impossibility of ordaining women to the priesthood, “Church discourse on women’s ordination, by contrast, largely defies postsecular expectations” (93).

In chapter 5, “Religious Freedom: The U.S. Bishops and the Shock of the Secular,” Dillon analyzes the postsecular in the US bishops’ campaign for religious freedom in the context of the Obama administration’s reform of health care. If the episcopate’s activism on the issue speaks of a postsecular sensibility, at the same time a clear gap emerges compared to Pope Francis’s language of the postsecular. The author notes accurately that during the September 2015 visit to the United States, “the bishops’ adoption of his mantle is somewhat manipulative. The origins of the bishops’ campaign preceded his election” (108).

Chapter 6, “The Synod on the Family: The Church’s Dialogue with Difference,” emphasizes the postsecular significance of the 2014–2015 Synod of the Bishops in Rome for the renewal of the understanding of modern social and cultural realities by the Catholic Church. At the same time, Dillon notes the marginal role of women at this synod and the narrow range of lay views. Overall, the synod called by Francis achieved a consensus “tilted more toward change than confirmed the status quo (though in continuity with Church doctrine)” (154).

In the last chapter, “Postsecular Catholicism: A Continuous Dialogue of Doctrinal Ideas and Secular Realities,” Dillon describes a key aspect of the church’s dealing with postsecularity—a world in which neither religious nor secular realities can be denied—as “the dance of hierarchical authority and individual interpretation. This is a maneuver that allows the accommodation of both doctrinal truths and changing realities” (160).

Michele Dillon’s book provides a much needed contribution to the understanding not only of contemporary Catholicism in postsecularity in the United States but also of the Western world more generally and of the modern papacy—Pope Francis and his two predecessors—in particular. One aspect that deserves more attention is the relationship between nonassenting Catholics and the new kind of radical dissent against Pope Francis in contemporary American Catholicism, which is related to the particular kind of postsecular in the United States and the open rejection by neo-traditionalist and conservative US Catholics of this pontificate’s construal of the secular.

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Today, to argue that King David never ruled over a united Israel from Dan to Beer-sheba, as the Bible describes it, is perhaps commonplace among academic scholars. But in the 1990s such a position was more controversial. Then, in the wake of findings at Tel Dan—namely, fragments of an Aramean victory stele that mentions the “house of David”—heated debates took place over the history of Israel’s monarchy and whether the Bible is a useful source for studying that history. Biblical studies conferences hosted fiery exchanges, “maximalists” and “minimalists” called each other names, scholarly reputations were made and sullied; or so the stories go. In the midst of these debates, Lester Grabbe, professor emeritus of Hebrew Bible and Early Judaism at the University of Hull, England, founded the European Seminar on Methodology in Israel’s History, which had its first meeting in Dublin in 1996.
This volume represents the conclusion to that seminar, which met for seventeen years between 1996 and 2012. Part 1 of the volume includes six statements from long-time seminar members, in which they reflect upon the seminar’s accomplishments and/or make closing arguments about the work of writing history. Part 2 contains a paper by Rainer Alberz that has been translated into English from its original 1997 German version, and five papers from seminar sessions that were not previously published. The previously unpublished papers include contributions by Philip Davies and Lester Grabbe, on orality and memory, from the 2008 meeting; and by Tobias Funke, Phillippe Guillaume, and Ernst Axel Knauf, on the Maccabees and Hasmoneans, from 2011. Part 3 is a concluding reflection from Grabbe. In the balance of this review, I will focus on the work of the seminar in general and on the six reflections in part 1.

The seminar produced an impressive number of publications—eleven volumes in total—each published in the Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies Series (LHBOTS; formerly the Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series [JSOTSup]). Scholars interested in the ancient Levant should read them all. The seminar was an important scholarly endeavor, the kind of long-term and productive collaboration that many of us aspire to, but that we seldom actually see in the academy. In his concluding reflection, Grabbe helpfully outlines the history of the seminar’s formation, its development over the years, and its various session topics. Surveying these topics, however, readers will notice that the seminar, as a collective, rarely addressed methodology per se. The seminar’s opening session, which led to the volume Can a ‘History of Israel’ Be Written? (ed. Lester L. Grabbe, JSOTSup 245 [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1997]), is a noteworthy exception, as is the 2005 meeting, which focused on analyzing and critiquing recent histories of Israel (see Enquire of the Former Age: Ancient Historiography and Writing the History of Israel, ed. Lester L. Grabbe, LHBOTS 554 [London: T&T Clark, 2011]). Another is the 2008 gathering on the topics of orality, memory, and their interrelationship with history, which unfortunately did not lead to a volume. Otherwise, the question of method came up only obliquely.

