

ISRAEL IN THE PERSIAN PERIOD:
THE FIFTH AND FOURTH CENTURIES B.C.E.



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Israel in the Persian Period:
The Fifth and Fourth Centuries B.C.E.

ISRAEL IN THE PERSIAN PERIOD:
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by
Erhard S. Gerstenberger

Translated by Siegfried S. Schatzmann

Society of Biblical Literature
Atlanta

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PREFACE

The faith of our spiritual ancestors, to whom we owe so much with regard to the biblical traditions, has always had its historical and social context. However, social and historical contexts are changeable and hence amazingly profound. Our only access to the faith of our biblical ancestors exists by means of texts or, more specifically, by means of a very slender selection of formerly extant texts that have crystallized as Holy Scripture through a lengthy process of fervent, communicative usage and continuing interpretation. This process came to a provisional conclusion during the time of the Persian domination of the world (539–331 B.C.E.). During those two centuries a Torah emerged in ancient Israel and in nascent Judaism, and prophetic and other communal writings were formed. The newly developed community of Yahweh presented itself in the emerging canon.

For this reason the Persian Empire, this immense, global, multinational state with its cultures and religions, its politics and economy, and its intellectual climate, is the direct background and context for the emergent Old Testament. The present work is a tiny, almost hopeless, attempt to do justice to this understanding. For one, this is about understanding Persian models of thought and belief (in contrast, for instance, to Assyrian, Babylonian, Egyptian, and Canaanite models), as well as of their social and economic structures. For another, it is worthwhile to read the Hebrew writings of the Bible from the perspective of the Yahwist communities of the Persian era and to pursue the history of tradition in reverse. It would not be surprising if this were to result in links between Judaic and Persian interpretations of the world. However, Old Testament research still has a long way to go before it is able to leave behind its traditional interpretive patterns or is able to supplement them.

Pensioners like myself are no longer able to express their gratitude to eager co-workers. Nevertheless, I wish to express my sincere gratitude to the many friends and students in Germany, Brazil, South Africa, and the United States who involved themselves in unusual formulations of a question. Without them, this book would quickly have ground to a halt. Likewise Walter Dietrich, the patient editor, who has kindly encouraged me to conclude it,

deserves a sincere thank you. Those who would like to engage in dialogue for or against it are welcome to contact me via e-mail address: gersterh@staff.uni-marburg.de.

Many thanks!

Giessen, 15 October 2005

Erhard S. Gerstenberger

ABBREVIATIONS

AB	Anchor Bible
ABRL	Anchor Bible Reference Library
ACCSOT	Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, Old Testament
<i>AcT</i>	<i>Acta theologica</i>
ADPV	Abhandlungen des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins
AfOB	Archiv für Orientforschung Beiheft
<i>ANET</i>	<i>Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament.</i> Edited by James B. Pritchard. 3rd ed. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969.
ANET	Ancient Near Eastern Texts and Studies
AOAT	Alter Orient und Altes Testament
AOTC	Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries
ATANT	Abhandlungen zur Theologie des Alten und Neuen Testaments
ATD	Das Alte Testament Deutsch
ATS	Arbeiten zu Text und Sprache im Alten Testament
AzTH	Arbeiten zur Theologie
<i>BA</i>	<i>Biblical Archaeologist</i>
<i>BAR</i>	<i>Biblical Archaeology Review</i>
BARIS	British Archaeological Reports International Series
BBB	Bonner biblische Beiträge
BBET	Beiträge zur biblischen Exegese und Theologie
BBVO	Berliner Beiträge zum Vorderen Orient
BEATAJ	Beiträge zur Erforschung des Alten Testaments und des antiken Judentums
BETL	Bibliotheca ephemeridum theologicarum lovaniensium
BEvT	Beiträge zur evangelischen Theologie
BibB	Biblische Beiträge
BibEnc	Biblische Enzyklopädie/Biblical Encyclopedia
BKAT	Biblischer Kommentar, Altes Testament
<i>BN</i>	<i>Biblische Notizen</i>
BN	Biblische Notizen

BThSt	Biblisch-theologische Studien
BWANT	Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten und Neuen Testament
BZ	<i>Biblische Zeitschrift</i>
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
CAH	<i>Cambridge Ancient History</i>
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CDOG	Colloquien der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft
CHJ	<i>The Cambridge History of Judaism</i> . Edited by W. D. Davies et al. 4 vols. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984–2006.
CRINT	Compendia rerum Iudaicarum ad Novum Testamentum
DMOA	Documenta et monumenta Orientis antiqui
EdF	Erträge der Forschung
EHS	Europäische Hochschulschriften
ETS	Erfurter theologische Studien
EvT	<i>Evangelische Theologie</i>
FAT	Forschungen zum Alten Testament
FB	Forschung zur Bibel
FCB	Feminist Companion to the Bible
FOTL	Forms of the Old Testament Literature
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
FThSt	Freiburger theologische Studien
HANE/S	History of the Ancient Near East. Studies
HAR	<i>Hebrew Annual Review</i>
HAT	Handbuch zum Alten Testament
HBS	Herders biblische Studien
HBT	<i>Horizons in Biblical Theology</i>
HO	Handbuch der Orientalistik
HSM	Harvard Semitic Monographs
HTKAT	Herders theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament
HUCA	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
IEJ	<i>Israel Exploration Journal</i>
Int	<i>Interpretation</i>
JAAR	<i>Journal of the American Academy of Religion</i>
JAOS	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JEOL	<i>Jaarbericht van het Vooraziatisch-Egyptisch Genootschap ex Oriente Lux</i>
JPTSup	Journal of Pentecostal Theology Supplement Series

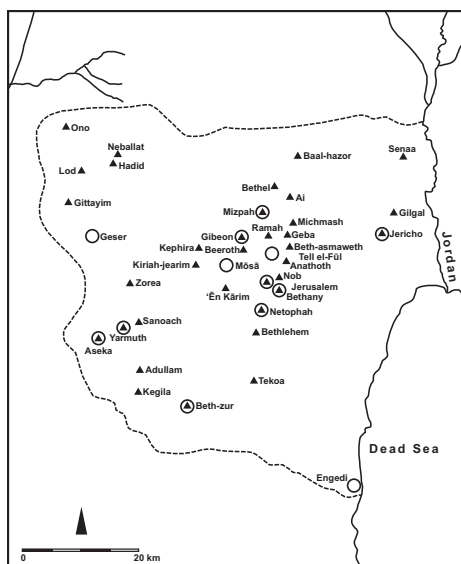
<i>JQR</i>	<i>Jewish Quarterly Review</i>
<i>JSHRZ</i>	<i>Jüdische Schriften aus hellenistisch-römischer Zeit</i>
<i>JSJ</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of Judaism</i>
JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
JSPSup	Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha Supplement Series
KAT	Kommentar zum Alten Testament
LAPO	Littératures anciennes du Proche-Orient
LSTS	Library of Second Temple Studies
<i>MDOG</i>	<i>Mitteilungen der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft</i>
<i>NBL</i>	<i>Neues Bibel-Lexikon</i> . Edited by Manfred Görg and Bernhard Lang. 3 vols. Zürich: Benziger, 1991–2001.
NCB	New Century Bible
NCBC	New Century Bible Commentary
NGWG.PH	Nachrichten der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen, Philologisch-historische Klasse
NEB	Die Neue Echter-Bibel
NSKAT	Neuer Stuttgarter Kommentar, Altes Testament
NTOA	Novum testamentum et orbis antiquus
OBO	Orbis biblicus et orientalis
ÖBS	Österreichische biblische Studien
<i>OEANE</i>	<i>The Oxford Encyclopedia of Archaeology in the Near East</i> . Edited by Eric M. Meyers. 5 vols. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.
OIP	Oriental Institute Publications
<i>Or</i>	<i>Orientalia</i>
OTG	Old Testament Guides
OTL	Old Testament Library
OTS	Old Testament Studies
OtSt	Oudtestamentische studiën
QD	Quaestiones disputatae
RGG	<i>Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart</i> . Edited by Kurt Gall- ing. 7 vols. 3rd ed. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1957–65. 4th ed. 8 vols. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001.
<i>RIA</i>	<i>Reallexikon der Assyriologie</i> . Edited by Erich Ebeling et al. Berlin: de Gruyter, 1928–.
RM	Die Religionen der Menschheit
SAA	State Archives of Assyria

SBAB	Stuttgarter biblische Aufsatzbände
SBB	Stuttgarter biblische Beiträge
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLMS	Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series
SBLSBL	Society of Biblical Literature Studies in Biblical Literature
SBLSymS	Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series
SBLWAW	Society of Biblical Literature Writings from the Ancient World
SBS	Stuttgarter Bibelstudien
SBT	Studies in Biblical Theology
SDIO	Studia et documenta ad iura Orientis antiqui pertinentia
SEÅ	<i>Svensk Exegetisk Årsbok</i>
SHANE	Studies in the History of the Ancient Near East
SHR	Studies in the History of Religion
SOR	Serie orientale Roma
SOTSMS	Society for the Study of the Old Testament Monograph Series
SSN	Studia semitica neerlandica
<i>StIr</i>	<i>Studia Iranica</i>
SUNT	Studien zur Umwelt des Neuen Testaments
SWBA	Social World of Biblical Antiquity
TAVO	Tübinger Atlas des Vorderen Orients
TB	Theologische Bücherei: Neudrucke und Berichte aus dem 20. Jahrhundert
<i>TDOT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i> . Edited by G. J. Botterweck and H. Ringgren. Translated by J. T. Willis, G. W. Bromiley, and D. E. Green. 15 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974–2006.
TF	Tehraner Forschungen
ThB	Theologische Bücherei
ThSt	Theologische Studien
<i>TMO</i>	<i>Travaux de la Maison de l'Orient</i>
<i>Transeu</i>	<i>Transeuphratène</i>
<i>TRE</i>	<i>Theologische Realenzyklopädie</i> . Edited by Gerhard Krause and Gerhard Müller. Berlin: de Gruyter, 1977–.
TThSt	Trierer theologische Studien
<i>TUAT</i>	<i>Texte aus der Umwelt des Alten Testaments</i> . Edited by Otto Kaiser. 18 parts in 3 vols. Gütersloh: Mohn, 1982–1997. New series edited by Bernd Janowski and Gernot Wilhelm. Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2004–.
<i>TynB</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>

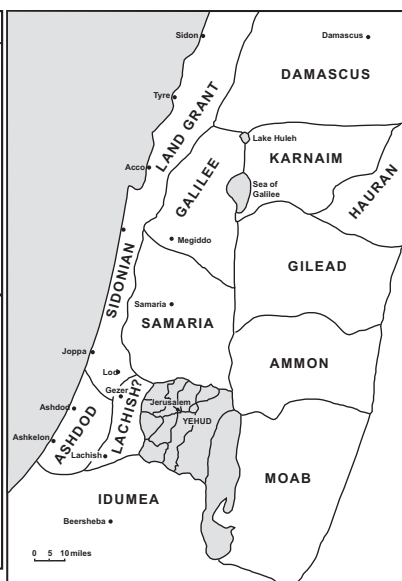
TZ	<i>Theologische Zeitschrift</i>
UAVA	Untersuchungen zur Assyriologie und vorderasiatischen Archäologie
UNHAI	Uitgaven van het Nederlands Historisch-Archaeologisch Instituut te Istanbul
UTB	Uni-Taschenbücher
VF	<i>Verkündigung und Forschung</i>
VT	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
VTSup	Supplements to Vetus Testamentum
VWGTh	Veröffentlichungen der Wissenschaftlichen Gesellschaft für Theologie
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WMANT	Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
WO	<i>Die Welt des Orients</i>
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
YNER	Yale Near Eastern Researches
ZA	<i>Zeitschrift für Assyriologie</i>
ZAW	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
ZBKAT	Zürcher Bibelkommentare, Altes Testament
ZDMG	<i>Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft</i>
ZTK	<i>Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche</i>



The empire of the Medes and Persians. After Joachim Herrmann, *Lexikon früher Kulturen* (Leipzig: Bibliographisches Institut, 1987), 2:142.



The Persian province of Yehud. After Helga Weippert, *Palästina in vorhellenistischer Zeit* (Handbuch der Archäologie 2.1; Munich: Beck, 1988), 691.



The Syrian-Palestinian provinces of the Persian Empire. After Charles E. Carter, *The Emergence of Yehud in the Persian Period* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 291.



Two seal impressions and a coin. After Charles E. Carter, *The Emergence of Yehud in the Persian Period* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 264.

PERSIAN PEOPLE-LISTS

Countries ruled by Darius I, Behistun Inscription §6 (W. Hinz, *TUAT* 1:423)

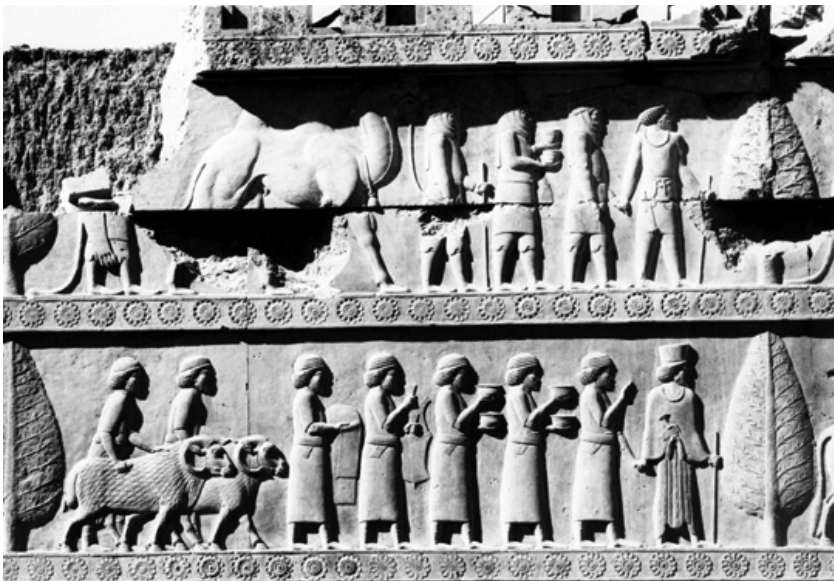
Persia, Elam, Babylonia, Assyria, Arabia, Egypt, the countries by the sea, Sardis, Ionia, Media, Armenia, Cappadocia, Parthia, Drangiana, Areia, Chorasmia, Baktria, Sogdia, Gandara, Scythia, Sattagydia, Arachosia, Maka, twenty-three lands in all.

Delegations of the nations in the Stair Relief of the Apadana in Persepolis (Heidemarie Koch, *Dareios*, 99–112)

Medes, Elamites, Parthians, Areians, Egyptians, Baktrians, Sagartians, Armenians, Babylonians, Syrians, Scythians, Sattagydians and Gandarians, Sogdians and Chorasmians, Lydians, Cappadocians, Dranians and Arachosians, Indians, Thracians, Arabs, Karians, Lybians, Ethiopians.

Xerxes' list from the "Daeva" Inscription (XPh 41–56; according to Pierre Briant, *Cyrus*, 173)

Media, Elam, Arachosia, Armenia, Drangiana, Parthia, Areia, Baktria, Sogdia, Chorasmia, Babylonia, Assyria, Sattagydia, Sardis, Egypt, Ionia, those who dwell on this side of the sea and those who dwell across the sea, Maka, Arabia, Gandara, Indus, Cappadocia, Dahae, Saka H., Saka T., Skudra, Akaufaka, Lybia, Karia, Ethiopia.



Emissaries of the Areians (above) and Syrians (below) at the eastern steps of the Apadana in Persepolis. From Ursula Schneider, *Persepolis and Ancient Iran* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976). Used by permission.

I. THE BIBLICAL PORTRAIT OF THE PERIOD

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For Israel or, more precisely, nascent Judaism, the two centuries in which the ancient world, positioned between Egypt and India, was under the hegemony of Persian emperors (539–331 B.C.E.), were decisive in many ways. During this era the Judeans, in their native country and in the Diaspora both in Babylon and in Egypt, were drawn to new communal forms. From the Torah and some parallel writings they shaped a sacred canon for themselves, and in Jerusalem and its rebuilt temple they gained a geographic and symbolic focal point. As a tiny minority in a multinational empire, that is to say under aggravated circumstances of incessant pressure to adapt and the never-waning quest for autonomy, they developed their own convictions of faith into the final form that is found in most parts of the Old Testament today. The tradition of the Hebrew writings (and a few Aramaic passages among them)

gained its decisive form in the Persian era. Furthermore, the written form of the insights achieved, the values of life, and the forms of community and worship established at that time had a significant impact upon later rabbinic Judaism and the Christian movements that emerged from it, as well as upon Islam.

If we view the two Persian centuries in this manner as the formative period of biblical Israel, we indeed contradict many biblical statements that assume that the point of gravitation of the history of faith was located in the period of Moses, the conquest, or the tribes, and partly in the period of the Davidic kingdom as well. This differently focused biblical perspective probably also accounts for the fact that the Persian episode attracts relatively little attention in the Hebrew writings. The Pentateuch and the Deuteronomistic History, in other words, the books from Genesis to 2 Kings (in Jewish terms, the Torah and the Former Prophets) do not explicitly mention the Persians, even if many texts reflect those late world affairs (e.g., the Priestly part of the Pentateuch). To what extent there are occasional Persian loanwords in the Hebrew writings of the Old Testament remains unclear; in any case, they are not very numerous.¹ Among the Major Prophets, only Isaiah, beginning with chapter 40, points directly and indirectly to the radical change of history beginning with Cyrus. Jeremiah and Ezekiel are focused on the Babylonians as a threat and foreign power, while Daniel already belongs to a post-Persian context, curiously still very much concerned with the Babylonian kings Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar as prototypes of tyrants (see Dan 1–5; 7) and then with one leap turns to Darius “the Mede” and places Cyrus following Darius (Dan 6; 9–10). Fundamentally, however, the account is entirely focused on the “fourth king” (Dan 7:7–12; cf. 2:40–45) and his successors, in other words, on the Hellenist Alexander and his Diadochi. Among the twelve Minor Prophets, most of them make no reference to any events or facts pertaining to our segment of history. Only Haggai and Zechariah refer to it and presuppose Persian conditions. In the Psalms and wisdom literature, too, Persian matters are largely unknown. Even Chronicles, which, as far as we are able to ascertain, most likely emerged in the Persian period, allows its contemporary profile to shine through unconsciously at best. The writers intend to report primarily about what in their view was the constitutive past, especially the reign of

1. See H. S. Gehman, “Notes on Persian Words in the Book of Esther,” *JBL* 43 (1924): 321–28; Blenkinsopp, *Ezra–Nehemiah*, e.g. 147, 152, 216. The old Persian term *pardes* (garden), for instance, occurs three times: Song 4:13; Eccl 2:5; Neh 2:28. The Assyrian tradition is reflected in the use of *pelek* (district) in Neh 3:9–18 (A. Damsky, “*Pelek* in Nehemiah 3,” *IEJ* 33 [1983]: 242–44).

David and Solomon and their accomplishments. To be sure, they are concerned with informing and motivating their own contemporaries (see 2 Chr 36:22–23). For the Chroniclers, however, the fundamental rules for the contemporary structures and norms were mainly decreed in the early history of the kings. Hence it is necessary to highlight the latter, while their own Persian existence is not examined. Thus there remain only a few writings of the Hebrew Bible concerned with shedding light on a few selected segments of the Persian era that was both so very creative and instructive: the books of Ezra and Nehemiah (originally one volume in the Hebrew and Greek canon, preceding Chronicles in the former); and the book of Esther, which itself presumably narrates retrospectively from the historical distance. Deutero-Isaiah, Haggai, and Zech 1–8 may still be reckoned among the eyewitnesses. Thus out of a total of 946 chapters of the Hebrew Bible, 51, that is, 5.39 percent, of its content is dedicated directly to the Persian period of history, to the life and state of “Israel” in this era. This is a value that runs counter to our assessment of the epoch; in other words, it points to a radically different view of the period of history addressed here. According to the view of the ancients, the respective present obtains its structures and meaning precisely from certain constellations of the past. Conversely, our own feeling of self-esteem is rather skeptical over against the influences of history and their consequences. In the view of moderns, the past often represents only liability and wrong decision that we need to correct, if we want to face up to the current challenges. For us it is the future that points the way; it determines our behavior. Nevertheless, we need to pose the following questions: How was the course of contemporary events experienced in ancient Judah or in the Diaspora? What significance did the reality experienced at that time have for the Judean communities (see, e.g., Neh 9:32–37; Ps 137; Hag 2:20–23)? As already intimated, in view of the lack of contemporary interest, we cannot expect a continuous, exhaustive account of two centuries of Jewish history. The texts focus on a few topics.

I.1. RETURN AND RECONSTRUCTION

Ackroyd, Peter. *Exile and Restoration* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1968). **Albertz**, Rainer. *Israel in Exile: The History and Literature of the Sixth Century B.C.E.* (trans. David Green; SBLSBL 3; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 119–32. **Blenkinsopp**, Joseph. “The Mission of Udgahorresnet and Those of Ezra and Nehemiah,” *JBL* 106 (1987): 409–21. **Caspari**, Wilhelm. *Lieder und Gottessprüche der Rückwanderer (Jesaia 40–55)* (BZAW 65; Giessen: Töpelmann, 1934). **Gerstenberger**, Erhard S. *Psalms* (2 vols.; FOTL 14–15; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans,

1988–2001). **Seybold**, Klaus. *Bilder zum Tempelbau* (SBS 70; Stuttgart: KBW Verlag, 1974).

THE SO-CALLED CYRUS EDICT

In the first year of King Cyrus of Persia, in order that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished, the LORD stirred up the spirit of King Cyrus of Persia so that he sent a herald throughout all his kingdom, and also in a written edict declared: “Thus says King Cyrus of Persia: The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem in Judah. Any of those among you who are of his people—may their God be with them!—are now permitted to go up to Jerusalem in Judah, and rebuild the house of the Lord, the God of Israel—he is the God who is in Jerusalem; and let all survivors, in whatever place they reside, be assisted by the people of their place with silver and gold, with goods and with animals, besides freewill offerings for the house of God in Jerusalem. (Ezra 1:1–4 NRSV; cf. Ezra 5:13–15; 6:3–5)

From Isa 40ff. we gain a presumably accurate picture of the atmosphere in Babylon around 540 B.C.E. Cyrus, the Persian king, prepared to take over the Neo-Babylonian Empire. He was celebrated, not only by the Babylonian priesthood of Marduk that broke with its own government under Nabonidus and Belshazzar and welcomed the conqueror from the East as savior, but also by the Jewish deportees who had been resident in Babylon for decades. A prophetic oracle says: “Thus says the LORD to his anointed [Hebrew “Messiah”], to Cyrus, whose right hand I have grasped to subdue nations before him.... For the sake of my servant Jacob, and Israel my chosen, I call you by your name, I surname you, though you do not know me” (Isa 45:1, 4). In the hymn to Yahweh cited immediately prior, which was surely sung in worship contexts, the concrete hope is echoed: “who says of Cyrus, ‘He is my shepherd, and he will carry out all my purpose,’ and who says of Jerusalem, ‘It shall be rebuilt,’ and of the temple, ‘Your foundation shall be laid’” (Isa 44:28). The restoration of the city of Jerusalem and its (only legitimate) temple, according to the contemporary sources, was the central matter of concern at least of the third generation of Judeans living in Babylon. Apparently it did not find undivided support among those who had “remained at home” (see Hag 1:2–11; Jer 24:4–7), so that the return of the exiled became the indispensable prerequisite for the “restoration” of the community of Yahweh. It is a well-known ethno-

logical and sociopsychological phenomenon that the attachment of emigrants to their country of origin can be maintained for generations.²

While the mood of the return was prepared in Isa 40–55, Cyrus is said to have implemented it immediately upon his assumption of power in Babylon. The Persian king is said to have issued an edict published throughout the empire, according to which the Babylonian Jews were permitted to return to Jerusalem. Moreover, the repatriates were to obtain substantial financial support apparently from those adhering to a different religion in their present environment. Cyrus himself saw to the return of the looted treasures of the temple (Ezra 1:1–4, 5–11). Meanwhile, the remigration of more than five hundred miles on foot is not worth a historical record. Almost fifty thousand repatriates (Ezra 2:64–65) are simply there and begin with the construction of the altar on the ancient temple court in Jerusalem because the sacrificial service was indispensable for daily life and the festivals (Ezra 3:1–6; those who had remained at home apparently did not share this priority). The actual construction of the temple, however, began to flag because the Jewish community under Zerubbabel and Joshua barred people from Samaria from sharing in the Jerusalem temple (Ezra 4:1–3). As a result, these northern “adversaries,” regarded as unorthodox, successfully intervened with the Persian authorities. As long as Cyrus was in power and well into the reign of his second successor, Darius (Ezra 4:5), the work on the temple could not proceed. “In the reign of Ahasuerus” (i.e., Xerxes) the opponents drew up a formal indictment against the Jews. It was resubmitted to his successor Arthashastra (i.e., Artaxerxes) and written in Aramaic (Ezra 4:6–16). The main point was the political suspicion that “they are rebuilding that rebellious and wicked city; they are finishing the walls and repairing the foundations” (4:12b). The king was persuaded and stopped the rebuilding in a letter also cited verbatim and addressed to Rehum, the royal deputy, and Shimshai the scribe (4:17–22). The royal communication carried highest authority and led to the cessation of all the construction “until the second year of the reign of King Darius of Persia” (4:24b). The succession of kings and the prolongation of the temple construction for more than one hundred years, from Cyrus until Artaxerxes I and back again to Darius I (or to Darius II?), indicate that for those handing down this story the actual chronology of events was either unknown or, more likely, entirely without interest. The Chronicler does not think “in terms of linear history, that is, diachronic-

2. German emigrants to the Americas, Africa, Russia, or Australia, for instance, have adhered to this pattern quite closely. Of course, they were not “deportees” like the Judeans who had been resettled by force; nevertheless, they were driven from their homes by economic distress.

ally..., but rather thematically, that is, synchronically.”³ For this reason he incorporated the didactic account of the foiled reconstruction into his presentation. Haggai and Zechariah take up the rebuilding of the temple again (Ezra 5:1–2). This information is confirmed in the respective prophetic writings (Hag 1:2–2:9; Zech 1:16–17). Following a further appeal to the central government by the “enemies,” again documented by an exchange of letters, the Jews receive permission from Darius to undertake the construction. Again they are promised generous assistance for their plan (Ezra 5:3–6:12). The completion “in the sixth year of the reign of Darius” (Ezra 6:15) and the dedication of the sanctuary are a high point of this “historiography” (Ezra 6:16–18). Now the entire temple service is made possible again without strictures; it is in accordance with the will of all the Persian governments from Cyrus to Artaxerxes (Ezra 6:14) and, of course, with the purpose of Yahweh, who directs the rulers of the world like puppets (see Ezra 1:1; 7:6; Neh 2:1–8). In order to demonstrate the comprehensive appropriateness of the restoration of the temple, the chroniclers order a great Passover, fulfilling all the ritual requirements (Ezra 6:19–22). The priests and Levites are prepared appropriately; the repatriates and, from among those who had remained at home, those having separated themselves fully from the “nations” celebrate together, and appropriate joy abounds.

Thus a concrete account about the earliest returnees following the liberation by the Persians is practically nonexistent. More likely the didactic theme of “returning from Babylon” has been condensed into various accounts that, while heavily symbolic and seriously weighted theologically, are not able to provide us with any precise historical information, despite references to places and individuals. As a contrasting narrative, a comparison may be drawn with the legendary stories of Israel’s wilderness wandering after the liberation from Egypt (Exod 16–18; Num 11–26), whose central themes are the dangers, tests of faith, protections, and cultic-ethical problems of the wandering community. The biblical portrayal of the first return from Babylon, however, ushers into an episode of building the temple in which the furnishings and function of the sanctuary and its servants have absolute priority over any other information. Apart from the portrayal in Ezra-Nehemiah (see the lists in Ezra 2 and Neh 7), the Hebrew writings, if at all, offer only minuscule references to the returnees from Babylon or to existing links between the home country and exiles (e.g., Jer 29; Ezek 2:4–15; 33:21; Zech 5:5–11). The announcements in Isa 42:15–16; 43:1–7, 14–21; 48:20–22 and so on are prophecies of deliverance and, in turn, informed by texts in Exodus. The topic of the temple’s

3. Gunneweg, *Ezra*, 87.

rebuilding likewise is barely touched on in texts other than Ezra and Nehemiah, but most strongly in the prophets Haggai and Zechariah. In the latter it is indeed rather an event to celebrate the eschatological return of a king from the house of David. The visions of Zechariah are entwined around the anticipated turn for those exiled; they bring together the dawn of the kingdom of God, the restoration of the temple, and the appointment of the “two anointed ones” (Zech 4:14; cf. Zech 1:7–6:15). Further, the dedicatory words addressing Zerubbabel that precede this glowing view of the future also belong here:

The word of the LORD came a second time to Haggai on the twenty-fourth day of the month: “Speak to Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, saying, I am about to shake the heavens and the earth, and to overthrow the throne of kingdoms; I am about to destroy the strength of the kingdoms of the nations, and overthrow the chariots and their riders; and the horses and their riders shall fall, every one by the sword of a comrade. On that day, says the LORD of hosts, I will take you, O Zerubbabel my servant, son of Shealtiel, says the LORD, and make you like a signet ring; for I have chosen you, says the LORD of hosts.” (Hag 2:20–23)

Thus for our understanding we find only exceedingly scant, fragmentary notes in the Hebrew writings (and their Aramaic pericopes) about Israel's return from the exile and the new beginning in their home country under Persian management. For this reason the control question is inescapable: What did the Old Testament witnesses want to emphasize in writing? On what was their focus? Which “apprehensive” contents and experiences did they entrust to their children and children's children in the book-like fixed tradition? Precisely this kind of questioning is not easy, to be sure; in contemporary biblical interpretation it is even intensely controversial. The sources are too confused, the status of the readings is too ambiguous, and the theories that have been generated are too numerous. Those who are convinced that the postexilic community of faith of Israel cultivated predominantly eschatological hopes will read the texts differently from those who discover overwhelmingly a rigid, legalistic, hierarchical disposition in the late writings. Sometimes the basic decision in favor of a particular interpretation of the biblical portrayal of history is already made by means of classifying and dividing up individual documents, books, or compositions. What main points of emphasis are we able to determine in conjunction with the themes of “the return and reconstruction after the exile” against the backdrop of the present discussion? In the initial phases of the remigration and the new establishment of Israel's existence, there are relatively few individuals and officials who played key roles. The Persian great-kings set the religio-political action in motion in the historical accounts; behind them is Yahweh, the real ruler

of the world (Ezra 4:1). They make use of Jewish envoys who apparently are construed either as available at the seat of the central government or as members of the Babylonian *golah*, the community of emigrants (see Ezek 1:1; Zech 6:10; the Persian royal residence of Susa is specifically mentioned only in Neh 1:1; cf. Dan 8:2). The elaborate commission narratives concerning Ezra (Ezra 7) and Nehemiah (Neh 1:1–2, 10) are intended to show the absolute engagement—theologically: the unconditional obedience toward Yahweh—of the imperial government. The “governor” Zerubbabel and Jeshua (or Joshua) the high priest belong to the first wave of remigration (Ezra 2:2; Neh 7:7; Hag 2:21; Zech 3:1; 4:7, 8; 6:11). In the context of opponents who occasionally obstruct the building of the temple, they establish the foundation for the new beginning of the liberated religious community of Israel, consciously ordering their affairs within the Persian Empire.⁴ The prophetic references to the contemporary situation, however, lack a clearly positive assessment. Whether it is possible to derive an opposing disposition of nationalistic circles from this is nevertheless questionable. At any rate, the dating in Haggai and Zechariah objectively follows the years of the reign of Darius (e.g., Hag 1:1; 2:10; Zech 1:1, 7; 7:1). As shown clearly in the programmatic introduction to the historical summary of Ezra–Nehemiah, the universally responsible Persian government wants to erect a temple in Jerusalem on behalf of Yahweh, the “God of heaven” (Ezra 1:1–4; esp. v. 2). Thus opens a universal theological perspective comparable with ideas of the one world under one God in apocalyptic literature (e.g., Dan 3:31–4:34; 7:1–27) or of the embedding of the infancy narrative of Jesus into the Roman Empire (Luke 2:1). The theologians of the postexilic community think in terms of the comprehensive frame of the one world. As has been customary for thousands of years in the ancient Near East, the reigning God first of all deserves a “house” that, according to traditional understanding, must be the center of the world and the seat of the divine governing power.⁵ Since the construction of the temple in Ezra–

4. For good reasons many scholars assume the literary independence of Ezra–Nehemiah, e.g., Japhet, Eskenazi. In addition, Willi emphasizes the programmatic peculiarity of this block of literary material as the depiction of a new epoch in which Ezra–Nehemiah becomes “the first historical portrayal of early Judaism.... Over against what was in the past, it describes something fundamentally new and how it came about” (Willi, *Juda*, 57). “The temple is the sign and the central task at the dawn of a new era” (56).

5. The significance of temples and dwelling places of the gods in the ancient Near East should not be underestimated; cf. the extensive hymn of construction of Gudea of Lagās (Thorkild Jacobsen, trans. and ed., *The Harps That Once...: Sumerian Poetry in Translation* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987], 386–444) and the efforts of Baal in the Ugarit myths of building his own house (KTU 1,4 trans M. Dietrich and O. Loretz, “Baal-Zyklus KTU 1.1–6,” *TUAT* 3.6:1151–73). The lists of temples from the ancient Near East

Nehemiah has such fundamental significance, it may be legitimate to assume that oriental and Persian ideas of world dominion resonate, too, either consciously or unconsciously, even if they are not publicly expressed.

