“How Lonely Sits the City”:  
IDENTITY AND THE CREATION OF HISTORY

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How lonely sits the city  
once full of people!  
She has become like a widow,  
once great among the nations!  
Once a princess among the provinces,  
she has become a vassal. (Lam 1:1)

What led to the development of the literary genre of historiography in postexilic Yehud? Where were the roots of the genre of historiography? Once developed, how was historiography used? These questions are rarely asked in biblical studies, or their answers are unproblematized: the existence of genre is a given; development and transformation of genre has to do with *Sitz im Leben*, specifically preexilic. Although naïve presentations of the so-called Succession Narrative in 2 Samuel as “an eye-witness account” are now mercifully rare, the discussion of the reasons for the development of historiography has not moved much past earlier discussions. Historiography as a genre and as a practice has remained a given. Even Marc Zvi Brettler (1995) and Baruch Halpern (1988), who have recently written finely argued books on biblical historiography, do not write about the origins of the historiographic impulse. In this essay, therefore, I will discuss the development of the genre of historiography in the Persian period. In order to do so, I will first outline my understanding of historiography as a genre, an understanding grounding in the work of Mikhail Bakhtin. I will then use two approaches, which I will synthesize in order to make a third.

The first approach will be inspired from the rabbinic practice of midrash.1 Midrash has a typical form that can be roughly described as follows: a verse

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1. Midrash can be defined in many different ways, but I am taking my definition from Renée Bloch’s classic article: midrash is the noun form of the Hebrew root *drš* “to search.”
of Scripture is quoted, and a dialogue ensues between various rabbis on the meaning of the verse. It is a dialogue of commentary, expansion and replete with intertextuality. As part of the midrashic process, other parts of the Hebrew Bible are used in order to illuminate the verse under examination. I quoted the first verse of Lamentations at the beginning of this paper, and presently I will perform something akin to midrash in order to elucidate meaning from this verse. As with midrash, we might end up somewhere very different from where we started, or we might end up back exactly where we started.

The second approach will be comparative in nature. Here I will look at the development of historiography in the Greek world and try to answer some of the questions I posed at the beginning: What caused historiography to develop in the Greek world? How did it develop? How was it used? Then I will combine the results of this analysis with the results from my first section. This will allow me to answer the questions with respect to the development of biblical historiography.

**Genre**

The issue of genre is complicated, because it is so nebulous a term. The idea of genre is as old as thinking about literature: Aristotle began the *Poetics* by stating that he wanted to consider poetry (*poiēsis*) in general and its genres or forms (*eidos*; 47a1). In *The Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, Mikhail Bakhtin described literary genre as containing “the most stable, ‘eternal’ tendencies in literature’s development,” yet a genre is “reborn and renewed at every new stage in the development of literature and in every individual work of a given genre” (1984:106). In “The Problem of Speech Genres,” where he discussed the speech genres of utterances (ranging from the sentence to the full-length text), he noted that speech genres are heterogeneous in the extreme and that their diversity is linked to the diversity of the human experience (1986:60–61). Thus, speech genres can be seen as an ever-shifting array of speech types. Bakhtin divided speech genres into primary (simple) and secondary (complex) speech genres; the complex speech genres such as novels absorb primary speech genres such as letters (61–62). However, most important for our pur-
poses is Bakhtin’s assertion that “style is inseparably related to the utterance and to typical forms of utterances” (63): there is an “organic, inseparable link between style and genre…. each sphere has and applies its own genres that correspond to its own specific conditions” (64). He also stated, “Where there is style there is genre. The transfer of style from one genre to another not only alters the way a style sounds, under conditions of a genre unnatural to it, but also violates or renews the given genre” (66). Finally, Bakhtin also suggested that an individual’s speech is adapted for a specific genre; it takes the form of the genre, and if speech genres did not exist, communication would be almost impossible (78–79). We rely on stylistic markers in order to determine genre, which makes communication possible. Genre is thus linked to form as well as theme. Contrary to this view, Meir Sternberg (30) has claimed that one cannot tell the difference between fiction and history by formal characteristics alone; they can be distinguished only by their purpose. Sternberg’s understanding of genre is the understanding implicitly shared by most scholars of the Bible: How else can we understand scholars who see Genesis as legend and Kings as historiography? Ultimately, if a Bakhtinian understanding of genre is realistic, there must be formal markers to distinguish these two genres. If there are no such markers, then we have to consider the possibility that for the ancients, both Genesis and Kings belonged to the same genre.

