between the oral world and the written. It is primarily in the display of this division that the power of the ruling monarch for good and evil is played out, revealing what these ruling characters write or have written for them that the characters living in an oral world cannot know. This reflects in the narratives the shift from a common culture to one of literate circles in society with a closed membership. For the postexilic writings, on the other hand, the main concern is the documentation of the official and recognized notion of community defining the Judeans/Jews, by that time scattered throughout the known world. In this the documents, fictive though they might be, legitimize the Jews and Jerusalem over against actual (Samaritans, in Ezra) or potential (anyone malevolently against the Jews, in Esther) opposition.

Over half of the volume is dedicated to the written documents presented in Esther. Schaack determines that this biblical narrative is concerned with the identity of the Jews in the postexilic eastern Diaspora, probably in the Hellenistic period, though perhaps with narrative traditions received from the Persian period. It is proposed that the story itself addresses the dual loyalties of the Jews within empires through which the population is dispersed: one loyalty to the empire and another loyalty to the Jewish people. A paradigm derived from the Joseph and Exodus traditions stands behind the book. Passover, therefore, is replicated in Purim—the former identifying people as Israel, distinguished from Egypt and the rest of the populace, the latter uniting scattered groups of Jews as a common people related by origin, though unrelated by geography or (popular) culture. In this the proclamations made by Esther, Mordecai, and "Xerxes" become defining documents fulfilling both loyalties simultaneously.

The concluding section on Dan 6:26–28 examines Darius the Mede's proclamation to all the world that Daniel's God is God. The writing is, as with Esther, a statement about Jews in Diaspora, but here the author uses the written proclamation to make a statement about universal truth: this is the only true and real God. The weight of both royal and experiential authority resides in the passage. The ramifications of this literary document are then investigated in ever-widening literary circles: Dan 6:2–7, prophetic and other biblical writings, and finally the canon of the Hebrew Bible.

The volume may be heartily recommended to anyone who wonders about the social context of internal biblical documentation. The whole notion of using writing as itself a narrative device affects more than just the passages herein investigated and so warrants consideration by all who read the biblical texts either as literary productions or as historical documents. Finally, it should be pointed out, the book does have the usual readability of a German dissertation.

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This work's title might lead the unwary reader to believe that the author is going to present his understanding of the nature of the "historical" Israel of the Iron Age and
how it compares with the literary Israel of the biblical "tradition." Such is not the case. Essentially it is an extremely long critique/debunking of the efforts of most biblical scholars (historians, archaeologists, and theologians), over the last century, including his own earlier work (Ancient Israel: A New History of Israelite Society), to try to utilize the Hebrew texts as a source for reconstructing a history of Israel.

The book is divided into a prolegomenon, five main chapters of varying length, and a conclusion. Chapter 1, "Playing the von Ranke Game," discusses the nature of the Hebrew Scriptures as a historical source. In chapter 2, "Israel in Contemporary Historical Documents from the Ancient Near East," he discusses the major extrabiblical texts that mention Israel, Judah, or their ruling houses. Here he repeats his earlier assertions, a minority opinion at best, that the various fragments of the Bet David inscription from Tel Dan do not belong to the same stela, do not mention the House of David, and may be a forgery. Lemche derides scholars at several points for not following basic rules of historiography; yet in the case of this inscription he is guilty of the same charge. A basic tenet of historical research is always to follow the simplest solution which answers the most questions while raising the fewest problems in the process. Surely it is sounder methodology to understand the text to read "House of David" than as an otherwise completely unattested place name. Lemche seems somewhat obsessed with the fact that one of the in situ pictures of the inscription does not really show the fragment as it was found, but after it was repositioned for the photograph (p. 181 n. 25), and that this may be grounds for suspecting that it is a forgery. This sort of repositioning is a fairly common practice in archaeology, especially when the significance of an apparently innocuous object may not be realized until it has been removed from the debris and cleaned and should not be used to impugn the reputation of the excavator(s). Chapter 3, "Archaeology and Israelite Ethnic Identity," discusses the role of material culture in studies of ethnicity. Chapter 4, "The People of God," examines the historical value of such traditions as the exodus and the twelve-tribe system and asserts that while they have value as foundation myths for postexilic Israel, they have no bearing on the institutions of the Iron Age. Chapter 5, "The Scholar's Israel," critiques specifically the works of J. Wellhausen, M. Noth, J. Bright, and R. Albertz.

In some respects it is difficult to evaluate this book as the author never explicitly defines the goal of his work, or the methodology he will use to establish his thesis. In fact, the author's thesis, that the Hebrew Scriptures are essentially religious propaganda of the Persian-Hellenistic period created to justify the existence of a Jewish nation, propaganda useless for reconstructing the history of Iron Age Israel, is really only established in the last few pages of his conclusion.

In many ways Lemche's opus is only half a book. While the long critical appraisal of prior scholarship may be interesting and possibly useful, it is not the entire race. It is a barren exercise to tear down the work of others without offering a least some concrete examples of how the material should be studied, and some preliminary results of this new method. For example, while most scholars accept a Persian-Hellenistic date for the final shaping/editing of the Hebrew Scriptures, Lemche asserts that these works were composed at that time. If Lemche is going to insist that these works tell us more about the emerging Judaism of this latter period than they do about Iron Age Israel, he should offer examples of what these texts tell us about postexilic Israel. For example, what is the
importance in the Persian-Hellenistic period of the list of David’s thirty champions in 2
Sam 23:24–39?

