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ABSTRACT

This article examines recent studies of ethnicity in the Hebrew Bible. A subsequent article will analyze similar studies of the New Testament writings. After a brief overview of selected trends in the study of ethnic identity, I organize my analysis according to broad historical periods in the biblical narrative: pre-monarchic, monarchic, and exilic/post-exilic eras with monographs receiving the bulk of attention. I conclude that three persistent problems hinder progress in these investigations. First, the inability of scholars to agree upon dates for biblical texts, our best source for ascertaining ethnicity, limits our capacity to locate them within specific socio-historical contexts and thereby reconstruct Israel's ethnic identity at a given time and place. Second, the evidence that can be dated most accurately, archaeological remains, provides inadequate data for drawing conclusions about ethnic self-perceptions. Finally, vague definitions of ethnicity result in imprecise characterizations of Israel's identity. Such methodological and theoretical difficulties are not unique to this young sub-discipline of Hebrew Bible studies, nor should they detract from the fact that analysis of ethnic dynamics in the Hebrew Bible is a promising development in the overall study of ancient Israelite identity.

Keywords: ethnicity, ethnicity and the Hebrew Bible, ethnogenesis, Israelite ethnicity.

Introduction

Recent years have witnessed the rise of studies analyzing ethnic dynamics within biblical documents. As with other areas of focus in biblical studies,

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this trend reflects larger developments in the culture of the interpreter, in this case, the increased salience of ethnic identity in modern societies. Increasingly forced to grapple with issues of ethnicity as part of our own experience within a multicultural world, biblical scholars today bring a new set of questions to our investigation of biblical texts.

The Hebrew Bible itself also begs for such investigation. Within the overarching biblical narrative, the 'tribe' Israel consists of twelve 'clans', kinship groups that each trace their ancestry back to one of the sons of Jacob/Israel. The central human character running through this narrative, then, consists of an 'ethnic' group (for issues related to terminology, see Mojola 1998).

This article reviews and analyzes recent studies of Israel's ethnic self-understanding as portrayed in the Hebrew Bible and reconstructed through the use of material remains. After summarizing recent developments in the study of ethnicity, I organize my analysis according to three broad eras of the biblical narrative: pre-monarchic, monarchic, and exilic/post-exilic. Greater attention is given to monographs than article-length works, since the former generally address issues in more depth. A final section summarizes the analysis. A bibliography of representative works concludes the article.

Although the study of Israelite ethnicity intersects with numerous other subjects, this article will focus on works related to ethnicity itself. Hence, it will not deal at any length with studies treating Israel's identity in general (such as Linville 1998), works dealing with the ethnic identity of Israel's ancient neighbors (such as Sadler 2005), nor studies of the organization of Israelite society. I shall engage these and other related subjects only to the degree to which they intersect with the study of ethnicity itself.

Furthermore, throughout this article I shall refer to the people under study as 'Israel' or 'Israelites', even though some scholars contend that no such entity existed in the pre-monarchic period, or even later. The exception to this practice will be specific referents to the people of Judah during the divided monarchy, or after the fall of the northern kingdom.

Defining 'Ethnicity'

Key Themes in the Study of Ethnicity

Overviews of the study of ethnicity are legion. For those seeking an initial orientation to the field, Hutchinson and Smith (1996), and Malešević (2004) present useful theoretical and historical overviews. For helpful surveys by biblical scholars, see Sparks (1998: 1-22) and the writings of Esler. Because of concerns over space, I shall highlight five selected trends and seminal

issues in the ongoing debate over defining and studying ethnicity. I then spend some time defining ethnic identity itself.

1. *Ethnicity is a social activity* (Hall 1997: 25). Traditionally, ethnicity has been understood in essential or 'primordial' terms. That is, ethnic identity was conceived of as a static, objective phenomenon rooted in the stable structures of kinship and culture. What made an ethnic group an ethnic group were the language, customs, and other characteristics shared by group members, but most importantly, the fact of their common descent.

Frederik Barth's introduction to the book *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* (1998: 9-38) changed the debate in this regard. Barth contends that ethnicity becomes defined through the social interaction that occurs between groups as each constructs what it means to be 'one of us' and what it means to be 'one of them'. Groups interact, differences and boundaries become defined, and boundaries must be continually maintained (Duling 2003: 226). In the words of Malešević:

> Ethnicity is not a thing or a collective asset of a particular group; it is a social relation in which social actors perceive themselves and are perceived by others as being culturally distinct collectivities (Malešević 2004: 4).

Barth, therefore, characterized ethnicity as the 'social organization of cultural difference', the subtitle of the volume in which his groundbreaking essay appears (1998).

From this perspective, defining the ethnic identity of a group requires focus on 'the ethnic *boundary* that defines the group, not the cultural stuff that it encloses' (Barth 1998: 15; original italics). Boundaries between groups, from this perspective, should not be thought of as 'walls or barriers but as zones of interaction' (Esler 1997: 128). Group distinctives are therefore 'the product or result rather than…the basis of ethnic differentiation' (Esler 1996: 223).

2. In a related point, *ethnicity is a changing, socially constructed phenomenon*. Once again we must contrast this statement with earlier primordial views. In primordial terms, ethnic identity was conceived of as a given, something unchangeable possessed by a group through time. Though currently out of fashion, variations of such views persist among sociologists working within the sociobiological tradition, and among advocates of identity politics.

As one would expect in our postmodern era, most scholars now understand ethnicity as socially constructed. Through ongoing interaction with others and the self-reflection prompted by such interaction, groups continu-

ally construct and reconstruct who 'we' are and who 'others' are (Barth 1998: 15-16; Jenkins 1994: 199; Malešević 2004: 3). Thus, identity changes as groups encounter new environments and fresh experiences. In fact, as Barth has observed, the ongoing process of boundary definition and maintenance *is* ethnicity. Generally labeled a constructivist approach to ethnicity, perhaps this approach could be better characterized as social 'interactionist'.

For some, this constructivist perspective becomes cast as instrumentalism, a view that sees ethnic identity as purposely formed in order to further social or political agendas (see Mullen 1993, 1997). Further distinctions can be made between instrumentalists and constructivists. Key to the point here, however, is that from either viewpoint, ethnicity is socially constructed.

One additional note warrants mention. The fact that ethnic identity is a changing social phenomenon rather than a 'thing' possessed by a group means that no single configuration of Israel's 'ethnic identity' existed. Rather, attempts to describe Israel's ethnicity must ask, 'How did these people understand themselves, and how were they understood by others in a particular time and place?'

3. *The intensity of ethnic solidarity and the assignment of significance to particular boundary issues are situational*. Ethnic sentiments may remain dormant for significant periods of time until a group's identity or survival comes under threat. At such times, identity becomes intensified and defined over against an external 'other'. In other words, the intensity of ethnic solidarity varies depending on social-historical context.

Furthermore, what particular boundary issues a group regards as important will differ according to setting. A particular accent that distinguishes one group's speech may be important in interaction with a second group, but not with a third. Historical experiences shape what characteristics a group will use to define or not define itself over against others.

4. *The boundary-defining process of ethnic group formation takes place on two levels: aggregative and oppositional*. It is not just the social interaction with outsiders that defines the boundaries of the group, but also the types of internal debate regarding identity that are generated within the group by that interaction. The process, in other words, is a dialectical one.

Hall describes these internal debates regarding self-definition as taking place at two levels: *aggregative* self-definition, meaning who we are in relation to others like us, and *oppositional* self-definition, meaning what we are in opposition to those different from us (1997: 47). Thus, Barth's focus on the boundaries of a group rather than the so-called 'cultural stuff' those boundaries enclose does *not* mean that the 'cultural stuff' should be ignored. In fact, defining these internal characteristics can become the

object of heated debate. Although one often thinks of ethnic conflict taking place between quite different groups, studies show that ethnic conflict often occurs between similar groups, sparked by internal debates over who is truly 'one of us' and who is not.

5. *Ethnic boundaries are permeable*. The fact that boundaries are created that discriminate between social groups does not mean boundaries are impermeable. We can think of any number of common means (marriage, adoption) by which boundaries may be crossed and non-members included in a group. This often takes place through the creation of 'fictive kinship' ties. What concerns researchers are: which areas are permeable, under what conditions, and how boundaries are crossed.

The permeability of ethnic boundaries stems from the situational, dynamic social process of identity formation. Group identity is always being redefined in subtle ways. In the process, boundaries can be opened as well as closed.

Defining 'Ethnic' Identity

Social collectivities are of many kinds (political, racial, religious, etc.). The issues enumerated above are as true of social identity more generally as they are of ethnic identity in particular. What, therefore, distinguishes *ethnic* identity from other forms of social identity? This is no small point. As we shall see in our descriptions of the work of biblical scholars, 'ethnicity' often means no more than 'groupness' or 'group identity'. Furthermore, social scientists have used 'ethnic group' to mean 'minority group', 'nationhood' or 'racial group' (Malešević 2004: 1-2). What is it that makes a group an ethnic group, as opposed to some other form of social collectivity?

Although no definitive definition of an ethnic group exists, a broadly agreed-upon set of descriptors can be used to distinguish an ethnic group. Hutchinson and Smith, drawing upon the work of Schermerhorn, propose the following widely-cited list of ethnic identifiers:

1. a common *proper name*, to identify and express the 'essence' of its community;
2. a myth of *common ancestry*, a myth rather than a fact, a myth that includes the idea of a common origin in time and place and that gives an *ethnie* [ethnic group] a sense of fictive kinship…
3. shared *historical memories*, or better, shared memories of a common past or pasts, including heroes, events, and their commemoration;
4. one or more *elements of common culture*, which need not be specified but normally include religion, customs, or language;

5. a *link* with a *homeland*, not necessarily its physical occupation by the *ethnie*, only its symbolic attachment to the ancestral land, as with diaspora peoples;
6. a *sense of solidarity* on the part of at least some sections of the *ethnie's* population (Hutchinson and Smith 1996: 6-7 [italics original], citing Schermerhorn 1978: 12).