The religio-political measures of the Persian government, especially for those executing them who come to the fore here, have a singular aim: to open up the possibilities of life in the homeland to those Israelites released from Babylon. The enterprise of the return and building of the temple therefore has a clearly marked address. The history of the world to which appeal is made, led by the Persian great-king, is concerned with a lost minority, and this scattered section of the population becomes the main point, gaining names and number in painstakingly detailed lists of inhabitants and families (Ezra 2 = Neh 7). "The whole assembly together was forty-two thousand three hundred sixty, besides their male and female servants, of whom there were seven thousand three hundred thirty-seven; and they had two hundred male and female singers. They had seven hundred thirty-six horses, two hundred forty-five mules, four hundred thirty-five camels, and six thousand seven hundred twenty donkeys" (Ezra 2:64–67).

Apparently the detailed list of names (Ezra 2:2b–58), concluding with an impressive count (2:64), is intended to establish a reliable stock of nationals. In the case of some families, the affiliation cannot be established beyond doubt, which has legal ramifications for the legal status of those affected (2:59–63). Whatever the time and situation might be in which the list originated,⁶ for the chroniclers of the Ezra-Nehemiah tradition in any case it demonstrates how they imagined the national community. It was structured by families and hometowns; their members are distinguished by their functions, as in the Chronicles, as laypeople, priests, Levites, singers, gatekeepers and temple-servants (plus the otherwise unknown "slaves of Solomon," 2:55; cf. Neh 11:3). Collectively they are called "the Israelite people" (Ezra 2:2b). It is not as much the advanced archival technique, apparently functioning on a

provide a glimpse into the immense energy with which rulers and populations invested in building temples (see A. R. George, *House Most High: The Temples of Ancient Mesopotamia* [Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1993]). Haggai likewise gives priority to the temple over building houses (Hag 1:2–11), albeit with the more obvious argument that neglecting the house of God resulted in drought and barrenness of the fields. On this, see Wolfgang Zwickel, *Der Tempelkult in Kanaan und Israel* (FAT 10; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1994); unfortunately, he dates all of the sacrificial texts to the preexilic era.

6. Many exegetes want to see the list as an authentic account of the number of returnees from Babylon. Gunneweg considers assigning it to the population statistics of the fifth century (*Esra*, 65–66). This may agree with the repetition of the list in Neh 7, where the included families and locations represent the core of the nation, the "true community" (56).

local level and culminating in central archives that is astonishing, but rather the theological significance of the list. The members of the general assembly of Israel are recorded according to their family trees. Apparently they are subordinate to a committee of twelve leaders.⁷ The political entity to which all of those residing in their towns belong is the “administrative district” (*hammedinah*, Ezra 2:1), namely, the newly established province of Judah. Yahweh’s people live in an accurately delineated realm and comprise a group of people who can be counted and identified by name. They are assigned to the great God, the creator of heaven and earth, whose temple is to be built anew. For their sake Yahweh, the God of Israel, arranges their release and return, as well as the building of his house. His chosen people, the community as a whole, entirely aligned with him and presumably also in accordance with the narrators, adopts the status of being the witness for the mighty God of creation and redemption (see Isa 49:18–26; Ezra 9:9; Pss 68:29–36; 97).

That the plan for the return and reconstruction could not be realized trouble-free, even in the literary construction, accords with every human experience. In the context of the Ezra-Nehemiah narrative, neighbors and state officials rise up against the Jews. In addition, this episode is not recorded historically; instead, it exists in a historically condensed form and also shows tradition-historical uncertainties. According to one account it is “adversaries”⁸ of Judah and Benjamin who appear (Ezra 4:1). A little later they are called “people of the land”⁹ or are associated with them (4:4). They successfully “discouraged the people of Judah and made them afraid” (4:4).

Further pieces of tradition even mention the names of opponents. After weaving in an episode of constructing the wall (Ezra 4:7–22), emphasizing the blocking of the project as well, Ezra 5 reflects the building of the temple as continuing for the moment. In this instance it is the prophets Haggai and Zechariah who provide the impetus (Ezra 5:1). But then the official representatives of the state, the governor of the province of Transeuphrates and a

7. Are those mentioned by name in Ezra 2:2a and Neh 7:7 heads of families? In the case of Ezra only Nahamani is missing, who appears between Raamiah and Mordecai in Neh 7:7.

8. The precise identity of the opponents is a matter of debate. Many scholars are of the opinion that the reference is to the Samaritan community of faith or to an early form of this grouping (negatively: Blenkinsopp, *Ezra*, 106–8). Many see an intra-Jewish opposition here, one that was perhaps associated with the ancient “people of the land” that used to support David (see Willi, *Juda*, 11–17, 30–33).

9. See Ernst Würthwein, *Der Amm Ha'arez im Alten Testament* (BWANT 4/17; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1936); Shemaryahu Talmon, “The Judean ‘Am Ha'ares in Historical Perspective,” in *Fourth World Congress of Jewish Studies* (2 vols.; Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1967), 1:71–76; and Willi, *Juda*.

certain Shethar-bozenai, intervene. They are missing the permission to build in Jerusalem, turn to the reigning King Darius, and request that the matter be clarified (Ezra 5:6–17). The archives of the imperial government in Ecbatana indeed yields the original writing of the edict of Cyrus relative to the building of the temple in Jerusalem, albeit in an entirely different formulation¹⁰ from the one in Ezra 1:1–4, and nothing stands in the way of completing the building. Further, under the threat of punishment, Darius also orders that support for the ongoing expenses associated with the daily sacrifices in the new temple be provided (Ezra 6:6–12). The reigning king remains faithful to his obligation over against Yahweh, the God of the world, whereas the subordinate authorities, when in doubt, are inclined to line up with the ranks of the opponents. The opposition of the latter against the up-and-coming city of Jerusalem continues. Under Nehemiah, Sanballat, governor of Samaria, and Tobiah, apparently one of Sanballat's officials,¹¹ work to impede the rebuilding of Jerusalem (Neh 2:10; 3:33–35; 4:1–2; 6:1–14). All these hostilities can be explained from the new political and religious situation. On the literary level they are cleverly condensed and integrated into the events of the narrative. They are to illustrate how the plan of Yahweh and of the Jews meets with opposition among wicked people, who are entirely unsuccessful over against the prudent achievements—inspired by Yahweh, to be sure—on the part of the Jews. With a prayer vindication that also occurs in the ritual practice of the Psalms (petitions for defense; curses), Nehemiah counters the opponents: “Remember Tobiah and Sanballat, O my God, according to these things that they did, and also the prophetess Noadiah and the rest of the prophets who wanted to make me afraid” (Neh 6:14; cf. Ps 109:6–20).

Overall, however, Yahweh's cause and his now worldwide community must be successful. The temple and the city of Jerusalem are built and proclaim the might and favor of the universal God, to whom even the world powers are subject. The resounding dedication of the completed temple and

10. Ezra 6:2b–5 brings out different emphases: “A record. In the first year of his reign, King Cyrus issued a decree: Concerning the house of God at Jerusalem, let the house be rebuilt, the place where sacrifices are offered and . . . its height shall be sixty cubits and its width sixty cubits, with three courses of hewn stones and one course of timber (shall be placed), and the cost be paid from the royal treasury. Moreover, let the gold and silver vessels of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar took out of the temple in Jerusalem and brought to Babylon, be restored and brought back to the temple in Jerusalem; you shall put them in the house of God” (so Gunneweg, *Ezra*, 103).

11. Gunneweg points out names containing a reference to Yahweh both in Sanballat's and Tobias's family and concludes that both believed in Yahweh (*Nehemia*, 56).

the joyful annual festivals (Ezra 6:16–18, 19–22; Neh 8:13–18) are demonstrations for the God of Israel.

I.2. PROVINCIAL STRUCTURE OF JUDAH: THE SHAPING OF THE COMMUNITY

The topic of rebuilding now appears in two further “accounts” bearing the names of Ezra and Nehemiah¹² and addressing further phases of the new constitution of Israel following the conclusion of the exile. As before, they are not concerned with elaborate portrayals of the events, their comprehensive historical documentation, or careful investigations of the background, that is, with historiography in our sense of the term. The “correct” chronology is secondary, even if an occasional, albeit questionable, synchronization with the Persian sovereigns occurs. Perhaps it rather has a symbolic character and makes use especially of the legendary name of Artaxerxes as an emotional peg. Literarily, however, we need to ask whether the historical blurredness and contradictions in the Ezra-Nehemiah complex are to be traced back to accidental disorder and the layering of the blocks of tradition. For instance, scholars have been debating for some time now whether Ezra undertook his mission prior to or after Nehemiah. For the Old Testament tradents, the historical coherence overall is secondary. They reconstruct select episodes for the sole purpose of depicting how the city of Jerusalem rises again after (or parallel with) the successfully completed building of the temple and how the new community of Yahweh obtains its structures and rules. Assuming this lack of historical interest, it does not matter whether or not the literary recollections of the time got mixed up in the collection process. A historical report simply does not exist, and our burning historical curiosity will hardly be satisfied by means of this material. As in the case of Ezra 1–6, it is much rather a question of theological interpretation and construction of history, of the portrayal of important facts for the young Jewish community, which is, as it were, the community familiar to the writer in the last quarter of the fifth century at the earliest; it is not even the society contemporaneous with the historical figures of Ezra and Nehemiah. The issue is the definition of early Jewish identity in the Persian Empire and over against the powerful, binding traditions of the era of the fathers, as they meanwhile had taken shape in the Torah of Moses.

12. Both are representatives of the central government and apparently originate from Judaic settlements; thus the Ezra-Nehemiah tradition moves the impetus for the return, the rebuilding of Jerusalem, and the founding of the community very consciously to the communities of Yahweh in the Diaspora.

Thus we endeavor to understand the unusual view of things in Ezra 7–10. In this second remigration account the spotlight is on Ezra. In a genealogy of sixteen parts, his origin is traced back all the way to Aaron (Ezra 7:1–5)—an extraordinary hallmark for this leader of the people and the community, whose actual function is the communication of the “law of Moses” (7:6; cf. Neh 8:1–2). His encompassing titles are “scribe” (*sōpēr*), “priest” (*kōhēn*), “scribe of the law of the God of heaven” (Ezra 7:12). Over against the first remigration narrative, the emphasis on the leader’s personality and its solemn authentication by the king himself are conspicuous (7:11–26): the authority accorded to Ezra establishes protection, assistance, construction cost, and tax exemption for the restoration and overall is presented as overwhelmingly pro-Jewish. This time the preparation and undertaking of the journey attract some attention among the aspects of the special providence of God for the Jews and their mission to rebuild the temple (7:9, 15–32). Analogous to the first remigration, it is again the sacred utensils and gifts for the sanctuary that are prominent (7:19; 8:33–34); additionally, following some items in summary fashion (7:7), there is a detailed list of families that accompany Ezra (8:1–14). Nevertheless, the main emphasis is on (re?)establishing the internal order, namely, the resolving of the problem of mixed marriages, once again in accordance with the Torah (Ezra 9–10). In a broader context, this topic also appears in Neh 13. In the two concluding chapters of Ezra, however, it is the one conspicuous example of Israel’s unfaithfulness to Yahweh: “The holy seed has mixed itself with the peoples of the lands” (Ezra 9:2). The Ezra account goes back to holy tradition: the prophets warned against the people polluting themselves by means of contact with the Canaanite inhabitants (9:1, 11) and declared the strict prohibition of relationship by marriage (9:11–12). No doubt what is in mind is such passages as Exod 34:11–16; Lev 18:24–30; Num 25:6–18; Deut 7:1–11; 20:16–18; in other words, the Torah is regarded as the prophetic word of God, or indeed as the word of God adopted and proclaimed by the prophets (see 2 Chr 29:25; 36:15–16).

From a literary-critical perspective, the following book of Nehemiah, which in Jewish and Christian antiquity had been an integral part of the present Ezra-Nehemiah compound until the fourth century C.E., poses major problems. The protagonist Nehemiah is mentioned by name only in Neh 1:1, 8–9; 10:2; 12:26, 47. His reporting “I” emerges in the sections of 1:1–7:5 and 12:31–13:31. In between, however, there is a neutral section in which the leading part belongs to Ezra (Neh 8–10). In whatever way this mixture of narrative, meditative prayer, lists, contractual obligations, and the like may have come about, the resulting picture is a topical triptych.

TRIPTYCH "NEHEMIAH"

Neh 1–7	Neh 8–10	Neh 11–13
Commission (Neh 1–2; 10) cf. Ezra 1; 7; 8:15–36	Proclamation of Torah (Neh 8) _____	Population (Neh 11) _____
Steps to construction (Neh 2:11–6:10) cf. Ezra 3–6	Prayer of petition (Neh 9) cf. Ezra 9	Priests, Levites (Neh 12:1–27) _____
Lists (Neh 7) cf. Ezra 2; 8:1–14	Covenant commitment (Neh 10) _____	Dedication of city wall (Neh 12:27–43) cf. Ezra 6:13–22 Dedication of the community (Neh 13) cf. Ezra 10

In the first section, Nehemiah, the cupbearer at the court of the Persian emperor Artaxerxes, in the capital Susa, receives the news that Jerusalem's wall was (still?) in ruins. Fully aware that acting or desiring with a mind of his own could cost him his position and life, he dares, strengthened by praying to his God, to ask the emperor for permission to repair the city of his "ancestors' graves" (2:5). The emperor is extremely gracious and grants all his requests, even the request to provide the building materials and issue a letter of safe conduct to the Persian authorities (2:7–8). In contrast to Ezra 8:15–30, the narrative of the journey itself remains sparse. In Nehemiah it simply says: "Then I came to the governors of the province Beyond the River, and gave them the king's letters. Now the king had sent officers of the army and cavalry with me" (Neh 2:9).

The partial stylizing in the first-person singular¹³ supports the impression that this text-collection represents a chronologically continuous narrative. Sprinkled in are some quick prayers by the supposed author (see Neh 1:11; 3:36–37; 5:19; 6:14; 13:14, 22, 29, 31). More likely the material itself gives the impression that it was thematically arranged, perhaps for practical purposes

13. See Titus Reinmuth, *Der Bericht Nehemias: Zur literarischen Eigenart traditionsge-schichtlicher Prägung und innerbiblischen Rezeption des Ich-Berichts Nehemias* (OBO 183; Fribourg: Universitätsverlag; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2002).

in gatherings of the community. At any rate, the comparison with analogical topics in the Ezra part of the book suggests this conclusion.

Having scarcely arrived in Judah, Nehemiah tackles the colossal task forthwith. Jerusalem's walls and gates arise in the incredibly brief time of fifty-two days it took to rebuild them (6:15)—the result of an exemplary organization, of the active support of all Judeans, and of Yahweh's grace (see 4:3, 9, 14; 6:16). Just as there was opposition to the building of the temple already in the first account of the returnees, so also now the Samaritan authorities, represented by "Sanballat the Horonite," "Tobiah the Ammonite official," and "Geshem the Arab" (see 2:19; 3:33; 4:1; 6:1, 12), strongly oppose the reconstruction of the walls. They even insinuate that Nehemiah is guilty of attempting high treason and seek to mislead him with hired prophets (6:12–13). But contrary to everyone's, especially the enemies', expectations, the construction is successfully completed (6:15–16; 7:1). Thus the entire story of the restoration of Jerusalem, its rebirth as a viable community and administrative center (Neh 2:11–4:17; 6:1–7:3), turns into a triumph for Nehemiah, the commissioner sent by the imperial government. The solemn dedication follows in Neh 12:27–43. However, even in this first act Nehemiah is not content merely with the construction; rather, he immediately takes care to replenish the decimated population of Jerusalem (7:4–68) by using the list of the first returnees handed down in Ezra 2 (cf. Neh 11:1–2). The catalogue of his immediate measures is expanded by the restoration of the temple (7:69–72) and, as an obvious insertion into the chronicle of the building of the wall, by the restoration of social justice in the renewed community (Neh 5).

The middle part of the triptych comprises Neh 8–10. It has central significance, given that it depicts the archetype of a worship service in a synagogue¹⁴ and other essential elements of early Jewish spirituality (Festival of Booths, prayer of repentance, and pledge of loyalty to Yahweh; 8:13–10:40). Thus it is concerned with the constitution of religious institutions for the postexilic community. We see community leaders and community members at work ("men and women and those who could hear with understanding"; see 8:2). Ezra, a priest and scribe, reads the Torah from a platform, as it is still practiced in synagogues today, albeit for six hours, "from early morning until midday" (8:3). The appointed Levites, twelve in all (thirteen are mentioned!), "helped the people to understand the law" and "gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading" (8:7–8); in other words, they paraphrased the Hebrew text of the Torah in the colloquial Aramaic of the time, which as an official

14. Gunneweg, *Nehemia*, 110ff.; Eskenazi, 97–100; contra Willi, *Juda*, 108–17.

version also served as the state language (Imperial Aramaic) in the western Persian Empire. The Aramaic Targums that have been handed down in the rabbinic tradition had their origin in this practice.¹⁵ Finally, the community rises in the liturgical manner with which we are familiar, bows in prayer, and responds with “Amen” (8:5–6). The hymn of praise sung by choirs is not mentioned until later (9:4–6), and we are not able to discern whether hymns were also associated directly with the preaching from the start. Ezra’s reading of the Torah on the first day of Tishri, the month concluding the religious calendar of the year (see Lev 23:23–43), ushers in the Festival of Booths in a service brimming with joy and gratitude (Neh 8:13–18). This is followed by the model of a ceremony of repentance (Neh 9), characterized by the underlying tenor that the pure community has to be separated from everything foreign in the country (see Ezra 6:21; 10; Neh 13). The rigorous separation from those of foreign descent in terms of the purity laws in the book of Leviticus was a claim raised especially by those who returned from the Babylonian exile. Thus they proved to be the purists of the time, in contrast to “those who remained at home,” who clearly had a different scale of values and thought and acted less rigorously.

In terms of form, Neh 9:5–37 belongs to the genre of corporate confessions, such as Ezra 9; Dan 9; and Pss 78; 106.¹⁶ Noteworthy are laments, assumptions of guilt, petitions, and expressions of trust in the communal “we”-form (see Neh 9:16, 32–37), which continue into the declarations of obligation of Neh 10. More specifically, the prayer of repentance in Neh 9 contains a salvation-historical, hymnal part (9:5–15) and the major historical confession, drawing upon the narratives of the wilderness wanderings up to the conquest of the land (9:6–25), so as to portray the era of the prophets inclusively as an occasion for returning to Yahweh, as well as the story of departing from the time of the law and returning to it again (Neh 9:26–31). This view of history is also found in the Deuteronomic work (cf. the retrospective glances and summaries of Deut 1; 32; Judg 2; 2 Kgs 17). Presumably a negative assessment of the past such as this stemmed from the not infrequent laments of the people since the demise of Judah. Occasionally we hear about these days of prayer and repentance (see Zech 7:2–6; Lam 1–5), which have also become the model of the Christian services of mourning, petition, and remembrance. The communities in the Persian Empire accepted the debt of the fathers, endeavored to learn lessons from this, and sought to conduct themselves as more loyal to Yahweh. The renewed self-commitment on the

15. Targumim = “translations”; see Georg Schelbert, *NBL* 3:781–85.

16. See Rainer Kessler, “Das kollektive Schuldbekenntnis im Alten Testament,” *EvT* 56 (1996): 29–43; Gerstenberger, *Psalms*, vol. 2, in loco.

part of the community (Neh 10) serves this goal. It is a broadly laid out covenantal document in keeping with Exod 24:1–11; Deut 29–31; and Josh 24. The leaders of the community sign and seal the agreement, the people joining them by means of a solemn declaration of their will (Neh 10:29–30), literally entering “into a curse and an oath to walk in God’s law.”

The six specific regulations of the covenant, all given in the first-person plural, show clearly what mattered to the community of that time: separation from those of different faiths ([1] prohibition of mixed marriages; [2] “if the peoples of the land bring in merchandise or any grain on the Sabbath day to sell, we will not buy it from them,” Neh 10:31–32a); social balance ([3] observing the Sabbath year according to Lev 25:2–7; Deut 15:1–2, Neh 10:32b), and responsibility for the sanctuary and the priesthood ([4–6] Neh 10:33–38a). Thus the main emphasis lies in the latter obligations, as the extent of the text used confirms. In any case, it is interesting how the actualized commandment of the Torah finds concrete expression in the form of decisions made in accordance with the community’s will.

THE TORAH OBLIGATION OF THE COMMUNITY

1. We will not give our daughters to the peoples of the land or take their daughters for our sons.

2. We will not buy merchandise and all kinds of grain from the peoples of the land on the Sabbath, when they bring them on the Sabbath day to sell.

3. We will forego the crops of every seventh year and the exaction of every kind of debt.

4. We lay on ourselves the obligation to give yearly one-third of a shekel for the service of the house of God.

5. We also want to cast lots among the priests, the Levites, and the people, for the wood offering, to bring it into the house of our God, by ancestral houses, at appointed times, year by year..., as it is written in the law; also to bring to the house of our God, to the priests who minister in the house of our God, the firstborn of our sons and of our livestock, as it is written in the law, and the firstlings of our herds and of our flocks.

6. We want to bring the first of our dough, and our contributions, the fruit of every tree, the wine and the oil, to the priests, to the chambers of the house of our God and to bring to the Levites the tithes from our soils. (Neh 10:30–37)

By means of the threefold infinitive “to bring,” part 5 (10:34–36) is subordinate to the casting of the lot (10:34), and in the course of time the text possibly experienced substantial growth. The count of six obligations has religious significance.

The third part of the triptych, posited on the right, is linked with the part on the left, discussed at the outset, and illustrates the realization of Nehemiah’s and Ezra’s efforts (Neh 11–13). Following the securing of the city by means of the rebuilt wall, Jerusalem desperately needed more inhabitants (Neh 11). Then the dedicatory celebrations are recounted (12:27–43), when the Levitical choirs came into their own. At the end, the first two commandments of the covenant obligation take effect: everything “alien,” including the non-Jewish merchants who want to do business on the Sabbath and the foreign women related by marriage, is removed from the newly constituted people of God. The Puritanism of an ancient Israelite mould has been victorious—in theory.

Given this brief summary of the status, we pose the question yet again: What was of prime importance to the tradents of the Ezra-Nehemiah narratives concerning the topic of “organization and structure of the community,” which is not placed in concrete terms in the period of the reigns of Cyrus and Darius but rather under Artaxerxes in the fifth century? Apparently the constitutional founding of the province of Judah (Yehud), which also finds expression in contemporary imprints of seals, is a prominent point of orientation for the narrators. The other matter is the internal ordering of the new community, as manifested in the written Torah, namely, in the dimensions of religion, liturgy, and civil law. In conclusion, both of these focal points need to be discussed for the purpose of a better understanding of the biblical portrait of this epoch.

Nehemiah’s mission begins at the Persian court of Susa; it is ignited by the situation of the population of Jerusalem:

In the month of Chislev, in the twentieth year, while I was in Susa the capital, one of my brothers, Hanani, came with certain men from Judah; and I asked them about the Jews that survived, those who had escaped the captivity, and about Jerusalem. They replied, “The survivors there in the province who escaped captivity are in great trouble and shame; the wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been destroyed by fire.” (Neh 1:1–3)

More than half a century after the release of the exiles, the returnees are said to be doing very poorly. With the help of Yahweh (Neh 1:5–11), Nehemiah, the Jewish cupbearer of Artaxerxes (Neh 1:11; 2:1), initiates a fundamental improvement of the conditions. He is successful in making use of his personal relationship with Artaxerxes and to detach Jerusalem and its surroundings,

namely, the ancient heartland of the Davidic kings, from the administrative jurisdiction of Samaria and to turn it into the semiautonomous province of Judah. This is a decisive political and legal step. Already during the era of Israelite tribes and kings, Judah had conducted a certain independent existence but was then possibly made subject to the provincial government of Samaria during the Neo-Babylonian and Persian era.¹⁷ Removing dependence upon the unloved “brothers” of the north (see, e.g., 2 Kgs 17; Amos 3:12; 4:1–3) and attaining a certain autonomy in the framework of the Persian Empire were the professed goals of the exiles, whose focus was on their native country. The preservation of the pure teaching and of the only true worship of Yahweh seem to have played a major role in emphasizing the Judaic identity (see Ezra 4:1–3). Nehemiah restores the defense installations and Jerusalem’s capability to defend itself and thus establishes the basis for his political task of constituting an administrative center that was directly assigned to the satrapy of Transeuphrates and to the central government. Only in this manner was it possible to complete the liberation of the deportees decreed by Cyrus. That this meant a firmer incorporation of Judah into the empire appears to have been accepted, if not welcomed, by the Judeans. The founding or acknowledgement of the province of Judah apparently was a divine salvific act for the tradents of Ezra-Nehemiah. The dedication of the walls is an occasion for a great thanksgiving service:

Then I brought the leaders of Judah up onto the wall, and appointed two great companies that gave thanks and went in procession. One went to the right on the wall to the Dung Gate; and after them went Hoshaiiah and half the officials of Judah, and Azariah, Ezra, Meshullam, Judah, Benjamin, Shemaiah, and Jeremiah, and some of the young priests with trumpets: Zechariah son of Jonathan son of Shemaiah son of Mattaniah son of Micahiah son of Zaccur son of Asaph; and his kindred, Shemaiah, Azarel, Milalai, Gilalaid, Maai, Nethanel, Judah and Hanani, with the musical instruments of David the man of God; and the scribe Ezra went in front of them. At the Fountain Gate, in front of them, they went straight up by the stairs of the city of David, at the ascent of the wall, above the house of David, to the water Gate on the east. The other company of those who gave thanks went to the left, and I followed them with half of the people on the wall, above the Tower of the Ovens, to the Broad Wall, and above the Gate of Ephraim, and by the Old Gate, and by the Fish Gate and the Tower of Hananel and the Tower of the Hundred, to the Sheep Gate; and they came to halt at the

17. Strictly speaking, this cannot be substantiated from sources but is a thesis of Albrecht Alt and as such is questioned by some historians today; see Grabbe, *Yehud*, 140–42.

Gate of the Guard. So both companies of those who gave thanks stood in the house of God, and I and half of the officials with me; and the priests Eliakim, Maaseiah, Miniamin, Micaiah, Elioenai, Zechariah, and Hananiah, with trumpets; and Maaseiah, Shemaiah, Eleazar, Uzzi, Jehohanan, Malchijah, Elam, and Ezer. And the singers sang with Jezrahiah as their leader. They offered great sacrifices that day and rejoiced, for God had made them rejoice with great joy; the women and children also rejoiced. The joy of Jerusalem was heard far away. (Neh 12:31–43)

This pericope certainly shows traces of editing and slight textual interferences; we receive it as a witness of the final hand. It shows those responsible for worship in action: Ezra heads trumpeters and other musicians (12:35–36); on the eastern wall this choir moves toward the temple. Nehemiah concludes the second “thanksgiving choir” moving on the western wall toward the temple district situated to the north (12:38). Hymns and sacrifices of thanksgiving, as well as roaring bursts of joy by all the people, including women and children, mark this festive day. They expressly celebrate both the temple and the building of the wall, God’s presence and the political independence from the hostile brothers. At the end of the account of the founding, the focus returns to Ezra 1–6 and the building of the temple, and it becomes clear once again that those handing down the tradition wanted to provide a definitely theological presentation rather than a historical one. For them, the building of the temple had factual priority because the ancient Near Eastern code of conduct stipulates thinking of God’s dwelling place and only then of other things vitally necessary for life. Haggai reproaches his contemporaries for having disregarded this basic law:

Thus says the LORD of hosts: These people say the time has not yet come to rebuild the LORD’s house. Then the word of the LORD came by the prophet Haggai, saying: Is it a time for you yourselves to live in your paneled houses, while this house lies in ruins? ... You have looked for much, and, lo, it came to little; and when you brought it home, I blew it away. Why? says the LORD of hosts. Because my house lies in ruins, while all of you hurry off to your own houses. Therefore the heavens above you have withheld the dew, and the earth has withheld its produce. (Hag 1:2–4, 9–10)

Both measures, the building of God’s dwelling place and the securing of the capital city of the new province, therefore, are closely linked, and the portrayals of the book of Ezra-Nehemiah do not establish a historical sequence of their realization. In an equally cursory way, the pioneers are linked precisely with one or the other project for the constituting of an independent Judah. The tradition plays with both names, Ezra as well as Nehemiah, and

in the end, despite chronological inconsistencies, manages to have both celebrate the consecration festivities jointly.

In the tradition, the second vanishing point of the narrative collage is taken up by Ezra alone, the “priest” and “scribe, a scholar of the text of the commandments of the LORD” (Ezra 7:12).¹⁸ He is the one who presents to the people and mediates that unique document revealing the divine will, which for more than two thousand years now has formed the foundation and center of the Jewish and Christian Bible (Neh 8). “He was a scribe skilled in the law of Moses that the LORD the God of Israel had given” (Ezra 7:6). In stark contrast to Moses, Ezra acts on behalf of an alien power when he sets out from Babylonia to deliver to his fellow countrymen in Judah the foundational divine norms and requirements for the temporal and religious life. In the view of the tradents, the Persian government fully supports Ezra’s mission with great firmness and in consciousness of serving the true God and his chosen people. Ezra “had set his heart to study the law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach the statutes and ordinances in Israel” (Ezra 7:10).

The question of what text of the law Ezra was actually supposed to have brought to Jerusalem will be dealt with at a later point. In accordance with the Ezra-Nehemiah tradition, the following may be stressed: the ancient tradents have solely the Torah of Moses in mind, which, according to Neh 8, is also read in a major worship context. For this reason the combination of the sacred revelatory text and the Persian “imperial authorization” appears even more curious. What do the early Jewish witnesses wish to say in this connection? Do they associate their most important symbol of identification, the Torah of Moses, with the “pagan” government and obtain, as it were, its blessing on the sacred text? Do we understand the Jewish theologians of that time correctly when we assume that this desire for imperial authorization was not simply an act of political reason by a defeated minority but suggests an inward proximity to certain political and religious powers in the Persian Empire?

The effects of the Torah on the Jewish community of faith in the writings of Ezra-Nehemiah are varied. Scripture clearly also regulates—whether or not

18. We know as little about the historical Ezra as we do about Nehemiah or the writing prophets, though in the case of the latter, alongside many genealogical references at least the place of birth is occasionally also handed down. For Ezra, the tradition construes a descent from Aaron (Ezra 7:1–5); however, the place of birth or other reliable references are lacking. In postbiblical writings the builder of the temple and mediator of the Torah has become the second Moses; see Magne Sæbo, “Esra/Estraschriften,” *TRE* 10:374–86. The various titles attributed to Ezra likewise reflect a multilayered tradition and clearly also betray Persian influences.

this is stated explicitly is immaterial—the relationship with other believers in Yahweh who are not part of the community mentioned by name. It prescribes the cycle of the festival and governs the liturgies of worship. It demands a strict ethic of brotherhood from the members of the community and defines what has to be considered “holy” and “unclean” in the cultic and everyday life. If it is a case of dealing with specific problems that may clarify the significance and functions of the Torah, the tradents resort to several traditional discourses. For instance, they use the ancient form of the poetic summary of history reminiscent of the Psalms, serving as an example of clarifying the conduct of the people over against Yahweh (cf. Neh 9; Pss 78; 106). But they also offer relevant examples for living in accordance with the Torah or denouncing current deviations. As governor, for instance, Nehemiah keeps watch over the practice of debt relief (Neh 5), the irreproachable financial administration and maintenance of the temple’s purity (13:4–13), the meticulous observance of the Sabbath commandment (13:5–22), and the prohibition of marriages with foreign women (13:23–28). The final three passages respectively conclude with a quick prayer (13:14, 22b, 29), as if the tradents wanted to achieve a liturgical frame for such practical commentaries on the Torah. The “law” of Moses also inspires the hierarchy of offices in the community and the list-like record of the current office-bearers (see Neh 12:1–26). Priests, Levites, singers, and gatekeepers stand out as bearers of functions and provide the community with a strong cultic orientation, modified by “secular” professions such as “officials” and “representatives” (Neh 10:29, etc.) and by Ezra, who also functions as “scribe” or “skilled in the law of Moses.” Finally, it is significant that, after so many preceding biblical ceremonies of this kind (see Exod 19–20; 24:3–11; 34; Deut 5; 29–30; Josh 24), the tradition, as shown above, inserts the making of a truly new covenant of the people with Yahweh into the literary corpus in the form of a written self-commitment (Neh 10). Incidentally, content-wise the initial two clauses correspond with two of the concrete examples mentioned in Neh 13 for a Torah-focused lifestyle: “We will not give our daughters to the peoples of the land or take their daughters for our sons; and if the peoples of the land bring in merchandise or any grain on the Sabbath day to sell, we will not buy it from them on the Sabbath or on a holy day” (Neh 13:30–31).

Concerning the internal order of the community committed to the Torah, Ezra-Nehemiah develops a colorful, very dynamic portrait of the early Jewish conditions in Judah, perhaps enigmatically in the Diaspora as well. The Torah is the decisive power; it is the point of reference (e.g., Neh 10:35, 37), yet at no point is the Torah quoted verbatim, nor are there signs of wrestling with interpretive details. Rather, the “law” of Moses proves to be an invigorating, liberating instrument belonging and leading to its own identity.

To be sure, everything we learn from these relatively contemporary documents about the Persian epoch by no means comes close to an even roughly complete “picture of that time” that we would wish to have. For us, two hundred years of Persian rule in Palestine remain largely shrouded, if we want to make use of the biblical witnesses alone. The few references focused fully on some select points concerning the emerging Jewish community of faith, however, can still be broadened somewhat by means of communicable information from various prophetic writings and by blending materials found in later writings, which consequently portray traditional material about the past empire and its reality of life. Even then, however, the historical darkness cannot really be illuminated.