Of course, there are reasons why scholars do not want Genesis and Kings to be examples of the same genre. The most important is due to a confusion between the literary genre of historiography and the idea of history as “what really happened.” Sara Japhet notes that the obvious is often lost sight of: narrative is not necessarily fiction; literary works should be studied in their own genre; and historiography is a literary genre. She also implies that fact and fiction is not a useful dichotomy in biblical historiography (1991:188). We want the events narrated in a work of historiography to be true. This understanding of historiography as something true is based on Aristotle’s definition of history in the Poetics. He separated out history from poetry as a genre, then defined history as the genre that “relates actual events” and poetry as the genre that relates “the kind of events that might occur.” He went on to suggest that poetry is “more philosophical and more elevated than history” (51a36–51b8). However, Aristotle did not describe how one would know the difference between history and poetry, thus leaving the door open for those like Sternberg who see no formal differences. In the context of biblical literature, Marc Zvi Brettler has defined history as “a narrative that presents a past” (12) and has opposed it to ideology, which he defines as a type of sets of beliefs (14). He does not use the term literature; instead, he uses ideology, suggesting that, just because a text has literary features, that does not mean it is literature (17).
Glen Bowersock does not explicitly define the terms “fiction” and “history” in his *Fiction as History* but implies that history is what really happened and fiction is what did not. However, he does go on to show how, later in the classical period, Roman authors such as Lucian “tried to pull down the distinction between fiction that we accept as fiction and fiction that is presented as a record of real events” (5–6). Although Herodotus had described his work as “researches,” by the first century B.C.E. the term *historia* meant plot, “the received account of the past that reached back into mythical times without a break” (7–8). Creating fiction through the rewriting of history (the reuse of plot as Aristotle described such reuse) was important in ancient times (12). Sternberg describes the usual opposition between history and fiction but then describes both history-writing and fiction-writing as discourses: one claims to be factual, and the other claims the “freedom of invention” (25). I would suggest that, although for us it is unclear as to the genre of ancient texts, for the ancients it might have been perfectly clear (see Bakhtin 1986:98). Thus, at this point we shall assume that there is a typical historiographical style and that Genesis through 2 Kings belongs to it.

**Midrash**

So let us begin with the first line of the first verse of Lamentations: ἡκὰ yāsēbā bādād hāʾir rabbātī ʿām “How lonely sits the city once full of people!” The city sits alone. This city is Jerusalem, as the rest of Lam 1 makes clear. We may assume that, since the city of Jerusalem represents Judah, therefore Judah sits alone. It is the use of the word bādād “alone” that gives us our first link, to Jeremiah.

Jeremiah 15 is a dialogue between God and Judah concerning Judah’s impending destruction. Jeremiah says, “I have not sat in the company of merrymakers, nor have I rejoiced; with your hand upon me I have sat alone [bādād], for you have filled me with anger” (15:17). Jeremiah insists that the nation has already held itself apart from the other nations because of its belief in Yhwh. The complaint is futile. God has already decided to destroy Judah and has expressed it by making use of the personification of Jerusalem: “For who will pity you, O Jerusalem, and who will console you, and who will turn aside to wish you well?” (15:5). So although it is the city that sits alone in Lamentations, it is really the nation, in accord with a prophetic convention of identifying city with nation. The nation Judah is alone, its people scattered, its identity destroyed. This may remind the reader of Isaiah, who says, “For the fortified city is alone [bādād], an abandoned and forsaken place, like the desert” (27:10). However, Isaiah is also looking forward to the day when the empty city is again filled with people, when Judah is again gathered
into Jerusalem; thus, in 27:13 we read: “[T]hose who were lost in the land of Assyria and those who were driven out to the land of Egypt will come and worship Yhwh on the holy mountain of Jerusalem.”