Once again we note that most of the characteristics listed above apply to collectivities other than ethnic groups. For example, a group primarily bound by religious or national commitment would likely share historical memories and a proper name. Thus, although this list isolates common elements of ethnic identity, it does not tell us what sets apart an ethnic group as an *ethnic* group.

The one crucial factor for ethnic identity is a myth of common ancestry. Although this factor is always linked with some of the other characteristics listed above, it is shared ancestry, however fictive, that distinguishes an ethnic group from racial, religious, national, cultural, or other forms of social collectivities. This conclusion remains debated by sociologists and anthropologists. But in light of recent and ongoing research on the subject, simply to equate ethnicity with group identity of any undefined sort will not suffice. In what follows, then, I define the distinctive of ethnic identity as 'perceived common ancestry' (Sparks 2005: 270).

Two further comments are in order. First, collective identity is always a complex matter. Ethnicity, therefore, will always be bound up with other forms of social identity. As a result, isolating specifically ethnic components of identity constitutes a daunting task, especially in an ancient society where social scripts differ markedly from those of modern societies, and for which our sources are limited.

Finally, questions remain about the appropriateness of employing the modern notion of ethnicity to ancient societies. Most scholars, however, regard the organization of human groupings around perceived ties of common ancestry to be a universal human phenomenon. This was likely to be even more true in pre-industrial societies than in modern, urban settings. Therefore, the search for a specific ethnic component to ancient Israel's identity is not without warrant.

Pre-monarchic Era

Having reviewed current trends in the study of ethnicity, we now turn to studies of Israelite ethnicity according to three broad eras of Israelite

history: pre-monarchic, monarchic, and exilic/post-exilic. Any attempt to speak of 'pre-monarchic Israel' involves one in a host of controversial issues in contemporary studies related to the Hebrew Bible. For example, archeological work has demonstrated that new settlements spread throughout the central highlands during the transition from the Late Bronze Age to Iron I (aptly summarized in Dever 1997: 26-30). Scholars remain divided, however, over who these early settlers were, where they came from, and whether or not we can refer to them as 'Israelites'. This debate is usually referred to as one over the 'emergence of Israel' or Israel's 'ethnogenesis'.

Furthermore, disagreement persists regarding the nature of the evidence concerning Israel during this time period. Other than selected material in Judges or 1 Samuel, most scholars working specifically on Israelite ethnicity in the pre-monarchic period regard the biblical narratives portraying this era as late and historically unreliable (see, for example, Mullen [1993, 1997] and Sparks [1998], dealt with below). Although most of these same scholars believe these narratives may contain memories of genuine historical events (such as a memory of some sort of group escaping from Egypt), the historical realities that may lie behind these narratives are believed to be simply too difficult to reconstruct with any confidence.

With textual evidence ambiguous, scholars are left with data assembled from the work of archaeologists. Yet, as we shall see, controversy persists regarding what can and cannot be learned regarding ethnicity from the material remains.

Studies reviewed within this section concern highland settlers within the transition from Late Bronze Age (LBA) to Iron I, roughly the thirteenth to early eleventh centuries BCE. Because archaeological evidence serves as the primary source material for the pre-monarchic period, it is necessary to first present a brief overview of ethno-archaeology before turning to examinations of Israelite ethnicity.

Ethno-archaeology

In many ways, transformations that have taken place within archaeology as a discipline resemble those in the study of ethnicity. These developments carry significant implications for discerning ethnic symbolism in the archaeological record. The following (greatly simplified) description is derived largely from Jones (1997), a key text for gaining an *entrée* into the larger discussion of archaeology and ethnicity. Similar overviews of larger developments within archaeology itself can be found in any introductory textbook on the subject.

Fundamentally, what researchers learn from material remains is rooted in their own conceptions of culture, since such a conceptual framework determines the questions posed or not posed of the evidence. As the dominant understanding of culture within the social sciences has shifted in recent decades, so also have archaeological approaches to material remains.

Jones distinguishes between two basic approaches within archaeology: cultural-historical and processural. The full range of approaches to archaeology is more complicated than this simple division allows, but a basic description of these two approaches will be sufficient for our purposes.

The cultural-historical method assumes that cultures are static, homogenous, and firmly bounded. These entities correspond to particular historical ethnic groups or peoples. Such groups maintained regular internal contact that in turn produced a highly uniform cultural record. Discontinuities in the material remains, therefore, result from physical and social distance between populations. Thus, one can measure social 'distance' between past groups by the degrees of similarity or dissimilarity among material remains. From this perspective, cultures or people groups appear almost as tectonic plates—distinct, largely unchangeable masses that occasionally bump into one another. The concern within this approach is to identify when and where particular cultural 'plates' existed (Jones 1997: 24-25).

Although it was dominant during the middle of the last century, the cultural-historical approach began to be displaced during the early 1960s by what became known as 'processural' or 'new' archaeology. Processural approaches view past cultures as complex social systems involving economic, political, ideological, environmental and social factors. Rather than static or bounded phenomena, cultures become defined and maintained through interaction with other groups (Jones 1997: 26-29). The contrast with the cultural-historical approach is stark.

Within processural approaches, in order to understand social groups one has to investigate the dynamic web of phenomena, including ethnicity, that constitute culture as well as the manner in which cultural systems evolve. Both continuities and discontinuities must be examined through time. In many cases, all of this must be ascertained on the basis of material remains. The task for the archaeologists becomes not just locating remains in time and space, but also determining how these remains functioned in their changing socio-cultural-historical context.

In summary, we could say that 'cultural-historical' approaches are descriptive. They are concerned with empirical observations and descriptions of remains. Processural archaeology, on the other hand, is more interpretive. It goes further by asking what these remains tell us about the

complex and changing social relations of the peoples who produced them. If cultural-historical archaeologists ask 'when' and 'where' questions, researchers working within processural paradigms also focus on 'how' a culture functioned and 'why' it took the shape it did through time.

The ascendance of this more complex understanding of culture and material remains greatly complicated scholars' understanding of the relationship between material culture and ethnicity. In contrast to the cultural-historical approach, Jones writes that one can now 'rarely' posit 'a one-to-one correlation between cultural similarities and differences, and ethnic groups' (1997: 28). Citing Hodder (1982), Jones concludes that:

> the kinds of material culture involved in ethnic symbolism can vary between different groups, and that the expression of ethnic boundaries may involve a limited range of material culture, whilst other material forms and styles may be shared across group boundaries (1997: 28).

In their work on pig bones, Hesse and Wapnish (1997) offer an illuminating illustration not only of this transition in perspective, but also of the complex relationship between material remains and ethnicity within a processural approach. They note that within a cultural-historical perspective, an absence of pig bones at an archaeological site has generally been regarded as indicating the presence of Israelites. In other words, pig bones serve as an 'index fossil' revealing the presence or absence of Israelites at that site during the period under investigation.

Hesse and Wapnish contend, however, that 'the linkage between all types of social identities and material culture items is simply too complex for such a straightforward methodology' (1997: 239). In order to understand the significance of pig remains at a site, one must rather understand the complex 'political economies' involved in pig husbandry. In order to do so, they propose what they call 'pig principles', a series of comparisons that provide a means to examine the complex variables in which pigs were or were not raised. Here we can only offer a sampling of these principles.

- Pigs were more likely to be raised in wetlands rather than dry places and among settled people rather than mobile communities. Yet, wide variations of pig production occur even within these variables.
- Where grain production was important, conditions favored cattle and goats over sheep and pigs.
- Pig production was a method of local subsistence, reducing the producer's dependence on urban markets. Where rural and urban markets were more intertwined, swine production declined.

- Pig husbandry tended to take place among new arrivals to a region. As economic prospects rose, sheep and cattle assumed greater significance.
- The presence of pig remains varies according to the economic status of the household. In some cases, pig bones are more likely found among lower class dwellings, while in other locations they appear among the wealthy.

Hesse and Wapnish conclude: 'It is evident that there is no clear singular relationship that ties either pig bone abundance or its absence to social identity that we can use as a marker, because other factors can produce similar effects' (1997: 253). In other words, the complexity of the culture that produced the material remains, not to mention the multifaceted nature of ethnic identity, greatly complicates that task of linking archaeological evidence with a particular social identity.

Nevertheless, numerous studies (as we shall see below) continue to link artifacts with ethnic identity in a fairly straightforward manner. For a popular, though informed, presentation of the relevance of pig bones for determining ethnic identity that differs from Hesse and Wapnish, see Finkelstein and Silberman (2001: 119-20).

Pre-monarchic Israelite Ethnicity: The Optimists

Having surveyed recent developments in ethno-archaeology, I now turn to treatments of Israelite ethnicity during the pre-monarchic era. As specified above, these studies concern highland settlements that arose during the transition from the LBA to Iron I. I shall categorize these studies as optimistic or agnostic, depending on their evaluation of whether or not evidence permits a judgment on this issue. I will also devote added space to Killebrew's description of the origins and physical characteristics of these settlements (2005), since these issues form the backdrop for the other studies under consideration in this section.

Killebrew's ambitious monograph (2005) examines four major peoples who play significant roles in the biblical narrative—Egyptians, Canaanites, Philistines, and early Israel—during the transition from LBA to Iron I. As the title indicates, Killebrew focuses on 'ethnic' identity for each of these peoples. Although her work is interdisciplinary and makes use of biblical materials as well as contemporaneous non-biblical texts, Killebrew relies primarily on archaeological evidence. She confidently states that 'ethnicity in its diverse manifestations can be identified under certain circumstances in the archaeological record' (2005: 2). She defines ethnicity as 'group

identity' (8), a definition she acknowledges as approaching 'the concept in its broadest meaning' (9). She does little more to expand upon it, other than stating it 'is a dynamic and ongoing process of interaction or ethnogenesis…that can take place on many levels between various groups of people' (9).