I.3. FURTHER TRACES OF PERSIAN LIFE

Fountain, A. Kay. *Literary and Empirical Readings of the Books of Esther* (Studies in Biblical Literature 43; New York: Lang, 2002). **Josephus**. *Jewish Antiquities* (trans. Louis H. Feldman; 9 vols.; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965). **Koch**, Klaus. *Daniel* (BKAT 22; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1986–). **Kossmann**, Ruth. *Die Esthernovelle: Vom Erzählten zur Erzählung* (VTSup 79; Leiden: Brill, 2000). **Mayer**, Rudolf. “Iranischer Beitrag zu Problemen des Daniel- und Esther-Buches,” in *Lex tua veritas* (ed. Heinrich Gross and Franz Mussner; Trier: Paulinus, 1961), 127–35. **Yamauchi**, Edwin M. *Persia and the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990).

Apart from the references mentioned in Haggai and Zechariah (see below, §III.1.2.1), very few writings of the Hebrew Bible refer directly to datable events of the Persian era or to the Persians themselves. For these two prophetic writings, the building of the temple is at the center of their attention. The second book of the Chronicles likewise ends with a view of this event that for the Judeans surely was foundational (2 Chr 36:22–23). Following its integration into the Persian Empire, the ancient kingdom of Elam became a satrapy and Susa at times the seat of government of the Achaemenid rulers. The frequent references to Elam and the Elamites in the Bible are to be understood in part as an echo of the legendary major power and in part possibly as references to the actual world power of Persia. In these cases, for instance, we would be facing prophetic oracles against Persia in Jer 49:34–39 and Ezek 32:24–25. Conspicuous, however, is that none of the collections of sayings concerning foreign nations in the major prophets mentions Persia or one of its rulers directly.

Without explicit mention of names, places, or history, there are still all kinds of other contemporary biblical sources referring to the life of the

Judeans in the Persian period. Of course, an appropriate interpretation depends on the literary-historical classification of the textual components in question. Scholars basically agree that the Priestly literary components in the Pentateuch, the two books of Chronicles, and Isa 56–66 originated in the Persian epoch (see below) and hence reflect the contemporary situation of Judah and/or of the exiles, even though thematically they are concerned with different phases of Israel's history. The texts of Trito-Isaiah are not dated. Following the tendency of the entire book of Isaiah, however, based on a rough chronological structure, they allow postexilic circumstances to shine through. We learn a good deal about the desired internal order of the community and the internal conflicts regarding the correct lifestyle pleasing to God, about the eager expectation of a better, more righteous world, and especially about Jerusalem's role in the imminent dawn of God's reign (Isa 60–62). Even without the texts allowing a concrete time reference, it is indirectly possible to draw conclusions about the situation of Judeans believing in God. The Psalms surely contain many texts that go back to the Persian era or received their final textual shape at that time. Nevertheless, the dating of hymns, prayers, and meditations is extremely difficult. Apart from Ps 137, there are no precise and reliable statements about the historical locations of the Psalms. Persian names or events do not surface anywhere. For this reason, I omit the Psalms as direct witnesses at this point (but see below, §§III.1.2.1 and 2).

In the literature of the post-Persian, in other words, especially of the Hellenistic, era, the consequences of the Achaemenid rule or reminiscences of it are to be noted. Particularly in the canonical writings of Daniel and Esther, the Persian royal court comes into view retrospectively. In reality this means that action and feelings of life of roughly the second century B.C.E. are projected into the Persian era. Daniel supposedly comes to Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar but remains there "until the first year of King Cyrus" (Dan 1:21). Thus the connection with the Persian rule is made. When Nebuchadnezzar's son violates the sanctity of the holy vessels of the temple that had been stolen, the Babylonian era is definitely over, and the kingdom is "given to the Medes and Persians" (Dan 5:28). The Jewish exiles, led by Daniel, increasingly were in conflict with the despotic Babylonian rulers; hence it is not surprising that under Darius (!) Daniel is promoted to a key position of the imperial administration (Dan 6:1–4). Envious people set a trap for him: on account of his loyalty to Yahweh, he must violate the royal ordinance of veneration of the ruler (a trademark of Hellenistic ideology, unknown among the Persian kings!), is thrown into the lions' den, and comes through this dreadful test in a marvelous way by virtue of divine help: "So this Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius and the reign of Cyrus the Persian" (Dan 6:28). Daniel 9–12 then reflect the Persian era entirely, although the tradents are no longer con-

versant with the historical connections:¹⁹ Darius the Mede (!) again appears before Cyrus and further is considered the son, instead of the father of Xerxes (Dan 9:1; 10:1), while the four major Persian kings who are yet anticipated in the fifth/fourth century are already past in the apocalyptic vision. The fourth was defeated by the “kingdom of Greece” (Dan 11:2). Apart from the names of the kings, very little remembrance of the early Jewish communities has remained of the Persian rule. Nevertheless, it is characteristic that the major Persian kings are not really enemies of the Jews but instead are favorably disposed or neutral toward them and intervene against the people of Yahweh only on the basis of intrigues. This also applies to the dramatic book of Esther.

Esther, the stunningly beautiful Jewess, replaces Queen Vashti, whom King Ahasuerus (Xerxes) has rejected. On the urgent petition of her uncle Mordecai, she entreats the king on behalf of the Jews, who are threatened by a conspiracy of their arch-enemy Haman. The king orders the execution of his former confidant, whose possessions and position at the court are transferred to Mordecai, and grants the Jews permission to take revenge against the conspirators. Oriental potentates of all times may well bear a similar profile. The striking features of Persian court life in the book of Esther are therefore more or less timeless: there are euphoric feasts and an acknowledged tendency of the grand king to display his power; the invitation to Queen Vashti to come over from the banquet of the women to the convivial banquet of the men and parade herself is to strengthen the glory of the ruler. The erotic varnish of the legend may be a Persian (or perhaps rather Hellenistic?) feature. The status of the “law of the Medes and Persians,” however, is more clearly identifiable as an authentic recollection of Persian imperial edicts and legislative practices: Vashti is not executed for her insubordination; she is “merely” rejected, and an imperial order, distributed immediately empire-wide, regulates the subordination of the women. The counselors argue: “For this deed of the queen will be made known to all women, causing them to look with contempt on their husbands, since they will say, ‘King Ahasuerus commanded Queen Vashti to be brought before him, and she did not come’” (Esth 1:17). The text then reports: “He sent letters to all the royal provinces, to every province in its own script and to every people in its own language, declaring that every man should be master in his own house” (Esth 1:22).

This is the “law of the Medes and Persians” that “may not be altered” (Esth 1:19)! Whether the intensified patriarchalism is to be dated in the Per-

19. Thus the only plausible explanation for the “confusion” in the presentation of the Achaemenid rule; see John J. Collins, *Daniel* (FOTL 20; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 69–70.

sian era remains uncertain. However, the administration of the huge empire by means of royal decrees and of a concept of legitimacy (*dātā*)²⁰ with religious coloring are frequently attested in the Persian era. The uncompromising nature of the drafted order has remained proverbial even today, a far-reaching and profound cultural reminiscence.

A glance at extracanonical Jewish literature may round off the picture. A historical interest in the Persian era—unlike for the Greeks, who are victims of Persian aggression (see below, §II.1.1)—does not emerge until late. Josephus, born in 37/38 C.E., mentions, in *Jewish Antiquities* book 11, from his contemporary perspective what he knows or considers newsworthy about the Achaemenid Empire. In part he draws upon biblical sources, partly upon extrabiblical ones, and to a fair extent he probably allows his imagination to run free. The Persian kings, except for Cambyses (“violent-tempered in character,” *Ant.* 11.2.2), show their kind disposition toward the Jews. Especially Darius and Xerxes are major benefactors of the people of God. After a magnificent banquet, the former appoints the winner of a speech competition on the topic “Who has the greatest power? Wine, king, or woman?” to become his personal counselor. The winner is Zerubbabel the Jew. He persuasively attributes the greatest influence to the woman but tops this crowning with a further eulogy on the “truth” (*Ant.* 11.3.1–6). Based on Zerubbabel’s petitions, Darius allows the exiles to return to their home. Other biblical accounts are likewise drawn up like a novel; Josephus’s version of Esther is a good example. In *Ant.* 11.7 Josephus offers a brief narrative about desecrations of the temple: the high priest John, the son of Eliashib (cf. Ezra 10:6; Neh 12:23), murders his brother Jesus in the house of God; Bogas, the commander of Artaxerxes, enters the holy place as a Gentile. Where this legend of a twofold desecration originated cannot be determined.²¹ The final chapter of book 11 is dedicated to the apostate Samaritans and the erection of their temple on Mount Gerizim, followed by the appearance of Alexander as the great new friend of the Jews. After the entry into Jerusalem he shows favor to the high priest Jaddus as the representative of Yahweh, the universal God.

Josephus, too, knows very little about the circumstances of life and the historical events of the Persian era. He narrates biblical sources in a free rendition, especially the writings of Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther and Daniel; he inserts a few episodes of unknown origin and leaves the two hundred years

20. Pierre Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander: A History of the Persian Empire* (trans. Peter T. Daniels; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2002), 956–57. This expression is also a loanword in Akkadian and Aramaic (“law”).

21. See Lester L. Grabbe, *Judaism from Cyrus to Hadrian* (2 vols.; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 1:62–63.

of Persian rule in their expanse practically as a blank. Thus for the biblical picture of our epoch of time as a whole, this results in a historical vacuum but one in which the rebuilding of the temple and of Jerusalem, as well as the reconstitution of the early Jewish community under the Torah, are nevertheless established. Other references to events in the Persian period are found mainly in the extracanonical writings of Ezra, sporadically in Sirach (see Sir 49:11–12), and veiled in many apocalyptic visions (see 1 En. 89:59, 72; Sib. Or. 3:286), if we disregard the broad stream of Greek traditions at this point (see below §II.1.1).

I.4. ANALYSIS OF THE BIBLICAL PORTRAYAL

Grabbe, Lester L. *Yehud: A History of the Persian Province of Judah* (LSTS 47: New York: T&T Clark, 2004). **Lemche**, Niels Peter. “Kann von einer ‘israelitischen Religion’ noch weiterhin die Rede sein?” in *Ein Gott allein?* (ed. Walter Dietrich and Martin A. Klopfenstein; Fribourg: Universitätsverlag; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1994), 59–75. **Davies**, Philip R. *In Search of “Ancient Israel”* (JSOTSup 148; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992). **Thompson**, Thomas L. “Text, Context and Referent in Israelite Historiography,” in *The Fabric of History: Text, Artifact and Israel’s Past* (ed. Diana Vikander Edelman; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), 65–92. **Watts**, James W., ed. *Persia and Torah: The Theory of Imperial Authorization of the Pentateuch* (SBLSymS 17; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2001).

How should we classify the partial biblical perspectives of the Persian era that have been preserved in the tradition? There should be no doubt at all that historical perspectives shift with the progress of time. Contemporary observers in a particular epoch must obtain a different picture of current life with which they are bound up themselves than historians who look back on events and developments from a more or less considerable distance. Today we are separated from the Achaemenid realm by more than two millennia, a period of time—and cultural gap—that seems almost unbridgeable, given the numerous changes and rejections. Not only the language and communication have shifted numerous times since those days, but technology, economy, politics, worldviews, and the science of humans and societies have changed substantially since then. It is appropriate at least to mention briefly some basic positions of our own thinking and inquiring, so as to gain clarity concerning the goals of the examination and the possibilities of understanding the ancient accounts of Israel’s earliest postexilic period of time.

Our historical interest probably is dominantly in the foreground, if we turn to a historical segment of history, the events and personalities, devel-

opmental tendencies, and intellectual return. Ever since the Enlightenment, history for us means a causal network of human activities that we are able to reconstruct and explain. Hence we want to know how the various groupings of the Persian era, including the monarchs setting the tone, commanders of armies, and priests, acted with and against one another. The consciousness of the people in general and of the various societal and religious communities among the Achaemenids is very important for us as well. Our historical investigation, therefore, searches comprehensively for all causal connections and motivations of humans at that time; the biblical witnesses report merely on select episodes with the goal of maintaining the fundamental purposes of God for and with Israel during that time as normative and enduring. We think in terms of inherent networks of reason, into which God is possibly integrated. The ancients experienced history as divinely directed from the outside. Whereas we expect the actual historical decisions in the present and future, our spiritual ancestors derived the guidelines for their conduct exclusively from the past. What was right and good was always that which had been given. The present and future basically did not open up new formulations of a question, achievements, or opportunities. They merely had to realize the perfect ancient, the original model of being. Since the European Enlightenment the meaning of past and future has been interchanged, as it were. In our parts of the world one now builds upon that which does not yet exist, upon the progress that overcomes, falsifies, preserves in fragmentary form at best, and develops further what has been received. Our hope rests predominantly on the new, although we have also learned to fear it.

The categories of thought and comprehension have changed not only in regard to faith and the perception of history. Our ideas of the person, society, culture, religion, and everything associated with this adaptable substance in the flow of history have fundamentally changed, even though we also ought to learn from anthropologists, behavioral scientists, sociologists, and psychologists that despite radical changes there are also constants of human existence in individual as well as collective behavior. In view of the unlimited distances of the universe familiar to us and of the fantastic population growth on every continent, the world has become much smaller and confined. Conversely, it has gained depth dimensions of knowledge in science and the arts that our ancient ancestors could not have anticipated. Thus today's humanity has accrued responsibilities that would have been entirely unthinkable in antiquity. Our world is no longer structured geocentrically, although the traditional religions still assume the untenable hypothesis that the planet earth is the absolute focal point of the universal creator. It is not even situated heliocentrically any longer but hovers at the fringe of a galaxy that, in turn, is in a "distant realm" of a vast universe. For that, by virtue of their number, intel-

ligence, and technical skills, humans meanwhile have been given so much power over the fate of the earth that it is not without good reason that in ethics one has to bother with categories of likeness to God.

From the contemporary perspective we are able to understand the biblical statements about the history of the world and Israel's destiny in the Persian era quite well. A tiny ethnic and religious minority in an immense multinational state attains an independent symbol of identity in sacred writings. The Judeans who were exiled to Babylon and those who remained at home form a community of faith that understands itself as the most important tiny wheel in the bustle of the world and thereby apparently resists tendencies to fuse with other societies or religions. It is necessary to exercise caution at this juncture, however; we must examine the relationship of the Judeans to the Persian religion still more closely. The endeavor for safeguarding a certain autonomy, however, can be gathered from the extant writings of the early postexilic communities. We cannot go wrong if we describe the strengthening of their identity as the main motif of the biblical contemporary writings. This also means, however, that all time-related statements (and those of subsequent generations) do not yield "objective facts"—basically this is true of any human report, however altruistic it may claim to be. Even in their limitation to Judah and the Judeans, the statements cannot simply be taken as facts. Rather, they are written and organized entirely from the specific interests of self-preservation. The true goal of these witnesses is the justification of their own existence as the community of Yahweh. Further, they interpret their own limited world from an ancient theological perspective, as shown above. The extant writings of the Persian era, like those from other, earlier epochs, are without exception religious, not historical, statements; they are pure documents of faith, and documents of faith are to be attributed to the literary genres of program and propaganda rather than ("objective") historiography. Thus we cannot hope to reconstruct a coherent course of history, a somewhat complete genre picture of the Jewish community, or even of only a typical day for a normal family in the two centuries of Persian supremacy.²² From the extant, differently accentuated fragments of writing and other material accessible to historical scholarship today, we intend to decipher some features of a largely unrecognized physiognomy of the respective era. To the extent that

22. The debate on whether a historiography is even possible for Israel and Judah in biblical times must be continued with level-headedness and critical ability; see, e.g., Niels Peter Lemche, Philip R. Davies, Thomas L. Thompson, and Lester L. Grabbe. Rainer Albertz (*Israel in Exile: The History and Literature of the Sixth Century B.C.E.* [trans. David Green; SBL SBL 3; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003], 3–4, 15–38) is very skeptical about the available historical accounts ("murky, gaping hole") from the sixth century B.C.E.

biblical texts are available, the principle applies that especially unintentional, parenthetical references deserve greater confidence than those with an orientation of programmatic and evidently controlled interests.

The main topics outlined above—building the temple, setting up the province of Judah, constituting Yahweh's community around Yahweh's law, and carrying through a strict order (observance of the Sabbath, prohibition of mixed marriages, etc.)—have a certain plausibility about themselves. If not in the Persian era, when is the new "Israel," the confessional community around Yahweh, supposed to have coalesced and issued a binding order? It is quite possible that the beginnings of a new constitution of the defeated were already made during the era of Babylonian domination (597–539 B.C.E.). Nevertheless, presumably the granting of free religious practice by the Persians was still needed for a comprehensive regeneration of Yahweh's people. We must adopt the causal connections and successions of actions presented in the Old Testament writings leading to this success with extreme caution. The following at least should be clear: the biblical patterns of explanation were born out of situations of the time, presuppose the interpretation of faith of the time, and in all probability appear differently for Israel's ancient neighbor nations, the Persian authorities, and us in the twenty-first century C.E. The following may be mentioned as cases in point in which the perspectives of the biblical witnesses and our own perspectives differ substantially.

Most important is the self-assessment of the Jewish tradents. They perceive themselves as the people of Yahweh chosen above all other ethnicities and their land and temple as the center of the universe. For the sake of their welfare, the God of the world sets in motion the Persian Empire in the form of its major kings and satraps. By virtue of divine guidance, they support not only the project "Israel" in terms of their return and building of the temple, but occasionally they even provide the impetus for it. According to the accounts, Jerusalem is the very center of the world, rather than Susa or Ecbatana, Persepolis or Pasargadae, where the imperial government met. As a statement of faith, the focus on Judah is understandable; as a historical assessment, however, it has no basis at all. Due to our own distance, any historical consideration also must consider the perspectives of the "others," in this case of Israel's neighbors and rulers. According to the literary and other cultural witnesses received, it is impossible to credit them with a Yahweh-centered conception of the world such as this.²³ Thus the contextual bond with their

23. Norman I. Gottwald, *The Hebrew Bible: A Socio-literary Introduction* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 422: "Whereas for Jews *Judah* was the metropolis and *Jewish settlements abroad* were the colonies, for the ancient political world as a whole the regnant great *empire* was the metropolis while Judah was one among a number of semiautonomous

own religio-cultural community becomes very clear. Further, we do not have the slightest chance to cheat our way back into the role of the ancient Jews, for instance, via identifying with God's election.

The central position of Jerusalem and the Jews, established in terms of faith, agrees with the system of values of the developing community of Yahweh. God in his holiness is the highest good to be experienced in the temple and the Torah. "For a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere" (Ps 84:10). "The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul.... the ordinances of the LORD are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey, and drippings of the honeycomb" (Ps 19:7, 9b, 10). We are able to understand the enthusiasm of faith, but the contents of this faith are first of all distant and foreign to us. If we want to reach the point of deriving orientations for the contemporary reality of life from the foundational theological insights of that era, we must understand additional mental barriers that have become historical, such as delimiting neighboring peoples or confessions, dissolving so-called mixed marriages with women of foreign tribes, rigorously adhering to cultic regulations, authoritative reading of the Torah, penitential rites for particular offences, using force against enemies or "evil," a class system according to family ties, the priority of priests, avoiding impurity (rules of taboos), and many other facets of ancient Jewish life and faith. All of this cannot easily be integrated into our own system of religious, political, and cultural values.

The ancient valuation of historical facts and individuals is situated in another system of coordinates. Individual events refer to the basic theological concern: the mission of Ezra and Nehemiah; Samaria's resistance against the building of the temple; the willingness of the returnees to complete the enormous constructions; the gifts of the neighbors for the temple; the return of the ancient, sacred utensils. No narrative feature stands on its own but is oriented to the central concern, that Yahweh has created a new beginning after the exile and the Judeans take hold of their opportunity. This also applies to the presentation of the acting characters. Biographical profiles are unnecessary. Major kings, prominent Judeans, opponents, the people—none of them needs a historical, that is to say, a concretely one-time characterization. All of them are depicted stereotypically in their respective roles. They act in stereotypes and seem to us colorless clichés. The actors show emotion only where the issue is their task, that is to say, the theologically understood object: car-

homelands and the dispersed Jewish settlements were *minority religio-cultural communities* among other peoples in the polyglot of the empire."

rying out Yahweh's plans. Artaxerxes notices Nehemiah's sorrow (Neh 2:2); Ezra and Nehemiah become angry and react with deep consternation when they encounter obstacles in their tasks (Ezra 9:5–6; Neh 5:6–7; cf. Nehemiah's "prayer sighs" in 13:14, 22, 29, 31).

The consequence of this state of affairs is that in the traditions received we have theological comments, drafts, and debates in front of us; there is neither report, historiography, nor an "objective" rendering of individual events or historical characters. But since we cannot do without our historical inquisitiveness, we will have to examine the biblical as well as all of the extrabiblical sources. What we are able to understand in good conscience as historical reality, we must fit together into a provisional, probably fragmentary, portrait of the Persian era in Palestine. From the theologically framed picture of the biblical era, all of the dates must be examined carefully and, if possible, compared with other witnesses. This also applies to the seemingly secure protagonists of the Judaic exiles and their antagonists, as well as the identity of Persian authority figures. Perhaps the community structures behind the biblical traditions will still appear to be the most reliable data of (social) history.

II. THE KNOWN HISTORY

II.1. SOURCES

After so many complaints about the lack and unreliability (in the sense of how we view history) of biblical “snapshots” of the Persian centuries, it is difficult to believe that we are able to gain useful communications about events, persons, and ideas of that time at all. However, we are not dependent upon the canonical biblical writings alone. An overview of possible contemporary witnesses strengthens the hope of obtaining a certain glimpse into the mind and history of the Persian period, especially with reference to the region of Palestine-Syria. In this context the archaeological finds are also to be taken into account; they gain considerable weight of their own, even if in many regards they need to be complemented by literary documents. An overview in brief shall suffice here.

II.1.1. LITERARY TRADITIONS

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Biblical writings. As already indicated, the witnesses (Hebrew and Aramaic) concerning the Persian era are Ezra and Nehemiah and the prophetic writings of Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. Further, as indirect witnesses there are those layers or parts of the Old Testament that in all likelihood originated in the Persian period or underwent far-reaching editing there; see ch. III below): the Priestly texts of the Pentateuch (e.g., Gen 1:1–2, 4a; 17; Exod 25–40; Lev 1–27; Num 1–30 [36]); and the cosmopolitan narratives (novellas) about Joseph (Gen 37–50), Ruth, and Jonah.

The complex Ezra-traditions must be mentioned separately, since they project into the Old Testament or, assuming the chronological perspective, issue from the canonical literature. Apart from the Hebrew and Aramaic parts, there are extant Greek Ezra-texts that can hardly be assigned to the former. In addition, a late apocalyptic writing bears the name of the “Scribe of the God of Heaven.” In scholarship the Greek version of Ezra is more accurately called 3 Esdras (while 1 and 2 Esdras correspond to our Ezra and Nehemiah).¹ Thus 4 Ezra is probably the apocalypse originating in the first century B.C.E. The Chronicles are literarily independent but associated with the Ezra literature.

1. On the text of the book, Greek and German, see Karl Friedrich Pohlmann, “3. Esrabuch,” *JSHRZ* 1.5 (1980): 375–425. For a discussion of the literary conditions, see Gunneweg, *Ezra*, 21–24; Hugh G. M. Williamson, *Ezra and Nehemiah* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1987); and Grabbe, *Yehud*, 70–85.

Apart from Haggai and Zechariah there are occasional sections in the prophetic writings that belong into the Persian era, for example, Isa 24–27; 56–66; Ezekiel; large portions of Jeremiah; possibly the writings of Obadiah, Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah; and, if not the final redaction then an earlier edition of, the book of the Twelve Prophets. The Psalter in part has its roots in postexilic Judah or in the Diaspora. Many prayers and hymns may have belonged from the start to the work of the new temple. Almost all the older psalms were adapted for use by the community. Instructive poems originated in the didactic events of the communities. Collections and revisions of older psalms served various religious rituals (see below, §III.1.3.1 and 2). The collection and revision of wisdom writings was popular: at least Proverbs, Job, and the Megilloth originated entirely or in part during the Persian period. Practically all of the canonical writings (except for Ecclesiastes and Daniel), whether intentionally or unintentionally, express something about the situation of the Judaic communities in the Persian era.

Noncanonical. Some apocryphal, pseudepigraphic, or other Jewish writings are possibly rooted entirely or in part in the Persian epoch, for they were originally written in Hebrew or Aramaic (cf. Sirach, Judith, Ahiqar, and Balaam).² Of particular importance, however, are witnesses from Jewish communities of the Diaspora. There are only minimal traces of the Babylonian *golah*. The business archives of the firm Murashu from Nippur, Babylonia, show some Jewish names of customers.³ Groups of refugees of the early sixth century B.C.E. in Egypt have left no communications behind (cf. Jer 44). Amazing is the fifth-century archive of papyri of the Persian military colony at Elephantine, the island in the Nile River. Jewish mercenaries were well represented in the military; extant temple documents (lists of sacrifices, tax registers), personal documents, correspondence, and fragments of novels (?) associated with them shed light on the living conditions and religious circumstances.⁴

2. See James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (2 vols.; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1983–1985); Werner G. Kümmel et al., eds., *Jüdische Schriften aus hellenistisch-römischer Zeit* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher, 1973–). For Ahiqar, historical analyses of language lead to the eighth–seventh century B.C.E.; see Ingo Kottsieper, *Die Sprache der Ahiqarsprüche* (BZAW 194; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1994); and Nickelsburg, *Jewish Literature*.

3. See Rykle Borger, “Neubabylonische und achämenidische Rechts- und Verwaltungsurkunden,” *TUAT* 1.4:412–18; Michael D. Coogan, “Life in the Diaspora: Jews at Nippur in the Fifth Century B.C.,” *BA* 37 (1976); and Ran Zadok, *The Jews in Babylon during the Chaldean and Achaemenian Periods*, (Haifa: University of Haifa, 1979).

4. The discoveries were published by Eduard Sachau, A. E. Cowley, Emil Kraeling, Bezalel Porten, and others (see bibliography on §§II.1.1 and II.4).

Persian Secular Texts. Some Babylonian witnesses do exist relative to the early period of the Persian rule, especially from the reign of Nabonidus.⁵ Archaeologists have found authentic Persian data in Elamite, Median, and Persian administrative centers. More than any other, the Persian royal court produced administrative and legal documents, letters, and the like.⁶ In addition, there are monumental royal inscriptions, correspondence by diplomats, reports, literary and religious texts, and similar items.⁷ In sum, the administration of the state, functioning to a large extent literarily, left substantial amounts of material. The discovered texts come largely from the Persian tribal territories beyond the Zagros Range. Concerning the "Trans-Euphrates" territories, including Egypt—the latter are most beneficial for our subject—a few textual witnesses have survived. There are inscriptions by local rulers, such as the kings of Sidon and Byblos, papyri of the Egyptian satrap Aršam, an Aramaic archive of Hermopolis, and the already mentioned documents of Elephantine, which are outstanding numerically as well as in content. In Palestine itself Samaritan papyri have been found at Wadi Daliyeh and a substantial number of seal imprints (*bullae*) near Jerusalem. In addition, there are all kinds of ostraca, brief inscriptions on coins, seals, pitchers, and so forth.⁸

Persian Religious Texts. To be mentioned separately, of course, is the corpus of religious canonical literature, which probably was not compiled until after the Achaemenid period, the so-called Avesta. It is fairly certain that parts of it were available orally or already in written form in the time frame of interest to us. Old Testament studies generally ignore these religious texts of the dominant culture, as if the contemporary empire in which the Judeans found themselves had been completely neutral in terms of belief. However, in their inscriptions the Achaemenids often declare themselves as disciples of the god Ahura Mazda, the "Lord of Wisdom." Therefore the ancient Persian religion, of which one can get a glimpse at least in the oldest layers of

5. See Borger, "Ur-Zylinder; Babel-Steile; Kyros Zylinder," *TUAT* 1.4:406–10; on the Cyrus cylinder, see 407–10; Schaudig, *Die Inschriften Nabonids*.

6. See Hallock, *Persepolis*; and Klaus Koch, "Dareus der Meder," in *The Word of the Lord Shall Go Forth* (ed. Carol L. Meyers and Michael P. O'Connor; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1983): 287–99.

7. In part they are published in the *Corpus Inscriptionum Iranicarum* (see bibliography §II.1.1 above, esp. Greenfield, Schmitt, and Voigtlander; cf. Borger and Hinz, "Die Behistun-Inschrift Darius' des Großen," *TUAT* 1.4:419–50).

8. See the surveys cited in the bibliography to II.1.2: Stern, *Material Culture*, xv–xvii; Weippert, *Palästina in vorhellenistischer Zeit*, 693–97; Kehl and Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses and Images*, 373–91.

the Avesta,⁹ belongs to the portrait of the epoch to be reconstructed. In this context we may have to reckon with Zoroastrian and popular Persian components (Geo Widengren, Mary Boyce, and Michael Stausberg). The lack of reference to Persian veneration of God in the Bible is certainly ambiguous. Nevertheless, it cannot prevent us from searching for the structures of faith of those societies with the means available to us.

Greek. Greek culture flourished in the fifth and fourth centuries B.C.E. Their interest in the Near and Middle East was substantial, not least because of the political differences from the "Asian" empire. Numerous authors and historians¹⁰ dealt with the Persians, who tried for a century and a half to conquer the Greek city-states on the European side of the Aegean Sea as well. In the mid-fourth century, Herodotus traveled the Persian Empire and collected all kinds of stories and historical items of the first half of this saeculum. Xenophon himself served as a mercenary in the army of the younger Cyrus against Artaxerxes II and described his escape from him. Thucydides describes a segment of the Peloponnesian war (ca. 431–411 B.C.E.). At times Ktesias lived at the court of Artaxerxes II and wrote a history of Persia (*Persica*, extant only in part). These outstanding historians of ancient Greece and a number of their colleagues depict Persia and Persian politics, religion, and culture—from their Greek perspective, of course. Nevertheless, the informational value of their writings, compared to the biblical accounts, is to be rated considerably higher. The Greeks write as sophisticated historians, not as theologians who intend to establish a community of faith.¹¹ Thus we gain some understanding especially on the Persian expansionist politics in a western direction. The Greek reporters convey their opinions on the Persian domestic affairs, colored, of course, by their own biases. A coherent historical perspective of the Persian era, however, can only be gained from the Hellenistic sources (Pierre Briant). Yet on Syria-Palestine or the eastern provinces of the Persian Empire there is little to be learned from the extensive Greek accounts.

9. See especially the translations of Humbach, Kellens, Widengren, and Hinz in the bibliographies of II.1.1 and II.2.3.

10. See the surveys in Grabbe, *Judaism from Cyrus to Hadrian*, 64–67; idem, *Yehud*, 118–29; Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 5–9 and his "Index of Classical Sources," 1125–42.

11. In 1984 the Groningen symposium on the history of the Achaemenid Empire dealt with the Greek historians; see Heleen Sancisi-Weerdenburg and Amélie Kuhrt, *The Greek Sources* (Achaemenid History 2; Leiden: Nederlands Instituut voor het Nabije Oosten, 1987).

II.1.2. ARTIFACTS AND ARCHITECTURE

Alizadeh, Abbas, et al., eds. *The Iranian World: Essays on Iranian Art and Archaeology Presented to Ezat O. Negahban* (Tehran: Iran University Press, 1999). **Avigad**, Nahman. *Bullae and Seals from a Post-exilic Judean Archive* (Qedem 4; Jerusalem: Institute of Archaeology, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1976). **Carter**, Charles E. *The Emergence of Yehud in the Persian Period* (JSOTSup 294; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999). **Harper**, Prudence O., et al., eds. *The Royal City of Susa* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1992). **Hrouda**, Barthel. *Vorderasien I: Mesopotamien, Babylonien, Iran und Anatolien* (Handbuch der Archäologie; Munich: Beck, 1971). **Keel**, Othmar. *Studien zu den Stempelsiegeln aus Palästina/Israel* (OBO 135, vol. 4; Fribourg: Universitätsverlag and Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1994). **Keel**, and Christine Uehlinger, eds. *Gods, Goddesses and Images of God in Ancient Israel* (trans. Thomas H. Trapp; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 373–91. **Krefter**, Friedrich. *Persepolis Rekonstruktionen* (TF 3; Berlin: Mann, 1971). **Matheson**, Sylvia. *An Archaeological Guide* (London: Faber, 1976). **Meyers**, Eric M., ed. *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Archaeology in the Near East* (5 vols.; New York: Oxford University Press, 1997). **Rehm**, Ellen. *Der Schmuck der Achämeniden* (Altertumskunde des Vorderen Orients 2; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1992). **Saliby**, Nessib. “Amrit,” *OEANE* 1:111–13. **Schippmann**, Klaus. “Forschungs- und Ausgrabungsergebnisse in Irān seit 1965,” *MDOG* 104 (1972): 45–79. **Schmidt**, Erich F. *Persepolis II: Contents of the Treasury and other Discoveries* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956). **Seipel**, Wilfried. *7000 Jahre persische Kunst* (Ausstellungskatalog; Milan: Skira, 2001). **Stern**, Ephraim. *Material Culture of the Land of the Bible in the Persian Period 538–332 B.C.* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society; Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1982). **Stern**, ed. *The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land* (4 vols.; Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1993). **Stronach**, David. *Pasargadae: A Report on the Excavations* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978). **Weippert**, Helga. *Palästina in vorhellenistischer Zeit* (Handbuch der Archäologie 2.1; Munich: Beck, 1988), 682–718. **Yamauchi**, Edwin M. *Persia and the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990), 279–377.

Scientific excavations related to investigating ancient Persian culture have been underway for about 150 years and have yielded abundant results. The bringing to light of architecture and art, tools and weapons, coins, and seals has contributed significantly to drawing a realistic picture of the epoch. Today archaeologists are also able to reconstruct economic, social, and religious facts from the discoveries made. Of course, inscriptions and texts help in providing names and meaning to the discovered objects, yet the supposedly lifeless objects speak their own language. In a sensory way they draw attention directly to the material environment of life created by the Persians. The iconography of ancient Persian art has its own imagery and symbolism. The inventory of artifacts associated with the Persian period in the major museums is an inestimably valuable contribution to our comprehension.

