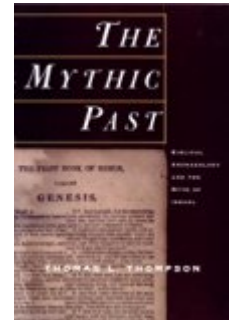


Thomas L. Thompson. *The Mythic Past: Biblical Archaeology and the Myth of Israel.* London: Basic Books, 1999. xix + 397 pp. \$30.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-465-00622-9.



Reviewed by Charles D. Isbell

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Thomas L. Thompson, Professor of Old Testament at the University of Copenhagen, is best known in circles of biblical scholarship for three previous books: *Historicity of the Patriarchal Narratives* (1974), *The Origin Tradition of Ancient Israel* (1987), and *The Early History of the Israelite People* (1992). To scholars familiar with his previous works, the words with which Thompson opens this latest book will not be surprising. "Today we no longer have a history of Israel. Not only have Adam and Eve and the flood story passed over to mythology,[1] but we can no longer talk about a time of the patriarchs. There never was a 'United Monarchy' in history and it is meaningless to speak of pre-exilic prophets and their writings." In short, "the Bible is not a history of anyone's past" (p. xv). And again: "In history, neither Jerusalem nor Judah [*sic!*] ever shared an identity with Israel before the rule of the Hasmoneans in the Hellenistic period" (p. 105). "The stories of Solomon and David, and even the story of good king Josiah, must wait for a second-century John Hyrcanus before they can find an historical context that makes sense" (p. 149). "It is only a Hellenistic Bible that we know" (p. xv). Why? The an-

swer to this question is the reason for Thompson's publication of this book.

Readers are assured in the Preface that Thompson is not alone in his thinking. And while Copenhagen colleague Nils Peter Lemche is perhaps his strongest ally, several others deserve mention. The work of Israeli archaeologist Israel Finkelstein[2] has underpinned Thompson's thesis that there existed neither the social-municipal structures nor the population expansion necessary to confirm the biblical idea of a late Bronze Age "conquest", and that scholars cannot hope for such data to be recovered. HUC Professor of Bible S. David Sperling has weighed in with the thesis that "nothing in the Torah is historical." [3] And above all, Philip R. Davies has provided not only weighty scholarly support for the theses of Thompson but has also edited (through the JSOT Series of Sheffield Academic Press) a raft of impressive books and articles written by adherents to this new school of thought.

It is not difficult to summarize the basic thesis of Thompson. For him, if it were not for archaeology and the physical artifacts it recovers, there

would be no history of the ancient Near East. Reading archaeology through the lens of the Hebrew Bible yields a distorted and inaccurate picture because it assumes the basic historicity of the biblical narratives. The process should work the other way. The ideology of the Bible must be read through the unbiased and objective lens of archaeology. We may find that once in a while the Bible luckily gets something correct, but archaeology will receive the last word on every point at which the two disagree.[5]

Two things in particular characterize the work of Thompson. First, he has a penchant not only for dismissing in cavalier fashion anyone who might disagree with him either at present or in the past, but also for impugning his or her personal integrity as well. Thus he speaks of a 1960's scholarly theory about Nuzi parallels to patriarchal customs (now widely believed to be incorrect) not as a reconstruction that has been proven tenuous in the light of evidence which had not been available when the original proponents (serious scholars like E. A. Speiser and C. H. Gordon among them!) first proposed the idea, but as "a thinly veiled fabrication" (p. xii). Again, tenets of the "Amorite hypothesis," now believed by Thompson to be incorrect, had never been anything more than "arbitrary and wilful [*sic*] careless assertions" (p. xii). In other words, those whose positions Thompson denies were all guilty of allowing their personal ideologies to color the way in which they interpret the Bible. And they were sometimes blatantly unethical: "At least one [Nuzi] contract had been mistranslated with the purpose of creating a parallel with the Bible" (p. xii).