In her chapter on Israel, Killebrew first reviews the textual evidence related to Israel's origins and presence in the land of Canaan. She regards the Exodus narrative as reflecting collective memory of Egyptian occupation and enslavement of Canaan during the thirteenth to twelfth centuries BCE, rather than an account of an actual departure of a group of people from Egypt itself. The conquest narrative of Joshua must be regarded as historically suspicious, in Killebrew's evaluation, though she notes that both Joshua and Judges portray Israel as a non-indigenous group distinct from the native Canaanites (153-54). Among non-biblical texts, she cites the Merneptah (or 'Israel') stele, an Egyptian victory stele commemorating Pharaoh Merneptah's triumphant military campaigns, which mentions a people named 'Israel' in this region. Though not all scholars agree (see Sparks 1998: 95-109 for a survey of opinion), a majority understand this as a dated marker (*circa* 1207 BCE) testifying to the existence of some sort of group known as 'Israel' in the general area of Canaan at this time.

Killebrew chronicles archaeological evidence demonstrating major changes in settlement patterns throughout Canaan and, in particular, a marked increase in small villages in the central highlands during this time. On the basis of her survey of archaeological work on these highland sites, she identifies the following as typical of these settlements, characteristics that others have noted as well:

> villages are characterized by modest numbers of domestic structures, usually a version of the three- or four-room pillared house; few, if any, public structures or fortifications; a proliferation of silos; the appearance of cisterns and agricultural terraces; absence of pig bones; paucity of burials; and, most notably, a very limited repertoire of utilitarian ceramic containers that continue the tradition of Late Bronze Age pottery shapes (2005: 157).

For Killebrew, these factors represent a distinct material culture that, when considered together with textual evidence, can be regarded as 'Israelite'.

Killebrew's main concern lies with Israel's ethnogenesis during this era. She contends that 'Israel' in this era can only be understood in the context of regional developments. The decline of LBA empires, especially Egyptian imperial hegemony over the eastern Mediterranean, resulted in a social and political fragmentation that allowed for the development of more kinship-

based societies. In particular, these changes allowed for greater movement of indigenous Canaanite populations. This accounted for the migrations of urban dwellers into the central highlands and, thus, the rapid growth of new settlements. Killebrew concludes that what became known as Israel gradually emerged during the infiltration of diverse peoples into these highland areas (Killebrew 2005: 37-42, 184-85).

She characterizes these origins as coming from 'mixed multitudes', a point she seems to think is original, though Miller and Hayes proposed the same concept in 1986. She defines 'mixed multitude' as 'a collection of loosely organized and largely indigenous, tribal, and kin-based groups whose porous borders permitted penetration by smaller numbers from external groups' (2005: 184). Among these people, she envisions native Canaanites, displaced peasants, lawless *apîru* (see Lemche 1992a), possible runaway slaves from Egypt, and others who became part of Israel's ethnogenesis. These people congealed around the epic narrative of an escape from slavery to a promised land of salvation and the worship of 'the Israelite God, Yahweh' (2005: 184). She offers no details, however, about how this took place, why it happened, or what the resulting group looked like in ethnic terms.

Killebrew is a seasoned field archaeologist. The conceptual breadth of her work plus her thoroughgoing familiarity with material evidence makes the book a worthy contribution to discussions of Israel's emergence during this early time period. Her argument, however, deals more with constructing a plausible scenario in which a new social collectivity could emerge in the highland areas than in demonstrating something particularly ethnic about this group's identity. Furthermore, she is able to claim an Israelite ethnic identity only by conflating 'group identity' with 'ethnic identity'. What specifically makes these people an 'ethnic' group she does not establish. Finally, as we shall see below, claims that these settlements reveal a distinct material culture are highly contentious.

Like Killebrew, Dever brings a wealth of field experience to the task of analyzing material remains. In a series of articles and books, Dever demonstrates numerous similarities in approach to that of Killebrew, sharing her optimism about linking material remains with ethnic identity. He writes, 'ethnic traits and ethnic consciousness can be recognized in material culture remains' (1993: 23*). Furthermore, and again like Killebrew, he contends that we can know almost nothing of this era from biblical texts, though he finds the archaeological record indicates a social-economic system that looks much like that depicted in the book of Judges. Thus, also like Killebrew, Dever asserts that what can be known must be learned through

the material remains. Finally, both Dever and Killebrew invest ceramics, especially the collared-rim jar, with great significance (see Dever 1995b).

I draw the following largely from Dever (1993). Though this is an early work, the basic interpretation offered by Dever here is largely repeated through subsequent works. For a full recent statement, see Dever (2003: 191-221).

Dever contends that in the twelfth century BCE, an ethnic group distinct from the Canaanites and Philistines can be identified in the archaeological remains (1993: 24*). Furthermore, on the basis of the Merneptah stele, he argues that such a group had existed since the thirteenth century. Finally, the material culture of these 'Israelites' stands in continuity with that of the 'Israelites' under the monarchy. On these bases, Dever concludes that, in spite of differences that may have existed between the earlier and later 'Israels', this earlier group can rightfully be regarded as 'progenitors' of biblical Israel (1993: 24*). In one of the distinctives of his approach, he labels them 'proto-Israelites'.

According to Dever, these people originated from Canaanite stock and had moved from urban areas to the highlands out of economic necessity. At some point, as a result of changes that took place over time as they adapted to their new environment, and as a 'motley' assortment of other marginal peoples joined them, a new group identity emerged that set them apart from their Canaanite neighbors.

Dever makes a number of troubling claims about our ability to detect 'consciousness', ethnic or otherwise, on the basis of material remains (1997: 42). For example, he claims these proto-Israelites could distinguish themselves from Canaanite 'consciousness' (1993: 30*). Furthermore, he contends that the original movement of urban Canaanites to the highlands was not motivated by ideology or 'Yahwistic fervor' (1993: 25*). On the other hand, he also states that we can know 'very little' about 'perceptions of self-identity' among the proto-Israelite settlers. He concludes, 'At best, we may be able to ascertain some of what people actually did, but not what they thought they were doing, much less whom they thought they were' (1995b: 207). How Dever reconciles these conflicting claims, or how he supports his ability to discern motives and 'consciousness', he does not say (for a similar critique on this point, see Skjeggestad 1992: 179 n. 50).

Dever, again like Killebrew, provides an inadequate theoretical basis for his contentions about Israelite ethnicity during this period. Although he cites the work of Barth (1998), he makes little use of it. At one point, Dever speaks of how the 'proto-Israelites' distinguished themselves from other Canaanites by farming technology, socio-economic structures, and 'con-

sciousness' (again, how does Dever know the last factor?). He writes, 'If, as our "Proto-Israelites", they thought themselves different, then they were: that is what "ethnicity" means' (1993: 30*). Unfortunately for Dever, the archaeological evidence does not tell us if they thought of themselves as different or not. Furthermore, Dever himself acknowledges that the kinds of evidence required to talk about ethnicity 'have disappeared from the archaeological record' (1992b: 54). Finally, even if they did understand themselves as 'different', there are many ways a group can think of itself as distinct from another besides ethnic ones. Dever stands on better ground when he refers to twelfth-century 'Israel' having a general sense of 'peoplehood' (1992b: 60). Yet, in a related problem, he claims that ethnicity is the same thing as peoplehood (1997: 42). It appears that for both Killebrew and Dever, their generalized definitions of ethnicity allow them to claim a distinct 'ethnic' identity for the inhabitants of the central highlands during this era, when the evidence only supports a more limited description of people with a common material culture. The 'ethnicity' Dever claims to have found seems more asserted than demonstrated.

In contrast to Killebrew and Dever, Bloch-Smith contends that the search for Israel in the late thirteenth- and twelfth-century central highlands stands at an 'impasse' (2003: 402). In her view, all the typical features used to argue for Israelite ethnicity in this period—the pillared or four-room house, the 'collared-rim' jar, and abstinence from pork—have been shown to be without foundation. None can be 'conclusively identified as exclusively "Israelite" or as distinguishing "Israelites" from neighboring peoples' (406). Furthermore, these remains cannot be linked to later 'Israelite' culture under the monarchy. Material continuities with later remains do not begin until the eleventh or tenth centuries BCE.

Bloch-Smith contends that the problem with previous work, which she particularly identifies with Dever and with Finkelstein's 1988 study, lies in their use of a 'Culture Area' approach to ethno-archaeology. By her description, this approach identifies an *ethnos* on the basis of a set of cultural traits shared by people in a particular area, a characterization that sounds much like Jones's description of the 'cultural-historical' approach. Bloch-Smith contends that this approach has difficulties distinguishing ethnic features from other aspects of culture. In addition, this perspective has trouble incorporating changes in cultural traits through time. Further work on the issue, therefore, must rely on new methodology.

In response, Bloch-Smith brings together multiple means of analysis in order to detect what…she sees as 'faint traces…of Iron I Israelite' ethnicity (2003: 425). These methods include use of a 'Meaningful Boundaries'

approach to ethnicity, an emphasis on the role of collective memory in the process of ethnogenesis, and an integration of biblical and archaeological evidence that she calls a 'Tell-Tale' approach to ethno-archaeology.

Rather than simply examining differences between groups in general, a 'Meaningful Boundaries' approach asks which boundaries a people regards as meaningful for distinguishing themselves from other groups. Some dissimilarities may carry no import at all. Thus, this approach looks for those differences invested with significance by the group itself (Bloch-Smith 2003: 412).