The key imperial territories around Ecbatana and Susa, the earlier capital cities of the Medes and Elamites, as well as the Persian centers of Pasargadae and Persepolis probably have attracted the greatest attention of the archaeologists. The discoveries made there substantiate and enrich our picture of the structure of those regions and the entire empire, for in the respective capital city the strands of administration, politics, and imperial organization of the military converge. Important insights can be gained from the palaces and administrative texts, sculptures, and seal impressions.

Particularly attractive are the monumental palaces that the Achaemenids built after Cyrus. Administrative centers such as Pasargadae, Susa, Persepolis, and Ecbatana were brilliantly planned so as to be able to receive the royal court. Artists and craftsmen from many parts of the empire worked for decades on the buildings, which are still impressive today, even if only negligible remains are preserved. The idea of the Persian Empire took shape architecturally: huge audience chambers supported by pillars, storehouses and workshops, residences for the king and the court servants, enormous sculptured animals (especially oxen, lions, and cross-breeds), giant reliefs of national legations, and triumphal portals convey the impression of comprehensive rule. Architectural styles of the Assyrians, Babylonians, Greeks, and Egyptians blend into a new synthesis of Persian imperial self-consciousness. Temple layouts are hard to identify in the spacious palaces, yet sacral locations must have been available for the royal worship. At least reliefs over the rock tombs of Naqsh-i Rostam depict the emperor in front of an altar, and royal inscriptions, as well as extensive descriptions of sacrifices, ceremonies, and priestly and shamanistic personnel (magicians) attest to the fundamental disposition of the Achaemenids. Perhaps the Achaemenid Persians did indeed prefer to sacrifice at open-air altars, as Herodotus and Strabo report.¹² In any case, sanctuaries are extant for the Persian goddess Anāhita, who frequently merged with Ishtar or Hera. The royal burial places also are documents of imperial rule. For Cyrus a still relatively simple, compact tomb with a gabled-roof had been erected on an elevated terrace near Pasargadae. The interior measures a mere 6.4 by 5.35 meters. Darius I and his successors Xerxes, Artaxerxes I, and Darius II were buried near Naqsh-i Rostam, 6 kilometers north of Persepolis. For each of them a lavish burial chamber was hewn into a vertical wall of sandstone. The face is laid out in the form of a cross and is more than 20 meters tall. Half-reliefs are above the entrance: the king with a winged Mazda (figure?) and the face of a moon in front of an

12. According to Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 915; cf. R. Boucharlat, "Monuments religieux de la Perse achéménide: État des questions," *TMO* 7 (1984): 119–35.

altar. Below are the groups of nations representing the interests of the state, while inscriptions of praise on the inside are preserved and demonstrate the task and consciousness of the government of the Achaemenids buried there.

Numerous individual finds from the royal administrative centers complete the picture of the material culture of the rulers and their subjects. Metal processing, ceramics, and the art of cutting seals flourished. Goblets with affixed heads or torsos of animals were fashionable; one may compare the beautifully fashioned golden lion rhyton¹³ at the national museum of Tehran. From the glyptics we are able to gather many different mythological and ideological motifs, such as winged half-breeds, hero-like depictions of kings, tree metaphors, and celestial objects. Jewelry made of precious metals and of precious and semiprecious stones has been found in abundance. On the whole, it demonstrates high-quality craftsmanship.¹⁴ For weapons (swords, spearheads, arrowheads, and decorated shields), iron or bronze was used. Ceramic objects such as household utensils of every kind or figurines and smaller cultic equipment afford glimpses into private and religious life. The latter category of artifacts is particularly informative for the province of Judah.

Archaeological research in Syria-Palestine did not yield significant results until the last few decades. Biblical ideas of a comprehensive deportation of the entire population and of a corresponding gaping void of people and thus a "Sabbath rest" for the land of Yahweh had also impressed modern scholars subliminally and, in conjunction with the fact that at a few important tells the Persian layer had fallen victim to erosion, reinforced the assumption that the land was not populated. "The surmounting of this dilemma we owe above all to the excavations in the northern coastal locations ... and places in Transjordan. At minor digs in these locations abundant layers of architecture of the Babylonian-Persian period were discovered, by means of which a catalog of criteria for the culture of the time could be established."¹⁵ From archaeology of the Persian era, therefore, we may expect some help in reconstructing the epoch.

Ephraim Stern divides his pioneering study of the "material culture of the Persian period in the countries of the Bible"¹⁶ into eight segments, and

13. Cover page of the exhibition catalogue *7000 Jahre persische Kunst* (ed. W. Seipel; Milan: Skira, 2001); see also A. S. Melikian-Chirvani, "The Iranian Wine Horn from Pre-Achaemenid Antiquity to the Safavid Age," *Bulletin of the Asia Institute* 10 (1996): 85–139.

14. See Rehm, *Der Schmuck der Achämeniden*.

15. Weippert, *Palästina in vorhellenistischer Zeit*, 698. The author refers especially to the pioneering works of Ephraim Stern and concludes, "The sources for the Babylonian and especially the Persian era are particularly good" (693).

16. Stern, *Material Culture*, 1982. Subsequently it was especially Carter, *Emergence of Yehud*, who continued this work.

the ninth chapter offers a summary. The first forty-six pages present the relevant excavations in the coastal region, Transjordan, Samaria, Judah, and Idumea that were undertaken until 1972. During the initial phase of Palestinian archaeology (1890–1914), it was extremely difficult to identify the layers from the Persian period. The precise dating of the uncovered strata only came about between World War I and II on the basis of imported Attic ceramics and Persian coins.¹⁷ Only by means of the criteria gained thereby was it subsequently possible to profile the Persian period in Palestine archaeologically as an independent cultural period. The excavations of Hazor, Shiqmona, Tel Megadim, Tel Mevorakh, and En Gedi were particularly helpful because the Persian remains there were preserved better than anywhere else.¹⁸ Discovering the Persian remains of settlements led to the revision of the historical picture mentioned, which had been shaped by the biblical concept of a Palestinian *tabula rasa* after 587 B.C.E.

A “cessation of municipal life” after the Babylonian conquest is out of the question, based on the findings of the excavations. In his second chapter, on architecture, Stern observes that apart from southern Judah the cities in the north and along the coast disclose an unusually abundant life at the end of the Babylonian period.¹⁹ Charles E. Carter and others conclude that under Persian supremacy the population of Judah had clearly increased.²⁰ The first signs of proper city planning can be observed: straight, sometimes checkerboard-like arrangement of streets and level ground plans for residential buildings.²¹ At this time there is no evidence of major buildings in Judah, but compare the palace of Lachish; typical Persian elements, such as the bull-capital, turn up at the seat of the Persian governor in Sidon. Fortifications of cities were undertaken several times in Palestine during the Persian period. Archaeologists have identified three contemporary buildings as temples, one of them at Lachish, that is, possibly in the area of Judaic influence.²² Dating and determining the purpose of this sanctuary are debated, however; nev-

17. In this context the excavations at the minor site of Tell Abu Hawam by R. W. Hamilton and of ‘Atlit by C. N. Johns (both in 1932/1933) were decisive (Stern, *Material Culture*, xvii).

18. Stern, *Material Culture*, xix, 47–49.

19. Ibid., 48. For instance, he appeals to the results achieved by P. W. Lapp in the excavation of Tel el-Ful.

20. Carter, *Emergence of Yehud*, 199–205.

21. Stern, *Material Culture*, 48–49. There seems to be evidence of Greek influence (hippodamian plan).

22. Ibid., 61–64. Lachish, however, did not belong to Yehud; see Carter, *Emergence of Yehud*, 84–87. In ‘Amrit, at the Syrian coast, Persian structures, including funeral towers (?), were visible until the modern era; see Saliby, “Amrit,” 1:111–12.

ertheless, the arguments for a Persian context seem to be stronger.²³ In the graves of the Persian period, the burial of the entire body can be established according to various traditions. Only one individual grave, made with slabs of stone, is also represented in the eastern regions of the empire; burials in jugs, sarcophagi, and caves are typical of western (Phoenician, Egyptian, Syrian) practices. Various burial gifts (Attic ceramic, Achaemenid metal utensils, and coins) often permit a relatively accurate dating.²⁴ In historical archaeology, discoveries of ceramics function as lead-fossils because they abound and are hardly subject to ideological misinterpretations. In the Persian period, the inhabitants of ancient Palestine used largely imported Greek, often lavishly painted, earthenware alongside quite plain native products.²⁵ Among the artifacts made of metal, alabaster, faïences, and glass,²⁶ the Iranian-Scythian and Greek arrowheads stand out as typical for this period.²⁷

For our topic Stern addresses very important aspects in chapters 6–8; they are concerned with small cultic objects, especially figurines and small altars, iconography, and addenda of seal-imprints (i.e., seals) and discoveries of coins.²⁸ All of these finds of small items are able to provide good insight into the religious and political conditions of the time, especially when they gain contrasting sharpness by comparing them with finds outside of Palestine. In the case of artifacts that have religious relevance, however, we ought to qualify slightly two of the principles that Stern presupposes. First, he assumes that the small number of cultic figurines found in the province of Yehud automatically suggests that monotheism functioned officially there and that precisely these figurines (at least if they were found in larger number in so-called *favissae*, “burial pits”) were used (as votive gifts or as depictions of deities) in temples.²⁹ The written prohibition of “other deities” does not mean the same as religious reality, nor does the solemn burial of worn-out cultic

23. Against the second excavator, Yohanan Aharoni (see “Trial Excavation in the ‘Solar Shrine’ at Lachish. Preliminary Report,” *IEJ* 18 [1968]: 157–64), Stern and Weippert (*Palästina in vorhellenistischer Zeit*, 700–701) appeal to the clearly Persian ceramic and other minor finds made at this location, as well as to the architectural analogies to recognized contemporary temples (long form; entrance on the narrow eastern side, rooms aligned on an axis, sacred places elevated by steps).

24. See Stern, *Material Culture*, 68–92.

25. See *ibid.*, 93–142. Carter stresses the weakness of the economy (*Emergence of Yehud*, 285).

26. See *Ibid.*, 143–57.

27. *Ibid.*, 154–57.

28. *Ibid.*, 158–95, 196–214, 217–28, respectively.

29. Jews and Samaritans “did not utilize such objects in their rites.... We can therefore infer that sanctuaries also existed at those Palestinian sites at which assemblages of

statuettes exclude their previous domestic use (see Exod 21:6; 1 Sam 19:13). A decrease of domestic veneration of "other deities" apart from Yahweh, however, would demonstrate a certain success of the official communal theology.

Some of the most substantial discoveries of figurines were made near the province of Judah. Tell Sippar yielded more than two hundred items, Tell es-Safi more than one hundred (carefully broken) fragments. Lachish evidently had several storage places for figurines and small altars; of the latter, about thirty were found in one place (the total number for Lachish is over two hundred). One of them bears the inscription "Incense." Other collections of such sacred utensils removed from service were discovered in Gezer, Tel Jemmeh, Sheik Zuweid, and Tel Beersheba. On the whole, the places where the finds were made extend from Beersheba in the south to beyond northern Syria. The province of Judah is not completely excluded but apparently shares in the cultic tasks that had been associated with these artifacts. Among the figurines there are masculine sculptures (deities, heroes, worshipers) as well as a much-discussed "Persian rider" and especially reproductions of an unclothed or clothed female in various poses, sometimes pregnant, occasionally with a child. Precursors in great numbers are known from earlier centuries.³⁰ In the Persian period there now appear, on one side and following the Greek example, stylized figurines of women, mostly fully clothed, sitting or standing. Over against them stand nude young men of the Apollo-type; both belong to the "Western" model. On the other side are predominantly nude figurines of goddesses emphasizing the symbol of fertility belonging to the "Eastern" model. It continues the Near Eastern tradition but provides their figurines with a clearly happier and more natural facial expression than in earlier periods.³¹ The small incense altars that share the form of a four-legged box also can be classified in terms of their origin and tradition. The native Palestinian models are joined by Cypriot, South-Arabian, and Mesopotamian ones. Almost all of them are carved or painted and seldom embossed (relief)

figurines were found" (ibid., 158). Keel and Uehlinger are less apodictic in their viewpoint (*Gods, Goddesses and Images*, 385–86).

30. See Urs Winter, *Frau und Göttin: Exegetische und ikonographische Studien zum weiblichen Gottesbild im alten Israel und in dessen Umwelt* (OBO 53; Fribourg: Universitätsverlag; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1983), esp. 96–199; Raz Kletter, *The Judean Pillar-Figurines and the Archaeology of Asherah* (BARIS 636; Oxford: Archaeopress, 1996), esp. 78; Joachim Jeremias and Friedhelm Hartenstein, "JHWH und seine Aschera," in *Religionsgeschichte Israels* (ed. Bernd Janowski and Matthias Köckert; VWGTh 15; Gütersloh: Kaiser, 1999), 79–136.

31. Stern (*Material Culture*, 165–76) characterizes the Eastern and Western types in this manner.

figures or scenes. The chosen decorations and their skilled workmanship, however, betray the tradition in which the individual pieces are presented. Thus figurines and incense altars at the same time represent the native traditions and the interreligious exchange. Truly Persian religious iconography and symbols, however, do not occur in the Palestinian items found.

This is different in the area of seal imprints and coining. Here the focus is on the arm of the government, for the respective seals were used, in part, in an official capacity by Persian government officials of the satrapy of Trans-Euphrates or of the subordinate provinces. The minting of coins, which began in the Persian period in the history of economics, was entirely a matter of the government. Numerically, of course, private seals were much more broadly represented than the official ones; they yield valuable knowledge with regard to family and social history but also to the religious ties of the wardens of the seal. The discovery and publication of further specimens has progressed rapidly in recent decades, so that Stern's groupings are outdated.³² Important for our purposes are the pictorial depictions of the Persian royal hero in combat with mythical monsters, protected by the winged Ahura Mazda figure and, on the other hand, all those seals and coins that bear the name of the province Yehud or Samaria and in some instances of the governor in office (*phh*). Also noteworthy is a Samaritan seal with the inscription "Shelomith, servant of Elnathan, the governor"; it probably belonged to a high-ranking female official in the provincial government.³³

Evaluating the many, ever-increasing small finds demands much time and patience, as well as more intentional investment of both financial resources and specialists than are in fact available. A comparison of the research results with the biblical sources, especially of the Ezra-Nehemiah tradition, is desirable but succumbs to certain difficulties. Archaeological witnesses are accountable in a different way to the interests of their producers than the biblical authors and tradents who produced or maintained their texts for a religious community. The process of the tradition alone cannot be more diverse: after their production, artifacts and their inscriptions are fixed for all time (apart from slight modifications by erasure and reinscription); the tradition of the community, however, remains fluid, whether oral or in writing, and in general it serves the living ceremony of communicative acts that endure even into our present.

32. See especially the comprehensive collection of seal imprints and seals in vol. 4 of Keel, *Studien zu den Stempelsiegeln*; Keel and Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses and Images*, 373–91; Carter, *Emergence of Yehud*, 259–83. In addition, numerous individual publications have appeared in archaeological periodicals.

33. See Avigad, *Bullae and Seals*, 6–7.

II.2. THE PERSIAN EMPIRE

From our contemporary perspective it is helpful first to mark the larger framework in which the small Judaic community was formed and lived. According to the biblical witnesses, too, the shape of the community came about in the interplay with the major power of Persia. This reactive factor can be understood only if we sketch the contours of the organization of the state that the Persians brought about. On this point experts on Iran debate the infrastructure and the “ideology” of the empire and its rulers.³⁴

II.2.1. IMPERIAL STRUCTURES

Ahn, Gregor. *Religiöse Herrscherlegitimation im achämenidischen Iran* (Acta Iranica 31; Leiden: Brill, 1992). **Blenkinsopp**, Joseph. “The Mission of Udjahorresnet and Those of Ezra and Nehemiah,” *JBL* 106 (1987): 409–21. **Blum**, Erhard. “Esra, die Mosetora und die persische Politik,” in *Religion und Religionskontakte im Zeitalter der Achämeniden* (ed. Reinhard G. Kratz; VWGTh 22; Gütersloh: Gütersloher, 2002), 231–56. **Briant**, Pierre. *From Cyrus to Alexander: A History of the Persian Empire* (trans. Peter T. Daniels; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2002). **Dandamaev**, Muhammad A., and Vladimir G. Lukonin. *The Culture and Social Institutions of Ancient Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989). **Frei**, Peter, and Klaus Koch. *Reichsidee und Reichsorganisation im Perserreich* (2nd ed.; OBO 55; Fribourg: Universitätsverlag; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996). **Grabbe**, Lester L. *Yehud: A History of the Persian Province of Judah* (LSTS 47; New York: T&T Clark, 2004). **Hinz**, Walther. *Darius und die Perser* (2 vols.; Baden-Baden: Holle, 1976–1979). **Hoglund**, Kenneth G. *Achaemenid Imperial Administration in Syria-Palestine and the Missions of Ezra and Nehemiah* (SBLDS 125; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992). **Koch**, Heidemarie. *Es kündigt Dareios der König: Vom Leben im persischen Grossreich* (Kulturgeschichte der Antiken Welt 55; Mainz: von Zabern, 1992). **Kratz**, Reinhard G., ed. *Religion und Religionskontakte im Zeitalter der Achämeniden* (VWGTh 22; Gütersloh: Gütersloher, 2002). **Miller**, Margaret Christina. *Athens and Persia in the Fifth Century B.C.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997). **Redford**, Donald B. “The So-Called ‘Codification’ of Egyptian Law,” in *Persia and Torah: The Theory of Imperial Authorization of the Pentateuch* (ed. James W. Watts; SBLSymS 17; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2001), 135–59. **Sancisi-Weerdenburg**, Heleen, et al., eds. *Achaemenid History* (Leiden: Nederlands inst. voor het Nabije Oosten, 1987–).

34. See Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*: the empire is viewed either as “loose federation of autonomous countries under the distant aegis of a Great King” or as a uniform power structure in its “organizational dynamic” with “intense processes or acculturation,” 1.

Vogelsang, Willem J. *The Rise and Organisation of the Achaemenid Empire: The Eastern Iranian Evidence* (SHANE 3; Leiden: Brill, 1992). **Watts**, James W., ed. *Persia and Torah: The Theory of Imperial Authorization of the Pentateuch* (SBLSymS 17; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2001). **Weber**, Ursula, and Josef Wiesehöfer. *Das Reich der Achaimeniden* (Berlin: Reimer, 1996). **Wiesehöfer**, Josef. *Ancient Persia: From 550 B.C. to 650 A.D.* (trans. Azieh Azodi; New York: Tauris, 2001). For all areas of research on the Achaemenid period, the online bibliography of the Groningen team is extremely important: <http://www.achemenet.com>.

Global Rule. The Achaemenid Empire extended from the Indus to the Hellespont and to the first cataracts of the Nile. The east-west distance exceeded 5,000 kilometers, and from the north to the south extended roughly 1,000–3000 kilometers, as the crow flies.³⁵ The overall population count within the Persian boundaries can only be estimated. If the world population was between 20 and 50 million people around the fifth century B.C.E.,³⁶ we may perhaps estimate a third or more of it for the Persian sovereign territories. In any case, the empire was enormous. We may easily compare it with the largest states of our world today. It is not hard to imagine that then and now such large structures of states and societies presented the respective rulers and subjects with comparable problems of organization, economy, supply, communication, administration of justice, and so forth.

How did this enormous political display of power come about in the first place? The Persian Empire did not fall out of the blue by accident. It built upon the preceding empires that existed since the third millennium B.C.E. in Mesopotamia and, though in a different external and internal constitution, in Egypt. The concept of an empire developed interculturally in the gradually developing major societies in the ebb and flow of history. Probably since the third millennium, the empire belonged to the collective existence of Near Eastern concepts of the world. Already in the early dynastic era of Mesopotamia, rulers claimed that the chief deity of the country had commissioned them to conquer foreign peoples, to bring peace and redemption to others, and to establish a firm governorship over “the four areas of the

35. See below, §II.2.2: The area of ca. 6 million square miles roughly corresponds to that of Europe.

36. Opinion estimates for antiquity can only be orientated by an approximate, archaeologically identifiable population density here and there; see Herwig Birk, *Die Weltbevölkerung: Dynamik und Gefahren* (2nd ed.; Munich: Beck, 2004); Deutsche Stiftung Weltbevölkerung, *DSW Datenreport* (Hannover: Deutsche Stiftung Weltbevölkerung, 2002).

world.”³⁷ In the Akkadian realm of the kings from Sargon to Naramsin (ca. 2350–2150 B.C.E.), the commitment to practicing world mission and world rule was already expressed quite clearly. The rulers of the third dynasty of Ur (ca. 2100–2000 B.C.E.) adopted the tradition more emphatically.³⁸ Especially the Assyrians then followed in the footsteps of their predecessors. By openly appealing to the kings of the third millennium, they developed these ideas and advanced them to a certain apex. The major Assyrian kings frequently appealed to the state-deity Ashur and the belligerent Ishtar when they reported on their victorious expansion in all four directions of the compass. Already the founder of the Assyrian supremacy, Tiglath-pileser I (1114–1076 B.C.E.), sets the tone:

God Aššur, great Lord, who properly administers all the gods, guarantor of scepter and crown, sustainer of sovereignty ... [there follow several other deities and, finally, Ištar] ... foremost among the gods, mistress of tumult, who adorns battles.... [The king is called.] ... unrivaled king of the universe [LUGAL.KIŠ la-a šá-na-an],³⁹ king of the four quarters [LUGAL kib-rat-4-i], king of all princes, lord of lords, chief herdsman, king of kings.⁴⁰

The royal titles are passed on in variations through the centuries and the different imperial constitutions. But precisely at the point where the concern is the expansion of the rule on the known surface of the earth, they follow a traditional line and use largely customary forms. Sargon II (721–705 B.C.E.), too, as well as the Neo-Babylonian and Persian rulers after him, adhere to them: “Sargon, king of the totality [Šarru-kin šar kiššati], king of the land of Assyria: by my own desire I built a city. I called it Dur-Šarrukin. A perfect [?]”

37. See Sabine Franke, *Königsinschriften und Königsideologie* (Altorientalistik 1; Münster: Lit, 1995), e.g., in view of the epithet of Eannatum: “who subjects all foreign countries to Ningirsu” (52, 89–101, 160–64, etc.).

38. See Mario Liverani, ed., *Akkad, the First World Empire: Structure, Ideology, Tradition* (HANE/S 4; Padova: Sargon, 1993); Pascal Attinger and Markus Wäfler, eds., *Mesopotamien: Akkade-Zeit und Ur III-Zeit Annäherungen 3* (OBO 160.3; Fribourg: Universitätsverlag; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999).

39. From the third to the end of the second millennium, the title “King of Kiš, unparalleled” had undergone a development in its meaning to “universal ruler,” which is often expressed with the Akkadian designation šar kiššatim, “king of totality,” as well; see Franke, *Königsinschriften und Königsideologie*, 492; Erhard S. Gerstenberger, “‘World Dominion’ in Yahweh-Kingship Psalms,” *HBT* 23 (2001/2): 192–210.

40. Albert K. Grayson, *Assyrian Rulers of the Third and Second Millennia B.C. (to 1115 B.C.)* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987); idem, *Assyrian Rulers of the Early First Millennium B.C. I (1114–859 B.C.)* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), citation from 13.

palace I built in it, for which there is nothing comparable ... in the four parts of the world [kibrat arba'i].⁴¹ The great Persian kings adopted both ideas and titles for themselves and in a restricted sense for their deity, Ahura Mazda, the "Lord of Wisdom." In any case, they practiced and celebrated the unlimited world power that knew no equal, although there was no lack of internal and external foes. Nevertheless, the ideology of the king, inherited beyond cultural boundaries, claimed to be the relevant concentration of power willed by the deity and therefore also agreed with the well-being and interest of the nations united in the empire. The titles of the rulers appear cumulatively:

FROM THE CYRUS CYLINDER (539 B.C.E.)

I, Cyrus, king of the empire, great and powerful king, king of Babel, king of Sumer and Akkad, king of the four shores of the world, son of Cambyzes, the great king, of the king of Anšan, the nephew of Cyrus, of the great king, of the king of Ašan, descendant of Šišpiš (Teispes), of the great king, of the king of Anšan, eternal seed of the kingdom, to whose reign Bel and Nabû were endeared and whose kingdom they desired for the delight of their hearts, when I entered Babel peacefully I established the seat of government with jubilation and joy and the palace of the prince.⁴²

The predecessors of Cyrus had been only regional kings of Anshan, the Elamite-Persian place of origin. This phase of limited power was past. Cyrus the Great himself speaks emphatically of world dominion, which, as a matter of course in this inscription on the cylinder, was apportioned to him by Marduk, the Babylonians' god of the city and of the state. In the style of a report, it is said of Marduk, "He scrutinized all of the countries, looked around among his friends; he took a just prince by his hand: he called Cyrus, the king of Anšan, he called his name to rule over the whole universe."⁴³ Naming Marduk the divine guide of the world is not unusual in the city of Babylon. The conqueror enters into the traditions of the conquered; perhaps he does this so well because, through the revolt of the priesthood of Baby-

41. According to Christoph Uehlinger, *Weltreich und "eine Rede"* (OBO 101; Fribourg: Universitätsverlag; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1990), 476.

42. Kurt Galling, ed., *Textbuch zur Geschichte Israels* (2nd ed.; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1968), 83.

43. Ibid.

lon, the god of the conquered opponents had explicitly welcomed him, Cyrus, as the savior.⁴⁴ From the Persian perspective, this may have meant that the grantor of world dominion was none other than their own deity of the state, Ahura Mazda. According to Cyrus, several Persian rulers expressly declared their support to him.

In the trilingual Behistun Inscription, Darius adopts the titles of the predecessors: "I am Darius, the great king, king of kings, king in Persia, king of countries, son of Hystaspes, grandson of Arsame, an Achaemenid."⁴⁵ The world ruler continually refers to his commission by Ahura Mazda: "Darius, the king, declares: According to the will of Ahura Mazda I am king. Ahura Mazda has conveyed the reign as king [Persian *xšaça*] to me."⁴⁶ This is followed by a listing of twenty-three governed nations, then: "Darius, the king, declares: These countries that have been given to me were made subject to me by the will of Ahura Mazda. They brought tributes to me. What I said to them, by night or day, they did."⁴⁷

The rule conveyed by the deity surely commits the king to preserve justice on behalf of God, for a kind of guideline of jurisdiction for the subjects: "Darius, the king, declares that in these countries I have given a rich reward to a man who was loyal, but whoever was disloyal I have punished severely. These countries have observed my law [Persian: *dāta*, Aramaic: *dāt*, "decree,

44. Thus in the defamatory poem on Nabonidus, *ANET*, 312–15; cf. the Cyrus Cylinder: Rykle Borger, "Kyros Zylinder," *TUAT* 1.4:408–10 and also Isa 44:28; 45:1–4. Herbert Donner (*Geschichte des Volkes Israel und seiner Nachbarn in Grundzügen* [2nd ed.; 2 vols.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1995], 2:424–25) comments on these texts traditionally; Briant (*From Cyrus to Alexander*, 41), however, argues differently: "This traditional interpretation evokes suspicion to the extent that it agrees with the image that Persian propaganda itself would have portrayed."

45. A composite text from an ancient Persian, Babylonian, and Elamite version, following Borger and Hinz, "Die Behistun-Inschrift," *TUAT* 1.4:420–21 (= §1 of the rock inscription divided into 70 sections; each section is introduced stereotypically in ancient Persian with the formula "Darius the king heralds").

46. §5 of the inscription, in Borger and Hinz, "Die Behistun-Inschrift," *TUAT* 1.4:422. Again and again the inscriptions of Darius emphasize in formulaic fashion: Ahura Mazda is the creator of the universe "who created the fortune for the human being that made Darius king, who gave Darius the empire, the great one, with good horses (and) with good men"; cf. Ahn, *Religiöse Herrscherlegitimation im achämenidischen Iran*, 180.

47. §7 of the inscription, in Borger and Hinz, "Die Behistun-Inschrift," *TUAT* 1.4:424. On royal legislation, see Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 510–11, 600–611. Ahn (*Religiöse Herrscherlegitimation im achämenidischen Iran*, 180–227, 246–302) explains that the great king acts in fulfillment of the divine order. In §9 the urgent advice follows again that Ahura Mazda is the driving force behind the governmental practice of Darius.



King Darius in audience: “Treasury relief” in Persepolis. From Ursula Schneider, *Persepolis and Ancient Iran* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976). Used by permission.

law”] by the will of Ahura Mazda, as I told them, so they acted.”⁴⁸ Wherever the opponent of the supreme God appears, the lying spirit, the negation of the good, there the king has to intervene, and Ahura Mazda will support him. The ruler really becomes the preacher for his god: “Darius, the king declares: The countries that became rebellious were made so by the lie [*drau*], so that these (men) lied to the people. Consequently, Ahura Mazda handed them over to me. As I willed it, so I did to them. Darius the king declares: You who will be king subsequently; guard yourself carefully against lies. Punish a man severely who is a slave to lies, if you take the view that your country may be secure.”⁴⁹ Finally, it may be appropriate to cite the inscription on Darius’s gravestone that places the lifework of the king under the direction of the Persian god of creation and order (these motives may quite possibly be Mesopotamian, since they do not occur as stereotypical in the Gathas of Zoroaster) and presents the ruler once more in the posture of proclamation:

I have done everything according to the will of Ahura Mazda. Ahura Mazda granted me support until I accomplished the work. May Ahura Mazda pro-

48. §8 of the inscription in Borger and Hinz, “Die Behistun-Inschrift,” *TUAT* 1.4:424.

49. Thus the full text of §§54 and 55 of the inscription (*ibid.*, 1.4:444). “Lies” are contrary to the divine. See Mary Boyce, *A History of Zoroastrianism* (2 vols.; HO 1/8.1.2; Leiden: Brill, 1982), 2:173–77.

tect me from evil, as well as my royal house and this country! This I beg from Ahura Mazda; may Aura Mazda [*sic*] grant it. Oh human, may what is Ahura Mazda's command not appear evil to you! Do not leave the right path! Do not be obstreperous!⁵⁰

Given the wealth of religious statements of power and the missionary zeal of the Darius inscriptions,⁵¹ it is pointless to ask whether belief in Ahura Mazda played a part in the politics of the state among the Achaemenids. In any case, for the reign of Darius this is clearly demonstrated to be a frame of reference, even if little can be determined about the religious contents and, more specifically, the question of whether Zoroaster's teaching alone was decisive. Nevertheless, the valuation of "lies" in politics and conduct demonstrates the character of the religion in question.

The zeal for Ahura Mazda is also documented for other Achaemenids. For example, in an inscription of Xerxes he apparently intensifies a religious purge in conquered territories:

XERXES IN HIS "DAEVA" INSCRIPTION OF PERSEPOLIS AND PASARGADAE

Ahura Mazda is the great god who has made this earth here, who has made heaven there, who created man, who brought forth fortune for man, who appointed Xerxes as king, the only king of many, the only ruler of many.⁵² Among those nations there was one where the Daivas used to be venerated, but thanks be to Ahura Mazda, I have destroyed the sanctuary of the Daivas. I have decreed "that the Daivas are no longer allowed to be worshiped." Where the Daivas once had been venerated, I now venerate Ahura Mazda, at the determined time and according to the (correct) ritual.⁵³

50. According to Koch, *Es kündigt Dareios der König*, 294.

51. A compilation of the texts with numerous references to the uniqueness of the reign of the emperor, predicated on the will and order of the deity, is offered in Lecoq, *Les inscriptions de la Perse achéménide*, 187–249.

52. Following Ahn, *Religiöse Herrscherlegitimation im achämenidischen Iran*, 111–13; Lecoq translates as follows: "Ahuramazda est le grand dieu qui a créé cette terre ici, qui a créé ce ciel là-bas, qui a créé l'homme, qui a créé le bonheur pour l'homme, qui a fait Xerxès roi, unique roi de nombreux, unique souverain de nombreux" (*Les inscriptions de la Perse achéménide*, 257–58).

53. Following Ahn, *Religiöse Herrscherlegitimation im achämenidischen Iran*, 111–22; according to Lecoq, the text reads as follows: "Et parmi ces people, il y en avait un ou

Experts puzzle over which people are in mind and to what historical events the inscription alludes. This much is clear: in the text Xerxes deals with revolts that he put down successfully. Further, he explicitly poses as one who fights for the correct religion, which appears to play a significant role in the preservation of the empire, in stark contrast to the commonly known Achaemenid politics of religion. The Daivas are the concretion and personification of false belief, being diametrically opposed to the “Lord of Wisdom,” Ahura Mazda, the creator and refuge of what is good. In any case, the royal inscriptions indicate that faith in Ahura Mazda had fundamental significance for the Achaemenid Empire, however this faith was construed internally and however different it may have been represented to those outside, over against other religions. In contrast to the Mesopotamian empires, in which the king traditionally had been the trustee of the deity and the highest guardian of justice and righteousness,⁵⁴ the royal functions are broader among the Achaemenids. On the global scale, the emperors represent the authority of the creator of the world; they are jointly responsible for the innermost structure of the empire, consisting of truth, being good and justice.⁵⁵

In all of this, however, the fundamental question is not the one of the bodily divinity of the king, as it has been rehearsed time and again in the Christian tradition with reference to Jesus Christ being the Son of God. Rather, it is the ruler’s function that is decisive: Does he carry out the task of his (i.e., the state’s) god? Does he receive a divine mandate to rule the empire? The personal faith of the king, too, is not really open to debate. The oft-debated question of whether or not the Achaemenids were confessing adherents of Zoroaster is pointless. In keeping with ancient Oriental prac-

précédemment les dévas étaient vénérés; alors, grace à Ahuramazda, j’ai détruit le sanctuaire des dévas e j’ai interdit: ‘Que les dévas ne soient pas vénérés!’ (*Les inscriptions de la Perse achéménide*, 257–58). Cf. Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 550–54; Boyce, *A History of Zoroastrianism*, 2:173–77; Michael Stausberg, *Die Religion Zarathustras* (3 vols.; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2002–2004), 1:173–74. The most recent edition is Schmitt, *Inscriptions of Naqsh-I*, 88–95.