For example, the seminar’s third volume (which has the catchiest title of all: Did Moses Speak Attic? Jewish Historiography and Scripture in the Hellenistic Period, ed. Lester L. Grabbe, JSOTSup 317 [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2001]) wrestles with the question of how to date biblical texts, but it does so as part of a larger discourse about our knowledge of the Hellenistic period, traditionally conceived. In other words, the seminar, for the most part, assumed a rather traditional approach to historical method and thus asked rather traditional historical questions to convene its meetings: the Bible says one thing, but what really happened in the polities of the Levant in the twelfth century BCE? The seventh century? The Persian period? And so on. These are important questions, to be sure, and they generated some insightful answers from seminar participants; but they are not the kinds of questions that tend to spur new thought on historical method. The seminar made many important contributions to the study of ancient Israel and Judah and the broader Levant, but how deeply it impacted method per se within biblical studies is debatable.

That said, each of the contributors to part 1 of this volume do comment directly on method, in one way or another, and the methodological commitments on display in these essays reflect much of the scholars’ earlier work in the seminar. Bob Becking (“Why Start with the Text? The Fall of Samaria Revisited”) draws on Annaliste historiography and advocates an approach that incorporates five different “windows” into the past: landscape, climate, archaeology, epigraphy, and biblical texts—in that order. It is only by taking this multifaceted approach, he argues, that we can fully understand the texts and their particular ideologies. Ehud Ben Zvi (“Clio Today and Ancient Israelite History”) points out the elephant in the room, acknowledging
Ernst Axel Knauf’s reflection (“Vingt ans après: A Personal Retrospective”) highlights what he sees as the most significant recent developments in our knowledge of ancient Israel. He concludes with a critique of the concept of canon, ultimately taking aim at Protestantism, which, he states, “bases itself on a Bible which was invented by Martin Luther and had never and nowhere existed before” (61). His critique of canon and its role in history is on the mark, but this focused attack on the Protestant Bible is curious, as if all Bibles, before and after Luther, were not somehow invented in particular sociocultural contexts. Niels Peter Lemche (“The Future of Israel’s History”) lobbies for a sociologically informed approach. He makes a sharp distinction between histories of events, which he calls the “real history” of Israel, and what I would call the cultural history of the texts themselves. Within this framework, like Davies, he appeals to memory studies. But Lemche tries to distinguish between “collective memory” (which he calls a “sociological term”) and “cultural memory” (which he says “comes from cultural studies”), concluding that “History is the way we remember our forefathers” (66–67). To my mind, Lemche’s comments here are too brief and unnecessarily confusing—Davies’s appeal to memory is more insightful. Thomas Thompson’s contribution (“The Problem of Israel in the History of the South Levant”) is the final reflection of the group. Thompson joins Becking in arguing for a kind of Annaliste history, beginning with the *longue durée* as a means to understand the texts and social contexts. He ends with conjecture about the role of Jerusalem in the formation of the Bible, wanting to downplay that city’s import in history. Notably, one of Thompson’s key sections (“Jewish Ethnogenesis,” 78–81) contains zero scholarly references, and Grabbe comments that he finds Thompson’s latest work “almost surreal” (221).

In his conclusion, Grabbe writes, “One regret I have is that more women did not participate” (219). Indeed, not a single woman contributed to this volume, which basically reflects the work of the seventeen-year seminar. During those years, dozens of scholars contributed papers. Yet only a few were women, and only one woman, Diana Edelman, was a regular participant. Grabbe blames this situation on the demographics of the scholarly field. That surely played a part, but another factor, I think, was the assumed methodology of the seminar, which, by asking traditional historical questions, reinforced traditional gender dynamics in the academy. Had the seminar gathered scholars around methodological questions related to contemporary issues in social and cultural theory—the kinds of methodological issues that many working historians across the academy wrestled with in the 1990s and 2000s—I imagine the seminar would have brought together a different kind of crowd.

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Over his long career, Wael Hallaq has provoked scholars to rethink Islamic social and intellectual histories as well as foundational accounts of modern liberal political