Bloch-Smith also recognizes that ethnic groups arise out of shared interests between peoples, typically political or economic. In this process, in order to 'define and legitimate itself', the new group 'asserts' a fabricated common ancestry and a shared culture (2003: 403). These become projected onto the past, contributing to a collective memory for the group. Over time, a group will meld with other groups, incorporating stories of origins and kinship from both groups into a blended single story.

Both primordial and circumstantial traits serve vital roles within collective memory and group definition. Primordial features are part of the way things simply are and have been from the beginning. Such characteristics include kinship, religion, or a memory of a former unity. Circumstantial features arise in response to changed situations such as shifting relations with neighboring groups. These developments change the shape of a group's identity over time, as well as its boundary definitions.

Bloch-Smith's 'Tell-Tale' integration of biblical evidence with archaeology forms a central pillar of her work. Biblical texts offer evidence of traits regarded as meaningful at some point in Israel's history. Biblical texts, however, remain notoriously difficult to date. Archaeology, on the other hand, cannot determine the significance of traits appearing in the material remains, but it can provide means of dating some traits that have been tagged as significant by biblical evidence. So, even though Bloch-Smith regards the biblical narratives as products of the exilic era, she believes they contain remnants of ancient material that can in some cases be dated by archaeology.

A 'Tell-Tale' approach also asks two questions. We will use these questions to recount Bloch-Smith's reconstruction of the early Israelite *ethnos*. First, regarding early Israel, 'What primordial features or "common heritage" unified the *ethnos*?' (2003: 420). Bloch-Smith identifies worship of the god 'El', along with a sense of kinship, as distinctive features of this early era.

The second question asks, 'What circumstantial features including shared interests fostered the formation of ethnic Israel?' (2003: 421). In

Bloch-Smith's view, the key for answering this question lies in seeing the Philistines as the primary people over against whom early Israelite identity took shape. Both biblical and archeological evidence supports cultural and material distinctions between these peoples. Earlier scholars made the mistake of trying to distinguish early Israel from the Canaanites, a task doomed from the beginning, since cultural differences between the two are not supported by the material record.

Material remains provide evidence of Philistine movement from the coastal plains inland, beginning in the twelfth century BCE. Bloch-Smith contends that antagonism between early Israelite groups and the encroaching Philistines 'fueled ethnic affiliation' from this early era through the beginnings of the monarchy, perhaps out of the need to muster an army to counter the militarily superior aggressors (2003: 421). Such a scenario fits the evidence of Judges and 1 Samuel.

Furthermore, textual and material remains point toward meaningful differences between Israel and the Philistines. These include circumcision, short beards rather than clean-shaven faces, and abstention from pork. Although these traits may not have been unique to Israel, they nevertheless formed meaningful boundaries, setting Israel apart from the Philistines. Thus, Bloch-Smith contends that 'traces of the Iron I Israelite *ethnos* are discernible in material remains interpreted in conjunction with biblical testimony' (2003: 425).

Bloch-Smith displays a much more sophisticated understanding of ethnicity than Dever or Killebrew. Above all, she recognizes the hazards inherent in equating material remains with markers of ethnic identity. Yet, in turning to biblical materials for help, one wonders how she can be so confident that texts she dates in the exilic period contain reliable data regarding Israelite identity from such an earlier time. Furthermore, one must also ask on what basis she is certain that she can isolate such information.

What is disturbing about Bloch-Smith's work are her unsubstantiated assertions about evidence. For example, Bloch-Smith does not specify where she finds the biblical evidence for the distinctive Israelite traits she lists. As Collins has noted, only circumcision appears in biblical narratives about the Philistines. Biblical injunctions concerning beards and pork appear only in Leviticus and Deuteronomy; and even then, no instructions appear regarding short beards, nor is pork singled out as significant from a list of prohibited meats (Collins 2005: 44-45). Furthermore, in support of her contention that material continuities with monarchic Israel do not begin until the eleventh or tenth centuries (2003: 411), Bloch-Smith cites only evidence from Dever (1995b: 206-10) and Finkelstein (1988: 332). But in the cited article, Dever

claims that the continuities begin earlier (1995b: 210); and Finkelstein's remarks on the cited page concern population figures.

Like several other biblical scholars working on this subject, Pitkänen (2004) reviews the six characteristics of ethnic groups specified by Hutchinson and Smith (1996), cited above. Pitkänen proceeds to collect biblical evidence regarding Israel that fits within each of these categories. Although he recognizes the disputed dating of biblical texts, he contends that the amount of evidence at least presents the possibility of a 'distinctive Israelite identity and the existence of ethnic boundaries' during the LBA–Iron I transition period (2004: 174). Potential boundaries include being called an 'Israelite', belief in physical descent from the patriarchs, an exodus from Egypt, an egalitarian ideology, certain food restrictions such as a pork taboo, male circumcision, and a solidarity with other Israelites. Pitkänen suggests that such early Israelite ethnicity could have come about through a group of slaves who escaped from Egypt and made their way to Canaan. Called by the name 'Israel' and bearing the characteristics outlined above, their company grew as individual Canaanites joined the group and became assimilated to Israel's beliefs and practices.

Pitkänen offers his model for the development of Israel's early ethnic identity and emergence in Canaan as one possible explanation for how these processes happened. In the current context of contemporary studies of the Hebrew Bible, however, Pitkänen's thesis requires a more thorough defense for the dating of the biblical evidence he gathers. Furthermore, in spite of a demonstrated awareness of theories of ethnicity, he mistakenly identifies any characteristic he finds in the Bible that matches a category in Hutchinson's and Smith's list as a sure sign of an ethnic boundary. Bloch-Smith's 'Meaningful Boundaries' approach represents a more defensible understanding of the nature of the evidence.

Pre-monarchic Israelite Ethnicity: The Agnostics (or Pessimists)

Killebrew's and Dever's optimism about an ethnic Israel in the pre-monarchic era places them at one end of a spectrum of opinion. Other scholars contend that the nature of the evidence at our disposal provides an insufficient basis on which to make a reliable decision on the matter, while one of the scholars reviewed below qualifies as a fully convinced pessimist on the issue.

Edelman's 1996 essay cites insufficient and indefinite evidence as the reason for thoroughgoing pessimism on the subject of pre-monarchic ethnicity. According to Edelman, potential textual evidence for Israelite ethnicity consists of biblical material, especially Joshua and Judges, plus

the Merneptah Stele. Edelman concludes that Joshua and Judges offer no assistance, since we are unable to determine with certainty what traditions contained in those books actually predate the monarchy. The Merneptah stele offers likely evidence that Israel existed as some sort of entity in the LBA, yet we can draw no conclusions regarding its precise location or nature.

Regarding artifactual evidence, Edelman examines pottery, architecture, site layout, diet, aniconism, social organization, and burial practices as markers of ethnic identity. According to Edelman, two factors preclude our ability to draw conclusions from this evidence. First, because we cannot positively locate Israelite territory, we cannot draw definitive conclusions about what sites offer us distinctive evidence of Israel. Furthermore, we cannot be sure that, even if we could locate known Israelite settlements, the remains would provide us with evidence of distinctive characteristics over against its neighbors. Thus, the opening statement of Edelman's essay offers her stark evaluation, 'Given the present state of textual and artifactual evidence, nothing definitive can be said about the ethnicity of premonarchic Israel' (1996: 25).

Finkelstein, whose groundbreaking *The Archaeology of the Israelite Settlement* (1988) provided the first thorough documentation of the new highland settlements, has changed his mind on the issue of Israelite ethnicity in this period, on the basis of a more nuanced understanding of ethnicity. In his 1988 monograph, he speaks quite confidently of the settlers as 'Israelites', a position argued on territorial (reading Israelite boundaries of Iron II back into Iron I) and socioeconomic grounds (these settlements are completely new) (1997: 221). He offers no substantiation for his designation of these people on the basis of theories of ethnicity or social identity.

His 1996 and 1997 articles, however, display a wide-ranging familiarity with literature on ethnicity. He states that ethnic lines are 'fluid, flexible, and changeable' (1997: 217). Quoting Peterson Royce (1982: 17), he notes that ethnic identity takes its 'form and content from the give and take of human behavior' (1997: 218). As such, tracing such boundaries even in contemporary societies, let alone ancient ones, has proved difficult.

Finkelstein (1997) then reviews the common types of material evidence typically used to indicate a specifically Israelite ethnicity in these settlements: pottery, architecture, and foodways. In each case, he concludes that while at times each of these factors *may* signal ethnicity in archaeological records, in the case of Iron I sites they offer no evidence for a distinctive ethnic identity.

In an article-length response to Finkelstein's 1988 monograph, Skjeggestad (1992) also critiques the equation of material culture with a particular ethnic Israelite identity. Skjeggestad quickly gets to the heart of the issue when he asks 'whether and how it is archaeologically possible to identify, distinguish and "observe" ethnic groups in the Second Millennium BC world' (1992: 168). As Finkelstein does in his later works, Skjeggestad emphasizes the difficulties involved in this task. Although archaeologists have traditionally used similarities and differences in material remains to detect different ethnic groups, any number of reasons can be given for differences among remains. A single ethnic group may display considerable internal cultural variation because of socio-economic, climactic or regional reasons, among others. At the same time, different ethnic groups may share a common material culture. In other words, similarities and differences within groups, as well as between groups, can have multiple explanations. Skjeggestad concludes, 'it is archaeologically impermissible…to attribute the characteristics of the central hill country settlements to one specific Israelite ethnic population group, claiming that the social and cultural features of the hill country are identical with *Israelite* culture' (1992: 185; emphasis original).