54. See Arnold Gamper, *Gott als Richter in Mesopotamien und im Alten Testament* (Innsbruck: Wagner, 1966); Borger, “Der Codex Hammurapi,” *TUAT* 1.1:39–80; Walter Sommerfeld, *Der Aufstieg Marduks* (AOAT 213; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1982; Ahn, *Religiöse Herrscherlegitimation im achämenidischen Iran*, 78–91, 196–99, 256–71.

55. As already stated, the quality of “righteousness” is typical of the king in Mesopotamian traditions as well. Perhaps Darius and Xerxes adopted these concepts and intensified them magnificently to the level of hymnal eulogies, based on their own theological premises; cf. the texts DNb and XP1 in Lecoq, *Les inscriptions de la Perse achéménide*, 221–24, 259–61; Ahn, *Religiöse Herrscherlegitimation im achämenidischen Iran*; Pss 45 and 72 may also be used for comparison.

tice, they appeal to their inauguration by a powerful, high-ranking god. The commission of building a temple for the main deity and the provision of social justice are traditionally included in this mandate to power. If the bestowal of world rule is to be discussed, the appointing deity is certainly authorized to such an act of sovereignty. It is the creating deity that conveys its cosmos to the chosen monarch in trust. In this phase and in the respective centers of power, where universal concepts of society have been developed, the ruler (in terms of function) becomes the “divine” vice-regent over the entire then known, habitable earth. Of course, there have been differences in understanding and forming the empire in the various periods of imperial display of power. For the Sumerians, Akkadians, Babylonians, Assyrians, Persians, Egyptians, Hittites, Greeks, and Romans, however, the basic idea was identical or at least comparable. Out of the practical necessity to legitimate world dominion emerged models of establishment that claimed a supratemporal embedding of current or desired conditions. That an ideology such as this in turn also became the motivation for expansive political strategies is easy to understand.

Yet what were the characteristics of the Persian version of a unified, global kingdom? Have the original religions of ancient Iran, over against Mesopotamia, Asia Minor, and Egypt, especially their shaping in the teaching of Zoroaster, in some way shaped the Achaemenid concept of empire? At this point we are able only to pose the question; we will take it up again after a survey of the fundamental religious philosophies. In any case, the different quality of faith and ideas of God in the Avesta, in contrast to the ancient Mesopotamian religions, suggest different religious accents, even if they are only vaguely expressed in the official royal inscriptions.

The imperial notion and the functions bestowed on the king thereby make up only one factor of the historical reality. Under no circumstances should we overrate it, as if people in the Persian Empire had continually lived with the consciousness of being part of a universal society by Persian grace. At times the converse may be true: life probably unfolded largely in the micro-regions, in settlements, cities, and family units. As far as cities are concerned, in the ancient Near East there certainly were considerable cities, even some metropolises that were enormous in their dimensions. Nevertheless, approximately 60–80 percent of the population lived “in the country” or, even if living in cities, were fully engaged in the agrarian industry. The ratio of the really urban population to the agrarian one has only shifted decisively in favor of the former in modernity. Even in predominantly agrarian countries today, up to 80 or 90 percent of people live in bursting metropolitan conurbations, thanks to modern agro-technology. Thus we are able to imagine, for instance, what life then might have looked like in a giant asso-

ciation of numerous tribes, groups of languages, and subgroups of states: the overarching ideology of the empire and its religious base that we encounter in the royal speeches are able to function like an external casing, including all people within the empire. As an encompassing bracket it is by no means always visible or conscious, but in given events, such as acts of war, recruiting of soldiers, levying or exempting taxes, pompous display of power, granting or withdrawing rights, it makes itself felt to the remotest corners of every single province. In their local and regional communities people were then directly affected by the state's organization, positively or negatively, and they had to declare their position. Costly propaganda by the empire's leadership, as depicted in the monumental inscription on a rock face near Behistun or the construction of palaces in the capitals, for instance, surely were a lasting reminder of the power and omnipresence of the imperial authorities for all who were aware of them. A sketch of how the ideology was translated in administrative structures and actions will serve as backdrop for understanding the Judaic reality.

Organization and Awareness. To some extent we stand in awe of the achievements of the ancient Persian government. It took above-average skill, incredible energy, and remarkable capacity for understanding to maintain such a huge realm in a balanced condition. Revolts and civil wars indeed were not scarce; in such a varied mixture of people within the boundaries of the empire, this is not surprising. The Behistun Inscription alone records fifteen rebellions against Darius I and their suppression.⁵⁶ But the Achaemenids succeeded more than once in preserving or restoring the unity of the multi-racial state. How did they achieve this? What difference did the nature of the empire make? The mere "will to power," established in a strong personality or a dynasty, surely did not suffice. Out of what, if at all, did a feeling of solidarity of the elite and the subjected nations arise? Was there a general awareness in those enormous realms of the coherence of authority and the comprehensive political (or military, economic, religious) reality of the Persian Empire?

First we should note that the central government from Cyrus to Darius III, residing in the Persian highland or in Susa, occasionally also in Babylon,

56. Summary in Lecoq, *Les inscriptions de la Perse achéménide*, 87–90; the text of the inscription is found on 187–214; Borger and Hinz, "Die Behistun-Inschrift," *TUAT* 1.4:419–50. The two final enemies, Elamites and Scythians, were explicitly acknowledged as "not revering Ahura Mazda" but that Darius is his supporter (§§72 and 75). The identical exhortation then says: "Darius the king declares: Whoever reveres Ahura Mazda will be shown favor, but while alive and after death" (§§73 and 76; Lecoq, *Les inscriptions de la Perse achéménide*, 213–14). See also Stausberg, *Die Religion Zarathushtras*, 1:157–86 (politicizing of religion).

did not attempt to create a linguistic, cultural, juridical, or religious basis of unity for the rule. As the various official archives demonstrate, alongside the Persian language, regionally and in communications with the government, Elamite, Babylonian, Egyptian, Greek (surely including various idioms from the eastern parts of the empire), and, for the entire western realm, Aramaic were officially permitted languages. Internally local languages remained untouched, in any case. Since the major kings established their supremacy as much as possible in cooperation with the local elites, the variety of languages was preserved, and the problem of the mediating translations remained the task of all Persian administrative offices that should not be underestimated (see Esth 3:12). Although the communications of the court often refer to the “law,” that is, the “decrees” of the king (*dāta*), and the impression arises often that they are universally applicable laws, a unified *code civile* is out of the question in ancient Persia. On the contrary, the Achaemenids seem to have seen to it that regional common law, whether established ethnically, culturally, or religiously, was observed in the various parts of the empire. In the provinces, of course, judges and legislators were not allowed to decide on verdicts and clauses that were perilous to the government. The alleged order of Darius I to “codify” the Egyptian laws and the introduction of Jewish law under Ezra are said to be the most important pieces of evidence for these politics. More recent historians do not interpret these hints as much in terms of constitutional or technical law as was the case earlier. They speak of respective isolated measures and of the ruler’s will to secure the loyalty of the subjects.⁵⁷ The Persian kings were far from any other regimentation of culture or religion in the governed countries, in contrast to their predecessors, the Assyrian and Babylonian sovereigns, and their Hellenistic successors. Thus the Persian imperial notion did not extend to the spheres of life mentioned, which we, together with all sorts of governmental philosophers known in history, consider to be decisive for the ordering of major societies.

What factors, then, shaped unity in the ancient Persian Empire? It was especially the domains of politics, military, and commerce that the Achaemenid creators of states used. Wherever they established themselves, the superordinate principle was to strengthen the authority of the central government through the presence of the military and speedy lines of communication, while also leaving the subordinate administrative districts with as much independence as possible. This, however, never excluded interventions by the highest authority even in trivial incidents in the provinces. The

57. See Redford, “So-Called ‘Codification’”; Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 510–11, 600–611.

garrisons served the former intent, especially in the border areas but also at strategically important points, and the famous postal horses that moved communications nonstop over vast distances served the latter.⁵⁸ In a remarkably efficient way it linked the central government with the main administrative centers of the empire. The clearly structured hierarchy of offices ultimately rendered all officials accountable to the emperor in the distant capital. As long as they were loyal to the emperor, satraps and provincial governors understood each other as mediators of the highest regal will. Key imperial positions remained largely reserved for the members of Persian nobility. In the provinces, the subdivisions of the vast satrapies, however, it was primarily the indigenous elite who shared in the responsibilities. Through them the great imperial power was translated into the microcosms of the “unified” global structure, whatever it comprised. Apparently the greatest credit went to Darius the Great in this regard. Around 520 B.C.E. he reorganized the entire administrative system and rearranged twenty or more “satrapies” with numerous subordinate “provinces”⁵⁹ (see map, p. xv above).

In this briefly sketched framework, the activities of the Persian “rulers of the world” and their courts, administrative officials, and military staff developed over two hundred years. Again, our question is how this entire display of power affected the empire’s population groups and whether there emerged a shaping of consciousness in the humanity of that time in that local rulers, as well as citizens and peasants, in one way or another were able or had to dialogue with the Persian rulers. No doubt the contemporary inhabitants of the Persian sphere of influence, however remote their dwellings and pastures, heard of the existence of the central government, its wars, legendary pomp, and luxury,⁶⁰ perhaps also of their endeavors for civilian order. The culture of oral tradition was effective and reliable, even without the electronic speeds that we consider normal today. Legends of rulers were a part of popular narrative material.⁶¹ Further, thousands of people in all parts of the empire were

58. Cf. Koch, *Es kündigt Dareios der König*, 68–70; Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 365–77; Wiesehöfer, *Ancient Persia*.

59. Lecoq (*Les inscriptions de la Perse achéménide*, 130–36) offers a selection of various lists of these extensive regions, where in each case a dominant nation with its capital became the major pillar. See Dandamaev and Lukonin, *Culture and Social Institutions*; Vogelsang, *Rise and Organisation*.

60. Royal celebrations, rituals, and the architecture of palaces and cities consciously served the purpose of raising the aura of the monarchy and to keep the empire as peripherally dependent upon the central power. Briant expresses this cogently as establishing an “idealized image of space and imperial power” (*From Cyrus to Alexander*, 175–203).

61. Partly they were taken up by writers, as in the book of Esther and the *Cyropedia* of Xenophon.

directly dependent upon the government as soldiers, administrative employees, or laborers in royal factories. The wage slips found in Persepolis provide a realistic picture of the living conditions of the “simple people” (see below, §II.2.4). However, it was not only in the cities where people came in direct contact with imperial institutions. The ongoing need for soldiers led to even the smallest communities being required to muster able-bodied men. There indeed were elite troops from the Persian tribal regions in the army, but the rank and file, the foundation of the armies, was constituted of regional contingents from all four points of the compass. The Persian navy had to fall back on skilled sailors from the coastal regions. Every family outside the Persian heartland around Pasargadae and Persepolis experienced most painfully what the state and government were all about when taxes were levied. The polished structure of the giant empire into satrapies and provinces was intended especially for the purpose of securing the financing of the machinery of the state with all its branches. There was no clear distinction made between regular taxes, one-time tributes, and gifts to the emperor. All goods, objects of art and general use, precious metals, and monetary payments went into the king’s treasury and from there were fed into the economic cycle. The administration continually had to finance high expenses for the court, the construction of expensive palaces and government buildings, army, navy, and warfare, traffic technology, infrastructure, and similar “public” tasks. All of these could only be realized by the extensive use of personnel. How did the various expressions of the Persian imperial structure of the state affect the inhabitants?

We know little about how Persian subjects related to the goals of the Achaemenid rulers. The most extensive depictions and opinions come from the Greek intellectuals. For them the Persian Empire was a fascinatingly repulsive reflection of their own political structure. However, even if the Greeks, from their tradition, found it difficult to understand the “Asian” conditions and mentalities, there were nevertheless dozens of writers with closer or more distant knowledge of the Persian reality who collected all sorts of information and left them for posterity. Because of the Greek dominance among the reporting and judging voices, the danger continues to exist to see the Persian rule through Greek eyes, to succumb to Western distortion. Individual witnesses from Babylon, Israel, Egypt, and archaeological discoveries, but also the Persian sources with their own biases, may serve as a counterbalance to the prejudice of the Greek interpretation of Persian reality. What is certain is that the Greek intellectuals devoted considerable attention to the empire in the East, mostly under the impression of a natural opposition shaped by the many battles against the Persian advance to Europe. This may also have been true of other ruling classes in the various regions of the ancient world. We will yet address individual voices that hailed Cyrus as liberator and thus

identified themselves with the imperial government. Based on behavior such as this, is it possible to conclude that there existed a common consciousness of “state” or “order” among the international elite in the Persian Empire?

Generally one speaks of a national consciousness only if the internal, positive attitude to the great society of the state is shared by the majorities of the population. However, these majorities generally do not leave behind direct declarations of their will. Consequently, we are not able to know how ancient people felt when they were asked about their Persian rulers. Some biblical texts, for instance, share the euphoria of those who celebrated the Persian conquest as deliverance. Others intimate that it was precisely under Persian aegis that the gap between rich and poor was wider than otherwise. The financial need of the empire was so immense that taxes were collected mercilessly and as thoroughly as possible, and many sank into social misery (see Neh 5:1–4). It is hardly surprising that a lament against the rulers who drive their subordinates hard for “great gain” could become popular in Judah. We do not know whether on the whole the reconstruction of Jerusalem and Judah, supported by the government, and the relative autonomy of the province balanced the exploitative experiences of the community of Israel. It is to be assumed, however, that in Israel, too, they understood themselves—apparently from the leadership elite to the members of the community—as part of the extensive Persian state. The relationship to the empire was ambivalent, yet to a large extent there was a positive attitude to the emperor. With Yahweh’s help they gained the goodwill of the head of state (see Ezra 1:1–4; 7:28; 9:9) and felt obligated to intercede for him before God (6:10). Thus for the Jewish communities the Persian Empire had assumed a theological quality.

Politics of Religion. Positive reports and assessments with regard to the central Persian government in several Old Testament writings (Ezra, Nehemiah, Isaiah), contradictory statements by Greek writers, and several references in administrative documents of Persian satraps have prompted contemporary historians to reiterate the generally extraordinarily liberal disposition of the Achaemenids over against other religions, such as the worship of Ahura Mazda. At times one spoke almost euphorically of their exemplary, tolerant politics of religion, which could include an active promotion of alien cults at the expense of the state treasury. Only most recently have here been voices calling for increasing caution. Sweeping statements are said to be inappropriate.⁶² An important objection is already the fact that among

62. Briant is to be mentioned foremost here; on Cyrus, see Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 55–61, 473–77, 491–93, 543–53, 962–67. See also Redford, “So-Called ‘Codification’”; Stausberg, *Die Religion Zarathushtras*, 1:157–86.

the available Persian sources there are no explanations of principles from major kings. The ad hoc statements of Cyrus or Xerxes, partly cited above, on religious or cultic problems do not allow a reconstruction of a longer-term religio-political program. The second reservation is directed against the presentation of the Jewish theologians (see §II.1.1.2 below). For interests of their own, they assert that the Persian court afforded Jewish leaders preferential consideration and actively promoted the affairs of the community of Yahweh because the ruler felt personally obligated to the God of Israel.⁶³ An outstanding piece of evidence for an allegedly far-reaching cultic and civil legislative initiative ordered by the central government is the inscription of the Egyptian physician Udjahorresnet in conjunction with a letter of Darius, who seemingly orders the collecting of Egyptian legal requirements.⁶⁴ Here, according to Blenkinsopp, Frei, and others, exists a direct parallel to the missions of Ezra and Nehemiah. The Egyptian emissary rebuilds the medical school (“House of Life”) and the temple of Saïs; apparently Darius wants to restore the Egyptian order of life comprehensively. The more recent critical investigations mentioned above, however, point out, that Udjahorresnet more likely represents a private instance of royal favor and the collection of the Egyptian legal tradition is an overinterpretation of an uncertain text.⁶⁵

If one disregards the comprehensive statements about a long-term, thought-out, and practiced Persian politics of religion, there still remain ample indications of a pragmatic, nonideological disposition of the Achæmenids over against other religions. Thereby the Persian rulers distance themselves from all attempts at making the official religion of the state mandatory for all the provinces. The empires that preceded the Persian one may sporadically have adopted a dominant position over against the subjected religions; in the Roman Empire, religion at times became a targeted political instrument of power. For the Persians, however, according to a cautious assessment of all sources, the many religions in the realm were considered harmless, as long as they did not pose difficulties to the government and, in the normal case, taxes and levies were submitted on time. If there was any resistance, the Persian kings were also able to intervene harshly against temple and priesthood. There is no evidence for ongoing financing or subsidizing of temples in the subjected provinces and as such is highly improbable.

63. Grabbe (*Yehud*, 209–16) lays out the Persian sources on the politics of religion clearly and discusses them critically. He concludes: “The alleged support of cults and religion under the Persians is often exaggerated in modern literature” (215).

64. Blenkinsopp, “The Mission of Udjahorresnet”; Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 473–74; Grabbe, *Yehud*, 113, 115.

65. Cf. Grabbe, *Yehud*, 212–13; Redford, “So-Called ‘Codification.’”

II.2.2. THE COURSE OF HISTORY

Briant, Pierre. *From Cyrus to Alexander: A History of the Persian Empire* (trans. Peter T. Daniels; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2002). **Bollinger**, Robert. *Herodots babylonischer Logos* (Innsbruck: Institut für Sprachwissenschaft, 1993). **Brosius**, Maria. *Women in Ancient Persia (559–331 B.C.)* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996). **Dandamaev**, Muhammad A. *Persien unter den ersten Achämeniden* (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 1976). **Dandamaev**. *A Political History of the Achaemenid Empire* (Leiden: Brill, 1989). **Donner**, Herbert. *Geschichte des Volkes Israel und seiner Nachbarn in Grundzügen* (2nd ed.; 2 vols.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1995). **Frye**, Richard N. *The History of Ancient Iran* (Munich: Beck, 1984). **Hinz**, Walther. *Darius und die Perser* (2 vols.; Baden-Baden: Holle, 1976–1979). **Koch**, Heidemarie. *Es kündigt Dareios der König: Vom Leben im persischen Grossreich* (Kulturgeschichte der Antiken Welt 55; Mainz: von Zabern, 1992). **Lenfant**, Doninique. “Ctésias et Hérodote ou les réécritures de l’histoire dans la Perse achéménide” *REG* 109.2 (1995): 348–60. **Lewis**, D. M., et al., eds. *The Fifth Century B.C.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992). **Lewis et al.** *The Fourth Century B.C.* (CAH 6.2; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994). **Tuplin**, Christopher. *Achaemenid Studies* (Historia Einzelschriften 99; Stuttgart: Steiner, 1996). **Herodotus**. *History* (trans. A. D. Godley; 4 vols.; LCL; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981–1982). **Weber**, Ursula, and Josef Wiesehöfer. *Das Reich der Achaimeniden* (Berlin: Reimer, 1996). **Wiesehöfer**, Josef. *Ancient Persia: From 550 B.C. to 650 A.D.* (trans. Azieh Azodi; New York: Tauris, 2001). **Williamson**, Hugh G. M. *Studies in Persian Period History and Historiography* (FAT 38; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004). The constantly updated online bibliography on the Achaemenid period (<http://www.achemenet.com>) offers extensive references to the relevant literature.

GOVERNMENTS AND EVENTS		
Ruler	Persian Empire	Judea and Diaspora
Cyrus II (559–530)	539 Capture of Babylon	Cyrus welcomed as messiah (Isaiah)
Cambyses II (530–522)	522 Conquest of Egypt	Sheshbazzar Zerubbabel, Joshua (?)
Darius the Great (522–486)	522 Victory over Gaumata, Behistun Inscription 520 Administrative reforms	Prophets: Zechariah, Haggai (?) 515 Dedication of temple

Xerxes I (486–464)	500–449 Battles against Greeks (Asia Minor; Athens)	Prophets: Third Isaiah (?)
	490 Battle of Marathon	Fourth-century B.C.E. Yehud coins
Artaxerxes I (464–425)	464 Revolt in Egypt	
	449 “Kallias” peace with Greek cities	445 Nehemiah (?)
Darius II (424–404)	410 Revolts in Media, Asia Minor	440 Sanballat I, governor of Samaria
	405 Egypt independent	435 Marriage of Mip-tahya
Artaxerxes II (404–358)	404–401 Civil war (Arses versus Cyrus); Xenophon, Anabasis	425 Ezra (?) 419 Passover letter from Jerusalem
Artaxerxes III (358–338)	361 (?) Satraps’ rebellion	410 Letter from Elephantine to Jerusalem (temple of Yahweh)
Arses (338–336)	350 Revolt in Cyprus and Phoenecia	405 Sanballat II, governor of Samaria
Darius III (336–331)	333 Battle of Issos	Elnathan, governor of Judea
	331 Battle of Gaugamela	
	Alexander takes over the empire	398 Ezra (?) 385 Yehoezer, governor of Judea (high priest?)
		Johanan I; Eliashib; Yoyada I; Johanan II; Jaddua II; Johanan III; Jaddua III. ... (?) 330 Yehezqiyah, governor of Judah

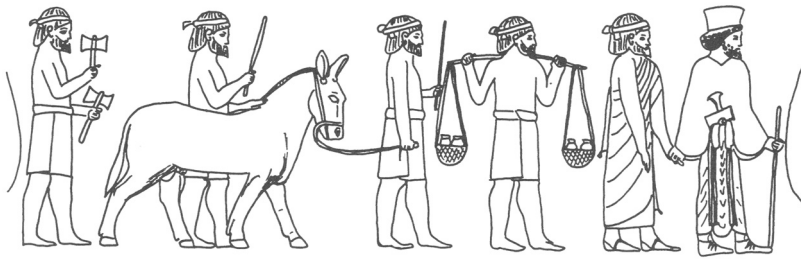
Data as such of rulers and events from the history of the Achaemenids are known well enough. The chronology of the governments and many political and warlike occurrences are attested accurately; private documents mention names and actions in the interpersonal sphere and refer to the public calendar. Yet such historical fixed points do not yet make up the history of a major society or an empire. According to our understanding, history is a continuum of many, ideally all, events of life in a given realm, a coherence of human interactions extending over longer periods of time. The Persian sources do not provide a flow of interwoven events such as this. We only find this in the observing and writing Greeks who were directly or indirectly affected by the Persian power and sketched a critical portrait of the empire. Their legacy is uniquely important for reconstructing the Persian history, but, as already mentioned, it naturally holds also the danger of distorted perspectives. The Greek historians narrated the events as victims and from the perspective of their different understanding of the human, cultural, and religious features. A critique such as this of historical facts cannot be excluded. It is part of the nature of every historiography. We need to keep in mind that all of the portraits of the history of the Achaemenid period that have come down to us betray the typically Greek viewpoint.⁶⁶ Greek historians have frequently been used uncritically by their Western colleagues as well, so that the conventional portrait of Persia is based on the Western pattern of understanding. Realistic research that takes into account ancient (as well as current) contexts of interpretation will depict the Persian era with appropriate care on every side.

From the beginning of the first millennium B.C.E. the Persians, together with the Medes, probably migrated from areas east of the Caspian Sea (according to another hypothesis from Lake Urmia) to the west and south and finally settled in Media and Persia, initially under the overlordship of the Median kings. Around 550 B.C.E. the famous first, great Persian king, Cyrus II, was able to reverse the balance of power, subjecting Media and Elam and advancing the imperial boundaries eastward and to the northwest. He conquered parts of the Assyrian state on the upper Tigris, reached western Haran and Carchemish, and advanced further over the mountains to the Cappadocian plateau. There the major crescent of the Halys initially formed the boundary over against the Lydians. But there was no limit to the urge of expansion. The Persian ruler turned his attention especially to the west, to the Mediterranean and Egypt, just as the early dynastic Sume-

66. European specialists on Iran are aware of this problem and deal with it with differing intensity. Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, offers the most careful attempt to critique the Greek presentations even in matters of detail.

rian and then Akkadian rulers of Mesopotamia had done thousands of years earlier. After the demise of the Lydian kingdom (Croesus was defeated in 546 B.C.E.; Herodotus handed down the legend of the ambiguous oracular saying to the king: "If he crosses the Halys, he will destroy a major realm"), the Neo-Babylonian state, weakened by internal clashes, could no longer resist. In 539 B.C.E., the capital of Babylon was handed over without a battle to Cyrus, who was hailed as liberator. Thus the small states of Syria-Palestine also were at the mercy of the superior and well-organized armies of the eastern masters, and the way to Egypt was open. However, because Cyrus also fought battles in the east, beyond the Aral Sea (today Uzbekistan), and died in 530 B.C.E. during a campaign against the Massagetes, it was only his son Cambyses who conquered the realm of the pharaohs at the Nile and integrated it into the Persian Empire (525–222 B.C.E.). In the east the Persians advanced as far as the Indus River; in the northeast they extended their imperial realm as far as the Pamir Mountains and the Jaxartes (Syr-Dar'ya). Hence, as already mentioned, the immense size of the empire, which for two centuries was essentially stable, encompassed an area 5,000 by 2,000 kilometers, or 10 million square kilometers (Europe to the Ural equals 10.5 million square kilometers).

Who would be able to defy an imperial power such as this? After the tribal countries of Media and Persia were first united under one dynasty and then the ancient cultural regions of Assyria and Babylon were added, the economic and military, as well as the cultural, might were so colossal that they, if reasonably joined and comprehensively organized, had no equal in the then-known world. The socioeconomic requirements for the military production and organization were given to a large extent by the political organization and the strict order of the system of taxation. The eastern part of the empire was inhabited mainly by nomadic tribes, apart from such trade cities and administrative centers as today's Samarkand and Tashkent, Kandahar, Kabul, and ancient Bactria. These eastern Iranian tribal societies, after they were brought into compliance, were reliable taxpayers and warriors. On the reliefs of the eastern staircase of the great audience chamber (Apadana) in Persepolis, the eastern peoples provide a number of envoys who bring their characteristic presents to the emperor: Drangians and Arachoses from today's Afghanistan and Pakistan enter with a camel, carrying bowls (made of precious metal) in their hands; they are characterized as riders by Turkish trousers and turbans. To the north they are joined by the Areians, with camel and bedouin scarf (bashlik), and the Bactrians. They, too, bring a camel but cover their hair with a net-cap. Both also bring bowls, indicators of their skilled workmanship and perhaps of unique foods or drinks. The Sattagydiens and Gandarians offer a Zebu bull, as well as lances and shields; they also produce weapons. They



Apadana of Persepolis: Delegation of Indians. After Heidemarie Koch, *Es kündigt Dareios der König: Vom Leben im persischen Grossreich* (Kulturgeschichte der Antiken Welt 55; Mainz: von Zabern, 1992), 116 plate 73.

wear breeches, a hip-length shirt, and a long, flowing wrap. The Chorasmians and Sogds, plus the Saks, related to the Scyths, form the northernmost group of nations. Apart from the arm bangles, their gifts are Bellian: battleaxes, short sword, and horse. Their bashliks betray their existence as riders. Thus the Eastern ethnic groups provide nine of twenty-nine depicted delegations. Because of three double representations in one segment of the relief, they are presented in six of twenty-three individual scenes. There is also a delegation of Indians, dressed with only a loin dress and headband, leading a mule by a leash and offering gold dust and double axes.⁶⁷ It probably symbolizes the homage of the nations beyond the Indus that never were part of the sovereign territory of Persia.

All things considered, the nations organized as tribes in the eastern part of the empire probably were by nature inferior to the concentrated economic and military ability of the middle and western regions. For one, they lacked the economic power; for another, their tribal interests may have hindered an effective union with the competing ethnic groups. It seems to be a common sociological law that fractured group interests generally render focused actions impossible; only the tight structure of a society is able to yield historic, maximum performances following commonly accepted hierarchy! However, the quality of life can also be defined differently (cf. the alliances of Greek city-states as an apparent counterargument below). In western Persia, however, things were entirely different. The Babylonians, Assyrians, Syrians, and Egyptians had attained a high cultural level more than two thousand years before the Persians and in part had built up systems of state that domi-

67. Illustrations and discussions are offered by Koch, *Es kündigt Dareios der König*, 93–123.

nated the world. Economically and technically, these western countries were superior to the new masters of the Middle East in terms of potential. That they all the same fell victim to the Persian armies so relatively quickly has to do mainly with the internal weakness of those ancient empires at that particular time. As can be observed in history again and again, they had exhausted their freshness and imagination in centuries of supremacy and became easy prey for the aggressive newcomers from the East. At the Egyptian and North-African frontier, the Persians' advance came to a standstill where the cultural boundaries had run for centuries.

A glance to the north and the northwest shows yet another situation, as far as Persia's neighbors and opponents are concerned. Already in Asia Minor the Persians encountered such Greek cities of colonists as Ephesus, Miletus, Chios, and Priene, which represent the standard of classical Greek education and life with regard to culture, technology, and science. There were revolts against the Persian imperial rule often and in many places during the two centuries of its existence. Good examples are the battles for succession to the throne that erupted following the death of Cambyses in 522 B.C.E. Darius I had great difficulties in achieving his claim to power. During his reign (522–486 B.C.E.) he also faced an uprising by the Ionian cities in western Asia Minor (500–494 B.C.E.), which did not want to submit to the autocratic rule of Persepolis. The Greeks in Asia Minor were assured of the sympathy and help of the “mainland” Greeks, that is, of the city-states of Greece proper, which were experienced in (naval) warfare. The Ionian rebellion became the Persian wars, those hard battles for the supremacy on the southern Balkans, which also kept Darius's two successors, Xerxes I and Artaxerxes I, in suspense and did not end until the treaty of 449 B.C.E. The Persians banged their heads against a brick wall in the Greek regions. At least, this is the way Greek eyes see the course of history. The entirely different political and intellectual culture, the powerful striving for local independence and personal freedom, the considerable economic resources of the Greek community, their military power, especially in naval warfare—all this caused the Persians ultimately to come off the worst from this perspective. At times they actually were successful with the occupation of some Greek islands, the control of the Hellespont, and thus of the shipping between the Mediterranean and the Black Seas; indeed, at times they advanced via the strait to Thracia and Macedonia. But for the attacking Persians, who had to put up a united front as invasion armies supported by the navy, the following heavy battles caused heavier losses than for the highly motivated and very well equipped and trained defenders. The defense battles of Marathon (490 B.C.E.), Salamis (480 B.C.E.), and others etched themselves on the Greek, and in part on the European, memory. After half a century of bloodshed, the parties reached

an agreement in the so-called Kallias peace⁶⁸ of 449 B.C.E., which preserved the autonomy of all the Greek cities on the mainland and in western Asia Minor but in which Athens relinquished claims to ownership of the island of Cyprus, as well as Syria and Egypt. The peace, however, was only temporary. Toward the end of the fifth century and through the fourth century B.C.E., Persia time and again interfered with Greek affairs, partly with the collaboration of Sparta against Athens. But the giant empire was not successful in encroaching on the European side of the Aegean Sea. Why? Perhaps the power of the ruling Persians was exhausted; perhaps the societal systems were too different after all, too incompatible; perhaps the greater reserves of power were with the Greeks, whose Macedonian branch at the end of the fourth century B.C.E. turned the pendulum of history in the brief triumphal run of Alexander the Great.

If the empire and its potential opponents are considered en bloc, it is noteworthy that, beginning with the fifth century, the frontiers remained quite stable. Other political powers could scarcely challenge or endanger the Persians. The only counterforces were internal struggles for independence, dynastic disagreements, or pure cravings for power in the respective satrapies and people-groups. Thus within the imperial boundaries there always were explosive situations that at times ignited. Consequently, the two hundred years of Persian rule were sporadically interspersed by civil wars. Of the ten rulers of the Achaemenid dynasty (rulers reigning for a short time only are not taken into consideration), only a few were able to maintain a peaceful rule in part. However, the observant historian, as already mentioned above, needs to remain aware that the predominantly Greek sources (they alone offer a coherent narrative synopsis) represent a Western perspective, place the main emphasis on a history rich in conflicts with Greek culture and the internal dynastic arguments of the Persian nobility, and like to place the stamp of a battle of the cultures—East against West, against civilization—upon the entire era. This latter perspective has dug itself into the Western mentality with fatal consequences. At the same time, for the central Persian government, the scene of Asia Minor and Greece possibly was the most important place of the discussion only in phases. The battle for Egypt for them certainly had similarly urgent significance over long stretches of time, and about the political and military challenges of the much larger eastern part of the empire we know too little to offer a realistic assessment.

68. Supposedly negotiated and concluded by the Athenian politician Kallias, who made a special trip to Susa; see Herodotus, *History* 7.151–152.

Thus the two centuries of Persian rule were definitely shaped by a comparable and repetitive course of history.⁶⁹ From the Greek vantage point, powerful Asian emperors developed an indomitable urge for conquest westward. The worst enemies are stylized as blood-thirsty tyrants, such as the emperor Xerxes. They were fended off with difficulty and found their true master only in the brilliant Greek hero Alexander. According to the Western model, history is above all the function of individual rulers, their driving force being the personal will of those prominent figures. No wonder that the histories of Herodotus and his colleagues consist largely of psychologizing sketches of the main actors and their motivations. Their character forms their innermost core of historical events. The plans, hopes, and intrigues of the rulers and their supporters and opponents drive the plot. For the Greek writers, the drama on the great world stage, driven by human desires, also takes place in keeping with the rules of the local theater. Thus for our consciousness, trained by Greek sources, ancient Persian history is entirely packaged in "Western" stereotypes.