We have just linked Lam 1:1 to prophetic literature. The prophets see Judah (or Israel), as personified by Jerusalem, to be alone. Not only do they foretell this loneliness and destruction; they also seem to get some kind of vicarious pleasure out of it: Yhwh has finally fulfilled his promise to destroy the people who had disobeyed him for so long (see Jer 32, 52; most of Ezek 1–24; Mic 1, though cf. Beal 1994 on the identity of the speaker in Mic 1:8–9). Lamentations mourns the destruction of the city, mourns the loneliness of its isolation, and calls for the pity that Jeremiah says will not come. However, by this midrashic linking of Lamentations with Isaiah, we can also see that there is hope for the future: the city is alone for now, but it will again be filled with people.

As far as form goes, the second and third lines of Lam 1:1 augment the first; they repeat the idea of the abandoned city, not in the plain language of the first line but in metaphorical language. The second line, hāyētā kē‘almānâ rabbātî baggôyim “How like a widow she has become, once great among the nations,” uses the familial image of the husband and wife, whereas the third line, which I will come to presently, uses the metaphor of political organization.

The imagery of Jerusalem/Judah as a widow can be found also in Hosea, where the relationship between Israel and Yhwh is often expressed as husband and wife: “And on that day, so says Yhwh, she will call me ‘My husband,”

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2. See Long for a contrary view on the meaning of this phrase; he suggests it should be translated “Overwhelming like the[se] sights” of Tirzah and Jerusalem (708). However, he also notes that the terminology here is linked with the “fearsome Neo-Babylonians” (706).
and she will not call me ‘My Baal’ again” (2:18). Once Israel has repented, she will take her rightful place as the bride of Yhwh. This verse also holds another link; in this scenario reported by Hosea, Israel repents of her abandonment of Yhwh and does so by calling Yhwh by his name alone, not by the name of the gods of the nations around her. Yhwh is Israel’s husband, not Israel’s Baal. Yet at the same time Jerusalem is his widow. How can Yhwh be dead, so that Jerusalem can be like a widow? The key here may be found in Lam 5:20, where it is clear that Yhwh has abandoned Jerusalem, and therefore the children (i.e., the inhabitants of Jerusalem) are orphans (Renkema: 121). The singular position of Yhwh is made clear, echoing the loneliness of the city Jerusalem. This verse also helps us explain why the image of the widow is juxtaposed with the former position of Judah/Jerusalem as great among the nations. We would call this a mixed metaphor, but the mixing of the metaphor is apt when we consider that the husband of Judah, Yhwh, has forsaken her for now, while the gods of the other nations around her seem to be enjoying their wedded bliss. The theme of loneliness, which was first stated in the first line, is now expressed as a sort of theological loneliness; Judah is alone without her God, unlike her enemies.

The third line of Lam 1:1 makes the transition to theological loneliness clear. It is a political metaphor: šārāti bammĕdînôt hāyĕtâ lāmas “Once a princess among the provinces, she has become a vassal.” The inclusion of šārāti “princess” introduces a term used elsewhere as part of a message of hope. The word šārā “princess” only occurs a few other times in the Hebrew Bible, and one of those occurrences is in Isaiah: “And kings shall be your foster fathers, and their princesses shall be your nurses; they will prostrate themselves before you and lick the dust from your feet, and you will know that I am Yhwh” (49:23). Again, a message of hope: the former princess Jerusalem will be attended by the princesses of the nations around her. However, it is the word mĕdînā “province,” that is really interesting here. This word, which refers to an administrative district, is used almost exclusively in the books of Esther, Daniel, Ezra, and Nehemiah, as follows: “And the king declared a holiday in the provinces, and he gave gifts like a king” (Esth 2:18). This is the Persian king that is referred to, and the four aforementioned books are books that deal with the position of Judah once Persian rule has come, after the destruction of Jerusalem. The word “province” makes no sense here unless it reflects on Yehud’s present reality as a vassalprovince: Jerusalem could not be a “princess among the provinces” unless the rule of empire has already come. This image therefore shows how Jerusalem’s former position of centrality has already come to be a position of marginality.

