



The Biography of Ancient Israel: National Narratives in the Bible (Contraversions: Critical Studies in Jewish Literature, Culture, and Society)

Ilana Pardes

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The nation--particularly in Exodus and Numbers--is not an abstract concept but rather a grand character whose history is fleshed out with remarkable literary power. In her innovative exploration of national imagination in the Bible, Pardes highlights the textual manifestations of the metaphor, the many anthropomorphisms by which a collective character named "Israel" springs to life. She explores the representation of communal motives, hidden desires, collective anxieties, the drama and suspense embedded in each phase of the nation's life: from birth in exile, to suckling in the wilderness, to a long process of maturation that has no definite end. In the Bible, Pardes suggests, history and literature go hand in hand more explicitly than in modern historiography, which is why the Bible serves as a paradigmatic case for examining the narrative base of national constructions.

Pardes calls for a consideration of the Bible's penetrating renditions of national ambivalence. She reads the rebellious conduct of the nation against the grain, probing the murmurings of the people, foregrounding their critique of the official line. The Bible does not provide a homogeneous account of nation formation, according to Pardes, but rather reveals points of tension between different perceptions of the nation's history and destiny.

This fresh and beautifully rendered portrayal of the history of ancient Israel will be of vital interest to anyone interested in the Bible, in the interrelations of literature and history, in nationhood, in feminist thought, and in psychoanalysis.

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