Therefore, the history of two hundred years of the Persian Empire is presented to us as a superb portrait of the unfolding and maintenance of an incredibly large form of state up until then. The main concern of Persian politics, the goal of proud emperors, may perhaps be seen in the attempt to bring the entire inhabited world under their control and to create and maintain a stable world order for the numerous people-groups united under their leadership. The specifically Persian experiment to found an empire like this was carried out mainly with military and economic means but also was based upon a certain Achaemenid ideology of rule that can be reconstructed from predominantly Persian sources. Beyond this, the archaeological discoveries document the blossoming of art, religion, and science, which came from the encounter between central Asian and Near Eastern traditions. Since we are inadequately informed about the activities of the central government in the eastern half of the empire, their attention seems to have focused mostly on the West, from Babylon to Egypt, and, owing to the ample accounts handed down, especially on Asia Minor and Greece. Syria-Palestine, of particular interest to us, was important as a transit country to the Nile, but it is mentioned only marginally in all literary sources.

69. Briant takes into account the stereotypical events by structuring his "history of the Persian Empire" chronologically only in part (parts 1, 4–6 interspersed with general analyses), with parts 2 and 3 dealing with the structural problems of the empire, from the regal ideology to the economy, administration, tax policies, and so on.

II.2.3. RELIGION IN ANCIENT PERSIA

Boyce, Mary. *A History of Zoroastrianism* (2 vols.; HO 1/8.1.2; Leiden: Brill, 1975–1982). **Choksy**, Jamsheed K. *Purity and Pollution in Zoroastrianism* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1989). **Colpe**, Carsten, ed. “Altiranische und zoroastrische Mythologie,” in *Wörterbuch der Mythologie* (ed. Hans W. Haussig; 7 vols.; Stuttgart: Klett, 1965–1997), 4:161–487. **Dabu**, Khurshed S. *The Message of Zarathushtra* (2nd ed.; Bombay: New Book Co., 1959). **Gnoli**, Gherardo. *Zoroaster in History* (New York: Bibliotheca Persia Press, 2000). **Gnoli**. “Einige Bemerkungen zum altiranischen Dualismus,” in *Proceedings of the Second European Conference of Iranian Studies* (Sept. 30, 1991) (ed. B. G. Fragner et al.; Rome: Istituto italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1995), 213–31. **Hinz**, Walther. *Zarathustra* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1961). **Humbach**, Helmut. *The Gāthās of Zarathustra and the Other Old Avestan Texts* (2 vols.; Heidelberg: Winter, 1991). **Hutter**, M. *Babylonier, Syrer, Perser* (vol. 1 of *Religionen in der Umwelt des Alten Testaments* (Studienbücher Theologie 4.1; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1996), 184–246. **Insler**, Stanley. *The Gāthās of Zarathustra* (Acta Iranica 8; Leiden: Brill, 1975). **Kanga**, Maneck Fardunji. *Khordeh Avestā* (Bombay: Trustees of the Parsi Panchayat Funds and Properties, 1993). **Kellens**, Jean, and Eric Pirat. *Les Textes vieil-avestiques* (3 vols.; Wiesbaden: Reichert, 1988–1991). **Lanczkowski**, Günter. “Iranische Religionen,” *TRE* 16:247–58. **Panaino**, Antonio. “Religionen im antiken Iran,” in *7000 Jahre persische Kunst* (ed. Wilfried Seipel; Ausstellungskatalog; Milan: Skira, 2001), 23–29. **Stausberg**, Michael. *Die Religion Zarathushtras* (3 vols.; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2002–2004). **Widengren**, Geo. *Iranische Geisteswelt: Von den Anfängen bis zum Islam* (Baden-Baden: Holle, 1961). **Widengren**. *Die Religionen Irans* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1965).

The history of religions of ancient Persia is difficult to reconstruct. Like all others, the Iranian ones also have undergone long-term developments and radical changes; the spiritual history of a nation or a cultural region never stands still. Over the millennia, which have left behind traces of varied clarity, the images of particular epochs, forms, and conceptions often blur. Nevertheless, significant witnesses of the Iranian intellectual and religious world have been preserved until today. The Avesta (basic writing?), the Persian holy writings, became known in Europe in the eighteenth century.⁷⁰ The Avesta is a lengthy collection of very diverse religious texts that in its oldest parts probably can be traced back to Zoroaster himself. Its collection and writing extended over long periods of time; the orthodox version of the Avesta was not produced until the fourth century C.E. in the Sassanid kingdom. Yet the

70. So Lanczkowski, “Iranische Religionen,” 249. Stausberg (*Die Religion Zarathushtras*, 1:69) considers the designation used, which was not known until long after the Achaemenid period, to be impossible to interpret.

Persians who escaped to India from the Muslim armies in the seventh century, and there today constitute an ethnic-religious minority, the Parsis,⁷¹ brought the Avestian tradition with them and continued to work on the basic religious documents. For contemporary research, therefore, there exists, along with the ancient documents, a line of direct access to the ancient Iranian religions via the current Parsi religious community and their rituals and witnesses to their faith, comparable to the situation of the Christian churches. But anyone seeking to identify ancient origins from the vantage point of contemporary communities will quickly realize what immense distances and major chasms exist between both shores. In the case of the Avesta, as in the biblical traditions, it is important to carve out the oldest layers via historical criticism and to differentiate subsequent additions, reinterpretations, and commentaries. To this end, the Persian writings provide welcome linguistic support: a pivotal collection of hymn-like texts, the Gâthâs, written in a special language, Old Avestian (related to Old Persian), can be linguistically identified as archaic. Here we probably have liturgical traditions from the early period linked with the religion of Ahura Mazda of ancient Persia.

Unfortunately, the absolute dating of this basic layer of the Avesta is still in dispute among experts. It is closely associated with the temporal positioning of the prophet or mediator of the revelation, Zoroaster, even if the Persian royal inscriptions of the epoch, strangely enough, do not mention him at all. One vacillates because of several pieces of linguistic and cultural evidence between 1000 and 600 B.C.E., but no argument is entirely conclusive. Be that as it may, faith in the highest god, Ahura Mazda, the "Lord of wisdom," to whom the Persian emperors felt obliged as well, was proclaimed in the Avesta by the mediation of Zoroaster. With a few exceptions, the prayer dialogues in the Gâthâs, according to some explicit references to Zoroaster (e.g., Yasna 28:6; 43:7–8),⁷² are stylized entirely toward the prophet. The speaking human "I" is the prophet who petitions the highest god often enough for enlightenment and intervention. We are insufficiently informed about his biography, however. Zoroaster and the early content of the Avesta associated with him seem to hail from the eastern part of the empire with its tribal structures. The

71. Today the Parsis are strongest in and around Bombay; see Stausberg, *Die Religion Zarathushtras*, 2:34–44.

72. "I have recognized you as the holy one, oh Mazdâ Ahura, when you visited me with Vohu Manah and asked me: 'Who are you? Whose are you? ...' Then I said to him, 'I am Zoroaster, a real enemy, as much as I am able, with regard to liars, but to the righteous a strong support, in order that I may attain the future things of Xšathra who rules in keeping with desires, as long as I praise and glorify you, o Mazdâ;" (Yasna 43:7–8; see Widengren, *Iranische Geisteswelt*, 158).

Gâthâs turn against the dominant sacrificial practices there; they condemn the killing of cattle. A relatedness of character of the ancient Persian religion with Vedic concepts of deity and the Vedic pantheon can also be demonstrated.⁷³

First let us return for a moment to the question of the sources for the ancient Persian religion. We may start out with the ancient layers of the Avesta; being handed down orally, they belong into the Achaemenid period. It may be necessary to compare the otherwise clearly contemporary texts of the sixth to the fourth century B.C.E. with the former, making reference to deity and faith in some form. Alongside the Avesta, the royal inscriptions are prominent witnesses for the religion of the time, albeit the religion that was practiced in association with the royal court, the seat of government, and the dynasty in the interest of the state. For the religion of the people, clay tablets may be adduced from everyday life, recording sacrifices or temple taxes, for instance, as well as theophoric names. In addition, archaeology contributes considerable insights by means of small finds and architecture from the sacral realm, as well as burial gifts and iconographic references. Since there were numerous contacts—not only those associated with wars—between Greece and Persia, which went down into history beyond the histories of Herodotus in the literature of the time, these foreign accounts on Persian religiosity and the cult of the state play an important part. We only need to keep in mind that foreign observers always see, understand, and evaluate things from their own coordinate system. This means that their perceptive faculty may be sharper than that of the locals, but it is certainly also burdened with prejudices leading to distortions and false assessments.

The portrait of the ancient Iranian religions that we have to construct is therefore varied, multilayered, and never without tension from the start. At any rate, we discover, at least fragmentarily, structures of faith with a spiritual, cultic, and didactic orientation that, as context and backdrop, could have a broadly underestimated significance for biblical religiosity. The starting situation is as follows: based on the literary and historical findings, we must assume that in the course of the first millennium B.C.E. the incalculable multiplicity of Iranian folk religions⁷⁴ became eclipsed by faith in the highest god Ahura Mazda and to a certain extent became unified. This does not rule out a previous regional veneration of this deity. Nevertheless, through

73. See Widengren, *Die Religionen Irans*, 7–20; Boyce, *History of Zoroastrianism*, 1:51–84; Stausberg, *Die Religion Zarathushtras*, 1:115–17.

74. A very systematized overview is offered by Widengren, *Die Religionen Irans*, 7–59; see also Boyce, *History of Zoroastrianism*, 1:1–177; Stausberg, *Die Religion Zarathushtras*, 1:12–20, 26–31, 108–23.

the (mission) activity of Zoroaster, a qualitatively new, generally applicable form of the Ahura Mazda religion seems to have emerged. Peculiar is the circumstance that it apparently was not the emerging Persian Empire or its governing level that was the driving force for the universalization of the Ahura Mazda belief. In the ancient Orient, a state-led promotion of religious systems did indeed exist occasionally, for instance, among the Assyrians. The supreme deity of the state, according to the legitimizing propaganda, commissioned the respective Assyrian king with conquering the world for the deity, and the latter expected cultic veneration from the subjected nations or their governments. Under the rule of the Achaemenids, this type of discourse was unknown, although, analogously to Mesopotamian rulers, they adorned themselves extensively with the goodwill of the supreme deity.⁷⁵ In contrast to the Semitic nations, the Persians of the Achaemenid period never supplied Ahura Mazda with monarchic titles or, conversely, elevated the emperor himself to the divine sphere by virtue of his office.⁷⁶ From that it may be assumed that the universalism of the Ahura Mazda faith did not grow in monarchic soil but rather in “civil” conditions. The Persian rulers simply made use of this already-existing theological system. Thus the place of this religion’s origin still remains obscure: Did it originate with schools of wisdom, orders of magicians, or lay communities? Is it possible to consider itinerant preachers and their following as the “breeding grounds” of the individualistic faith that transcended tribal associations?

The difficult question thus arising is in which societal milieu Ahura Mazda may have risen to the highest deity. Ethnic groupings eliminate themselves almost automatically, for, in keeping with the evidence of the traditions, at least the Old Avestic deity was not ethnically bound. All of the norms and rules of life of the Avesta simply concern “the human being,” not some member of a nation. There is no mention of an election of a specific group or the taking on an obligation, such as by forming a covenant, or of a flock of believers. Who, then, was the bearer of the new, encompassing belief that initially spread in the Persian heartland? Apparently there is only one viable explanation: belief in a wise creator and ruler of the world, who above all aimed at redeeming the individual person, teaching him or her a correct lifestyle, and finding completion in paradise beyond. These paradigms did not originate with political and ethnic social structures but from the sphere of

75. See Ahn, *Religiöse Herrscherlegitimation im achämenidischen Iran*, 17–25; Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 93–96, 204–54.

76. Ahn, *Religiöse Herrscherlegitimation im achämenidischen Iran*, 34–38. On the other hand, this does not rule out that the Persian kings represent the highest deity in his function as ruler upon earth (196–99)!

personal piety. Preachers and counselors, such as Zoroaster, priests and missionaries, such as the famous magi,⁷⁷ together with their followers produced the universal teaching of the highest god and spread it among the nations. In terms of structure, the Vedic religion may be offered by way of comparison. What were the main contents of this faith?

Ahura Mazda was the only, sovereign creator of the world and the lord of all history. Supported by superhuman beings (who, however, do not enjoy cultic veneration by humans), the Ameša Spentas (“immortal saints” or “benevolent immortals”), the good god battles for world order and against lies and deception (*drug* = “lie”) and their promoters, the Daēvas (“demons, evil spirits”), and the one who is their highest being, Angra Mainyu (“evil spirit”). The proclamation of Zoroaster, in the name of Ahura Mazda, seeks to present every individual human with the choice to follow the good way of the creator and to turn away from the demons.

If the better way to go is not seen by them, / I approach You all, since the Ahura knows a judgment, / mindful of those two (well-known) shares, (the Ahura), / through whom we live in accordance with truth. // (Tell us about) the satisfaction that you apportioned by means of (your) spirit and (your) fire and (that) you accorded through truth, according to balance, / (and about) what (is) your rule for the responsible ones, tell us about that, so that we may know (it), O Wise One, / (tell us about that) with the tongue of your mouth, so that therewith I might receive all the living.⁷⁸

Zoroaster is the only mediator of the divine revelation. He is able to provide the correct instruction that leads to the decision between good and evil (cf. the title: “arbiter”; Humbach: the one “who knows a judgment,” stanza 2). The highest of the Ameša Spentas is Aša (ancient Persian *arta*): through this concentrated, purest “world order” and toward it is the appeal to all to adapt properly into this powerful but ambivalent reality. By contrast, the other, evil side is exposed:

But you, O Daevas all, are seed (sprung) from evil thought, / and (so is that alleged) master who worships both, you as well as the activities of deceit and contempt, / for which you again and again have become notorious in (this) seventh (of the seven climes) of the world: // insofar as you order those worst (things), (by) offering that the mortals / may grow (as) minions of (you) Daevas, flinching from good thought / (and) straying from the intel-

77. See H. von Gall, “Magier,” in Colpe, “Altiranische und zoroastrische Mythologie,” 4:387–88.

78. See Humbach, *Gāthās of Zarathustra*, 1:126–27, Yasna 31:2–3.

lect of the wise Ahura and from truth. // Therefore you lure the mortal one away from good life and immortality, / because the evil spirit along with evil thought (had lured) you, the Daevas, (away from them), / (the evil spirit) as well as the action (inspired) by the evil word, by which a ruler recognizes a deceitful person.⁷⁹

The Daēvas are the life-destroying powers that have their own hierarchy. Their destructive activities thwart present and future wellbeing. They use lies and arrogance, as well as many other human flaws, to cause humans to fail and to keep them from deciding for what is good. Yet, what is this “good”? Is there a canon of behavioral rules describing the correct lifestyle? On this point the Gāthās offer little that is concrete. Instead, they tend to generalize and speak in hymnal tones about the self-identification of the believer with the good powers. Perhaps the ethical instruction occurred on another level and in literary genres different from these liturgical hymns. The petition for specific ethical instruction indeed also occurs frequently in the Gāthās: “So may you show me Aša when I call upon you” (Yasna 43:10); “when you said to me, ‘Come, in order to learn Aša,’ you did not call me to do something outrageous” (43:12); “So I can decide, tell me what you have given me through Aša that is better than knowledge through Vohu Manah and remembering” (31:5).⁸⁰ The ninth Gāthā (Yasna 44), made up of twenty strophes, has all but one strophe stylized as a question game. The prophet stereotypically presents Ahura Mazda with a certain problem: “This I ask you, tell me plainly, O Ahura...” In the first strophe, for instance, the issue is the appropriateness of the prayer petition: “This I ask you, tell me plainly, O Ahura: / On account of (my) reverence, how reverence to one such as you (should be), / O Wise One, one such as you should announce to one such as me, his friend. / Let friendly fellowships be granted us by truth / so that one may come to us with good thought.”⁸¹

Several stanzas deal with cosmological-eschatological themes, such as: “Who ordered the path of the sun and the stars?” (Yasna 44:3); “Who established the earth below and keeps the clouds from falling from the sky?” (44:4); “Who, doing well, created light and darkness?” (44:5); “Will Armati [“appropriate mindset”] lend support to Aša with her deeds? Did Vohu Manah [“good mind”] prepare the realm on your directives? For whom/what (?) did you create the pregnant cow bringing fortune?” (44:6). But posing these supra-individual questions may also have personal implications that elude us. Thus the petition for enlightenment in 44:8 says, “This is what I ask

79. Ibid., 1:132–33, Yasna 32:3–5.

80. All citations according to Widengren, *Iranische Geisteswelt*.

81. Humbach, *Gāthās of Zarathustra*, 1:156, Yasna 44:1.

you ... how my soul will attain the good that brings happiness.” Three further stanzas focus on the good self (*daēnā*) that is to be realized in earthly life (44:9–11), while four others are concerned with avoiding the lie (44:12–15). The final stanzas focus on the salvation to come, as well as on the success of the efforts of redemption:

Accord (as) a judgment bright (things to be) in my house, O Healer of Existence. / Let (recompense for) obedience come to him through good thoughts, / O Wise One, to him, to whomsoever you wish.⁸²

This I ask you, tell me plainly, O Ahura: How may I proceed toward my goal in accordance with you, O Wise One, / (toward) your attachment (to me), and so that my voice might be vigorous (enough) / to adorn, to (serve as) shelter, both, integrity and immortality / with that formula that (is) dependent on truth. // This I ask you, ... / Shall I deserve that prize through truth, / (namely) ten mares with a stallion, and a camel, / which secures for me, O Wise One, integrity / (and) immortality, just as you take these for yourself?⁸³

Following the basic standards of the belief in Ahura Mazda, a person's mission in life is to move into the realm of the good powers, to refuse the destructive, lying demons, and to realize the good order of the world in accordance with the will of the creator in order to survive the final personal judgment, both in this life and then decisively after death by attaining eternal life.⁸⁴ The repugnance against “killing cows,” which offends a divine taboo similarly to the Hindu tradition, and avoiding all false behavior are the most striking individual rules for right living. On several occasions the Gāthās already speak clearly of the impending final accounting for one's views and actions in life. It will occur with fire and judgment. Such eschatological conceptions were later on further developed into major scenarios in which the individual soul must cross the razor-sharp Činvat bridge, the dead rise, a messianic figure saves the believers, and Ahura Mazda finally vanquishes his

82. Ibid., 1:161, Yasna 44:16.

83. Ibid., 1:162, Yasna 44:17–18.

84. Eternal life in paradise beyond seems to be touched upon already in the ancient Gāthās but is only fully developed in the more recent layers of the *Avesta*; see Stausberg, *Die Religion Zarathushtras*, 1:144–50, 226–33.

archenemy.⁸⁵ These concepts clearly were also adopted into gnostic but finally also into late Jewish and Christian eschatology.⁸⁶

However, popular belief, eclipsed by the proclamation of Zoroaster, was never extinguished. It continued to exist, as the later levels of the Avesta tradition indicate, alongside, within, and underneath the "official" religion. The religious traditions of families and tribes found vivid expression in a distinct demonology and angelology, which also influenced the Zoroastrian belief structure. Manticism and incantations, which served especially the personal needs of people in their small groups, had always been practiced in Mesopotamia and had achieved a high level of perfection. According to evidence from small finds (e.g., amulets, images on seals, ostraca, figurines), popular forms of belief continued to exist unchallenged.⁸⁷ The multitude of venerated divine beings and deities alongside the all-wise Ahura Mazda surely is a result, in part, of syncretistic developments, even if the pure monotheism of Zoroaster must not be defined mathematically.⁸⁸ Even a female deity, Anahita, survived the emergence of mazda-ism and assumed an important function in the official Achaemenid religion.⁸⁹ Institutionally, thanks to the complex development that took place in the history of religions, the *magoi*, as the Greeks called them (originally native to Media), also frequently personify the kind of shamanistic mediator and temple-related priest at the Zoroastrian fire altars as well.⁹⁰ As background to and the context of the postexilic community theology, we must assume the complex religious world of the ancient Persian culture. Patterns of perspectives of faith and interpreting reality available in this world are also encountered in the writings of the Hebrew and Aramaic Bible. A broad range of analogies between Persian and

85. See Widengren, *Die Religionen Irans*, 102–8; Stausberg, *Die Religion Zarathushtras*, 1:150–53, 311–25.

86. For further literature on Persian apocalypticism and its influence, see Anders Hultgård, "Persian Apocalypticism," in *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism* (ed. John J. Collins; 3 vols.; New York: Continuum, 1998), 1:39–83.

87. See Widengren, *Die Religionen Irans*, 7–59, 94–97; Boyce, *History of Zoroastrianism*, 1:1–177; Stern, *Material Culture*, 158–228.

88. See Stausberg, *Die Religion Zarathushtras*, 1:95–99, 111–12, etc. In the Old Testament, too, the subordination of deities under Yahweh is common (see Ps 82). Stausberg labels the debate on monotheism, polytheism, or dualism in the ancient Persian religion "pointless" because it is based on "Euro-centric or Christian-theological implications which distort the facts" (98).

89. See Stausberg, *Die Religion Zarathushtras*, 1:175–76; Boyce, Anahid I and II, Elr 1, 1003–6.

90. See P. Kingsley, "Greeks, Shamans, and Magi," *StIr* 23 (1994): 187–98; W. Eilers, *RGG*³ 4:602.

Jewish spirituality extends from the high view of the liturgical tradition of faith and the significance of mediators between God and humans, via purity requirements, ethical dualism (good/evil; light/darkness, etc.), and ideas of angels and demons, to universal and both ritually and radically ethically shaped images of God and apocalyptic end-time expectations. The intellectual religious climate of the Achaemenid period is reflected in many texts of the Old Testament.

II.2.4. EVERYDAY LIFE AND CULTURE

Cameron, George G. *Persepolis Treasury Tablets* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948). **Dandamaev**, Muhammad A. *Slavery in Babylonia from Nabopolassar to Alexander the Great (626–331 B.C.)* (trans. Victoria A. Powell; De Kalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1984). **Dandamaev**, Muhammad A., and Vladimir G. Lukonin. *The Culture and Social Institutions of Ancient Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989). **Gschnitzer** Fritz. “Eine persische Kultstiftung in Sardeis und die ‘Sippengötter’ Vorderasiens,” in *Im Bannkreis des Alten Orients* (ed. Wolfgang Meid; Innsbruck: Institut für Sprachwissenschaft, 1986), 45–54. **Hallock**, Richard T. *Persepolis Fortification Tablets* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969). **Joan-nès**, Francis. *Archives de Borsippa: La famille Ea-ilûta-bâni* (Geneva: Droz, 1989). **Jursa**, Michael. *Der Tempelzehnt in Babylonien vom siebenten bis dritten Jahrhundert v. Chr.* (AOAT 254; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1998). **Klengel**, Horst. *Handel und Händler im Alten Orient* (Leipzig: Koehler & Amelang, 1979). **Koch**, Heidemarie. *Es kündigt Dareios der König: Vom Leben im persischen Grossreich* (Kulturgeschichte der Antiken Welt 55; Mainz: von Zabern, 1992), 163–250. **Koch**. *Verwaltung und Wirtschaft im persischen Kernland zur Zeit der Achämeniden* (TAVO B 89; Wiesbaden: Reichert, 1990). **Porten**, Bezalel. *Archives from Elephantine: The Life of an Ancient Military Colony* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1968). **Porten**. *The Elephantine Papyri in English* (DMOA 22; Leiden: Brill, 1996). **Ribeiro**, Darcy. *The Civilizational Process* (trans. Betty J. Metzger; Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1968). **Stolper**, Matthew W. *Entrepreneurs and Empire: The Murašû Archive, the Murašû Firm, and Persian Rule in Babylonia* (Uitgaven van het Nederlands Historisch-Archaeologisch Instituut te Istanbul 54; Istanbul: Nederlands Historisch-Archaeologisch Instituut, 1985). **Wiesehöfer**, Josef. *Ancient Persia: From 550 B.C. to 650 A.D.* (trans. Azieh Azodi; New York: Tauris, 2001). 105–50. **Wunsch**, Cornelia. *Die Urkunden des babylonischen Geschäftsmannes Iddin-Marduk* (2 vols.; Cuneiform Monographs 3a–b; Groningen: Styx, 1993). **Wunsch**. *Das Egibi-Archiv I: Die Felder und Gärten* (2 vols.; Cuneiform Monographs 20a–b; Groningen: Styx, 2000).

The everyday life of people who live together with many nations under an imperial central government, in an infinitely vast realm, can sometimes be

portrayed concretely by means of personal documents, but mostly only in a generalizing way on the basis of archaeological finds, also of a pictorial kind, and by administrative, business, and legal texts, as well as by allusions in official governmental literature. Here and there the Greek observers of Persian contemporary history have also recorded glimpses of the reality of life by appearance or hearsay.

For Near Eastern and Asian antiquity, the following applies quite generally. Most people were peasants or nomadic breeders of livestock whose main concern was the procurement of daily bread. They lived in village and small-town communities and practiced a subsistence economy, to which all members of the family had to contribute their very best from their youth to old age. For peasants, the daily rhythm of life, modified by the seasons, extended from sunrise to sunset. Depending on the geographical location, they farmed the land by means of rain or by irrigation. The main cultivation, depending on the region, included all kinds of grain, peas and beans, flax, vegetables of different kinds, fruit trees (in Babylonia often date palms) and vines, and so forth.⁹¹ For shepherds, it was necessary to be alert around the clock to protect the essential herds (sheep, goats, cattle, donkeys, camels—the latter mostly in the eastern parts of the empire)⁹² from predators and human robbers, illness, and accidents. By day, shepherds may often have had leisure for manual labor; by night, they slept and with one ear tuned to every movement in the nearby corral. Peasants as well as shepherds worked for their food and other basic necessities more or less by their own efforts. The tools remained the same for centuries; they are well-known through excavations and iconography.⁹³ The women and girls assumed the preparation of meals; they also took care of the clothes for the whole family. Whatever raw materials, tools, and jewelry a family needed but was unable to produce or obtain by themselves had to be procured by means of bartering their own surplus production. Normally, ancient families in the country were largely self-sufficient. However, a residue of dependence

91. See L. Cagni, G. Fusaro, and S. Graziani, "Die Nutzung des Ackerbodens im Mesopotamien der achaemenidischen Zeit: Die Pachtaufgabe (*imittu*)," in *Landwirtschaft im Alten Orient* (ed. Horst Klengel and Johannes Renger; BBVO 18; Berlin: Reimer, 1999), 171–212.

92. On fauna and cattle breeding, see, e.g., Billie Jean Collins, ed., *A History of the Animal World in the Ancient Near East* (HO 1.64; Boston: Brill, 2002); see also Klengel and Renger, *Landwirtschaft im Alten Orient*.

93. Tools for peasants, shepherds, craftsmen, and scribes are discussed in Ralf Bernhard Wartke, ed. *Handwerk und Technologie im alten Orient* (Tagung Berlin 1991; Mainz: von Zabern, 1994).

always remained and thus was an occasion to produce goods beyond their own need for exchange purposes.

The life of small people-groups who collaborated economically in this way was determined year in and year out by the requirement of their own needs.⁹⁴ Since time immemorial, interruptions of the monotonous, never-changing routine were normally most welcome—a circumstance also supported by contemporary agrarian societies. Cultic festivals with a social focus, religious ceremonies, and pilgrimages provided the desired events for freedom from daily chores. All religion-based festivities, of course, originated from other motives. They were to guarantee the fertility of fields and herds, to secure the blessing of the deities for the community, to rescue it from serious threats of life, and to bring about gratitude for answered prayers and the support of the superhuman beings. Yet the interruption of the daily routine must from the start also have been a relief for people trapped in the struggle for survival. In any case, many modern theories of festivals emphasize this perspective.⁹⁵ In this way normal people—the rural population presumably represented between 60 and 90 percent of the population of a country—were fully occupied with maintaining their sphere of life in labor and festivals. The further development of culture came from the urban way of life.

In the Near East, cities existed at least since the fifth millennium B.C.E.⁹⁶ The decisive criteria for an urban settlement are social structures that break through family relations, distribution of labor and an interdependence of the inhabitants, a focus on quality of life, and a respective economic dependence of the surrounding countryside. All of this also means a concentration of eco-

94. Koch informs us about the material conditions of life (dwelling, clothing, household utensils, jewelry, etc.) based on excavation finds (*Es kündigt Dareios der König*, 163–228). See also modern presentations of country life in the Near East, which runs on the same track in Gustaf Dalman, *Arbeit und Sitte in Palästina* (7 vols.; Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1928–1942).

95. See Otto Bischofberger, “Feste und Feiertage I,” *TRE* 11:93–96; Catharine M. Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 126–28 (“ritual” and “social inversion”); and Harvey G. Cox, *Das Fest der Narren* (Stuttgart: Kreuz-Verlag, 1970).

96. Gernot Wilhelm, ed., *Die Orientalische Stadt: Kontinuität, Wandel, Bruch. 1. Internationales Colloquium der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft 9.-10. Mai 1996 in Halle/Saale* (CDOG 1; Saarbrücken: Saarbrücker Druckerei und Verlag, 1997). When exactly settlements can be labeled as cities is relatively immaterial. The excavations of Jericho, for instance, have revealed a high degree of teamwork (building of the wall!) and thus a social structure (contra Eugen Wirth, “Kontinuität und Wandel der orientalischen Stadt: Zur Prägung von städtischem Leben und städtischen Institutionen durch jahrtausendealte kulturraum-spezifische Handlungsgrammatiken,” in *ibid.*, 2).

conomic, political, and religious functions in the city, collective achievements of the inhabitants in the architectural area and in the public supply or infrastructure. In short, the accumulation of a larger community of people—in the case of smaller and medium-size cities roughly between 200 and 1,000 individuals, in a metropolis up to 50,000—brought about a new social organization of the surroundings, which necessarily had to leave behind many family customs and traditions (e.g., blood feud). In this complex social structure, city life can be established only on the basis of technological knowledge, such as large-scale architecture and of newly formed behavioral norms for the social existence of a larger number of people who are not integrated as families. Or, conversely, the social existence of numerous families and clans in cramped urban housing estates brings forth new things in all areas of life (economy, art, architecture, religion, customs, law, military affairs, etc.) and allows art and culture to blossom. If this is not completely wrong, urban culture continued to grow during the Persian period and adopted even greater dimensions in the subsequent Hellenistic period.⁹⁷

At least in the West the ancient Persian cities belonged to the tradition of the Mesopotamian-Syrian residential centers and administrative capitals. The heartland of the Persians was already familiar to the Greek writers, among other things because of the numerous cities they established.⁹⁸ In this context, Far Eastern influences surely played a part as well. Commerce and trade, religion, and administration blossomed under normal conditions. The administrative documents discovered in Persepolis provide a vivid portrait of the conditions. Individuals are mentioned by name, as are numerous locations that communicated with the capital. Travel routes, supplies of groceries, earnings statements, and personal obligations appear in significant number, so that we are afforded an incredibly rich glimpse into the everyday world of the time of Darius and Xerxes.⁹⁹ The tablets refer to men and women in governmental services: craftsmen in various workshops of the “treasury” (storage

97. See Georges Tate, “Les villes syriennes aux époques hellénistique, romaine et byzantine,” in Wilhelm, *Die Orientalische Stadt*, 351: in the Achaemenid period cities were “considerably less numerous and less large than those associated with the Byzantine era.”

98. See Strabo, *Geography* 15.3 (Horace L. Jones, ed., *The Geography of Strabo* [8 vols.; New York: Putnam's Sons, 1923–1949], 7:155–89).

99. The preservation of clay tablets, among other things, is owed to the pillage of the governmental buildings by Alexander the Great. In 458 B.C.E., the documentation ends because the royal archive (in an administrative reform?) of the Elamite language changes to Aramaic and thus switches to more perishable writing material. Koch, *Verwaltung und Wirtschaft*, and Wiesehöfer, *Ancient Persia*, respectively provide vivid glimpses into the documentary treasure mentioning approximately 15,000 people. Koch is of fundamental importance.

facilities, at the same time trade centers and imperial manufacture) producing tools made of precious metals, furniture, and textiles; gardeners and caretakers; agricultural workers; administrative employees; coachmen and dispatch personnel. According to the respective occupation and established rates, they received natural produce, especially barley and wine, as wages or food for the journey. The daily ration varied between about 1 liter of grain for the ordinary worker and a little less than 2 liters for his superior, who in actuality was allocated 50 liters of barley and 30 liters of wine per month. Top earners among state employees, such as the head of the imperial administration or a “major-domo,” received up to 3,000 liters of barley and 2,700 liters of wine, plus sixty small animals.¹⁰⁰ The quantities indicated show that one’s personal use was to be covered; beyond that, certain quantities occasionally were available for exchanging for other consumer goods. With a worker’s minimum wage of approximately 30 kilos (29.1 liters, to be exact) of barley per month, amounting to about 1 kilo of bread per day, a recipient quite obviously could not live it up. Monthly special payments of wine, beer, or meat improved the menu.¹⁰¹ City dwellers were able to produce vegetables and fruit to a limited degree at best and thus were basically dependent on the marketplace. One gains the impression that the government provided its workers and employees fairly sufficiently and by means of the registrars exercised tight control of the management of stocks and the distribution of natural produce. The conclusion suggests itself that in government services, given appropriate performance required to secure employment, it was possible to live comfortably—as long as one did not belong to the lowest income level.