The image of marginality is further confirmed by an examination of the word mas “vassal.” Regarding vassals, Deuteronomy says, “And if they declare
peace to you and open their gates to you, all the people found in the city will become vassals to you” (20:11). This passage refers to the vassals that Israel created as she entered the Promised Land, and Lamentations reflects that Jerusalem/Judah has become a vassal just as Israel had marginalized the nations it had conquered. Her shame in becoming a vassal is linked to her shame in being abandoned by her husband/protector, having abandoned her covenant with her protector יְהוָה (Olyn: 215–17).

I would summarize the argument I have constructed above as follows: Lam 1:1 asks a question: Now that we in Yehud are not central, but marginal, and our God has forsaken us for now, and we are lonely, what do we do? We are also confident that God will remember us, but we now exist in a new reality. How do we make sense of this reality? This is not only a literary device but a question that would have resonated throughout the society. I would then make a suggestion as to the solution to the question posed in Lamentations: the great so-called “historical” narrative of Genesis through 2 Kings is the answer to the question of how Yehud should construct itself. In doing this reading, I am reading against the order of the biblical books, and I am also reading against the traditional dating of those books. However, reading against the canonical and chronological order of these books, as I have just done, gives us a different way to see their relationship. One can be seen as the response to the other: the two bodies of text (Lamentations and the Genesis–2 Kings) are in dialogue, not separated and irrelevant to each other. Brian Peckham (1–12) has argued along similar lines in History and Prophecy, suggesting that the historical and prophetic bodies of literature grew together, albeit in the preexilic period. Similarly, Philip Davies has suggested (somewhat tongue in cheek) that the various genres of biblical literature emerged out of various “colleges” located in postexilic Yehud and that the dialogue between the genres arose out of the competing agendas of these colleges (1995:116–17; cf. Berquist 1995). I will return to Peckham’s and Davies’s arguments below.

I would like to finish my midrash by looking at how the historical books answer the question posed by Lamentations. In Lamentations, loneliness is not a desirable characteristic, nor is it a desirable characteristic in the prophets I linked to Lamentations. The only good thing about loneliness is that it will end. The city will be filled again, and יְהוָה will remember Israel. However, the great historical narrative transforms loneliness and isolation: it becomes a highly desirable characteristic. What about “Hear Israel, יְהוָה our God one יְהוָה” (Deut. 6:4)? This is a wonderfully polyvalent phrase in Hebrew, in that it is entirely without verbs after the initial command to hear. It can therefore be understood in several ways: “Hear, O Israel, יְהוָה our God is one יְהוָה,” as I have given in the text, or “Hear O Israel, יְהוָה is our God, יְהוָה is one,” or “Hear O Israel, יְהוָה is our God, one יְהוָה,” or
even “Hear O Israel, Yhwh is our God, Yhwh alone.” No matter where the emphasis is placed in the phrase, however, the singularity of Yhwh is apparent. Yhwh is alone. Not only is Yhwh alone; this is a good way for Yhwh to be. Isolation becomes the defining characteristic of Israel’s God.