Other Thompson hallmarks are the tossing-off of self-evident statements as if they were completely new thoughts and the ascribing to "all scholars" positions that few if any of us hold. For instance:

[a] "We have good reason to argue that the book [of Psalms] as a whole as it now exists in the

Bible was understood as a book of songs of praise" (p. 238). Well, the Hebrew title of the book is TeHiLLim, so surely no serious scholar would assume that such a statement was newsworthy. Yet Thompson uses this simple datum, surely known to every first-semester student of Bible, to insist that these songs were not sung as a reflection of an early cultus (ninth or eighth century BCE for example), and further that they cannot be "the voice of a temple community that so many scholars once imagined to have existed in the fictional Jerusalem of Ezra or Nehemiah of the Persian period" (p. 238). Then, even though there is no connection between a simple statement of fact well known to everyone and the conclusion drawn from it by Thompson, we are assured that these songs are "not of an older and earlier Israel," but tell us only about the "true Israel" that did not come into existence until Hellenistic (or, better, Hasmonean) times (see pp. 238-9).

[b] "A biblical narrative reflects the historical context of its writing rather than the more distant past of its referent" (pp. 66-67). Thompson gives no reference to any particular scholar who is guilty of forgetting this elementary dictum, as he declines to tell us who forged a Nuzi contract, but solemnly assures us that "archaeological research of the past century" has repeatedly done so. His repetition of the dictum is just another way for him to assert that biblical scholars over the past century or so have got it all completely wrong and backwards. But this conclusion is precisely what Thompson is proposing to demonstrate, and no simple assertion of a conclusion can be assessed as a proven fact. For one thing, we might ask here whether Thompson's own books tell us only about the late twentieth century, and we might also wonder just why every biblical referent must be changed from its own plain sense to Thompson's personal best guess. David and Solomon are a reflection of John Hyrcanus, not because archaeological recoveries force such a conclusion upon

us, but merely because Thompson wishes to announce that it is so.

[c] "It has been most unbecoming for theologians to bicker so long about whether it was a man or a woman who was made first" (p. 83). Surely we are entitled to know which theologians Thompson is reading who are guilty of this particular sin.

[d] "All but a few modern scholars have accepted the conclusion uncritically that the Hyksos were originally Palestinians" (p. 141). Now in modern times, scholars have sought the identity of the Hyksos as Arabs, horse-breeders from Asia, Hittites, Indo-Iranians, or Hurrians. But who are the overwhelming majority of whom Thompson speaks in such sweeping fashion? To be sure, Josephus (*Against Apion*) identifies the Hyksos as Hebrews, but who else does? Does "Hebrews" mean "Palestinians" in the dialect of Josephus? Thompson does not say.

[e] Thompson asserts that the language of Scripture [speaking specifically of I Samuel 24], "is as much theological as it is political" (p. 45). Again we must ask which biblical scholar in the world thinks it is not. Thompson's point appears to be that theological discourse can have no historical value. And yet we know that language in ancient times was very often both theological and political. The official annals of Assyria openly advance a theological perspective. The famous cylinder of Cyrus chronicles not only what Cyrus has done but also the fact that he has acted as patron of the gods. Thus we may deny Isaiah's explanation of why the Assyrians abandoned their siege of Jerusalem (the angel of YHWH killed 185,000 of them according to Isaiah 37:36), and we may equally doubt Sennacherib's explanation that his success derived from "the awe-inspiring splendor of the 'Weapon' of Ashur" (ANET, p. 287). But should we doubt as well that Assyrian soldiers besieged Jerusalem, failed to conquer it, and left? Both documents give their own version of history, and both are explicitly "theological."