Life within private enterprises and family dynasties has become known by means of business archives. The Egibi (Babylon), Murašu (Nippur), and Ea-iluta-bani (Borsippa) families, as well as the clan of Iddin-Marduk (Babylon),¹⁰² among others, have bequeathed us their accounts with customers and many other business and personal documents. The activities of these firms, spanning several generations and apparently bridging the radical change from Babylonian to Persian rule with relative ease, focused on trading natural produce, real estate, and slaves, on lease and leaseholding,

100. A helpful breakdown of wage tables is provided by Koch, *Es kündet Dareios der König*, 54–64.

101. *Ibid.*, 55–56. Erroneously, 1 liter is treated as equivalent to 1 pound here.

102. “The core of the business activity of Iddin-Marduk may be characterized as purchasing goods essential to life (foodstuffs, wool) in the rural areas around Babylon and their transport, storage and sale” (Wunsch, *Die Urkunden des babylonischen Geschäftsmannes*, 1:86). The business specialized in onions, about 395,000 bunches of which were sold in one contract (*ibid.*, 1:87).

including under the Persian vassal system of the *hatru*,¹⁰³ and on awarding and receiving credit.¹⁰⁴ From these business documents the economic and social conditions of the time can be reconstructed to a remarkably large extent. Gains and losses by the leading lights, price systems and trade zones, family conditions and political considerations, as well as associations formed, bring to light social stratification and standards of living. Apparently life in the urban ambience could be quite pleasant under Persian rule. In any case, the private industry blossomed, but of the lifestyle among the lower social strata we hear little.

The already-mentioned documents from the Jewish military colony of Elephantine, at the first cataract of the Nile, situated ahead of the current artificial lake of Assuan (these will play a significant part below), lend a variety of witnesses to these and other spheres of life. Marriage contracts reveal a great deal about the relationships between families, the status of the husband, wife, and children, and so forth. The lists of taxes and temple contributions are extremely interesting because they offer insight into attitudes about ownership and the personal practice of religion. Personal correspondence exposes a variety of problems from the interpersonal sphere. Purchase contracts and property disputes shed light on attitudes to ownership and law. To be sure, the attitudes to life in a military camp are not to be treated as equivalent to those in civilian society. Nevertheless, on the whole they surely reflect the conditions in the urban milieu of the Achaemenid Persian Empire (see below, §II.4).

If we inquire into the role of religion in the private sphere, we initially need to disregard the widely disseminated, official Ahura Mazda faith and the politically promoted cults. They were part of the major societal organizations and hence not originally associated with the primary groupings. But behind and under the religious systems of the Persian imperial society, as in other cultural realms, a layer of local and regional deities can be recognized. There was, for one, the goddess Anahita, who apparently continued to play a positive role, and, for another, the “demons” (Daēvas), which were condemned by the Zoroastrian faith, as well as those divine figures that were initially driven

103. The estates that the emperor gave as *hatru*-properties to vassals had to provide especially soldiers and supplies for the army; see Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 597–99.

104. The businesses mentioned are not to be regarded as equivalent to our banks; rather, they were “conglomerates.” The rise of the families in question was rapid and occasionally was also threatened by internal feuds. The Egibi family, for instance, “within six decades obtained no less than 50 Kur of land (approx. 67.5 hectares, a substantial part of which were date orchards), for which at least 160 mina of silver were paid (Wunsch, *Egibi-Archiv*, 1:179).

out by the highest and only deity, Ahura Mazda, but then were admitted again in a subordinate function during the recent Avestian period. More appropriately, however, one does not inquire into the deities understood objectively but more purposefully by the tradents and bearers of the local traditions. As customary in ancient societies, in Persia the family chiefs may have been responsible for the primary religiosity. First, this can be concluded from the historical primacy of (migrating) kinship groups and tribal organizations. Second, the mediator type of the “shamans,” well known in tribal societies, also seems to have been very well known in ancient Persia. In any case, the Median “magician” seems to have played a significant role in the history of religions of the Near East and has become proverbial even in our modern Western languages.¹⁰⁵ He brought together many of the shamanist functions, since at least in the Iranian heartland he appears, for instance, as counselor, wise man, healer, and cult official. Third, there were priests of various schools of thought in ancient Persia. They took care of local shrines, and many of the Persepolis tablets refer to official allotments of material for the sacrificial practice.¹⁰⁶ Without doubt, magi and priests were also active for the Ahura Mazda belief. According to their origin, they may have originated in smaller societal contexts.

All in all, the various everyday documents from the ancient Persian Empire, all of which originate from urban connections of life, offer us merely temporal, local, social, and, furthermore, terribly fragmented excerpts of the total reality. What the status of education, medical provision, safeguarding old age, culture, and leisure time was in Persian cities, for instance, can only be reconstructed with difficulty and indirectly, for there are no extant texts focused on these matters. We have to realize, however, that reality can never be captured integrally. However, with the help of general sociological and anthropological insights and experiential values, we are able to reconstruct quite coherent pictures of everyday life, in this instance from the urban area of ancient Persia. In this context, a very interesting phenomenon is the independence (in the religious and theological sense as well) of the lower social, human associations over against the powerful state machinery. With

105. See von Gall, “Magier,” 4:387–88; Jean Kellens, *Le pantheon de l'Avesta ancien* (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 1994); Stausberg, *Die Religion Zarathushtras*, 1:159–60, 252–55; Heidmarie Koch, “Iranische Religion im achämenidischen Zeitalter,” in Kratz, *Religion und Religionskontakte*, 11–26.

106. Wiesehöfer mentions a supply of barley to Umbaba, the “priest” (*šatin*), for the *lan*-sacrifice, as well as for four other divine beings, mostly mentioned by name. This may refer to the local veneration of otherwise well known deities, see Wiesehöfer, *Ancient Persia*, 100. See also note 74 above.



Clay tablet in Elamite script found in Hall 38 of the Treasury of Persepolis. From Ursula Schneider, *Persepolis and Ancient Iran* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976). Used by permission.

their military, economic, as well as cultural and religious, power, imperial and regional governments had the possibility of intruding deeply into the lives of the people. But there they also encountered the close-knit small units, constituted according to the respective type of clan, tribe, and town, with their own traditions. The real life of people in the Persian Empire was, as always in great societies, shaped by the tension between the central government and local traditions. Apart from the traditional structuring in families and clans, social classes developed in the Near Eastern civilizations, especially in the urban realm. At least in the heartland and in the western part of the empire, the ancient Persian, like the Mesopotamian, society appears to have known a threefold layering: the nobility; free citizens; and slaves (servants).¹⁰⁷ While the structures of families and clans dominated societal life in many regards, there also developed, especially in the urban milieu, political, economic, and possibly religious interest groups and institutions.

107. See Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 302–54; Dandamaev, *Slavery in Babylonia*; Dandamaev and Lukonin, *Culture and Social Institutions*.

II.3. JUDAH IN TRANS-EUPHRATES

Ackroyd, Peter R. "The Jewish Community in Palestine in the Persian Period," *CHJ* 1:131–61. **Berquist**, Jon L. *Judaism in Persia's Shadow: A Social and Historical Approach* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995). **Blenkinsopp**, Joseph. "Temple and Society in Achaemenid Judah," in *Second Temple Studies 1: The Persian Period* (ed. Philip R. Davies; JSOTSup 117; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), 22–53. **Carroll**, Robert P. "Exile, Restoration, and Colony: Judah in the Persian Empire," in *The Blackwell Companion to the Hebrew Bible* (ed. Leo G. Perdue; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 102–16. **Carter**, Charles E. *The Emergence of Yehud in the Persian Period: A Social and Demographic Study* (JSOTSup 294; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999). **Crüsemann**, Frank. "Israel in der Perserzeit," in *Max Webers Sicht des antiken Christentums* (ed. Wolfgang Schluchter; Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1985), 205–32. **Elayi**, Josette, and Jean Sapin, *Beyond the River: New Perspectives on Transeuphratene* (JSOTSup 250; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998). **Galling**, Kurt. *Studien zur Geschichte Israels im persischen Zeitalter* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1964). **Grabbe**, Lester L. *Yehud: A History of the Persian Province of Judah* (LSTS 47; New York: T&T Clark, 2004). **Hoglund**, Kenneth, G. *Achaemenid Imperial Administration in Syria-Palestine and the Missions of Ezra and Nehemiah* (SBLDS 125; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998). **Janssen**, Enno. *Juda in der Exilszeit* (FRLANT 69; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1956). **Karrer**, Christiane. *Ringens um die Verfassung Judas* (BZAW 308; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2001). **Kessler**, Rainer. *The Social History of Ancient Israel: An Introduction* (trans. Linda M. Maloney; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008). **Kippenberg**, Hans G. *Religion und Klassenbildung im antiken Judäa: Eine religionssoziologische Studie zum Verhältnis von Tradition und gesellschaftliche Entwicklung* (SUNT 14; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1978). **Klein**, Ralph W. *Israel in Exile* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980). **Knauf**, Ernst Axel. "The Persian Administration in Arabia," *Transeu* 2 (1990): 201–27. **Lang**, Bernhard. "Vom Propheten zum Schriftgelehrten," in *Theologen und Theologien in verschiedenen Kulturkreisen* (ed. Heinrich von Stietencron; Düsseldorf: Patmos-Verlag, 1986), 89–114. **Lemaire**, André. "Les inscriptions palestiniennes d'époque perse: Un bilan provisoire," *Transeu* 1 (1989): 87–105. **Lemaire**. "Populations et territoires de la Palestine à l'époque perse" *Transeu* 2 (1990): 31–74. **Schäfer-Lichtenberg**, Christa. *Stadt und Eidgenossenschaft im Alten Testament* (BZAW 156; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1983). **Schottroff**, Willi. "Zur Sozialgeschichte Israels in der Perserzeit," *VF* 27 (1982), 46–68. **Stern**, Ephraim. *Material Culture of the Land of the Bible in the Persian Period, 538–332 B.C.* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1982). **Stern**. "The Persian Empire and the Political and Social History of Palestine in the Persian Period," *CHJ* 1:70–87. **Vanderkam**, James C. "Jewish High Priests of the Persian Period: Is the List Complete?" in *Priesthood and Cult in Ancient Israel* (ed. Gary A. Anderson and Saul M. Olyan; JSOTSup 125; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991), 67–91. **Veijola**, Timo. "Die Deuteronomisten als Vorgänger der Schriftgelehrten," in *Moses Erben: Studien zum Dekalog, zum Deuteronomismus, und zum Schriftgelehrtentum* (ed. Timo Veijola; BWANT 149; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2000), 192–240. **Watts**, James W., ed. *Persia and Torah: The Theory of Imperial Authorization of the Pentateuch*

(SBLSymS 17; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2001). **Weber**, Max. *Ancient Judaism* (trans. and ed. Hans H. Gerth and Don Martindale; New York: Free Press, 1967). **Weinberg**, Joel P. "Die Agrarverhältnisse in der Bürger-Tempel-Gemeinde der Achämenidenzeit," *Acta Antiqua Academie Scientiarum Hungaricae* 22 (1974): 473–486. **Weinberg**, *The Citizen-Temple Community* (trans. Daniel L. Smith-Christopher; JSOTSup 151; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992). **Weippert**, Helga. *Palästina in vorhellenistischer Zeit* (Handbuch der Archäologie 2/1; Munich: Beck, 1988). **Widengren**, Geo. "The Persian Period," in *Israelite and Judaeon History* (ed. John H. Hayes and J. Maxwell Miller; London: SCM, 1977), 489–538. **Williamson**, Hugh G. M. "The Governors of Judah under the Persians," *TynBul* 39 (1988): 59–82.

II.3.1. JUDAH VERSUS SAMARIA

The government of the Persian Empire presumably always pursued a general policy with the entire territory in view and in individual cases used special interests regionally, for instance, in view of Syria-Palestine, Asia Minor, Egypt, or the eastern parts of the empire (which likely called for more attention than we are able to gather from the sources). First among the general principles of the Achaemenids was the preservation of the inner peace, in second place probably the securing of the borders or conquering the frontier areas and the further expansion of the empire. It may further be assumed that a regular and good amount of taxes from all parts of the realm was vital for the Persian central government. In addition, the Syrian-Palestinian land bridge was particularly important strategically, for it represented land access to the satrapy of Egypt. Thus the relatively narrow strip between the Jordan Rift and the Mediterranean had great importance for both the Persian general staff and the administration of the empire's finances. A military presence and fortresses, tax authorities, and inspectors were to realize these expectations. Thus archaeological excavations since the 1970s have also brought to light hitherto unknown, abundant legacies from the Persian era; apparently, the trade and army routes through Syria and Palestine were secured by cities.¹⁰⁸ Some Persian shrines from Syria-Palestine are well known.¹⁰⁹ However, based on everything we know about this period, the Achaemenids did not use their religion as an instrument of power for the preservation of the empire. Rather, it is necessary to remember that they seem to have treated the cults of the subjected nations with care (see above, §II.2.1).

108. See further Weippert, *Palästina in vorhellenistischer Zeit*, 682–718; Stern, *Material Culture*.

109. See Saliby, "‘Amrit," *OEANE* 1:111–13.

If we want to portray Judah and the Judeans in the Persian period, a reference to the essential hermeneutical reflection (see §I.4 above) is of paramount importance; many biblical treatments, whether consciously or not, still opt for the Jewish perspective, as presented in the biblical writings, as the sole standard.¹¹⁰ The real actors in the historical play, however, were the Persians. They determined the goals. Their interests dominated politics and economy. Judah could react at best and articulate its desires from the context of dependence. That Jewish historiography concedes this fact (Ezra and Nehemiah ask for imperial favors) is obviously an authentic feature, but when it uses theological constructions and declares Yahweh, the one who directs the history of the world, to be the sovereign of the might of the Persian state, the one who directs the fortunes of the Persian Empire in favor of Jerusalem, his secret capital of the world, historical evaluation has been left behind. As historians, we need to remain with the historical-critical examination. In this context, it is essential to acknowledge the positions of both parties, Judah and Persia, against one another and to sketch the course of history as unprejudiced as possible from the distance given today with the currently available means of discovery. The history of Syria and Palestine of that time cannot be grasped as either exclusively centered on Persia or on Jerusalem.¹¹¹ The Judeans and their neighbors had to fit into the imperial organization—they had no other choice. Following the evidence from the Hebrew and Aramaic writings of the Bible, the community of Yahweh in Jerusalem and in the Diaspora continued with amazing energy to maintain their self-determined, humanly natural worldview (“We are the pivot! Everything revolves around us!”). We derogatorily label this a “church steeple perspective,” which was reinforced by the belief in election.

The reconstruction of the historical course of events in Syria-Palestine is made more difficult because we scarcely have reliable data. There are no archives (yet) of the Persian state from this region or that refer to it. To a great extent, the biblical accounts are legendary and shaped theologically, and archaeological finds have only limited meaning for historical facts. Thus what really did happen in and around Jerusalem from the late sixth century to the end of the fourth century? How should the motivations of the actors and their results be evaluated? What social groups were involved, and how were they structured? Given the paucity of direct witnesses, we can trace the

110. This fact is emphasized most consistently by Grabbe, yet his overarching interest is to establish “what really happened historically.” The history of ideas and theology comes second.

111. Both positions have been sketched best by Gottwald, *The Hebrew Bible*, 422.

developments in the two centuries in question only very cautiously for the area under consideration.

It was especially Darius I, Hystaspes (522–486 B.C.E.), who reorganized the empire on the basis of traditional boundaries, adopted in part from the Assyrians.¹¹² A new, smaller satrapy, Trans-Euphrates (the fifth overall in Persia), was established with the administrative headquarters in Tripolis or Damascus. It basically encompassed today's Syria, Jordan, and Palestine. Subordinate provinces were governed from Samaria, Amman, and, from the mid-fifth century (or earlier), also from Jerusalem and perhaps also from Lachish. However, these subdivisions are not completely certain.¹¹³ The Persian satrap, mostly from the aristocracy close to the king, had extensive authority and on behalf of the central government had to hold together the competitive regional clans. The empire granted the coastal cities a degree of autonomy; they in turn provided sizeable contingents of the navy that was urgently needed for the drawn-out conflict with Greece. Especially in the case of the major cities of Tyre and Sidon, therefore, the satrap had to treat the cities with kid gloves in order to preserve their loyalty to the crown. The western provinces contributed to the welfare of the empire in keeping with their particular economy and needed to be governed wisely. We know from the biblical writings—and this is relatively unsuspicious information—that the conflict between Samaria and Jerusalem, which had already existed in pre-exilic Israel, broke out again in the fifth century (2 Kgs 17; Neh 3:33–4:12; 6:1–13). Fundamentally it had to do with the restoration of the fortress of Jerusalem, apparently with its significance as an administrative center. In the background to the restoration of the temple, the question of the Samaritans' orthodoxy may also have played a part (see Ezra 4:1–24, esp. vv. 1–2; 5:1–6:18). Religious and political concerns mix easily. Basically, however, the feud between Samaria and Jerusalem was a power struggle within the fifth Persian satrapy. Which city was entitled to the leadership role in the middle south? We assume that in the southernmost area of the satrapy, to the border with Egypt, there was an Edomite administrative unit¹¹⁴ and that Judea's sphere of influence was limited to the closer proximity of Jerusalem, an area of about 50 square kilometers, comparable to German administrative districts. Be that as it may, in the fifth century the continuous pressure of the Judeans, who

112. Briant deems the role of Darius to be traditionally exaggerated (*From Cyrus to Alexander*, 122–38).

113. See Donner, *Geschichte des Volkes Israel*, 2:434–35; Elayi and Sapin, *Beyond the River*; Hoglund, *Achaemenid Imperial Administration*, 69–85; Williamson, "Governors of Judah"; Grabbe, *Yehud*, 140–42.

114. Cf. C. H. J. de Geus, "Idumaea," *JEOL* 26 (1979/80), 53–74.

after the return of the orthodox exiles from Babylon established themselves as an independent confessional community, showed its effect. The imperial government (or the satrap of Trans-Euphrates?) decided to turn Judea into an independent province. Its administrative seat was Jerusalem, which in the meantime had gained fame on account of the restoration of the temple.¹¹⁵



The Temple Mount in Jerusalem from the east.

EXCURSUS: THE RISE OF JERUSALEM AS THE HOLY CITY

Ariel, Donald, T. *Imported Stamped Amphora Handles, Coins, Worked Bone and Ivory, and Glass* (vol. 2 of *Excavations at the City of David 1978–1985*; Qedem 30; Jerusalem: Institute of Archaeology, The Hebrew University, 1990). **Avigad**, Nahman. *Discovering Jerusalem* (Nashville: Nelson, 1980). **Barker**, Margaret. *The Great High Priest: The Temple Roots of Christian Liturgy* (New York: T&T Clark, 2003). **Bedford**, Peter R. *Temple and Community in Early Achaemenid Judah* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992). **Bedford**. *Temple Restoration in Early Achaemenid Judah* (JSJSup 65; Leiden: Brill, 2001). **Busink**, Theodor A. *Der Tempel von Jerusalem* (2 vols.; Studia Francisci Scholten memoriae dicata 3; Leiden: Brill, 1970–1980). **Hahn**, Johannes,

115. Together with other experts, Grabbe (*Yehud*, 140–42) considers it unlikely that Jerusalem was ever subject to Samaria; consequently, the argument of a gradual emancipation is not tenable. A mediating position is offered by Kessler, *Social History of Ancient Israel*.

and Christian Ronning. *Zerstörungen des Jerusalemer Tempels: Geschehen, Wahrnehmung, Bewältigung* (WUNT 147; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002). **Keel**, Othmar, and Erich Zenger, eds. *Gottesstadt und Gottesgarten: Zu Geschichte und Theologie des Jerusalemer Tempels* (Freiburg: Herder, 2002). **McCormick**, Clifford, M. *Palace and Temple: A Study of Architectural and Verbal Icons* (BZAW 313; New York: de Gruyter, 2002). **Otto**, Eckart. *Jerusalem—Die Geschichte der heiligen Stadt* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1980). **Peters**, Francis E. *Jerusalem and Mecca: The Typology of the Holy City in the Near East* (New York: New York University Press, 1986). **Safrai**, Shemuel. *Die Wallfahrt im Zeitalter des Zweiten Tempels* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1981). **Schwier**, Helmut. *Tempel und Tempelzerstörung: Untersuchungen zu den theologischen und ideologischen Faktoren im ersten jüdisch-römischen Krieg (66–74 n. Chr.)* (NTOA 11; Fribourg: Universitätsverlag; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1989). **Tilly**, Michael. *Jerusalem—Nabel der Welt* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2002). **Zwickel**, Wolfgang. *Der Tempelkult in Kanaan und Israel* (FAT 10; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1994).

Jerusalem probably originated in the eighteenth century B.C.E. as a fortified settlement when the Hyksos emerged at the time of Egyptian dominance in Palestine; according to the Amarna archive, it was well known as a city-state. Further, when the Israelite tribes consolidated, it was inhabited by the Jebusites (Josh 15:8; 18:16). David conquered the backwoods nest of barely 400 by 150 meters peacefully and declared it his royal residence. He enlarged the area by building a palace to the north of the “City of David,” probably took over the Jebusite temple, including its high priest Zadok, and thus established certain functions associated with a capital city for the kingdom of Israel. Jerusalem became the center of administration and the army and, with its royal temple facility, had an important religious significance for the existence of the dynasty and the state. Mind you, in my view the Jerusalem temple, until the beginning of the exile (587 B.C.E.), was not a popular shrine, as were, for instance, Shiloh, Gilgal, Nob, and others, but exclusively a royal, dynastic place of worship that was taken care of by a priesthood established by and accountable to the monarch alone (state-cult!).

This situation changed only during the exilic period. The lamentably destroyed capital of the kingdom of Judah, conquered and neutralized by the Babylonians in 587 B.C.E., sheltered only a few people, yet nostalgic pilgrims from the surrounding area came and presented offerings at the ruins (Jer 41:5). There local residents seem to have conducted lamentations in commemoration of the demise of Jerusalem (Zech 7:2–3, 8, 19; Lamentations). A temple community was formed, supported by the population and with the cooperation and leadership of priests and Levites. We hear of a prophetic agitation for the rebuilding of the temple, which probably already falls into the phase following the Persian assumption of power (Hag 1–2; Zech 1–6). Among the people, feverish expectations seem to have been prevalent at

the time that a descendant of David would renew the old kingdom. Ancient hymns about the holy mountain, Zion, were charged with mythological conceptions of God's residence in the north, of a decisive battle against foreign enemies, and of the beginning of Yahweh's great dominion of peace and the world.¹¹⁶ Thus, from the perspective of faith in Yahweh, the "holy" city gained a unique, new significance, not only for the priesthood but also for the entire Jewish community. After the rebuilding of the temple (dedicated in 515 B.C.E.) and the gradual, full implementation of the centralization of the sacrificial cult in Jerusalem (Deut 12),¹¹⁷ the city, with Zion and the sanctuary, along with the Torah and circumcision, became a paramount identity symbol for the Jews worldwide.

II.3.2. THE ACTORS IN THE DRAMA

While the major trajectories of the emancipation of Jerusalem and Judah within the Persian Empire can be traced to some extent, we have to inquire separately into the authenticity and functions of the biblical and extrabiblical actors. To what extent is the news about the two founders of the Jewish community historically authentic and to what degree are they shaped by reflective, theological projection? Scholarly opinion is quite disparate on this matter. This comes as no surprise given the unfortunate situation of the sources.

II.3.2.1. Nehemiah

Nehemiah cannot be understood any more historically from archaeological and extrabiblical sources than was Ezra. Concrete references to his biography are missing, even though the Nehemiah traditions, largely in the first-person singular account (memoirs), intend to convey even more realism than those of Ezra. The book of Nehemiah begins with the great commissioning scene at the imperial court in Susa (Neh 1:1–2:10), one of the Achaemenid seats of

116. The scope, content, and especially the dating of the theology of Zion are much debated. In my opinion, dating it in the preexilic period seems unlikely. Rather, much points to the beginning of the Second Temple as the trigger for this specific variant on the "sanctification" of Jerusalem; on the Zion psalms, see Erhard S. Gerstenberger, *Psalms* (2 vols.; FOTL 14–15; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988–2001), *passim*.

117. Scholars, of course, date the Deuteronomic laws quite variedly. The lack of a frame of reference of the state (Deut 17:14–20, the "royal law" is the unintentional, scribal caricature of a monarch) and the propagation of a "community of brotherhood," in my view, clearly presuppose the exilic and postexilic social structure.

government.¹¹⁸ Nehemiah functions as the cupbearer of Artaxerxes, a position of trust from which he ventures to petition the monarch for assistance for Jerusalem, which was languishing. This seemingly unique historical situation, however, in spite of the precise references in terms of time, geography, and names, bears signs of the form of legend. In the interpretation of history, it is a favorite means of Old Testament tradition to transplant the protagonists of one's own weak people into the center of political power and from there to cause the fortunes to be turned to the good with the help of Yahweh. From the court of Pharaoh, Joseph saves his famished people (Gen 41–43); Daniel works miracles in terms of powerful faith and wisdom at the Babylonian as well as at the Persian court (Dan 1–5; 7–8; // 6; 9–12); and Esther and Mordechai, likewise at the court of Susa, gain decisive influence with Emperor Xerxes that saves the Jewish community from pogroms and makes vengeance possible against their foes. Such scenarios may not as readily be granted historical authenticity, as a condensed experience of history, according to which Israel and Judah had been at the mercy of distant potentates over long periods of history and knew how to assert themselves. In the struggle for survival against competing groups within the Persian Empire, the existence of the Judeans and the Jewish communities surely frequently depended on the goodwill of the authorities of the state, whether in the satrapies or in the central government. The tradents are mainly concerned to portray Persia's top governing authority as neutral to well-disposed toward the Jewish faith. The literarily beautiful motif of the activity of Jewish men and women in the immediate proximity of the monarch attests to self-consciousness and a sense of mission that get at the heart of the problem. In a touching, considerate dialogue between Nehemiah, on the one hand, and Artaxerxes and his wife (according to statements in the book of Esther, she lived strictly separated from her royal spouse in the women's chambers!), on the other, the cupbearer (normally a position for eunuchs) is able to bring up his matter of concern of rebuilding the city of Jerusalem (Neh 2:1–8). By virtue of the insertion of Yahweh hinted at in 2:4b, the Persian sovereign of the world, without even wasting a single thought on the political consequences of the venture, is immediately ready to give his attention to Nehemiah's desires. The dialogue between the protagonists revolves exclusively around personal well-being and the loving sympathy of the secular power for the fate of Nehemiah and the Judeans and cannot seriously be rated as a rendering of a historical event,¹¹⁹ not even from the pen of one of the participants.

118. See Prudence O. Harper et al., eds. *The Royal City of Susa* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1992).

119. Most commentators, however, attribute historical authenticity to the figure of Nehemiah; they generally evaluate the so-called "memoirs" as a report of the Judaic envoy

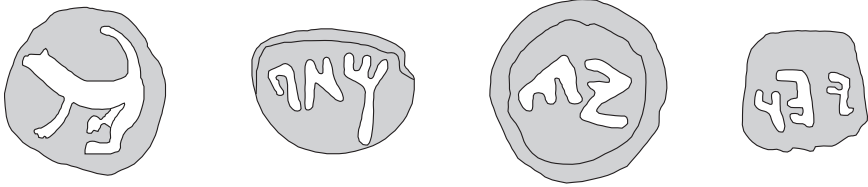
At the conclusion of the commissioning legend, Nehemiah's opponents already appear. They are mentioned by name: Sanballat and Tobiah (Neh 2:10), joined by "Geshem the Arab" (Neh 2:19; 6:1; cf. 4:1). The first occurs in the papyri of Elephantine as "governor of Samaria" and therefore is a "historically authenticated" figure. Does this also apply to the triad of opponents who treat Nehemiah, on a mission from Persia, with hostility? What status does the Judean have who was sent by Artaxerxes and was so troubled by the condition of the graves of his ancestors? What knowledge do we have about his historical authenticity? The list of the provincial governors of Samaria has been a point of discussion for several decades; the tedious reconstructions are based on discoveries of inscriptions from Samaria and Elephantine and late coins.¹²⁰ Early contemporary finds of coins and seals for Syria-Palestine are not extant.¹²¹ For the time being, the Samaritan governor Sanballat remains the only safely identified name from the time of Nehemiah; other rulers are merely attested to in biblical references (e.g., Mithredat and Rehum in Ezra 4:7–8) or can be reconstructed from incomplete inscriptions. Some successors appear in the Elephantine documents (Delaiah, Hananiah, Sanballat II and III). This means that the Nehemiah tradition goes back particularly to the authentic name of at least three provincial governors, Sanballat, in order to link Nehemiah's activities with reality. The opponents of Judah who made a pact possibly are fictitious figures. Hostilities against Jerusalem's attempts at autonomy, however, are historically very likely because they were attested to in that region for centuries and even referred to in the history of the kings of Israel (see 1 Kgs 12–2 Kgs 17).

The independence of Judah as a province of the satrapy of Trans-Euphrates is demonstrated for the fourth century B.C.E. by means of seal

for rebuilding and the provincial governor; see Sigmund Mowinkel, *Studien zu dem Buche Ezra-Nehemia* (3 vols.; Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1964), vol. 2; Ulrich Kellermann, *Nehemia: Quellen, Überlieferung und Geschichte* (BZAW 102; Berlin: Töpelmann, 1967); Gunneweg, *Nehemia*: "the irrefutably authentic sketches of Nehemiah" (176); Grabbe, *Yehud*, 294–310: "more believable than ... the stories of Daniel or Esther and Mordecai" (295); "We probably know more about Nehemiah than about any other Jew of the Persian period. This is mainly because of a unique source: a first-person account, Nehemiah's own composition" (308).

120. Cf. Galling, *Studien zur Geschichte Israels*, 209–10; Mary J. W. Leith, *The Wadi Daliyeh Seal Impressions* (vol. 1 of *Wadi Laliyeh*; New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Carter, *Emergence of Yehud*, 259–68; and Grabbe, *Yehud*, 55–69, 155–59.

121. Darius was the first Persian ruler to use coin imprints, following the example of cities in Greece and Asia Minor. The embossing, however, may have been limited regionally to the administrative center of Sardis; see Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 406–10.



Seal impressions from the province Yehud. After Charles E. Carter, *The Emergence of Yehud in the Persian Period* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 263.

impressions and silver coins. They bear the inscription “Yehud” = Judah and of several names, namely, that of the “governor” (*peḥâ*, Aramaic *pḥw*) Hana-nah, Yehoezer, Ahzai, Urio, Elnathan, and Yehezqiyah and of the “priest” Johanan.¹²²

A complete list of the governors of Judah cannot (yet) be reconstructed.¹²³ The biblical account, rather in passing, mentions that Nehemiah was the governor of Judah for twelve years (Neh 5:14, 18; 12:26). The main emphasis of the statements is the claim that he did without his income from this governmental office on account of the need of the people. In doing so, an element of praise seems to creep into the report, begging for caution. As usual, the Nehemiah tradition carries more historical data (names!) than the story of Ezra. Consequently, among professional colleagues, its historicity is often based on the authenticity of the so-called Nehemiah memorandum. A major part of the book of Nehemiah consists of a first-person-singular account that apparently pursues legitimating intentions. This one who had been dispatched to Jerusalem by the Persian emperor, who had pursued his mission with deep sighs and prayer (Neh 1:4–11; 2:4), seems to render his God a written account of his conduct and decisions in Jerusalem (see, e.g., 2:11–7:3; 12:31–13:31).¹²⁴ The first-person singular style and the interspersed prayers (e.g., 1:4–11; 5:19; 6:14; 13:31) apparently are intended to vouch for the authenticity of the document. The difficulties of the hypothesis are located in the realm of the history of tradition. How was a private document such as this supposed to have become public and entered into the biblical canon?

122. The dating of the latter two names is uncertain; see Grabbe, *Yehud*, 61–62, 64–67; Ya'akov Meshorer, “Ancient Jewish Coinage,” in idem, *Persian Period through Hasmoneans* (vol. 1 of *Ancient Jewish Coinage*; New York: Amphora, 1982), 13–34; and Leo Mildenberg, “Yehud-Münzen,” in Weippert, *Palästina in vorhellenistischer Zeit*, 719–28; silver coins are attested only beginning with 360 B.C.E. (ibid., 727).

123. See Williamson, “Governors of Judah”; Grabbe, *Yehud*, 148–49.

124. See Mowinckel, *Studien zu dem Buche Ezra-Nehemia*; Gunneweg, *Nehemia*, 176–80; Lang, *NBL* 2:916–18.

One is forced to postulate the depositing of the writing in the temple archives and the later discovery and use by chronistically oriented tradents. Both seem to have been inspired by legends such as 2 Kgs 22. The converse attempt at an explanation, that later tradents sought to provide a more persuasive, more authoritative presentation of the (theologically relevant) events, seems more plausible to me. The emphases of the Nehemiah narrative, unlike in Ezra, are the rebuilding of Jerusalem, especially of the city wall (Neh 2:11–4:17; 6:1–19; 12:27–43), the improvement of the social situation of the community (5:1–19), as well as adherence to the Torah (13:1–31). In the latter area there are noticeable overlaps with Ezra's tasks, without mentioning this exemplary teacher of the Torah, however. The first field of activity, the rebuilding of Jerusalem (and its emancipation from the overlordship of Samaria?), might have been a problem for a longer period of time for the Judeans. The social crisis ([crop failures?], oppressive taxes, seizures, indenture; see Neh 5) is not an actual, historical phenomenon but one that recurs again and again. Nehemiah intervenes as a genuine adherent of Yahweh who was committed to the will of God (of the Torah!) and does not pursue any advantage for himself; he decrees a remission of debt (see Deut 15; Lev 25). As a whole, this is a typical scenario, not a biographical or historical action. Nehemiah serves as an example of a popular political leader. He bravely moves toward self-determination, as far as it is possible in a multinational empire, and in the leading position he occupies he personifies the righteous one who does not fail his suffering compatriots.