Yhwh then takes his isolation and imposes it on Israel. This selection of Israel as Yhwh’s chosen people is a pervading theme of the great history of Genesis–2 Kings, and it may be summarized in Yhwh’s command, “You will be holy, for I am holy” (Lev 11:45). What does this holiness mean? The root ḥdš means to be separate or sacred (see Daly 1966:51–53). Israel is to be as isolated as her God. Now, loneliness, bādād, becomes a good characteristic, as in Deut 33:28: “And Israel settles down in safety, alone [bādād] is Jacob’s abode.” So Jerusalem’s loneliness as expressed in Lam 1:1 becomes her defining characteristic. I would like to put this in terms with which we might be more familiar: the great history of Genesis–2 Kings arose as a response to the destruction of Israel’s defining symbol, Jerusalem, and as a response to Persian imperialism. Israel’s loneliness became a way of coping with the new reality.

Comparison/Context

It is important to remember that historiography as a genre does not seem to be known to the author(s) of the main narrative of Genesis–2 Kings. The author of the so-called Primary History was a literary pioneer. We might therefore say that this narrative takes the form that later writers recognized as historiography. This would be an interesting argument in itself; however, there is another great narrative work from the same time period that later writers also recognized as historiography. That, of course, is Herodotus’s History. Like the biblical author, Herodotus did not know the genre of historiography, and it is his description of his work, historiēs (1.1), which means “inquiry,” that has given us the word “history.” Both the biblical author and Herodotus pioneered a narrative genre that told about the past events of their peoples. Herodotus set his work against the backdrop of the great conflict between the Greeks and the Persians, while the biblical author set his work against the backdrop of Israel’s conflicts with all of the nations it came into contact with. Both works are heavily influenced by the power of God in human affairs. Both works can be seen as framing history as a tragedy (see Nielsen). And both works can be seen as identity-forming exercises.

How did historiography develop in the Greek world? Both John Van Seters and Simon Hornblower have described the development of Greek historiography in some detail; here I will only summarize. There were several factors or features that combined to form historiography as a genre. First, there was the influence of the epic; it is a truism that Herodotus’s work was
a prose epic, telling a story of massive scope and consequence. T. James Luce points out (3) that the themes of war and descriptions of foreign lands, prominent in the Homeric epics, are also prominent in the histories. Second, there was the influence of drama, specifically tragedy; it is equally a truism that Herodotus's work was a tragedy in the Sophoclean mode. Third, there was the impact of the logographers of the sixth and fifth centuries: authors of lists and descriptions of all kinds, who also began to write local histories. The origins of this form of writing are also difficult to determine (Luce: 11). However, the works done by these authors—genealogies, ethnographies, annals, and chronologies—were all incorporated into the historiographic impulse (For-nara: 4–29). Fourth, there was the influence of the pre-Socratic philosophers, which led to the emergence of rationalism and the separation of myth/legend from fact (although questions of truth and fiction are best left aside here). Fifth, the Persian Wars were crucial to the formation of Greek self-identity, by defining Greek identity over against the Persian “other” (Hall: 44–45). Finally, in his study of the Near Eastern antecedents to historiography, Marc Van de Mieroop suggests that Greek literary historiography arose as a result of a breakdown in oral and visual historical transmission, when there was a panic about the preservation of historical memory (84–85). Historiography, then, is a genre developed in a mature literary tradition, and it is a genre that not every literary tradition has necessarily developed (80–81). Yet the vast majority of biblical scholars would probably agree that the historiography of Genesis–2 Kings (or portions thereof) was the first literary genre to develop in the biblical tradition. Even John Van Seters, in his trenchant criticism of previous works on the development of biblical historiography (1983:209–48), in a book that is more often read than actually used, does not escape this assumption. Philip Davies’s heuristic device of scribal colleges all working together to develop literary traditions in Yehud (discussed above) does not help us, since it does not allow us to see the development of genres.