It is also curious that while Lemche does accept that there are some historical Iron
Age remembrances in the biblical text, he does not tell us how he identifies these, how
many there are, or what one can do with these bits. W. G. Dever has shown on a number
of occasions that the biblical text preserves detailed and accurate knowledge of Iron Age
cultic practices that are unknown in the Persian-Hellenistic period. The same could be
said for many aspects of daily life presented in the Hebrew text. For example, by this lat-
ter era chariots had virtually disappeared from the arsenals of the ancient Near Eastern
world. By the time of Alexander they are ceremonial command vehicles, or were
equipped with clumsy scythes. Yet the biblical text preserves accurate descriptions of
the use of Iron Age chariot warfare as nimble archery platforms.

One of the central points of Lemche’s discussion is that it is impossible, based on
our existing sources (biblical texts, extrabiblical texts, and archaeological sources), to
establish the existence of an Israelite (or Judean) ethnic group. Now, the attempt to
identify ethnic groups in the material culture record is one of archaeology’s trendy holy
grails, with an ever-growing body of theoretical literature. Lemche pays little attention
to this theoretical discussion and adopts a very simple system (borrowed from the
ancient Greeks) for establishing ethnicity: common blood, language, and religion. Based
on these criteria he asserts that it is impossible to identify an Israelite ethnic group in the
Iron Age. However, by these same criteria it would also be impossible to establish the
existence of the Iron Age II Philistines, Ammonites, Moabites, and Edomites. In fact, it
would be interesting to learn which “ethnic groups” mentioned in our sources could sur-
vive Lemche’s analysis. In any event, the search for ethnicity will always remain some-
thing of a chimera. If, for the moment, one assumes a Davidic/Solomonic kingdom
embracing most of modern Israel in the tenth century and also assumes that Megiddo
came under Israelite control at that time, how many generations would it take for the
majority of the city’s population to identify themselves as “Israelites”? If one could ask a
Bethlehemite of the seventh century who he was, would he simply identify himself as
PN son of PN? Would he conceive of himself as having an identity beyond the level of
his family or clan? Would he see himself as a “Judean,” or simply as someone ruled over
by the king of Judah?

Lemche’s presentation seesaws between a generally serious scholarly tone and an
almost folksy banter more suited to a newspaper column (e.g., the paragraph at the bot-
tom of p. 65). This fluctuation leaves one wondering if the work is intended for scholars,
undergraduates, or casual readers of Biblical Archaeology Review. The book is written
in a Danishized form of English that varies considerably in quality. Often the English is
quite good. Sometimes the grammar is awkward and jarring to read, but is not used in
impossible ways. However, there are numerous examples of either typos or grammatical
errors which mar the volume (e.g., on p. 54 “... the kingdom was reckoned no more
than a city-state of limited extend ...” and “Thus Sargon II, the conqueror of Samaria,
also boast of...”). It is the job of the editor to catch such errors and to improve the read-
ability of the text. The book feels as though it was rushed too quickly through the press.

Lemche hopes that his book will provoke controversy, and he will be satisfied if it
does that. However, shocking the establishment without providing a credible new vision
is more the aspiration of a pop icon than a serious scholar. In the end, the lack of a
clearly defined new analytical method, in turn supported by some preliminary results, to follow on his long critique, leaves the reader feeling cheated.

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The generating insight of this interesting and provocative book is that because “the authors of the Torah set their tales in times and places far removed from their own,” its stories “are best described as allegories, narratives contrived to describe a second order of meaning from what they present on the surface” (p. 8). According to Sperling, the allegorical reading is not an option but a requirement “because [the Torah] cannot be read historically,” critical scholarship having demonstrated that “nothing in the Torah is historical.” It is this involvement with the results of historical critical study that differentiates Sperling’s method from other, more traditional modes of allegorical reading. “I find myself secularizing Paul,” he writes with reference to the use of typology in 1 Cor 10:11. “The things that supposedly ‘happened’ were ‘symbolically recorded for us,’ that is, if we understand ‘us’ to be the earliest and primary audiences of the writers of the Torah” (p. 9). Sperling not only secularizes Paul; he also stands the apostle’s method on its head. Whereas Paul, like all ancient allegorists, sought to show the applicability of the narratives beyond their own time, Sperling consistently and univocally restricts their meaning to the situation in which they were composed and, moreover, insists that the *political* function of the texts is their sole meaning. His reduction of significance to the realm of politics is so thoroughgoing that he can even assert that “[w]hen contemporary readers try to discover the ancient agenda, they are, in fact, coming closer to understanding [YHWH],” since “[YHWH] always stands for the agenda of the individual writer” (p. 136).

In each of the six studies that comprise the core of the book, Sperling’s method is twofold. He first demonstrates the lack of historicity in the pentateuchal narrative under discussion and then correlates the narrative with a later political situation that he thinks unlocks its real meaning. In chapter 3, “The Allegory of Servitude in Egypt and the Exodus,” for example, he builds upon the absence of evidence for an origin of Israel outside Canaan and for an Israelite enslavement in Egypt to argue that these notions constitute the “ideological statement” of a group of “dissident elements” in Late Bronze Age Canaan (pp. 47, 52). Pharaoh’s imposition of corvée (*mas*) on Israel for his forced-labor projects (*sēbel*, Exod 1:11) thus does not refer to “institutions of subjugation in Egypt proper” at all. Rather, it is an allegorical representation of Israel’s “withdrawing from the Egyptian system [of political domination in Canaan] . . . as a withdrawal from the land of Egypt itself” (p. 56). The “inspiration for the Israelite ideologues” lay in the arrival from abroad of Aramaeans and sea peoples (Amos 9:7; p. 57). Similarly, chapter 4 argues that the covenant of Israel with YHWH is properly understood as “the religious expression of the mundane cultic and military union of different groups that had merged to form the people of Israel” (p. 71).