long-term patterns of land use which stretch back centuries before? Similarly, are the agricultural terraces found throughout the West Bank not the result of ancient currents that flow into the present? Attempts to understand the history of ancient Palestine as part of an integrated narrative that continues into the present have been hindered by the way in which the history of ancient Israel has come to dominate and subsume the past.

In his frustration, Grabbe asks why I do not write a history of ancient Palestine. Again, this is puzzling since he claims to be critiquing *Invention*: I stated in the intro-

¹² He claims that this would negate my “concerns,” though what these concerns are is not defined.

duction that this was not a history of ancient Palestine but an attempt to expose the cultural and political obstacles that stood in the way of such a task.¹³

My recent work, *Rhythms of Time: Reconnecting Palestine's Past*,¹⁴ offers my understanding of Palestine in the Iron Age as part of a coherent narrative that runs from past to present. It is an inclusive narrative, not one driven by ethnic identity or narrow nationalism. It focuses on how its inhabitants, regardless of ethnic label, responded to changing natural and economic rhythms of the region. Grabbe may not approve of it, of course, but at least I have answered his question.

Representing Alt, Noth, and Albright

Grabbe says that I offer no support for the view that Alt, Noth, and Albright were influenced in their views of the history of ancient Israel by the “Zionist-Palestinian dichotomy” existing in Palestine in the 1920s and that he is unconvinced by my argument.

Once again, the analysis of the work of Alt, Noth, Albright and others was part of the analysis of the power of the discourse of biblical studies. The so-called immigration and conquest models had begun to lose their persuasive power as a result of fresh archaeological information and changes in the intellectual climate. What I was trying to illustrate was why these models had been so powerful and continued to exert influence despite changing perspectives or the growing weight of evidence against them. Although Grabbe only sees “scholars steeped in the Bible trying to make sense of the biblical text and the other data from the ancient Near East,” no scholar can interpret such evidence outside of the dominant concepts of their own thought worlds.¹⁵ I was trying to show how the reconstructions of ancient Israel by western scholars mirrored the social and political circumstances in which they found themselves. I prefaced this analysis with the following:

This is not a standard review of the relative strengths and weaknesses of German and American scholarship from the 1920s onwards, a function already provided by the many convenient reviews. It is an attempt to illustrate the theological and political assumptions which have contributed to the dominant definitions of Israel's past. It is designed as a commentary, using their own words, to illustrate just how far their constructions of

¹³ Whitelam, *Invention of Ancient Israel*, 1–2.

¹⁴ Keith W. Whitelam, *Rhythms of Time: Reconnecting Palestine's Past* (Sheffield: BenBlackBooks, 2013).

¹⁵ In footnote 32, Grabbe cites Jack Sasson's comment that Noth based his thesis on a “richly detailed and very carefully presented analysis of the traditions regarding the rise of the monarchy” (Jack Sasson, “On Choosing Models for Recreating Israelite Pre-Monarchic History,” *JSTOR* 21 (1981), 9). He then says that although I also cite Sasson's arguments, I make no attempt to show that they were wrong. The reason for that is that I believe Sasson to be correct. I consider Sasson's article on Israelite historiography to be one of the seminal articles in the field. He illustrated how American and German scholarship was influenced by the political context in which it was conceived. That is not to deny that Noth had carried out a detailed analysis of the text, but to try to explain how his interpretation was informed by a particular model of the past.

the past have mirrored and are implicated in contemporary struggles for Palestine. What it reveals is a series of imaginative pasts which have been responsible for the silencing of Palestinian history in the name of objective scholarship.¹⁶

I was not suggesting that this was a wilful distortion of the past but trying to show how our reconstructions are located firmly in their own contemporary worlds. Of course, Grabbe may not be convinced by the analysis that follows. But this was not a manipulation of scholarship, as he charges. It is a relatively detailed examination of the classic works of biblical scholarship using their own words. Readers can easily check whether or not I represented the views of these scholars accurately, even if they remain unconvinced by my analysis.