When we turn to the factors that led to the development of historiography in the biblical tradition, it is much harder to find clear evidence. Although Herodotus is the first historian in the Greek tradition whose work has come to us intact, we know from other ancient sources something about his predecessors. We have examples of the epic tradition and examples of the tragic tradition; we can see how these other genres influenced the development of historiography. In studying the biblical tradition, we must rely almost wholly on the Bible itself, and, more importantly, we must deal with how the texts are dated and understood by scholars. Although Davies’s heuristic device may be flawed for understanding the development of genres, his dating for the texts (Persian-period products) is more helpful (see 1998:115). Van Seters had the right idea when he argued that biblical historiography developed
out of the combination of chronologies, inscriptions, and annals/chronicles (1993:356–57); this corresponds to the logographers’ works in the Greek tradition. However, because he was working from a preexilic date for the biblical tradition, he could come up with no other influence than a vague notion that historiography was the ideal vehicle for presenting an authoritative tradition. If we work with a postexilic date for the biblical tradition, then we have a clear incentive for the development of biblical historiography.

There was another factor that led to the development of historiography in the Greek world—the Persian Empire—and this factor is directly relevant to our understanding of the development of historiography in Persian-period Yehud. From the mid-sixth to the mid-fourth centuries B.C.E. the Persian Empire was the greatest power the world had ever seen. We should remember that Herodotus was from Halicarnassus, an Ionian Greek city on the western edge of the Persian Empire (some of his logographer predecessors, such as Hecataeus, were also Ionian). We should also remember that Herodotus’s work was about the great conflict between the Greeks and the Persians. If we turn to the situation in Yehud, Jerusalem was on the southern edge of the Persian Empire, one of the last outposts before Egypt, which was not always under Persian control. Arnaldo Momigliano argued repeatedly for the need to consider the Persian context when studying the origins of historiography in both the Greek and Judean contexts. He suggested that it was a “generic influence of Oriental institutions and literary traditions” that led to the development of Greek and Judean historiography (1990:12; cf. 1977:25–33). He went on to suggest that the Greeks and Judeans had a similar reaction to the annalistic tradition of the Persians and their predecessors, developing a historical tradition pertaining to the community and not to the royal leadership. This tradition of historiography was a reaction against Persian imperialism, occurring as societies began to focus inward on the community, rather than outward internationally (1990:16–17).

However, what I would argue is that the genre of historiography arose simply because the Persian Empire was so vast. Before the era of the vast empires, there was a national symbol that would unite a particular group, and that symbol was local and based on the land. Thus Jerusalem could be a symbol for the people who lived in the land called Judah (or Israel). Jonathan Hall has suggested that an ethnic group is distinguished from other groups “by virtue of association with a specific territory and a shared myth of descent” (32). The coming of the great empires destroyed those local symbols. What arose as a response to that destruction was a loyalty to an ethnic group instead of the former loyalty to place, although the ethnic group itself might have a loyalty to place. One way to cement that loyalty was to write the great national history. E. Theodore Mullen Jr. has suggested that the
Deuteronomic History was written in the context of exile as an exercise of identity maintenance and that the Deuteronomist believed that adherence to the principles in the Deuteronomic History would lead to Israel (Judah) being given back its land (283, 285). It is also important to remember that the Persians were not cultural imperialists. They did not force adherence to their religious symbols. The space was there for ethnic groups to promulgate their own history, and the narrative genre of historiography arose to fill that space. This literature offered identity to “people deprived of their familiar structures of state,” regardless of whether this literature was fact or fiction (Weeks: 155). This literature also was an identity-forming exercise by opposing the group’s culture and history to the strange and foreign one of the Persians (see Hall: 44; Hartog).