To maintain his posture that everything in Scripture is Hellenistic or Hasmonean, Thompson declines throughout to reckon with the possibility of a complex literary tradition or to address the redaction history behind the final form of a piece of biblical literature. He also declines to consider examples of inner biblical exegesis that demand a fairly long period of development among the professional guilds (like the prophets) that produced them. For example, Hosea and Isaiah both appear to have been familiar with Amos; Jeremiah is aware of Hosea and appears at times to conduct a dialogue directly with the Deuteronomic History, [5] and Ezekiel openly borrows from the earlier Jeremiah.[6] If the bulk of biblical literature was not only edited and finalized, but also originally composed, only in the third or second century BCE, how much time can be allowed for a book by one prophet to achieve enough prominence to require that it be quoted by another?

Ultimately, any method must be judged by the results it produces. While it can be admitted that Thompson has done biblical scholarship a service by calling for rigor, denouncing blind ideology, re-examining many hallowed theories, it must also be said that his own examples of the validity of his method leave more to be corrected than the theories he would replace. That is, when Thompson turns from criticizing everybody else to the task of offering his own exegeses of specific biblical texts, the results are not only unsatisfying, but may be seen to rest on ideological foundations that seem to this reviewer to be virtually indefensible. Further, his own biblical interpretations do not conform to the standards Thompson wishes to impose on everyone else. Several of these illustrations demand explanation.

[a] Thompson's treatment of the revolt of Absalom against his father David is especially revealing. He opens his discussion by dubbing this story and the gospel account in Mark 14:32-42 (the prayer of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane) "two paired stories of David and of Jesus" (pp.

21-23). This pairing fits, according to Thompson, because both David and Jesus retired to the same Mount of Olives to pray. David is "everyman," a man shorn of power and resources, forced to depend utterly upon the mercy of God for his very survival, and the story which the hapless biblical narrator attempted to present as a battle for royal succession is really "a parable on the power of prayer." Absalom? Hear Thompson: "Though Yahweh's Messiah (note the capital M!), he has died ignominiously, hanging from a tree" (p. 22). "Returning as its king, David rides a donkey down to Jerusalem; he is Yahweh's anointed, entering his kingdom!" (p. 22). Who can fail to see the picture here? When Jesus goes to the Garden to pray, he may be heard to paraphrase the very words of David: "not my will but yours be done" (p. 22, and see also p. 49, where the same assertion is made about the same phrase in the Matthew story)." This, Thompson concludes, "is reiterated history, a philosophical discourse of a tradition's meaning" (p. 23).

Again we must question. Where did David say "not my will but yours be done" while he waited calmly for his own inevitable demise? How can anyone see a helpless and passive everyman of piety in this crafty old king who shrewdly switches advisors as part of a counter-intelligence campaign to subvert the plans of his son and opponent, divides his troops for maximum efficiency with all the experience of his many years as a warrior, and is so certain of victory that he must caution his advisors not to kill the boy who is revolting against his own father? This is an old king who intends to win, even against a beloved son. What ideology informs, yea governs, Thompson's analysis here? He does little more than peer back in time through his New Testament lens in order to foist meaning upon an "Old Testament" (his designation) text. What biblical (or "Old" Testament) warrant is there for capitalizing, and thus personalizing and divinizing, the one whom Thompson would refer to as "Yahweh's Messiah?" Is it really important that Jesus rode his donkey

into Jerusalem (probably intended as a parody on the ostentation of Herod Antipas riding his white war horse [7]) *before* his prayer and the loss of his life, while David could still ride triumphantly into Jerusalem *after* his victory as human ruler had been assured? Well, it is for Thompson. Jesus rides before rather than after his battle, "foreshadowing the closure of the story" (p. 22).

