

HISTORY, IDEOLOGY AND RHETORIC IN THE BIBLE

This exploration of appropriate definitions for history, ideology and literature suggests that the authors of historical texts are typically influenced by ideologies. Additionally, though I have rejected the term "literature", narrative devices are used in texts depicting a past, often for ideological purposes. There is nothing new in these observations; outside of biblical studies, the ideological nature of much of history is recognized,¹² and the narrative dimension of almost all history writing is acknowledged.¹²

My position concerning the use of what others would call literary devices in historical texts is very close to Peter Gay, who has studied the styles of great historians in *Style in History*. He claims: "Style... is the bridge to substance"¹² and observes that narrative devices in historical texts often "become signposts to larger, deeper matters."¹² Similar positions have been advocated in reference to the great classical historians.¹² For example, Thucydides structures his *History* using certain patterns to lead "his reader to make comparisons and contrasts that reveal the meaning of the events he describes"¹² or "to convey the truth about the war in a way which we cannot refute."¹² Others have emphasized that Thucydides' composed speeches are not "for the sake of mere ornament; their inclusion and placement form part of this same process of organization for the purpose of illuminating Thucydides' insights into the development of the war."¹⁰

The connection between history and ideology is emphasized by Robert Anchor:

Narrative theory shows beyond a doubt that the world is never given to us in the form of well-made stories, that we make up such stories, that we give them referentiality by imagining that in them the world yields up its various meanings, and that historical narratives, no less than fictional narratives, always serve, in one way or another, to legitimate an actual or ideal social reality.¹¹

This has been appreciated by scholars of classical antiquity, especially by M. I. Finley: "The study and writing of history, in short, is a form of ideology."¹² Even Charles Fornara, whose major (ideological) interest as a modern historian of classical history is in showing these works' historicity, is forced to concede:

Fortunately or unfortunately, history was harnessed early on to "higher purpose," was made to subserve ethics and patriotism.... Although none of this is theoretically incompatible with a strictly veracious account, the reader will readily perceive that the potential for distortion, even unintentional distortion, was great.¹³

Several scholars have explored the ideological nature of rabbinic and medieval Jewish texts.¹⁴ Ivan G. Marcus has depicted the communal

and social dimension of history, and thus its openness to ideological influence.¹⁵ In "History and Ideology in Talmudic Narrative," Robert Goldenberg examines the rabbinic stories concerning the Hillelite dynasty as "ideological propaganda."¹⁵ Similar analyses have been written by A. I. Baumgarten in reference to the status of Akiba and Rabbi Judah.¹⁷ William Scott Green, in the essay "History Fabricated: The Social Uses of Narrative in Early Rabbinic Judaism,"¹⁸ has begun to put forward a more synthetic picture of the fundamentally ideological perspective of the rabbis as they wrote history.

These studies make it abundantly clear that I am not claiming originality in combining the realms of ideology, history and rhetoric or narrative.¹⁹ Several biblical studies have examined the connections between history and rhetoric, and have commented on the etymological connections between "story" and "history."¹⁰ The understanding of literature in these articles, however, differs significantly from the one I have presented here. The connection between literature and ideology is the focus of Harold Fisch, *Poetry With a Purpose: Biblical Poetics and Interpretation*.¹⁴ This book is especially valuable because Fisch is very cognizant of the problems in calling the Bible literature, though his approach differs from mine in that his primary ideological focus is on religion rather than on politics. In terms of connecting all three realms, Meir Sternberg in *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* explicitly notes, "ideology, historiography, and aesthetics [are] a trio of functional principles,"¹² and he explores the relationship between them.¹⁴ However, his understanding of ideology is different from mine, and he spends little space examining the role of political ideologies in ancient Israel. In addition, many of his critics have correctly perceived his literary readings as modern, and thus of limited use in studies that are historical-critical, such as this one.¹⁴ An approach which is more kindred to my own is by Keith Whitelam, "Between History and Literature," which advocates: "the historian has to build up a whole network of interrelationships based upon reasoned arguments drawing upon historical, literary, anthropological and sociological evidence."¹⁵

My "reasoned arguments" begin from the Book of Chronicles. There is a strong consensus concerning the date of Chronicles; its sources are (largely) extant and its methods of composition are known: by examining it first, we are beginning with the (relatively) known and moving to the (relatively) unknown, using Chronicles as a model for what to search for in analyzing other texts. Rather than searching for exact parallels between Chronicles and earlier texts, I will use this work as a general model, concentrating on how the author of Chronicles wrote his history, and on some of the fundamental differences between ancient and modern history writing, especially in reference to chronology and to the use of sources.¹⁶