Drawing upon the anthropological work of T.H. Eriksen (1993), Brett (2003) contends that 'Israel' began as an ethnic 'network' among the indigenous population of the hill country. An ethnic network consists of informally linked groups, as opposed to an ethnic 'community', that share some territory and formal central organization. He cites, for example, the evidence of the Merneptah stele as pointing to 'an ethnic group with a low degree of incorporation…within Canaan' (2003: 406-407). How Brett can detect the level of organization of the group referred to on the stele he does not say. He stands on firmer ground later in the article when he claims merely that the stele affirms that a group named 'Israel' did exist at that time (407).

Brett builds his case for an Israelite ethnic entity on three factors. First, a god YHWH, who does not belong to the Canaanite pantheon, appears to be the object of worship for 'Israelites' from an early time. Second, Amos 2.10 and 3.1-2 point to early evidence for some sort of story of an exodus from Egypt linked to the actions of YHWH. Finally, he finds plausible the idea that absence of pig bones in Iron I sites in the Cis-jordan highlands, in contrast with their presence in the contemporary Transjordan highlands, as well as earlier settlements in the Cis-jordan, indicates a 'pig taboo' that points to a distinct social grouping. On these bases, Brett contends that 'Israel' emerged from other Canaanite peoples through a gradual 'fissure', eventually seeing itself opposed to other groups sometime during the Iron II period.

Finally, Thompson (1992, 1997, 1999) regards any attempt to identify an 'Israel' somehow consonant with the biblical presentation of Israel in the pre-exilic era, let alone pre-monarchic era, as futile. According to Thompson, 'biblical' Israel is a pure literary fiction, created in the Persian era period or later.

Evaluation

Our long trek through studies of possible ethnic factors in the pre-monarchic era reveals two consistent areas of dispute. A first set of questions concerns sources at our disposal. Most scholars date the biblical narratives depicting this period as late, though most regard them as containing earlier traditions. Yet, attempts to date these traditions have produced little if any widespread agreement. Furthermore, although archaeologists can learn much from material remains, in most cases little reliable information can be gathered from these data about the ethnic identity of the people who produced these artifacts. Bloch-Smith recognizes that we need both material remains and written texts in order to make judgments about peoples' perceptions of identity, but her approach has not fully resolved the difficulties involved in dating biblical traditions. We cannot determine how and when a group began to develop a distinctive 'Israelite' identity over against their neighboring peoples, and to define the particular contours of that identity based upon the sources currently at hand. As we shall see, these difficulties also characterize work on later eras in Israelite history.

A second set of issues centers on the need to employ a more refined understanding of ethnicity. At this juncture, scholars often conflate ethnicity with 'groupness' of any kind. In light of the amount of attention devoted to defining and analyzing ethnicity in social-science literature over the last few decades, biblical scholarship should provide more nuanced understandings of ethnicity. Although a more exacting definition of ethnicity will make the task of locating such an ethnic Israel more difficult, unless such a task is undertaken, the term 'ethnicity' is largely meaningless.

Monarchic Era

In contrast to the pre-monarchic and exilic/post-exilic eras about which studies of ethnicity abound, few scholars have studied Israelite ethnicity in the monarchic period. The major exception remains Sparks's revised doctoral dissertation, *Ethnicity and Identity in Ancient Israel* (1998). Sparks's project entails an analysis of Israelite ethnicity from its dim pre-monarchic manifestations through the post-exilic era, but he devotes the bulk of his

attention to the period of the monarchy. For this reason, his work serves as a suitable transition between the two eras most studied in this regard.

The detail with which Sparks reconstructs Israelite ethnicity during different historical periods precludes a full retelling of his thesis point by point. I shall provide an overview of his argument, first examining his treatment of theoretical and methodological issues, then turning to his reading of texts and reconstructions of ethnic identity.

Theory and Method

Sparks demonstrates a theoretical sophistication found in few other treatments of the issue. In terms of theory, he maintains a firm grasp on the complex, socially constructed nature of ethnic identity, as well as on the difficulties such an understanding creates for discerning ethnic components of identity in ancient texts. In particular, he displays a sensitivity to the complicated interrelationship of ethnic identity with other forms of identity. Thus, the book title and several chapter titles read, 'Ethnicity *and* Identity'.

The theories of Wallerstein and van den Berghe play particularly significant roles in Sparks's argument. Wallerstein (1979) argues that ethnic identity begins or intensifies in contexts where 'peripheral' groups exist under domination of a more powerful 'core' civilization (Sparks 1998: 21). Van den Berghe proposes that ethnicity forms as a natural extension of kinship. Groups work to incorporate new members, deliberately extending 'natural affiliations of kinship beyond the immediate family' to others (Sparks 1998: 329).

In terms of defining ethnicity itself, Sparks contends that what distinguishes ethnic social identity from other overlapping forms of identity is perceived genealogical links among group members. Sparks, therefore, defines the role of ethnicity in his project as follows:

> we are researching ethnic kinship when it serves as: (1) a concept of sociocultural integration ('*we* are the children of Abraham'); (2) as a tool for sociocultural delimitation ('*they* are not children of Abraham'): and (3) as a model for explaining the origins of other peoples ('*they* are the children of Lot') (1998: 3; emphasis original).

In terms of his overall project, Sparks defines his task in another series of three points, in this case stated as questions:

> (1) What varieties of ethnic sentiment and definition played important roles in ancient Israel's literature? (2) What does the literary discussion tell us about the origin and history of these identities? (3) What roles do other modes of identity (e.g., religious, political, etc.) play in relation to the various conceptions of ethnic identity? (1998: 13).

Regarding methodology, Sparks contends that ethno-archaeology presents too many problems to be used as a primary source for discerning ethnic identity. Therefore, in contrast to the studies of the pre-monarchic era that relied on material remains, Sparks turns to biblical texts to do his work. Furthermore, on the basis of the work of van Seters, *Doktorvater*, Sparks dates the Pentateuch and Deuteronomistic History (Deuteronomy–2 Kings; hereafter DtrH) as post-exilic, claiming that they tell us more about the later period in which they were composed than about the eras and events they supposedly portray. Thus, other than selected passages from Deuteronomy that he regards as pre-exilic, he relies exclusively on material from the prophets that he believes he can reliably date. This decision about dating texts, which many scholars would regard as idiosyncratic, decisively shapes the form of his investigation, as well as its conclusions.

In an opening chapter, Sparks establishes his theoretical moorings with regard to ethnic studies. After a consideration of ethnicity among ancient Israel's neighbors (Neo-Assyria, Egypt, Greece; ch. 2), Sparks proceeds in a chronological manner. He first examines the earliest witnesses to Israelite ethnicity in ch. 3, the Merneptah stele and the Song of Deborah (Judg. 5). He then treats segments of Israel's history in successive chapters. For each segment, he selects passages for analysis that contain information relevant for discerning ethnic sentiments, and that he believes can be reliably dated to this time period. These include selections from the late eighth-century prophets Hosea, Amos, and Isaiah of Jerusalem for the Neo-Assyrian period (ch. 4); portions of Deuteronomy plus Jeremiah for the Judean monarchy (ch. 5); and texts from Ezekiel and Deutero-Isaiah for the exilic era (ch. 6).

Overview

Working in this chronological manner, Sparks traces what he describes as a 'development of Israelite ethnicity from the more simple to the more complex' (1998: 320). Throughout his argument, Sparks labors to show how early and varied traditions become transformed over time in response to changing historical circumstances. In what follows, I will summarize Sparks's construction of this developing Israelite ethnic identity in the four stages mentioned above: early evidence, Neo-Assyrian period, Judean monarchy, and exilic era.

Both the Merneptah stele and the Song of Deborah point to an entity known as Israel. The sparse evidence from the stele, however, prevents us from drawing any firm conclusions regarding the nature of this 'Israel'. On the other hand, the Song of Deborah posits distinct, conflicting enti-

ties known as Israelites and Canaanites, as well as a religious identity for Israel entailing devotion to YHWH. Although details are wanting, Sparks concludes that such factors hint at early ethnic identity, which Sparks dates to no later than the ninth century.

The eighth-century prophets presuppose existing ethnic identity in the form of ancestor traditions (Jacob) and a migration tradition (exodus from Egypt). Sparks claims these factors amount to the first firm evidence of developed ethnic sentiments. The details and salience of such identity, however, vary between the north and south, and from prophet to prophet. For example, Hosea and his 'proto-Deuteronomic community' sought to intensify ethnic sentiments in favor of a religious, 'mono-Yahwistic' national agenda that rejected all other gods as foreign (1998: 322). In this rejection of foreignness, religious identity plays a stronger role than ethnic identity, and YHWH assumes the role of a national god. Sparks declares this outlook to be a distinctively northern means of construing ethnic identity, since Hosea does not apply his message to Judah, and the southern prophets Amos and Isaiah uphold a more universalistic outlook. Isaiah, for example, presents no polemic against foreign gods, but proclaims that YHWH rules over all the nations and their gods as the universal king. In other words, YHWH is far more than just a national god. Furthermore, both Isaiah and Amos emphasize socioeconomic aspects of identity, proclaiming YHWH's coming judgment on account of prevalent injustice. On these bases, Sparks judges ethnic sentiments to have played an important role in the writings of all three prophets, though to a much lesser extent in the south. In each region, however, ethnic identity is overshadowed by other types of identity, whether religious, political or socioeconomic.

Finally, Sparks believes that Isaiah formulated this theology in the context of the threat of Assyrian imperial claims of universal rule. This accords with Wallerstein's theory that ethnic identity takes shape among 'peripheral' people in response to imperial rule from a 'core' civilization.

Sparks proposes that after the fall of the northern kingdom, proto-Deuteronomic refugees from the north composed early portions of Deuteronomy with a view to promoting their 'mono-Yahwistic' agenda in the south, and to using this ethnic-religious sentiment to foster northern-southern unity. The latter would ensure their own security as sojourners in the land. Drawing upon van den Berghe (1981), Sparks proposes that these northerners promoted a 'brother theology' through Deuteronomy by claiming that all were of the same essential ethnic brotherhood of Yahwists, with a common heritage in the Exodus. All are welcome into this 'family' provided they embrace Yahwism. Sparks finds little in his

selected texts from Deuteronomy that indicates specifically ethnic boundary markers. In his view, condemnations were directed against foreign practices, not foreign people (Sparks 1998: 233).