Later in the book (pp. 70-71), we learn that it was also Matthew who patterned the Mount of Olives story of Jesus the night of his arrest after the Absalom revolt story. Does Thompson, implying that Jesus is a Davidic figure here, mean to say that Jesus is attacked for his own sins and failures, for inability to control his unruly disciples as David had been unable to control his unruly children? No! For Thompson, the stories each teach that in the manner of both David and Jesus, "so, too, should the reader accept his fate," and trust that "God brings all things to good" (p. 71). Once again Thompson tips his hand, and his ideology. The way in which Absalom died, being caught by his thick hair in the boughs of a great oak tree (according to 2 Samuel 18:9), prefigures for Thompson "the story of Jesus' crucifixion" (p. 71). In other words, everything reminds Thompson of Jesus, not only the passive and inept father David but also the murderous son Absalom, his literary (!) bi-polar opposite in the Samuel narrative. Methodologically, this is very little different from the classical Christian fundamentalist idea that "the New [Testament] is in the Old contained, the Old is in the New explained." In this passage, Thompson demonstrates that he cannot interpret a biblical text without the help of his New Testament lens of faith. Who is the ideologue here? Any scholar who lacks Thompson's pre-commitment to the idea that the New Testament holds the key for "Old Testament" interpretation, of whom the reviewer is surely but one of many, will find such exegesis fundamentally flawed.

[b] We have seen that Thompson despairs of finding anything historical in the entire Hebrew

Bible. Still, some of his discussions are dependent upon at least a pinch of history. The idea that true religion consists of obedience rather than upon rote sacrifice is a case in point. Thompson believes that this theme is "central to the intellectual currents of Hellenism" (p. 69), although he does not tell us where, in all of Hellenistic literature, the theme of blind obedience to the neglect of the cult is advanced. But since, for Thompson, such a profound idea apparently could not have originated anywhere except among the Greeks, it is incorrect to think of it as an idea stemming from the time of Saul, who never existed anyway. The telling comment that "Yahweh complains centuries later through the prophet Isaiah" (p. 69) is puzzling. The idea in 1 Samuel 15:22 must be late enough to allow for its Greek creation, and may even be as late as the Hasmonean era, and there are no pre-exilic prophets, as Thompson taught us earlier. So one wonders exactly how a passage from Isaiah could be "centuries later" than a Hellenistic (Hasmonean?) text from Samuel. Was Isaiah born after Jesus? With Thompson, one can never be sure. But clearly Thompson relies upon a somewhat traditional biblical chronology sometimes, at least if it suits his ideology.

To complete his discussion of this obedience theme, Thompson stirs Hosea 6:6 and Amos 5:22 into the gumbo before offering a completely inadequate translation of the famous text in Micah 6:8. Hebrew *la'asot mishpat* becomes "deal with understanding;" *'ahavat hesed* equals "show steadfast love;" *hatznea' lekhet 'im 'elohekha* means "keep awake and walk with your God." Incorrectly ascribing Hosea 6:6 to Micah, Thompson concludes with Matthew that Jesus is "lord of the Sabbath." Why is Matthew clear to Thompson, while the original messages of the prophets are not? Because these reiterations of tradition "do not reflect events, but beliefs that were current when the collections were made" (p. 69). The traditional idea that the texts from Amos and Hosea, Micah and Isaiah antedate the Samuel 15 narrative that is part of the Deuteronomistic History goes by the

boards here. But were all three collections (eighth-century prophets that could not be pre-exilic, a seventh or sixth century deuteronomistic narrative that cannot be as early as "exilic," and even the NT text itself) written that close in time to each other? Apparently so. And yet the Isaiah passage is "centuries later" than that from Samuel. When we are offered this particular example of what Thompson calls, the "interpretive retelling of a story," we are not told whether it is a process of several centuries or just a few decades. But we are left with no doubt that the story for Thompson has no meaning except that which he sees once again in light of the New Testament.

[c] Thompson's perception of Moses is also unique. Other than the fact that he never existed in history, "not a single line of the narrator's pen sketches a heroic man" (p. 93). True, the faults of Moses are etched plainly into the biblical fabric, but so also are his legendary and heroic qualities: [i] "With him I speak mouth to mouth, clearly, and not in dark speech. He beholds the form of YHWH" (Num 12:7-8). [ii] "There still has not arisen a prophet in Israel like Moses, whom YHWH knew face to face" (Deut 34:10). [iii] "Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God" (Deut 34:29). Thompson ignores these and all other similar statements, yet maintains that, after Moses' death, "there follows a series of warlike heroes who take the role of Moses' successor" (p. 94). But he does not explain how Moses could be such a dud while several central biblical figures patterned after him (Joshua, Samuel, etc.) are heroes. Even setting aside Thompson's view of the historically unreliable nature of all these texts, his interpretation stands on its head the literary presentation itself, quite apart from any historical referent.