However, if we return to the development of biblical historiography, we have not moved beyond Van Seters’s factors with the Persian factor added in. These explanatory factors were not enough to account for Herodotus’s history, so why should they be enough for the biblical history? Here is where the midrash I performed above makes its reappearance. I said above that the biblical history answers the question posed by Lam 1:1, but we also saw that the question of identity implicit in 1:1 is amplified by the prophetic corpus. I would argue that the prophetic corpus contributed to the development of historiography much as Attic tragedy contributed to Herodotus. Here is where Peckham’s work becomes useful, if we adjust it slightly. Peckham sees the development of the historical traditions in much the same way as source and redaction critics have seen it, relying on our old friends J, E, D, and P, combined in some later period. He calls J an epic, but it would only be a prose epic and thus not directly comparable to the Greek epic tradition, to which he does compare it (88). However, if we see Genesis–2 Kings as having been written to include material from other sources (as Herodotus wrote his work), and are not too concerned with the shape of those sources, then suddenly Peckham’s work becomes invaluable, if we adjust his dating slightly: Isaiah is the earliest biblical book, followed by the other prophets in reasonably quick succession. Of course, Isaiah would know some of the traditions that would materialize in Genesis–2 Kings (Peckham: 134), just as the Attic tragedians knew the myths and legends of their culture. The themes taken up in the prophetic corpus influenced the development of historiography, just as the themes of tragedy

3. Stuart Weeks has come to similar conclusions by a different route: he suggests that postexilic Judaism’s concept of Israel and its emphasis on the authority of written texts for the constitution of Israel was unusual in the ancient world and that these two features were possibly related (154–55).
influenced Herodotus. Showing these themes and their development in the historiographical corpus is a matter best left for another place.

The example of Herodotus and his predecessors also can help us in terms of time frame. It has been commonly supposed that a great deal of time was needed between the writing of the various parts of the biblical corpus in order to explain the differences in ideology between them. However, we should remember that about one century passed from the time of the beginnings of Attic tragedy to the time of Herodotus. Within another century, philosophy and full-blown historiography had arrived and prospered. Drawing on the Attic-Ionic model, then, it would not be unreasonable for us to assume that the literary production of the bulk of the Hebrew Bible took place within a span of two hundred years. In the Greek world, books like Herodotus became “canonical” very quickly, and it would not be unreasonable for us to hypothesize that the same happened in Persian-period Yehud.

Concluding Remarks

I am not claiming in this paper that Lamentations and the prophetic voices I linked to it represent a preexilic or exilic ideology or ideologies. Although I have argued that historiography arose in the Persian period as a reaction to an earlier literary tradition, I am not arguing that the earlier tradition was preexilic. My notes about the dating and time frame of these texts (above) should make this clear. The work of Bakhtin (1984; 1981) should alert us to the possibility of multiple ideological voices emerging from the biblical text. The ideology of the loneliness of YHWH and Israel that emerged from my midrash should be seen as coming from the Persian-period context, but so too should the ideology that loneliness was an evil to be avoided.

Historiography arose as a postcolonial form of writing, that is, as a way of writing shaped by cultural experience of and resistance to imperialism. These histories also had a subversive effect. The effects of works such as Herodotus’s *History* and the biblical narrative of Genesis–2 Kings were not immediately apparent. However, it can hardly be coincidence that a hundred years after Herodotus, the scholars accompanying Alexander the Great on his conquest of the Persian empire took Herodotus’s work along with them and compared their own observations with his. It can also hardly be a coincidence that the author of 1 Maccabees, about 250 years later than the biblical history, describes the Jewish liberator Judas Maccabee in terms drawn directly from the great history (e.g., 1 Macc 9:21, 73). The genre of historiography became a powerfully subversive tool in the hands of those who would overthrow their imperialist masters.

Eventually, of course, the genre of historiography was taken over by the imperialists themselves. Those writers who were part of the large empires of
Alexander and Rome found that this narrative genre of historiography was excellent for defending the existence of the empire. By establishing an empire or emperor’s “historical” right to rule, a Roman historian could show that empire or emperor’s right to rule in the present day. Such a historian could also show the superiority of the Roman empire (or British or American) over any other forms of rule available. It is ironic, I think, that this identity-forming narrative genre of marginal peoples became the identity-crushing genre of later Western tradition. And all of this from, “How lonely sits the city once full of people.”