Unfortunately at the time of writing *Invention*, I was unaware of Norman Cantor's brilliant analysis of medieval studies, *Inventing the Middle Ages: The Lives, Works, and Ideas of the Great Medievalists of the Twentieth Century*.¹⁷ His description of medieval studies as a cyclical process in which once powerful ideas lose their explanatory power and are replaced is equally applicable to biblical studies:

What was wrong was not the application of powerful modern ideas to interpreting the Middle Ages but the lack of the self-critical temperament to recognize their limitations and to reexamine assumptions periodically. What was wrong was not too much intellectualization in medieval studies but too little. It is well-nigh inevitable that once a group of scholars has gained success working with a set of intellectual assumptions and, following from the work using these ideas, has advanced to positions of comfort and power within the academic establishment, self-criticism wanes, and the ideas and assumptions that once were novel inspirations, held tentatively, harden into orthodox academic dogma, which the next generation is supposed to parrot.¹⁸

The work of great biblical scholars of the past (and the present), just like the medievalists described by Cantor, was fashioned amidst the tremendous social and political upheavals of their own times. In particular, I was exploring the role of the nation state and the different perspectives of competing national scholarly traditions in shaping how and why the history of ancient Israel was constructed differently by German and American scholarship. The world in which scholars pursue their research is imprinted on their work but usually this only becomes apparent in retrospect as perspectives and intellectual currents change.

¹⁶ Whitelam, *Invention of Ancient Israel*, 73–74.

¹⁷ Norman F. Cantor, *Inventing the Middle Ages: The Lives, Works, and Ideas of the Great Medievalists of the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 1991).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 38.

Many biblical scholars continue to long for “the golden age” of Alt, Noth, and Albright and deplore the move away from their seemingly dispassionate world. Yet like all “golden ages,” it is a myth: an analysis of their work reveals a world of committed scholarship. Biblical studies has always been a conceptual site of struggle for power and authority. It reflects the geopolitical world of which it is a part and a contributor.

Grabbe also claims that I misrepresent Albright’s views, particularly by selective quotation. However, as with Alt and Noth, there is a detailed analysis of his classic works against the background of his religious convictions and the social and political events taking place at the time of their inception. I also discuss Albright’s oscillating views on contemporary events, as evidenced in his article “Why the Near East Needs the Jews,” published in *New Palestine* in 1942.¹⁹ My conclusion was that Albright’s Israel of the Iron Age was a mirror image of the Israel of his present. His construction of this imagined past bears the imprint of the world in which he lived and operated.

Any reader is free to disagree with my analysis, of course, but can easily check if I have manipulated and misrepresented Albright’s views. Grabbe claims that when I cite Yadin’s comment that Albright had been “so free and open in supporting Israel politically, even in public press conferences, that I had to caution him a bit that he should perhaps be more careful on that,” I leave out “a telling phrase” from Running and Freedman’s work on Albright: “Of course he saw the problems which the creation of the State [of Israel] made for the Arabs; he admired the Arabs, he loved them. But on balance, as he always used to say, he thought that if there were two justs here, the justification for Israel to have a state was the greater one; that’s why he supported Israel.”²⁰

I am baffled by Grabbe’s charge of selective quotation because a careful reading of the footnote to which he refers, where I quote Yadin’s view, has the following sentence:

He describes Albright as a champion of Israel but one who recognized the problem that the creation of the modern state caused for the Arabs. “*But on balance*, as he always used to say, be that if there were two just causes here, the justification for Israel to have a state was the greater one.”²¹

Leaving aside any discussion of the belief that the dispossession and persecution of one group of people to solve the persecution of another can be described as a higher justice, Grabbe seems to have overlooked the fact that I do acknowledge Albright’s view of two just causes and his recognition of the problem that the creation of the modern state caused for Arabs. Where we disagree is on the interpretation of this view.

¹⁹ William F. Albright, “Why the Near East Needs the Jews,” *New Palestine* 32, no. 9 (1942): 12–13.

²⁰ Leona G. Running and David N. Freedman, *William Foxwell Albright: A Twentieth-Century Genius* (New York: The Two Continents Publishing Group, 1975), 378.

²¹ Whitelam, *Invention of Ancient Israel*, 249, n. 8, quoting Running and Freedman, *Albright*, 380.

History and Ideology

Grabbe's final comments on the writing of a history of Palestine further illustrate where we disagree on the nature of history writing. He questions how interested Palestinians are in the history of ancient Palestine, claiming that they would recoil in horror at being equated with ancient polytheistic Canaanites.

The writing of history is not dependent upon popular demand or acclaim; Palestinian or otherwise. Where in *Invention* are Palestinians equated with Canaanites? It is Grabbe who introduces the terms "pro-Zionist" or "pro-Palestinian" into the debate. These terms and his other comments reveal an assumption that history writing must be a nationalist enterprise. His immediate impulse appears to be to assume that history is essentially about difference.