[d] The death of Solomon does not chronicle the break up of a unified Israel, but rather "the pattern for this story is the break-up of the Hellenistic empire," and "Seleucid Syria and the hated religious syncretism of Antiochus IV is reflect-

ed in II Kings' descriptions of Samaria" (p. 97). Elsewhere, Thompson will assert that "the north's abandonment of the house of David in Chronicles mirrors the Seleucids' rejection of the true successors of Alexander: Egypt's Ptolemies. It was Antiochus IV of Syria who was the Ahab of history" (p. 208). This leaves much unexplained. First, granted that religious syncretism is the problem identified by II Kings, syncretism plays no role at all in the 2nd century BCE struggle against Antiochus. No one was allowed to be primarily a Yahwist while serving hellenism just a little bit. Yahwism was banned completely under Antiochus, leaving only two choices –hellenism or death. "Many in Israel ... chose death rather than ... profanation of the holy covenant, and they were executed (!)" (1 Macc 1:62-63). Second, the literary understanding of 1 Kings 12 (as also of 2 Chronicles 10) is that the abandonment of the house of David was due at least in part to Davidide oppression of those who broke away. Is this idea also to be derived from the Ptolmaic-Seleucid conflict?

[e] Thompson's interpretation of the Isaianic Immanuel stories once again illustrates the dependency of his method upon his NT lens. Here is his conclusion: "Matthew does not change our understanding of Isaiah. He simply reads the text of Isaiah 7-9 as a coherent whole, as it was, in fact, intended to be read" (p. 289). The child of 7:3, named She'ar Yashuv, Thompson sees as "the repentant remnant" (which would require she'ar meshovev) rather than the usual "a remnant will return," a translation he must employ to maintain his thesis that there was no real return from exile because there never was an exile.

To show further how faithful Matthew was to Isaiah, Thompson explains that the Immanuel "child in Isaiah 9 is born of Yahweh's wife." Apparently for Thompson, forcing the Isaiah text to speak of a divine-human coupling [8] is quite acceptable because that is the kind of story Matthew needs to tell, although anyone lacking Thompson's prior commitment to the validity of Matthew's Je-

sus story will find such eisegesis into the Hebrew of Isaiah quite without warrant.

But Thompson is not done. In his eyes, not only Matthew but also Paul understood the Old Testament properly, offering only "an epitomizing paraphrase, ... [but] not changing anything" (p. 290) about the Isaianic portrayal of the Immanuel figure. This means, of course, that "Isaiah 9's saving, messianic child ... is God" (p. 290).

So this is it, in a nutshell: the Jews did not understand their own Scriptures from the time of Isaiah until Jesus, but both Matthew and Paul "got it." And what Matthew and Paul "got" was not a new reading of a classical text which they wished to appropriate for the formulation of a new schema of faith, but what Isaiah had "really meant" all along. The "Old Testament" context for the Immanuel pronouncements, erroneously presented by some inept biblical narrator as the eighth-century Syro-Ephraimitic war, can now be transferred appropriately to Jesus. The Isaianic reference to "the land before whose two kings you stand in dread" does not tie Immanuel to an eighth-century setting; the reference to a woman tells of the consort of a deity, and could not have been the wife of the current King Ahaz or any other eighth-century woman; the reference can have no dynastic implications for a troubled eighth-century king, only Jesus-meanings. Even the fact that Matthew finds it necessary to translate for his readers so simple a Hebrew phrase as 'immanu-el fails to discourage Thompson, apparently because he does not expect the readers of Matthew to understand Isaiah's Hebrew any better than he does. Of course, without the guidance of Matthew, whom Thompson accepts as the ultimate authority on what Isaiah really meant, it is impossible to locate anywhere in the Hebrew text of Isaiah 7-9 a divine, saving Messiah, much less a virgin birth. [9] For these views, it is mandatory to alter the plain sense of the prophetic passage exactly as Matthew did. Again, just who is the ideologue here?