Sparks contends that only during the exilic period do ethnic sentiments come to the fore. Two threats to the exilic community fostered a heightened sense of ethnic identity. First, the danger of assimilation was met by 'a new set of ethnic indicia' found primarily in the Holiness Code of Leviticus. These indicia include Sabbath observance, circumcision, and an emphasis on ritual purity (1998: 314). The second threat, possible loss of ancestral land, provoked a concern for recording proper kinship ties so that links with the land could be maintained. Such a phenomenon can be seen in the books of Ezra-Nehemiah. At this point, Sparks sees the exilic community adopting or inventing the Abraham traditions in order to secure their right to the homeland. Thus, both the new ancestor traditions and the Holiness Code regulations provided strong ethnic boundaries for the group.

Deutero-Isaiah, which Sparks dates to later in the exilic era, demonstrates much more openness to outsiders. In contrast to the rigid boundaries between Israelites and foreigners of the Holiness Code, Deutero-Isaiah welcomes all foreigners to 'accept Yahweh' and join the community (1998: 316). Deutero-Isaiah also provides a much more complete portrayal of Israel's ancestor traditions, speaking of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the Exodus. Sparks interprets this as evidence of a much more detailed and complex understanding of ethnic identity than anything preceding it in the literature he has examined. At the same time, and as with the other works he examines, Sparks sees in Deutero-Isaiah a primary emphasis on religious rather than ethnic identity.

Sparks identifies two strands of ethnic sentiments running from the exile into the post-exilic era. The first begins with Ezekiel and the Holiness Code and continues in the Priestly Code and Ezra-Nehemiah. This strand demonstrates rigid ethnic boundaries. The second runs from Deutero-Isaiah to Trito-Isaiah, and displays less intense ethnic sentiments.

Overall, then, Sparks sees an historical evolution of Israel's ethnic self-understanding moving from simple to more complex. At the same time, Israel's identity remains primarily rooted in religious factors rather than ethnic ones.

Evaluation

Sparks's solid grasp of the theoretical issues surrounding the study of ethnicity shapes his analysis in numerous beneficial ways. For example, he poses appropriate questions of the texts under investigation. He persistently asks whom Israel defines itself over against, and on what basis she

does so. Furthermore, he looks for changes in Israel's ethnic sentiment over time. Finally, he inquires about Israel's ethnicity in the context of other interrelated aspects of Israel's identity. By approaching the issue in such an informed manner and then working his way through the history of Israel, Sparks offers a worthy prolegomena on the subject, as is his aim.

On the other hand, his questionable decisions regarding the dating of texts, especially the Pentateuchal narratives and the DtrH, are unfortunate. As reviewers have noted, Sparks's judgments on dating prevent him from considering other historical reconstructions that would produce a different take on ethnicity during a given period (Stone 2000; Fox 2001). Further work, therefore, is necessary in order to explore interpretative options that fall outside the scope of Sparks's textual framework.

Questions about Sparks's dating scheme can be extended to his decisions regarding passages within individual biblical books. For example, in Hosea, Sparks rules out passages for consideration that he regards as later redactional additions. His detailed historical reconstruction of ethnic sentiments lying behind the text of Hosea rests upon only those texts he judges as early. Even though the texts with which Sparks works are widely regarded as early, his judgments are by no means uncontroversial. In other words, his overall reconstruction rests upon numerous decisions regarding textual details, many of which can be called into question.

Finally, one must also query Sparks's argument that Israelite ethnic identity evolves from the simple to the more complex over time. Do we really have adequate source material to ascertain the simplicity or complexity of Israelite ethnicity in the pre-monarchic era? Furthermore, Sparks believes that the late (in his reconstruction) creation of the Abrahamic narratives, with their details of family origins, confirms his evolutionary hypothesis. After all, he reasons, the more developed foundations for ethnic identity only come late on the scene. Apparently, Sparks does not see the circularity in this argument.

Exilic/Post-exilic Eras

The exilic/post-exilic eras have recently drawn extensive attention in academic circles for several reasons. First, the Israel that survived the trauma of defeat at the hand of the Babylonians, the destruction of the Solomonic Temple, and exile of its leaders to Babylon, came away deeply transformed. In a profound sense, then, a new Israel 'emerged' in these eras.

Furthermore, most scholars date the finalization of the Hebrew Bible to the exilic and post-exilic eras. Thus, it is in some sense a response to

and, therefore, a reflection of the needs of a people and a nation attempting to redefine itself after the trauma of military destruction and exile. Efforts to read the Hebrew Bible in such a context have brought renewed attention to these time periods.

Finally, a small but quite vocal cadre of scholars (e.g., Lemche, Davies, Thompson; see the essays in Grabbe [ed.] 1997) claim that the Hebrew Bible, especially its historical narratives, was created in the post-exilic period in order to address the needs of Persian era Judeans. The 'biblical Israel' portrayed in these narratives is thus a literary fiction meant to serve as part of the collective memory for a newly formulated people. Any 'historical' Israel that we have written records of only exists in the post-exilic era. If one wants to use the biblical narratives to learn about 'historical' Israel, then one must 'mirror-read' these texts in order to discern what they tell us about the time of their composition. Such proposals have opened renewed discussions, often quite vitriolic, about what counts as sources for these eras and the very nature of Israel during these periods. Overall, the debates launched by this radical minority of scholars have raised renewed interest in the study of the exilic/post-exilic times. For an astute analysis of the disputes between these historical 'minimalists', and historical 'maximalists' (such as Dever), see Collins (2005: 27-52). See also the articles by Dever, Lemche, Davies, and Gottwald in *CR:BS*.

In this section, I shall devote the bulk of my attention to three monographs on these eras, giving only brief consideration to a selection of articles. As we shall see, questions of sources and issues of definition plague work on Israelite ethnicity in the exilic and post-exilic eras, just as they troubled scholars of earlier periods.

E. Theodore Mullen, Jr

Mullen's two monographs (1993, 1997) attempt to pioneer a new approach to the DtrH and the Tetrateuch/Pentateuch. Unlike most scholars, Mullen contends that the DtrH was written first by Judahite (his term) exiles in Babylon. After the exile, an elite group installed in temple leadership in Jerusalem by their Persian overlords composed the Tetrateuch (and later Pentateuch) as a 'preface' to the DtrH. Based upon detailed historical reconstructions of the circumstances of both groups, Mullen posits that each collection was created in order to shape a distinct ethnic, religious and political identity for these people within their particular historical milieu. The bulk of each monograph contains Mullen's reading of both sets of literature, analyzing them from the perspective of their function as identity-shaping instruments within these settings.

Our concern lies with Mullen's portrayal of ethnic identity, rather than with the methodological proposals and detailed historical work that form the heart of his books. Nevertheless, his depiction of ethnicity in these writings cannot be divorced from the historical circumstances he posits for their composition. A recounting of his historical arguments will therefore be necessary.

Mullen (1993) argues that the most likely location and dating for the completed form of the DtrH history lies in Babylon with the Judahite exiles, a generation after the fall of Jerusalem (*circa* 550 BCE). The destruction of the Solomonic Temple and deportation of Judah's elite to Babylon produced a deep, multi-faceted crisis among the survivors in exile. Connections with their land, the traditions rooted there, and their dynastic line had all been disrupted. In these circumstances, the threat of cultural assimilation and dissolution as a people loomed large, especially as a generation came of age in Babylon that bore no personal familiarity with their homeland as the context for their ancestral traditions.

Within this scenario, Mullen contends that the author/compiler of the DtrH combined traditional materials with freely invented stories in order to provide this community with a shared history that would define, in conceptual and behavioral terms, their particular boundaries and character as an ethnic community. These stories, therefore, present the exiles in Babylon with a host of 'memories' they can draw upon as part of this historical people in order to reform and preserve their collective identity. In particular, these memories explain the destruction of Judah, and offer a 'blueprint' for Judahite identity in the face of the threat of assimilation (1997: 318). In Mullen's words, the result becomes 'a form of national and ethnic myth, cast in the form of a history' (1993: 284).

The structure of the DtrH serves this purpose well. Deuteronomy presents the ideal, programmatic depiction of Israel's ethnic, religious and cultural distinctiveness, setting forth two key elements that serve as the basis of Israel's identity. First, in contrast to all other nations, Israel stands in a unique relationship with YHWH and must remain exclusively devoted to YHWH. Second, Israel must maintain certain behavioral norms corresponding to the nature of this relationship. One finds these two themes repeated throughout Deuteronomy. For example, in Deut. 4.7-8 (cf. Deut. 4.34; 18.19; 26.16-19), Moses asks,

> For what other great nation has a god so near to it as the LORD our God is whenever we call to him? And what other great nation has statutes and ordinances as just as this entire law that I am setting before you today? (NRSV)

As the key features of Israel's identity, these issues form the crucial boundary markers separating Israel from the surrounding nations.

This portrait of 'Israel' then serves as the 'ideological base' for Joshua–2 Kings (Mullen 1993: 55). For example, the actions of individuals and the nation in the face of new circumstances come to be evaluated against the standard established in Deuteronomy. Thus, Joshua, as successor to Moses, faithfully carries out the commandments found in Deuteronomy and conquers the land. The book of Judges, on the other hand, depicts the dissolution of a united Israel into disparate 'tribes', where each does what is right in its own eyes. Mullen sees this as an illustration of 'the dangers of failing to appropriate and maintain the ethnic boundaries established by Deuteronomy' (1993: 122). Furthermore, the depictions of the character and behavior of other nations serves to illuminate the distinctiveness of Israel. Mullen, for example, sees the point of the 'Ark Narrative' (1 Sam. 4.1–7.1) as illustrating Israel's uniqueness via comparing and contrasting Israelite and Philistine ethnic and religious identities (1993: 190).