When we examine Grabbe's principles for history writing—as set out in *Ancient Israel: What Do We Know and How Do We Know It?* for example—what we find are a set of proposals that are standard procedures that most, if not all, historians would claim to follow. Grabbe also included the instructions for the use of his hermeneutical machine for the production of neutral history: "The only valid arguments are historical ones. Ideology, utility, theology, morality, politics, authority—none of these has a place in judging how to reconstruct an event." It would seem that unlike the great biblical scholars or medievalists of the past, Grabbe believes that anyone who purchases his machine is able to escape the social and political upheavals that shape the lives of their contemporaries. What his machine produces is a colourless, disjointed narrative of "events," devoid of creativity or passion.

Although historians claim to follow very similar procedures, what we find in the case of British, American, Indian, Sri Lankan history, for instance, are differing and competing constructions of the past. Grabbe admits that historians are human and that subjectivity is inevitable. But what is subjectivity if not the product of the social, political, and religious background of the historian? The claim to produce ideology-free history is an ideological claim. It is part of the facade of objectivity that has characterized much of the history writing in biblical studies, particularly during the period of dominance of the Albright school.

Invention was born out of a question that had exercised me for some time. When we look at the debates that have swirled around the history of Israel and the supposed crisis of history that it was said to reflect, what does all the re-evaluation amount to when the same themes remain the focus of those who work in the field? Why the proliferation of works when the issues are constantly recycled and particularly when the shape of the history remains the same, unlike other fields of history? Is it solely due to inertia within the discipline? Or does it reveal the means by which consensus is manufactured and maintained within biblical studies?

Despite the high profile debates on history in biblical studies in recent years, there remains an existing consensus, involving a network of buried assumptions that need careful and patient analysis. It represents a powerful system of interests which has the

ability to manufacture consent by incorporating, frustrating, or, on odd occasions, silencing any challenges to its dominant position. It is, you might say, a mainstream orthodoxy against which it is very difficult to argue or provide alternative visions of the past.

It is reflected in the ways the so-called minimalist challenge has been dealt with in recent years. Many aspects of that debate have been incorporated into the orthodox position through the selection of what is considered to be the appropriate subject of history, while those aspects of the debate that cannot be managed in this way have been marginalized, or on occasions, demonized (particularly as a warning to younger scholars). It is a self-regulating system in which the preconceptions and assumptions that form this complex network are internalized through training and debate, so that scholars and students operating with complete integrity are able to convince themselves that their choices are unrestrained and objective.

Constraints are built into the system and operate in many different ways: the construction and choice of courses and course materials, which form part of the training of the next generation of scholars; the selection of topics that are deemed worthy of research; the constraints of the job market; the selection of research papers at conferences; the funding of research projects, including the evaluation of research for government funding; the publication of research; and so on. The kinds of choices that are made by biblical scholars, the particular emphases or the omissions, become understandable in the context of the discourse of biblical studies, that vast complex of assumptions and ideas that has build up over a century or more and operates below the surface but determines the nature, shape, and outcome of the debate. It helps to explain why our histories retain their essential shape and why we do not have alternative visions of Palestine's past; in short, how history is forged within our discipline.

Understanding the system in this way raises the critical question about how we choose to operate as biblical scholars, particularly if one of our particular concerns is the shaping and moulding of history. It is important, in my opinion, to use our privileged position to try to expose the ways in which our worldly affiliations influence scholarship, to challenge vested interests and unseen power and the unargued assumptions that mask their influence, and to offer a counter view which confronts the orthodox vision of the past.

Thus, we are faced with some very difficult personal questions about how we should act, particularly when faced with charges of antisemitism. It is a situation that requires constant vigilance, asking why have I made this choice, and whom does it serve? In asking myself these questions, I constantly return to Edward Said's discussion of the role of the intellectual and the recognition of the critical line between individual responsibility and the authority of consensus:

Nothing in my view is more reprehensible than those habits of mind in the intellectual that induce avoidance, that characteristic turning away from a difficult and principled position which you know to be the right one, but

which you decide not to take. You do not want to appear too political; you are afraid of seeming controversial; you do not pursue an issue or present an argument because you fear of being accused falsely of antisemitism; you need the approval of a boss or an authority figure; you want to keep a reputation for being balanced, objective, moderate; your hope is to be asked back, to consult, to be on a board or prestigious committee, and so to remain within the responsible mainstream; someday you hope to get an honorary degree, a big prize, perhaps even an ambassadorship.²²

²² Edward W. Said, *Representations of the Intellectual: The 1993 Reith Lectures* (London: Vintage, 1994), 74.