[f] Thompson's interpretation of "How Yahweh Became God" (pp. 317-22) is our final example. Readers will perhaps be fascinated by Thompson's idea that each of the numerous gods "all, each in its own way, refer to the one ineffable divine" (p. 319). Whereas the literary Moses is two different people (p. 319), the innumerable gods of the Ancient Near East are really one! The hesitancy of Moses is seen as a "leitmotif" illustrating that Moses must be given a genealogy before he can lead the people in the name of "the tradition's God" (p. 319, emphasis in original).[10] Here Thompson closes with a Sunday-School type midrash to explain the word 'ehyeh. Overlooking the linguistic indications that 'ehyeh is simply an allomorph of YHWH, [11] Thompson plunges forward to see YHWH "reinterpreted and revived as the divine messenger and prophet of Israel. That is, Yahweh is Immanuel" (p. 322).

Let me speak plainly. I do not deny to Thompson the right to use the New Testament as an interpretive "pony" by which to parse biblical texts. Such a method was pioneered by his heroes, Matthew and Paul and other NT writers. But it never must be forgotten that such interpretation is not free of its own ideology. Further, such interpretation does not restrict the stories of the NT to the class of those for which we possess absolute physical, archaeologically-recovered "proof," as Thompson demands for everything in the "Old Testament." Thompson apparently views the Bible as a whole consisting of two parts, and it is only in the second part of his Bible that we find the key to an understanding of all other biblical texts. But despite his assumptions, the NT simply does not formulate a new religion out of the materials at hand in its scriptural tradition alone. It draws freely from Greek and Roman pagan cults for its ideas (like a dying and rising god, a virgin birth, immersion as a [secretive?] initiation rite, etc.), and perhaps that is why Thompson wishes everything in the "Old Testament" to be Greek as well.

What he does not see is that the texts of the NT, far from being the only natural and logical reading of the "Old Testament," are every bit as radical a RE-reading of biblical traditions as are those of Mishnah, Tosephta, and the two Talmudim. Only an interpreter with an ideological commitment, a prior commitment to Christian faith matching that of Matthew and Paul, can treat biblical literature as Thompson does. And we still do not know why everything Persian and especially Greek is superior to anything Hebraic in Thompson's scheme. So we are left with a long list of questions. [a] Why did the people who wrote the Bible in Hasmonean times inject so very much that was ethical in content, using fake connections to the great prophets? [b] How can we account for the developing history of ideas, their reworkings, their re-interpretations in far more than merely the "legal" sections, that seem to be present in the Hebrew Bible? Surely the entire process involves a history that cannot be compressed into the time allowed by Thompson, which stretches only from post-Persian events to the date of the biblical manuscripts at Qumran. [c] If authors did not wish, or feared to comment theologically on the events of their own day openly, why would they not choose from among the timeless moralizing tales in the vast pool of internationally recognized Ancient Near Eastern literary types instead of projecting the circumstances of the second century back into the 10th-8th centuries? [d] Why would such documents falsely appear to presume a cultus that pre-supposed a Temple in Jerusalem? [e] How can we explain their johnny-come-lately pious fiction framed as a story that traces the origins of the disparate ancestors of those who became the Hebrews-Israelites-Judahites-Jews? According to the Pentauch, some of these people came from Mesopotamia, some from Egypt (not all, and not a large group in every case, as Exodus 1:1-7 indicates!), some from Canaan and elsewhere. Who would be convinced by a series of tales that everyone knew to be referentially inaccurate? Were the

ancients so much simpler than we are that they swallowed such things without question? And finally, [f] why would anyone have written books that were referentially false only until the NT lens on which Thompson depends came along? Comments from two colleagues speak directly to this particular point, and I cannot improve upon their wording. "It is an extremely questionable methodology to insist that wherever external political parallels can be drawn between events, every vestige of historicity must be withdrawn from the former of the two events." [12] "In fact, a case could be made for questioning the latter of two or more similar events, not only in instances where typology plays a part, but more importantly where recent events are interpreted analogously by means of historical exemplars." [13]