Of particular importance for the DtrH is the Davidic monarchy. David serves as the ideal king as specified in Deut. 17.14-20, and his reign as Israel's 'golden age'. Yet, this ideal age has been lost. The rest of the DtrH explains why it was lost and how 'the present community, so apparently separated from that past, might reincorporate and recreate its identity in a new, yet continuous form' (1993: 210). The Davidic king, therefore, plays a central role in Judahite identity.

By these means and others, the Deuteronomic Historian (the author of the DtrH) refines his interpretation of the ideal 'Israel'. The covenant laid out in Deuteronomy was not a static description of Israel's character and behavior; rather, the historical narrative that follows demonstrates how it required 'interpretation and implementation in new situations' (1993: 284). According to Mullen, Israel's experience depicted in such situations in Joshua–2 Kings offered help for the exiles in understanding how to respond in their current circumstances as they looked toward the future. If their current circumstances result from the failure of covenant faithfulness among their ancestors, the situation can only be remedied by a decisive return to the covenant with their God. The restoration of the Davidic kingdom and of this people to their land, therefore, requires renewed devotion to YHWH expressed through obedience to the commands of the covenant.

Although a more complete evaluation of Mullen's work on the DtrH will be given after we have also reviewed his 1997 monograph on the Tetrateuch/Pentateuch, an initial observation is in order. Mullen, like others before

him, conflates ethnicity with other forms of identity. Cultural, national, religious and ethnic identities are typically interwoven, and at times Mullen seems to mistake one for the other. On the surface, the DtrH seems more oriented toward national/political identity and history than toward something specifically ethnic. In order to argue for a particularly *ethnic* nature to the historian's task, one would want to look for stories involving common ancestors such as those found in Genesis. At this point, therefore, we turn toward Mullen's monograph on the Tetrateuch/Pentateuch.

In his second monograph (1997), Mullen argues that the Tetrateuch (Genesis–Numbers) was composed in the post-exilic era by those the Persians 'returned' to Jerusalem. Following Davies (1992) and others, Mullen contends that Persian imperial policy entailed resettling peoples from elsewhere in the empire into strategic cities, Jerusalem among them. A group, possibly made up of descendants of exiled Judeans, possibly not, was moved to Jerusalem in order to further Persian political and economic interests through unifying the local people around a common identity, and through the administration of the rebuilt temple. Persian policy even required some sort of written 'charter' for subject peoples, codifying their laws and recording their history. Mullen contends that Temple scribes, part of these transplanted 'returnees', created the Tetrateuch in order to provide this mix of 'returnees' and native inhabitants with such a 'charter' for a common ethnic identity.

Shared identity and Temple administration were not unrelated, however. If the inhabitants of Judah accepted that they and those in leadership stood in continuity with pre-exilic Judaic kingdoms, this 'fact' helped legitimate Temple administration of the land. Thus, through the creation of the Tetrateuch, these scribes solidified their own power under Persian hegemony.

According to Mullen, as part of its identity-forming function, the Tetrateuch was intended as a supplement to the DtrH. The DtrH, beginning with an extended speech of Moses, makes reference to earlier events and to ancestors. Yet, the DtrH develops neither of these subjects in any manner. The Tetrateuch fills in that missing information in several significant ways by explaining, for instance, the origins of the people 'Israel' and their claim to the land. As a result, the audience knows via historical narrative not only when and where this people came into existence; they also have a myth of ancestry that defines their distinct ethnic origins. At a later time, the two bodies of literature were combined when Deuteronomy was folded into the Tetrateuch by the addition of the death of Moses story at the end of Deuteronomy, creating a work unified largely around the person of Moses. Only at that point can we speak of a 'Pentateuch'. The result of this combination of

DtrH and Tetrateuch was a 'primary history' for the Second Temple community, one that explained events from creation to a time near the auditors' present.

Mullen detects distinct changes in the shape of ethnic identity from the exilic DtrH to the post-exilic Tetrateuch. Such transformations are normal, since changed historical circumstances dictate different cultural patterns and, hence, alternative means of communal identity. Mullen notes, for example, that the DtrH lays great emphasis on the role of the king within Israel, holding out hope for the restoration of the Davidic kingship around which the exiles can identify themselves. Yet, kingship plays no role in the Tetrateuch. Rather, the priestly hierarchy and the sacrificial system of the Tabernacle/Temple serve as central symbols for community identification. According to Mullen, this transformation reflects the stark fact of Persian hegemony over post-exilic Judah. First, Persian rule rendered hope for the restoration of the Davidic kingdom no longer viable. Furthermore, Persian rule elevated the place of the Temple within post-exilic Judah as a means of bolstering its own power.

For Mullen, two elements best illustrate the shape of Israel's identity according to the Tetrateuch. The first concerns the narrative of events at Mt Sinai (Exod. 3.5-22). Here we find YHWH's name is revealed, Moses is commissioned, and the divine plan to deliver YHWH's people from Pharaoh is announced. The results are foundational for all else. Mullen writes,

> For Israel, Yahweh alone is God and responds to his people's cries. Yahweh remembers and upholds his covenant and acts from his holy mount (Sinai/Horeb/Zion) to deliver his people and to settle them in the land of promise, where he will always be with them. Each of these factors constitutes an important element in Israel's identification of itself as a distinct ethnic community created and maintained through its religion. In the accounts of the exodus, what is being presented is the nature of Yahweh and his actions on behalf of his people (1997: 178-79).

Now Israel knows who YHWH is and what YHWH is like. The remainder of the tetrateuchal narrative will develop how Israel will respond to YHWH, as YHWH's people. Both issues constitute essential elements of Israel's ethnic identity.

Second, the sacrificial regulations and institutions found in Leviticus and Deuteronomy indicate the essential role of the priesthood. The purity of the people must be maintained so that the covenantal relationship with YHWH is kept in balance. Purification forms a necessary step for a people called to be a 'kingdom of priests' and a 'holy nation' (Exod. 19.6). Thus,

priestly sacrifices 'constituted the foundation of the communal relationship between Yahweh and his people' (1997: 223). As such, they 'reenvision the configuration of this new ethnicity, "Israel" ' (1997: 321) from that found in the DtrH.

Mullen, therefore, contends that the Tetrateuch casts an alternative, competing vision of identity to that presented in the DtrH. At the same time, however, it claims firm roots in Deuteronomy. While the DtrH picks up on the 'law of the king' (Deut. 17.14-20) and makes kingship central, the Tetrateuch draws upon the priestly, cultic portions of Deuteronomy to shape its vision for the people. In the Tetrateuch, the ritual purity of 'Israel', guaranteed by the proper functioning of sacral institutions, ensures YHWH's presence among them and sets them apart from the surrounding peoples (1997: 321).

Evaluation of Mullen

The substance of Mullen's two-volume work means it requires its own separate evaluation. Mullen skillfully integrates historical, literary and social-science insights into his work. He displays a thorough familiarity with the secondary literature on all fronts, including the function of historical narratives in the formation of communal identity. His broadside against traditional reconstructions of the DtrH and the Tetrateuch is ambitious and well informed, even where one must disagree with his conclusions.

As was the case with Sparks, Mullen's reconstruction of Israel's ethnic identity depends on multiple, detailed historical judgments. Each involves no small amount of mirror-reading of the text, and many would provoke widespread opposition from his colleagues in the academy. To cite but one example of questionable historical reconstruction: would the exilic community really have made kingship central to its self-identity on the basis of Deuteronomy, when Deuteronomy itself actually says so little on the subject? One wonders if his overall thesis can survive, given the many debatable judgments on which it depends. In order to get around this problem, a more fruitful approach might follow Mullen and ask how these texts would have *functioned* in a given setting, but define that setting in a less specific manner. For analyses of Mullen's historical work see, for example, the reviews by Dearman (1995), van Seters (1997) and Pardee (2001).

Earlier, I noted that the DtrH seems more concerned with national and political identity than ethnic identity *per se*. The material of the Tetrateuch, with its emphasis on common biological descent as a means for establishing Israel's identity, places analysis of ethnicity itself on much more solid evidence. Yet, as I noted above, Mullen tends to blend different elements

of identity. Sparks seems more aware of the distinction between different aspects of identity and makes good use of them in his monograph.

Mullen's monographs also serve as a methodological contrast to Sparks's. Sparks works primarily on the basis of prophetic materials, including texts he dates quite early. Mullen, on the other hand, relies on historical narratives and remains firmly agnostic about anything predating the exile. One wonders what role other portions of the Hebrew Bible would play in Mullen's work, should they be included. Mullen promises further work on the 'prophetic corpus' (1997: 58 n. 2), but that work has yet to appear.

R. Christopher Heard

Like Mullen, Heard (2001) places the composition of Genesis in the post-exilic era at the hands of a ruling elite in Yehud (Judah). With regard to Genesis 12–36, he undertakes a twofold task. He first subjects the portrayals of Abraham/Lot, Isaac/Ishmael, Jacob/Esau and Jacob/Laban to a close 'literary-aesthetic reading'. Of particular interest for Heard is how each pairing is characterized by a distinct elect/diselect dichotomy. Furthermore, he traces how the narrator depicts each 'diselect' character ambiguously.

Heard then asks what function these contrasts and ambiguities might have served for the post-exilic elite responsible for the narrative. He concludes that each pair represents the divinely-sanctioned relationship between the immigrant elite (the elect character in the narrative) and their neighbors in Canaan (the diselect). So, for example, Abraham is given a divine, unconditional guarantee of the land of Canaan. The diselection of Lot means that the Ammonites and Moabites, Lot's progeny, are excluded from this promise. Abraham's descendants, therefore, must remain separate from these people by not intermarrying with them (cf. Ezra 9.1; Neh. 13.23-29).

