The most controversial aspect of historical research of the biblical period concerns the literary sources, i.e. the biblical narrative. In a recent study I have presented an interdisciplinary approach to this subject. The spheres involved are: (a) biblical texts; (b) archaeological evidence regarding demographic circumstances and material culture, and (c) related extra-biblical records and the general historical process.

In the survey of the diverse scholarly methods I briefly referred to the extremely critical attitude to the biblical testimony that has been gaining ground. According to this school of thought, biblical narratives that are not corroborated by archaeological finds or extra-biblical records are discounted. They are generally branded as tendentious, ideological inventions or vague ancient traditions. These historical conjectures are based on the hypothetical motivation of the authors of these narratives due to their late composition or redaction. Countering this position I emphasized that it disregards the reasonable assumption that late composition or compilation and certainly redaction do not obviate the utilization of older materials. Furthermore, it leaves indicative data unaccounted for and cannot offer any reasonable explanation for them. The object of this review is to expand on some of the principles involved in judging these data that need to be considered in a historically oriented investigation. Observations in this respect have

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* A shortened version of this paper was read at the Fifteenth World Congress of Jewish Studies in Jerusalem, August 2009.


2 Idem, ibid., pp. 136–137.
been made by me in diverse related studies. For methodical reasons it seems useful to reiterate in a concentrated manner the main considerations that had been raised and examine relevant literary representations according to these criteria.

In dealing with problems of historical geography I maintained that any realistic feature, even if anachronistic, originates in a given situation. This principle is to be applied to the diverse historical data in biblical narratives. It is therefore a prerequisite for any historical analysis to probe the realistic background and feasibility of the literary data. This applies both to narratives formulated as historical descriptions and to legendary constructions.

Some of the major elements questioned by the critical school pertain to the establishment of Israel in the country and to the very existence of the United Monarchy. These issues, including the appraisal of the archaeological circumstances and the historical considerations deriving therefrom, have been discussed in the study mentioned above. The literary aspect of this problem has also briefly been referred to, but will be expanded on in this review. The negative attitude questions the entire historical development prior to the divided kingdoms and postulates the primary existence of the separate entities of Judah and Israel. The features affected by this controversy are quite varied. These are topographical lists and descriptions, narratives of historical events and developments, genealogical records, tribal and clan traditions and diverse epical compositions.

To counter this sweeping denial and to satisfy a critical examination, literary accounts that are not corroborated by external sources need to stand the test of realistic historical probability. Such scrutiny must consider the essential information conveyed and its historical function must be reasonable and integral in the synchronic and diachronic context. Literary and anachronistic embellishments, which elaborate on the basic components, may be encountered and should not disqualify the essence of the testimony. Any contention regarding anachronism as such must indicate the reality on which such features are modelled. Moreover, the negation of uncorroborated literary presentations must show the purported origin and purpose of the discounted sources. This has not been done in a well-founded manner.