I do not believe that I will be the only scholar unhappy with the results of Thompson's work. But let it be noted that our discontent is not because we all are guilty of the sins of which we are accused [14] as a guild, and it is not because we still believe in a flat world. It is because we understand that tearing down is easier than constructing something better than the old which we have demolished. Reading the Hebrew Bible with Matthew and Paul firmly in hand is not a new method of exegesis at all. It is a very old method of eisegesis that deserves to fall like the walls of Jericho.

Notes:

[1]. Here Thompson is not using "mythology" with its classical definition but with its popular meaning of something false and untrue.

[2]. Thompson cites only *The Archaeology of the Israelite Settlement* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1988). A more recent work is now available: *From Nomadism to Monarchy: Archaeological and Historical Aspects of Early Israel* (Biblical Archaeology Society, 1994).

[3]. *The Original Torah* (New York: NYU Press, 1998), p. 9. However, it should be noted that there are substantive differences between Thompson

and the far more judicious work of Sperling. While Sperling may agree with Thompson in the sense that he believes the Torah to be allegorical rather than literally historical, he nonetheless dates the formation of the biblical traditions to the period from 1100-400 BCE. Hence, most of the biblical figures dismissed by Thompson as ahistorical are historical personages for Sperling. And Sperling certainly does not deny the historicity of a biblical Israel. My friend, Professor Carl Ehrlich, brought this evaluation of Sperling to my attention.

[4]. This debate, that has been ongoing among biblical scholars for the past thirty years, has been conveniently summarized by Professor George Athas of the University of Sydney in: "Minimalism: The Copenhagen School of Thought in Biblical Studies", a 1999 edited transcript of which is available at <http://members.xoom.com/gathas/copensch.htm>. It is fair to say that Thompson is a leading voice for "The Copenhagen School," and also to note that his exposition of the school in *The Mythic Past* is the most articulate and tightly argued example of the method.

[5]. I have discussed one such example in "2 Kings 22:3-23:4 and Jeremiah 36: A Stylistic Comparison," *JSOT* 8 (1978), 33-45. See also the excellent article by Steve Delamarter, "But Who Gets the Last Word?" (*Bible Review*, October 1999, 34-45, 54-55).

[6]. See Joseph Blenkinsopp, *A History of Prophecy in Israel From the Settlement in the Land to the Hellenistic Period* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983).

[7]. As Richard A. Horsley has argued in *The Message and the Kingdom* (New York: Grosset/Putnam, 1997), 71-2.

[8]. The idea of a mythological interpretation of Isaiah 7:14 traces back to Rudolph Kittel's 1924 tome, *Die hellenistische Mysterienreligion und das Alte Testament*, a volume not available to me,

but brought to my attention by my colleague Stuart Irvine.

[9]. Please see my "Does Matthew's Gospel Proclaim Mary's Virginit?" *BAR* III (1978) 2, 18-19, 52.

[10]. Thompson does not even refer to the stories of Gideon or Isaiah, inter alia, who also protest their inability to perform the great task laid before them by the divine One.

[11]. See my "Initial 'Aleph-Yod Interchange and Selected Biblical Passages," *JNES* 37 (1978), 227-236; and "The Divine Name 'hyh as a Symbol of Presence in Israelite Traditions, *Hebrew Annual Review* 2 (1978), 101-118."

[12]. Private communication from Professor John Whittaker, my colleague at LSU.

[13]. Private communication from H-JUDAIC Book Review Editor Lorenzo DiTommaso.

[14]. Always without attribution. Thompson apparently thinks footnotes might detract from the appearance of his originality.

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