This process continues with Ishmael and Esau. Ishmael represents the Arabs. According to Ezra and Nehemiah, marriages with these people must be terminated through divorce. Esau represents Edom, explaining conflicts that developed between Yehud and Edom. Although each of these diselect characters may be a physical descendant of Abraham, each stands outside the true inheritors of the land on the basis of divine choice.

The one diselect character who does not fit this pattern is Laban. Laban never stands to inherit the land nor is he within Abraham's lineage. Rather, Laban serves as a suitable provider of wives from Mesopotamia. Thus, while marriage to local foreigners remains forbidden, marriage to foreigners from Mesopotamia is not. Heard points out that this stance towards wives from Mesopotamia is similar to that found in Ezra and Nehemiah.

Heard contends that the ambiguities used by the narrator in constructing the diselect characters allows readers to interpret them in either a negative or positive way. Such judgments, however, have no bearing on their diselection, since such exclusion stems solely from a divine decision. Heard argues that this use of ambiguity combined with an emphasis on divine choice only strengthens the narrator's call for elite distinctiveness, since one cannot claim that the diselect characters only 'get what they deserve' (2001: 183). Their status, and the elite's as well, exists by *divine* choice alone.

In summary, Heard asserts that Genesis reveals the power relations operative in post-exilic Yehud. The immigrant elites composed the patriarchal narratives in order to assert their identity as the true Israelites and, therefore, their 'rightful' claim to the land. That identity must be preserved through endogamous marriage. From the perspective of the narrative, such claims cannot be challenged, because they stem from God's own choosing.

Heard's monograph stands within the stream of work placing Genesis within a post-exilic context and positing an instrumental function to the ethnic identity portrayed in its narrative. He is at his best when providing close readings of texts, and demonstrating the ambiguity with which the reader is left—an ambiguity illustrated through his citation of diverging interpretations offered by commentators. Yet, in Heard's reconstruction, the narrator of Genesis makes the case for elite election in a rather indirect manner. One wonders why an elite so concerned to protect its own pure ethnic status would not be more straightforward about the distinctions they sought to make. After all, the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, which Heard is not shy of citing for parallels to his readings of Genesis, are hardly so irenic. Furthermore, as we have observed with Sparks and Mullen, Heard's argument relies on extensive mirror-reading of the text.

Berquist, Kessler, Esler

As with other sections of this study, most attention has been devoted to monograph-length works. A variety of short studies have also appeared, examining different facets of the post-exilic situation in Judah. To these articles we now turn.

Berquist (2006) examines the terms 'Judah' and 'Judeans' in the Persian period. A 'Judean' was apparently someone who had something to do with Judah. But, Berquist asks, 'Who, then, counts as Judean? What criteria can we use to ascertain who is a Judean and who is not? What are the limits of this group, and what kind of group would they be?' (2006: 53). He then examines five different ways in which these questions have been tackled. We shall only review his treatment of 'identity as ethnicity' (54-56).

Berquist first notes that 'scholarship' has generally held identity to be the same as ethnicity. From this perspective (basically, a primordial approach) identity is 'objective', 'innate' and 'inherited' (2006: 54). He continues, 'This position has been the classic assumption of early and modern biblical scholarship' (54). After noting some advantages to this way of thinking, Berquist points out two problems with this approach. First, he regards the application of the modern construct of ethnicity to an ancient society as anachronistic. Second, he contrasts 'racial and ethnic theories of identity' that 'assume a real, obvious, innate, and discernible difference between ethnic groups' with biblical texts of the Persian era that depict identity as 'unclear' and 'always contested' (55). He goes on to assert that, 'a theory of identity that accurately reflects the biblical interests will emphasize that identity is problematic, unobvious, and highly contested' (56). One is hard pressed to think of any scholars who would disagree. So I am not sure what to make of Berquist's charges against biblical scholars and social scientists. Contrary to Berquist's apparent assessment of these disciplines, not all biblical scholars are primordialists, and sociologists and anthropologists clearly recognize the problematic, contested nature of identity.

In a further point, Berquist claims that 'Nehemiah 5.7-8 depicts Nehemiah's perception that the deep divides between different groups in Judah were between kin; *this argues against a primarily ethnic identity*' (55; emphasis added). Why arguments involving kin cannot be about ethnic identity he does not explain. Later, in what Berquist seems to think is an original contribution of his essay, he contends that identities, including ethnic identity, must be conceived of as a process rather than in terms of fixed categories (63). But this perspective has dominated studies of ethnicity since Barth's essay first appeared in 1969. At this stage, Berquist's understanding of ethnicity appears deeply confused.

Berquist asks the right questions of the term 'Judean'. But his inaccurate assessments of biblical and social-science scholarship, his confusion about kinship and ethnic identity, and his lack of familiarity with central trends in the study of ethnic identity confound whatever answers he is trying to provide.

Kessler's 2006 article examines the role of the Golah returnees in the context of the complex landscape of Yahwism in the Persian era. Drawing upon the work of sociologist John Porter (1965), Kessler contends that the Golah group functioned as a 'Charter Group' on behalf of the Persians. A 'Charter Group' is 'an ethnic elite that moves into a geographical region, establishes its power base, and creates a sociological and cultural structure

distinct from the one already existing in that region' (2006: 99). In the case of the Golah returnees, they were an ethnically defined group (based upon connections with the previous rulers of Judah) sent by the Persians to reestablish a community in Jerusalem around a central shrine and worship of YHWH (2006: 106). They carried out this mission under the authority of, and for the benefit of, the Persian Crown. As those in a position of power, they played an important role in shaping the identity of Yahwists in the post-exilic period. Kessler sees this identity taking shape as the elite group emphasized ritual purity (Ezra 6.21), adherence to the Law of Moses, and action against foreign wives. Kessler, following Eskenazi (1992), sees the latter action as an attempt to forbid the movement of land outside of kinship groups (2006: 111).

Esler (2003a) explores Ezra-Nehemiah as a narrative intended to create ethnic identity. Esler relies heavily on Frederik Barth's understanding of ethnicity, and on Stephen Cornell's (2000) work on the role of narrative in the formation and maintenance of ethnic identity. He focuses on the roles of shared history and collective memory. Cornell contends that when people reflect upon their identity, they create or adopt a narrative that expresses important components of what it means to be part of their group. Key stages in this process include selecting events for inclusion, plotting those events in a sequence in which the group plays a central role, and interpreting the significance of those events and their plot for the group's identity. Such a narrative can be changed as new historical circumstances force the group to rethink their place within a new setting. Narratives related to ethnic identity are also tied to issues of power. In-groups will often struggle over the shape of these narratives, since the outcome will determine which group's claims to power receive legitimation (2003a: 415-16).

According to Esler, Ezra-Nehemiah represents the results of one post-exilic group's attempt to reformulate Israel's ethnic identity following the crushing events of destruction, deportation and return. As in Cornell's model, events depicted in Ezra-Nehemiah have been selected, plotted and imbued with significance. Events such as the struggles to build the Temple, the significance of the priesthood (established through genealogies), the emphasis on the people separating themselves from surrounding peoples, and so on, all work to formulate boundaries and establish who within the community rightly possesses power.

Esler is an astute student of social identity in general and ethnicity in particular. Although his is a fairly sweeping overview of Ezra-Nehemiah, when read in light of the theoretical model he carefully lays out, Esler demonstrates just how well this narrative serves an identity-forming role. Esler's articles serve as an example of the way asking questions about how a text functioned

in a general historical setting works better than trying to build elaborate historical models within which redactions of the text were composed.

Conclusion

Three themes have recurred throughout this essay. The first two concern sources. First, establishing agreed-upon dates for biblical texts and discerning the social settings reflected by them remains a persistent problem. Second, although archaeological work offers a more reliable means of dating sources, material remains present a less secure avenue for interpreting social realities as perceived by those who left them. Finally, investigations into ancient Israelite ethnicity require a more refined definition of ethnic identity.

In light of these persistent problems, I have made two suggestions regarding future directions for studies on ancient Israelite ethnicity. First, along with Sparks, I propose working with a more specific understanding of ethnicity, involving perceived shared ancestry. Many authors simply equate ethnic identity with group identity. Although ethnicity has been used in such a broad manner in the past, this usage says little or nothing about the nature of the group. A more refined conception of ethnicity allows us to distinguish ethnic identity from the many other forms of social identity.

Furthermore, given the problems associated with detailed historical reconstructions of ancient Israel, I have also suggested reading texts in terms of their function within a more general historical setting. Esler (2003a) exemplifies this approach using Ezra-Nehemiah. Historical questions are inherent in the search for Israel's ethnic identity. But the difficulties inherent in creating detailed portrayals of the distant past can be minimized in this manner.

In closing, I should also note that studies of ancient Israelite ethnicity have appeared almost exclusively in English. Perhaps, as Esler (2003b: 12) contends, the paucity of studies in German applying social-scientific understandings of ethnicity to biblical materials stems from the role of ethnicity, broadly conceived, in Western Europe's many wars.

We have only witnessed the beginnings of studies investigating ethnic issues in the Hebrew Bible, and I have reviewed only a sampling of works that could be considered. Additional studies that could have been discussed include, for example, those that deal with the name 'Israel' (see Harvey 1996; Hayward 2005; Knauth 2005; Willi 1995). Much further work remains, including analysis of poetic texts as well as investigations of legal texts dealing with boundary issues such as marriage laws, treatment of for-

eigners, and cleanness/uncleanness regulations. We can look forward to the maturing of this work in the years to come.

This is the first of a two-article series. The second will examine studies of ethnicity and the New Testament.

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