Again we may ask: What is historically reliable in this portrayal of Nehemiah? The struggle for the relative independence of the tiny territory of Jerusalem and its surroundings is given vivid features. The burning will to autonomy is narrated very realistically, so realistically, in fact, that the listening community is able to identify with it and internalize those exemplary acts. Because the entire account, however sober it may be, aims at empathy and emulation of this kind, it is scarcely possible that it could have been part of a report for Yahweh to be archived. Or are there comparable didactic accounts that were supposed to function on their own while hidden behind closed doors? The overall character of the Nehemiah memoirs targets hearing and emulation. Presumably this writing was penned precisely for this purpose. Its sobriety (yet exemplary strong relationship with God!) and both the personal and historical color render it a semihistorical document that cannot be fixed to a definite span of time and unique events (e.g., contra Neh 5:14). If one dares a historical positioning all the same, Nehemiah probably belongs into the middle of the fifth century B.C.E. and prior to the developments addressed in the book of Ezra.

II.3.2.2. Ezra

In the seventh year of a certain King Artaxerxes, Ezra is supposed to have moved from Babylon (!) to Jerusalem (Ezra 7:7–9) on a journey that took four months, equipped with a letter of safe conduct that guaranteed him free escort and lavish provision of food in the satrapy of Trans-Euphrates (7:11–26). His mission was to bring the Babylonian reparations for Judah to Jerusalem (7:15–16; cf. 1:4), to examine adherence to the Torah of Yahweh in the province, and generally to announce and carry through this divine order (7:14, 25–26). He is to equip the temple and its ritual with the essentials, also at the expense of the Persian king, and there to set the cultic activity in proper motion (7:17–20). The language and perspectives in this letter of safe conduct, written in Aramaic, are not of Persian but rather of Jewish origin.¹²⁵ For instance, it does not make a Persian perspective, moving from the center of the empire to the serving periphery, the focal point but rather a typically Jewish one in dominating fashion: Yahweh, the supreme God of heaven, dwells in Jerusalem (7:12, 15–16), not in Susa or Persepolis. Ezra begins his journey in Babylon, not at the royal court in Susa, like Nehemiah, because there the ancient victorious power, now reduced to provincial status (*mēdinā*, 7:16), sits humiliated and atoning for the past.¹²⁶ The exaggerated service by the Persian monarch for Yahweh and his representative¹²⁷ is projected wishful thinking of the marginalized but nevertheless self-confident Jewish community in Jerusalem. In chapter 7 of his book, as well as in all the other texts using his name, the figure of Ezra has so little flesh and blood that it could justifiably be construed as a literary product. It would by no means lose any significance thereby, for the biblical Ezra is completely taken up by his task of proclaiming Yahweh's way of life. (In the narrative Artaxerxes likewise has only one action-related purpose: to promote Israel and Yahweh.) An attentive reader will easily gain the impression that this figure has been designed from the perspective of its important functions for the community. The pompous genealogy, which reaches all the way back to the forebear Aaron (7:1–5) and the equally fulsome title addressing him as “priest,” “scribe,” “scholar of the text of the commandments of the LORD and his statutes for Israel,” “scribe of the law of the God of heaven”

125. According to Gunneweg, *Ezra*, 129–40; see also Grabbe, *Yehud*, 324–31.

126. Gunneweg, *Ezra*, 132; much more careful and more traditional is Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 135–39, 147, and others. The parallel of the mission of the delegate Udjahoresnet to Egypt is only partly evidential for the historicity of Ezra's mission; see Blenkinsopp, “The Mission of Udjahorresnet,” 409–21.

127. Gunneweg speaks of an “unlimited blank authority” that in and of itself already “sounds much too improbable” (*Ezra*, 135).

(7:11–12) appear artificial and at best correspond to small fragments of the Persian royal manner of speaking. If the person called Ezra (Aramaic “[God is] help”) ever existed, he was stylized by the shaping, super-elevating, and theologizing tradition into the prototypical to such an extent that we recognize virtually nothing of his concrete biography. Even the place of his birth or of his death and burial remain unmentioned. Incidentally, Ezra shares the fate of depersonalization in the wake of stylizing and glorification with other teachers of the law in the Bible, such as Moses and Jesus, perhaps to a certain extent also with Zoroaster, Muhammad, and Buddha. The tradition that continued to build on the biblical one even reinforced this tendency in the Ezra-tradition developed later.¹²⁸ Under these circumstances the tiresome question about when Ezra had appeared in Jerusalem is unnecessary. Most experts would like to maintain the historical personality of the “scribe and priest Ezra,” as well as the reference that he had come to Jerusalem in the seventh year of an Artaxerxes. Accordingly, there are three Persian emperors by this name, but only the first one, Artaxerxes Longimanus (465–425 B.C.E.), or the second, Artaxerxes Mnemon (404–359 B.C.E.), is possible. In this case, the year of the book of Ezra would be either 458 or 397 B.C.E. If the books of Ezra and Nehemiah were concerned with a documentary reporting of the events, the time of Ezra’s journey and the effects for the relationship to Nehemiah and the temple-citizen community in Jerusalem, as well as their lifestyle, would certainly have been very significant. But the writers and tradents of the memoirs of Ezra and Nehemiah neither intended nor were able to provide an account of the construction of the temple and the wall, the organization of the community, and the problems with the law. In an unhistorical, that is, nonchronologically ordered, way, their writings reflect the perspectives, expectations, and fears of the Jerusalem community for an entire century or more. They outline very condensed, general, rather than selective, situations. The truths the Ezra figure conveys are of the ethical and theological kind and less, if at all, of a historical sort. Still, they are meant for a specific period, the Persian period, and the Jewish community in Judah that formed precisely during that time. In conclusion, therefore, the Ezra story does yield historical aspects of a general sort, in other words, trends rather than individual facts. We can mention them only briefly, limiting them to a few main points. Our historical craving for chronological

128. On 3 Esdras and 4 Ezra, see Karl-Friedrich Pohlmann, *Studien zum dritten Esra* (FRLANT 104; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1970); Egon Brandenburger, *Die Verborgenheit Gottes im Weltgeschehen* (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 1981); Edwin M. Yamauchi, “Postbiblical Traditions about Ezra and Nehemiah,” in *A Tribute to Gleason Archer* (ed. Walter Kaiser and Ronald F. Youngblood; Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 167–76.

development, coherent and causally linked chains of events, however, remains unsatisfied. For example, should Neh 8 not follow Ezra 7–10? The tradition that has come down to us organizes the material according to different criteria that are not comprehensible to us.

1. The Yahweh-community of Jerusalem in the period in question (fifth–fourth century B.C.E.) is in a weak condition from the perspective of those who are “faithful to the law.” Loyalty to the Torah may well be a principle of faith for those who return from the Babylonian exile, for Ezra’s mission is ideally connected with one of the waves of returnees. The worship of Yahweh and the resultant lifestyle, including the dissolution of “mixed marriages,” are the fundamental problems of the community that need to be solved. Thus from the historical perspective, the biblical Ezra tradition deals with the consolidation and partly the new formation of the Jewish (i.e., confessional) community in the process of coming into being. The settling of the cultic conditions (with ritual, sacrifices carried out at the legitimate location, personnel legitimized by birth, properly dedicated utensils, etc.) is as much part of this as the delimitation of alien influences and the ordering of a worship service in which the Torah is publicly read.

2. Between the lines it may be recognized that Ezra, in his exemplary ancestral line and blameless personal disposition to the Torah, embodies the ideals of the leading ranks of this renewed and new religious community. On the one hand, he is a scribe, a guardian of the “book tradition” that was produced, collecting the traditions of the fathers and linking them into a construct of faith and life. On the other hand, he is the high-ranking priest whose ancestor even was the prototype of the office as such, namely, Aaron himself, the brother of Moses. Amazingly, however, Ezra brings together, as it were, the offices of mediating the message (Moses) and administering the worship (Aaron) in a single person. This may agree with the historical reality in nascent early Judaism; in the leadership of the community, there were two (or three, following Chronicles) competing claims of tradition: the full-blooded priesthood of priestly Zadokite descent; that of the lesser assistant priesthood of Levitical lineage; and that of an actually unprofessional rank of scribes and sages. Since the beginning of the exile, the main task probably fell upon the last group, since they had to cope with the horrible period of time devoid of worship, given the destroyed temple. For this reason also Moses seems to be dominant in the Exodus-Leviticus tradition, and in Ezra one likewise senses a priority of the scribal disposition and a late, additional qualification as “priest” (see Ezra 7:11–12; Neh 8:2).¹²⁹ Nevertheless, the vari-

129. In terms of the history of redaction, the priestly forms of address are later inser-

ous leadership functions argued for were merged into one in him, as an ideal, in wishful imagination.

3. The internal problems of the new community of faith were caused by external circumstances: loss of sovereignty; domination by foreigners and deportation; and the abolition of national symbols such as the kingdom and the temple. Therefore, determining the external conditions is essential. How do members of a humiliated, marginalized minority relate to authority and to the concrete environment? The Ezra tradition agrees with other strands that the central government of Persia had a neutral to positive relationship with the conquered nations and their deities. Whatever the explanation for the much-discussed religious tolerance of the distant imperial court might be, the biblical traditions in every way appreciated the support in conjunction with the rebuilding of the temple, the equipping and financing of the cultic work, and, perhaps the crucial authorization, the proclamation of the particularly Jewish law, all of which will be addressed later. All of these points, in my view, lead to the conclusion that the interests of the Jewish reporter in Ezra-Nehe-miah apparently glorified the goodwill of the head of state beyond any degree of probability. Even the commissioning legends of the two protagonists, Ezra and Nehemiah, are subject to this retrospective critique. Whether or not a Persian text describing the mission of Udjahorresnet to Egypt increases the probability of the historical authenticity of the mission of Ezra is an open question.¹³⁰ The pale portrayal of Artaxerxes and his obsequiousness in any case is not suitable to help the account in Ezra 7–8.

4. The powers forming against Ezra's constituting activity hardly come from the political or religious world outside; however, compare the Nehemiah tradition. At this point those traveling homeward together with Ezra predominantly experience absolute goodwill, readiness for atonement, and contributions for the house of God in Jerusalem. Hostilities en route, mentioned very briefly and vaguely (Ezra 8:31), are neutralized by God; indeed, by appeal to God's protection, Ezra even declined an escort of troops (8:22–23). In the Ezra tradition, the opposition to the great work, the implementation of the Torah of Yahweh, comes predominantly from within. If a community of faith appeals to the communication and interpretation of holy traditions of several lines that, as a matter of priority, are intended to substantiate the identity of the group, differences in interpretation and conflicts

tions; see Hans H. Schaeder, *Ezra der Schreiber* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1930); and Lang, "Vom Propheten zum Schriftgelehrten," 89–114.

130. Thus Blenkinsopp, "The Mission of Udjahorresnet," 409–21. The Egyptian is alleged to have received the royal commission under Darius the Great to restore "order" in his country; see above §II.2.1.

of interest handed down traditionally among fellow believers are inevitable. The history of Jewish and Christian communities is also replete with sharp, theologically argued fraternal feuds.¹³¹ They are already found in the exilic and postexilic biblical literature and represent a basic historical fact for the confessional religious community. On his arrival in Jerusalem, the Ezra of the tradition is deeply appalled by the lack of cultic distance between Judeans and foreigners. The main point is the widespread marriages between Jewish men and foreign women. (The converse alternative is of no consequence, because Jewish women who marry into other people-groups move into the group of the husband and no longer burden the Judaic faith.) Apparently the shock is caused by Deuteronomic prohibitions of alien marriages (see Exod 34:15–16; Deut 7:3; 23:3; Gen 34) but also by ideas of the unbearable cultic pollution of the country (see Lev 18:24–25). In any case, this is the way the prayer of repentance in Ezra 9 articulates the concerns of the scribe, sent by Yahweh, and thus vivifies a historical experience of the postexilic period.

From the writing bearing Ezra's name, we learn much about the models the communities around the beginning of the fourth century B.C.E. had in mind, but hardly anything about the historical figures possibly behind these ideas. Despite all of the intentional "biographical" embellishment (e.g., the relationship to the Persian emperor, the first-person singular style of the account, the emotional engagement; see Ezra 9:3, 5), Ezra remains a transfigured literary figure. Later, in the postcanonical tradition, he is elevated to the position of a second Moses who, after the alleged destruction of the Torah in the burning down of the temple in 587 B.C.E. (here again, the chronology is irrelevant for these imaginative tradents), restores the lost text word for word and letter for letter from memory (4 Ezra 14). The postexilic ideal of the perfect scribe is tangible; this, however, is not the case for the historical reality or the biographical profile of that legendary founder of the postexilic community of Yahweh.

II.3.2.3. Sheshbazzar, Zerubbabel

There are yet other Judaic individuals in the Ezra-Nehemiah complex whose contribution needs to be explored, although they are not as prominent as the two protagonists of the spiritual and secular will of self-assertion in the tiny Judean minority. In the history of reception and influence of Israel during and after the exile, they have not gained the same attention as Ezra or Nehe-

131. See Morton Smith, *Palestinian Parties and Politics That Shaped the Old Testament* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971).

miah.¹³² I refer to the two figures Zerubbabel and Sheshbazzar, who play a certain part in Ezra 1–6, not gloriously leading roles but nevertheless inestimably important ones. Perhaps it is precisely the fact that neither of them was embellished in legend-like fashion that vouches for their greater historical authenticity. Exactly those figures who appear mainly fictitiously are identified by means of loving, albeit stereotypical modeling. The public also wants to know more about fictitious figures than about those who are merely historical. This is why tradents are fond of thinking of dates and circumstances that cater to this curiosity, and there develop personal features with more or less legendary tint. In the case of the two figures just mentioned, this did not occur at all, neither in the biblical writings nor in subsequent history.

Sheshbazzar¹³³ bears a Babylonian name that perhaps had been parodied from Šamaš-ab-ussur (“Shamash, protect the father”). He is said to have been returned a number of valuable temple utensils by Cyrus that had been carried off from Jerusalem in the past (Ezra 1:8–11) and to have migrated back to the homeland with the first contingent of returnees. At a later point one reads that he had been a Persian governor, apparently in Jerusalem, and had placed the foundation stone of the new temple (Ezra 5:14, 16). We hear nothing further about him. These two references are generally taken literally, and Sheshbazzar is seen as the first Persian governor of the province of Judah. In this case, however, the position concerning the battle for the liberation of Jerusalem from the supremacy of Samaria would have to be reevaluated and substantiated (see above, §II.3.1). It seems to me that, at least with regard to the name of this elite personality, we are on safe grounds. Whether or not Sheshbazzar does indeed belong to the time of Cyrus is questionable, for the information about the departure of a group of returnees immediately following the takeover by Cyrus in Babylon (539 B.C.E.), like the drafted decree of Cyrus (Ezra 1:2–4) associated with it, has little credibility. Hence the Sheshbazzar in question would be an authentic leadership figure of the Judaic community before us, about whose activities, however, we know scarcely anything.

Zerubbabel, also given a Babylonian name (*zer-babili* = “shoot of Babylon”) and supposedly of Davidic descent (1 Chr 3:19), appears mainly in the traditions of Ezra and Nehemiah, as well as in the prophets Haggai and Zech-

132. The Ezra tradition has already been addressed. Concerning Nehemiah, for instance, 2 Macc 2:13 asserts that he founded a library with an archive in which his personal notes were preserved as well. Apparently his conspicuous memoir style was examined quite early.

133. See Sara Japhet, “Sheshbazzar und Zerubbabel,” *ZAW* 94 (1982): 66–98; 95 (1983): 218–29; Magne Sæbø, “The Relation of Sheshbazzar and Zerubbabel—Reconsidered,” *SEÅ* 54 (1988): 168–77; Grabbe, *Yehud*, 276–85.

ariah. He is integrated into the peculiar “list of returnees” (Ezra 2:2; Neh 7:7) and frequently acts in conjunction with Joshua the priest (Ezra 3:2; 4:2–3; 5:2; Hag 2:2; Zech 3). Above all he is also associated with the construction of the temple (Ezra 3:2; 5:2; Hag 2:2–5; Zech 4:8–10). In Hag 2:21–23, the tradition allows to shine through that there had been messianic eschatological expectations concerning the person of Zerubbabel. The eschatological woes begin, and he is the “signet ring” of Yahweh, that is, his earthly vice-regent (lord chancellor with authority to rule). The Ezra tradition does not label him a Persian official but as a leader in the construction phase of the new community of Judah. Only in Hag 1:1, 14; 2:2, 21 is he explicitly called *pehâ*, “governor.” In 1 Esdr 4:13 there are signs of the formation of a legend. Just as Zerubbabel plays a role in the prophetic books of Haggai and Zechariah, so the prophets mentioned also support him in the Ezra account: “Now the prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, son of Iddo, prophesied to the Jews who were in Judah and Jerusalem, in the name of the God of Israel who was over them” (Ezra 5:1; cf. 6:14). This sounds casual, almost like a chronological note, but it probably, in agreement with the prophetic writings, intends to announce the prophetic-eschatological dynamic in the building of the temple. From this vantage point one must ask whether the note has been adopted from a prophetic canon already extant in writing.

As long as there is a lack of extrabiblical and Persian documents, the evaluation of the historical figures of Sheshbazzar, Zerubbabel, Haggai, Zechariah, as well as of the priest Joshua or Jeshua, is extremely difficult. Were there really two early “governors” of the province of Judah? Or does this refer to the delayed emancipation of Jerusalem and its surroundings, as reflected in Ezra 4–6, for instance? The early opponents of the Jewish drive for autonomy here are Regum, the “master of command” (Gunneweg), and Shimshai, the “secretary”; both are said to have lived in Samaria (Ezra 4:7, 18). Of course, the temporal setting has shifted by more than half a century from Cyrus to the reigns of Xerxes and Artaxerxes. The narrators do not contest that, however; basically they are only conversant with the typical problem of obstructing the construction of the temple and of the external, hostile exertion of influence against Judaic matters.¹³⁴ In a letter of warning—surely formulated (adapted!) from the Judaic perspective—the opponents accuse the returnees of preparing for a separation from the Persian Empire (Ezra 4:11–16). The official representative of the satrapy of Trans-Euphrates joins this denunciation of the Judaic construction; in Ezra, his name is “Tattenai,” and he is surrounded by some

134. The writers do not think “diachronically—in terms of linear history” “but synchronically—thematically” (Gunneweg, *Esra*, 87).

associates and bears the title *pehâ*, as is customary for subordinate provincial governors (Ezra 5:3, 6; 6:6, 13). The inscriptions offer no evidence for this particular official, who would have had to function in the earliest years of Darius's reign, because the temple was already completed in the sixth year (515 B.C.E.).¹³⁵ Therefore, the attestation of the name Tattenai for the twentieth year of Darius¹³⁶ does not lead us any further. In the temporal overall view of most different phases and events that the biblical tradition affords, the Babylonian document is nevertheless an attestation of the historical existence of a figure such as this. The remaining, very numerous names of Judeans who returned home from exile have statistical value only in the theater-related sense.

II.3.2.4. The Elders

Of some importance is also the indication that the tradition is not only fond of working with symbolic figures and their aura of authority but also allows conditions to shine through in which the elders of the community of Yahweh are also able to manage without leaders and make decisions in agreement with one another (Ezra 5:5, 9; 6:7–8, 14). The report of Tattenai, for instance, states the following:

Then we spoke to those elders and asked them, "Who gave you a decree to build this house and to finish this structure?" We also asked them their names, for your information, so that we might write down the names of the men at their head. This was their reply to us: "We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth, and we are rebuilding the house that was built many years ago, which a great king of Israel built and finished." (Ezra 5:9–11)

In this Aramaic layer of the tradition, only the "old men" (*šābiyā*) are authorized to negotiate and make decisions; indeed, there is no other leadership personality available, either of noble or of priestly origin. This may, at least at times, agree with a valid historical reality. In this view of things, it is amazing with what naturalness the "elders" also carry on the royal traditions of Israel and understand themselves as their trustees. It is also noteworthy how freely Ezekiel gets together with "elders" as representatives of the community (see below, §II.3.3) rather than with priests, scribes, prophets, or similar

135. The date (Ezra 6:15) is historically probable but cannot be demonstrated (see Otto, *Jerusalem*, 94–100).

136. Helmut Utzschneider, *NBL* 3:787, with reference to Arthur Ungnad, "Keilinschriftliche Beiträge zum Buch Esra und Ester," *ZAW* 58 (1940): 240–44; Joseph Fleishman, "The Investigating Commission of Tattenai: The Purpose of the Investigation and Its Results," *HUCA* 66 (1995): 81–102.

functionaries of the Yahwistic faith (Ezek 8:1; 14:1; 20:1; cf. 3:15; 11:24). Such witnesses make us aware that the emerging early Jewish community was not dependent on major leadership figures and equally little on special office-bearers but rather enjoyed an independent social dynamic.

II.3.3. SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY STRUCTURES

The concluding observation leads us to investigate in summary fashion the social organization of the nascent Jewish community. This is of fundamental significance for understanding the Old Testament Scriptures and their theological statements.¹³⁷ In the preexilic period, Israel's familial, settlement-oriented, regional and statewide forms of organization were meshed and in part also stood in opposition to one another. Under the onslaught of Babylonian armies, the autochthonous state and its dynasty had perished. Now the Babylonian Empire, followed by the Persian Empire with its sub-structures, functioned as the superordinate major society, each of which had its own scope for decision-making. How did life develop in the remaining territory of Judah within this major web of social and political associations? The rise of Jerusalem to the precinct of the religion of Yahweh has already been addressed. But what did the social reality look like for the towns that depended upon Jerusalem?

The archaeological investigation of the topography, which has been undertaken for a few decades only, has already yielded some results in concert with the increasingly awakened interest in the history and literature of the Persian period.¹³⁸ They refer primarily to the administration, population density, living conditions, exchange of goods, and production of food of more than a hundred settlements¹³⁹ that can be identified in the Yehud province.

137. See Erhard S. Gerstenberger, *Theologies in the Old Testament* (trans. John Bowden; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002), esp. chs. 3 and 8.

138. In his 1972 dissertation in Hebrew, translated into English in 1982, Stern's *Material Culture* offered a first summary of the archaeological research. Charles E. Carter followed it in 1999 with a study that brought the work to its present status and set new perspectives: *Emergence of Yehud*. For our purposes both portrayals need to be examined specifically with regard to the social conditions. Based on textual witnesses, Joel P. Weinberg has sought to capture the social structure of the new "citizen-temple community" for some time now; see his *The Citizen-Temple Community* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992). Grabbe summarizes the status of the research up to about 2003 (*Yehud*, 134–55, 167–88, 197–208, 216–37).

139. See Carter, *Emergence of Yehud*, 216; 90 percent of the settlements housed less than 300 people; Jerusalem had about 3,000 inhabitants (221). Carter speaks of 22 exca-

Since the boundaries of this administrative district are not known completely and the population numbers can only be approximated roughly, the data gained for Yehud vary between 20,000 and 30,000 people.¹⁴⁰ In any case, the district of Judah, with its capital of Jerusalem, was a tiny speck on the vast map of the Persian Empire. What had been stated above concerning the everyday life in the giant empire (§II.2.4) probably also applies to our present topic. Yet, what specific conditions and what characteristic social organizations can be assumed for this realm? The research of the “material culture” of Judah during the Persian period needs to be investigated with regard to its basic sociological and productive pattern.

We may assume that the Near Eastern familial conditions (patrilinear, patrilocal, patriarchal kinship groups¹⁴¹) also applied to the province of Judah. Hardly any ethnic differences can be observed in the family structure of the region,¹⁴² and this most important primary group of human socialization was also relatively stable over the centuries. Within the solidarity of this network of relationships of families, women, men, children, and other members belonging to the group all had their clear-cut place.¹⁴³ In agricultural economies but to an extent surely in the case of artisans as well, all of the members worked together in the common task of survival, in keeping with their strengths and abilities. The close interrelationship, being dependent upon one another, made the closest kinship group the most important social structure of all. Isolated from the family and depending on himself or herself, the human of that time (in contrast to life in the modern industrial society) was hardly able to survive. The *desperados* of the steppe have to join together into marauding packs (1 Sam 22:2); otherwise they perish. Hermits and those claiming full autonomy are foreign and suspect to the Old Testament (Eccl 4:7–12). The family was the social unit in which people lived as willed by God

vated and 103 identified “sites” (114) and in an extensive appendix lists 132 locations (325–49). See also Grabbe, *Yehud*, 135–40.

140. However, Weinberg (*Citizen-Temple Community*, 34–48) argues for more than 150,000 inhabitants! By contrast, see Carter, *Emergence of Yehud*, 216, 221; Grabbe, *Yehud*, 199–202. For the period of Persian II, for instance, Carter calculates a population of 20,650 (199–205).

141. Organized in “paternal homes” (*bêt ’ābôt*); see Weinberg, *Citizen-Temple Community*, 49–61.

142. Whether or not there possibly were special privileges for women “among the Canaanites,” such as the right of disposal of immovable property (see 2 Kgs 4:8–10; Prov 31:16), is an open question.

143. See Erhard S. Gerstenberger and Wolfgang Schrage, *Woman and Man* (Biblical Encounters Series; Nashville: Abingdon, 1980); and Leo G. Perdue, ed., *Families in Ancient Israel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997).

and, as a matter of course, worked for their support, received security and care, fulfilled their obligations, received and nurtured their worldview and faith; in short, it was the refuge for every male (at least until he established his own family) and every female (until marriage, but also beyond that as support in the case of divorce or widowhood). The family shaped the life, thought, and feeling of the ancient Near Eastern people beyond our imagination: the individual thought of himself or herself rather in terms of the group than vice versa. Within the family, hierarchies of age, gender, and social status were in force: single people or divorced women (daughters, sisters) who lived in the house were regarded as less than the “orderly” members; aliens and slaves were positioned below the kinship groups.¹⁴⁴

The established hierarchy, for sure, applied especially to women, who had to be more flexible in the social structure. They were given away to a different family; from our vantage point, we have the impression that they were merely objects in the hand of the male society (see Gen 24; 34; 1 Sam 25:44; 2 Sam 3:13–16; Judg 19). This impression is deceptive in as much as there was a polished system of family negotiations (that still exists in the modern Near East) in which the children’s fortunes were determined by parents (see Judg 14:2–4). The outcome of arrangements was often enough preserved in written contracts.¹⁴⁵ The explosive question is whether in the Persian period in Judah the situation worsened for women on account of the developing worship of Yahweh alone and the concomitant prohibition of house and women cults. The sources are ambiguous on this point. On the one hand, especially texts of a later date witness to a relative autonomy of women in the framework of the given patriarchal system.¹⁴⁶ On the other, theologically argued devaluations and suspicions of the female gender are probably not only a phenomenon of the Hellenistic period. The incompatibility of the sexes but especially of the female gender with sacred service at the altar, reserved for men (Lev 12–15), the seemingly increasing suspicion of women being more to blame

144. On slavery, see Dandamaev, *Slavery in Babylon*; Innocenzo Cardellini, *Die biblischen “Sklaven”-Gesetze im Lichte des keilschriftlichen Sklavenrechts: Ein Beitrag zur Tradition, Überlieferung und Redaktion der alttestamentlichen Rechtstexte* (BBB 55; Königstein: Hanstein, 1981). On the temple slaves in the lists of Ezra-Nehemiah, see Weinberg, *Citizen-Temple Community*, 75–91.

145. See the reference to a marriage contract in Gen 31:43–50 and the documents of Elephantine below, in §II.4.2.2.

146. The book of Ruth may serve as an example, which has to be understood as a contemporary writing about women; see Irmtraud Fischer, *Rut* (HTKAT; Freiburg: Herder, 2001). The glorification of Hulda, Esther, and Judith is relevant here, but perhaps this phenomenon can be regarded precisely as an outlet for an increasing patriarchalism.

for the “fall into sin” than men (see Gen 3),¹⁴⁷ the typical prejudicial male perspective of the alleged “female temptability” with regard to apostasy and disobedience (see Deut 13:7; 1 Kgs 11:1–5),¹⁴⁸ and the symbolizing of evil by means of women or female metaphors¹⁴⁹ (Zech 5:5–11)—all of these, if the appearance is not deceptive, are also signs of the Persian period.

The settlements of Judah, with populations between 100 and 500, were arranged for interfamilial cooperation. Common interests had to be represented jointly or were transferred to delegated leaders. We hear hardly anything about local general assemblies; by contrast, the elders and heads of families are an ancient institution, even under the new circumstances of imperial rule. In the book of Ruth, it becomes exemplary how questions of civil law could be addressed at the gate. A head of a family waits until he has assembled a company of ten male citizens ad hoc and then presents his matter to this body (Ruth 4:1–4). If it is a case of murder or homicide, the “elders and judges” (*zēqēnim wēšōpētīm*; alongside the *šōtēr* also appears; Deut 1:15; 16:18; 29:9; Josh 8:33; 23:2; 24:1)¹⁵⁰ preside over the proceedings, including sentencing the culprit, executing the punishment, or, in the case of an unknown perpetrator, engaging in the necessary expiatory acts (Deut 19:16–21; 21:1–9). In Ezekiel it is the elders who, in consultation with the prophets, care for the well-being of their settlements (see Ezek 8:1; 14:1; 20:1). Thus we encounter broad biblical evidence attesting the administration of villages and towns through representatives of family units (see above, §II.3.2.4). This seems to have been a natural constitutional structure of settlements in

147. An impressive presentation of the consequences of the “temptation story” of Gen 3 is offered by Helen Schüngel-Straumann, *Die Frau am Anfang: Eva und die Folgen* (Freiburg: Herder, 1989).

148. In the case of Solomon’s wives, suspicion and fear merge in the label “foreign”; see also Num 25:6–9; Ezra 20; Neh 13:23–28.

149. The imagery of the marriage between Yahweh and Israel belongs to this context; see Gerlinde Baumann, *Love and Violence: Marriage as Metaphor for the Relationship between YHWH and Israel in the Prophetic Books* (trans. Linda M. Maloney; Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2003).

150. The offices mentioned are specifically Deuteronomic and roughly comparable to the earlier German village mayor (Herbert Niehr, “שָׂפֵט,” *TDOT* 15:411–31; Klaus-Dietrich Schunck, “שָׂטֵר,” *TDOT* 14:606–9). Modern interpreters like to read governmental officialdom into the expressions. Against this, see Frank Crüsemann, *The Torah: Theology and Social History of Old Testament Law* (trans. Allan W. Mahnke; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 98–107; Rainer Kessler, *Staat und Gesellschaft im vorexilischen Juda* (VTSup 47; Leiden: Brill), 161–89. See also Hanoch Reviv, *The Elders in Ancient Israel* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1989); Udo Rüterswörden, *Von der politischen Gemeinschaft zur Gemeinde: Studien zu Dt 16:18–18:22* (BBB 65; Frankfurt: Athenäum, 1987).

the Near East¹⁵¹ that was not established only in the period of the monarchy. On the contrary, the lines of power in tribal and national societies probably developed from the rural power structures. Rural conditions denote life in unfortified, open settlements assigned to the closest town. Individual families remained essentially self-sufficient. The agriculturally determined community knew only a few differentiated professions, although individual families may already have specialized in the production of ceramics and the working of metal and wood even in the rural milieu.

For the spiritual life of the village communities, these facts mean that the flourishing house cults and local cults of an earlier period in the long term no longer had a right to exist in the newly emerging Yahweh community. The dominant confessional obligation of the people of Judah became strictly regulated by the constitution of the Torah, focused on the sole legitimate place of the worship of God (see Deut 12). Consequently, the religious ceremonies and rituals, especially also the personnel associated with them, concentrated on the capital of Judah. Rural Levites or similar spiritual functionaries, especially also healers, prognosticators, male and female exorcists, who actually were essential for the medical and ritual care of the population, presumably withdrew into the niches of society, just like the notorious witch of Endor (1 Sam 28). Conversely, the Yahweh community had to offer necessary rituals and special events, such as for the purpose of treating the sick. The Psalms offers prayers in great numbers for those suffering and were intended for such acts of supplication by the community.¹⁵²

Thus, the question of the relationship of the settlements to the cultic and administrative center of Jerusalem may offer a conclusion. After all, in a certain sense Judah as a whole was one single “temple-citizen community” (Weinberg),¹⁵³ for, according to the Torah, the provincial capital was the only legitimate scene for the emerging sacrificial and cultic system. Already in Deut 12 we read:

You must demolish completely all the places where the nations whom you are about to dispossess served their gods.... You shall not worship the LORD

151. The constitution of eldership in towns or villages in Deuteronomy is examined with ethnological sidelong glances in Timothy M. Willis, *The Elders of the City* (SBLMS 55; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 2001).

152. See Erhard S. Gerstenberger, *Der bittende Mensch* (WMANT 20; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1980).

153. I take this designation primarily in terms of its spiritual dimension. The debate on how far the citizen-temple-community constitutionally is to be construed as a “temple state” with or without landholding, and what part the high priest played politically, is difficult to determine; see Grabbe, *Yehud*, 142–48.

your God in such ways. But you shall seek the place that the LORD your God will choose out of all your tribes as his habitation to put his name there. You shall go there. (Deut 12:2, 4–5)

This centralization of the cult reflects neither the time of Josiah nor that of the century of the exile, but very much so the Second Temple epoch. The individual villages came under the civil administration of Jerusalem to the extent of its authority. The relationship of the Judaic villages, as well as of the Jewish settlements in the Diaspora, to Jerusalem was the large social network of the Yahweh community, built upon the association of villages and region. A measure such as the “synoikism” of Nehemiah (Neh 7:4; 11:1–2) indicates a common bond between the center and the periphery. The ongoing sacrificial ministry, carried out by the temple priests and later supported by a permanent taskforce from the nonlocal settlements, was moved to Jerusalem.¹⁵⁴ Above all else, however, the holy city became the scene for the major annual festivals, led by the Passover.¹⁵⁵ The settlements of Judah, like the inhabitants of Jerusalem, were integrated into the great religious community of “Israel,” “the Jewish people,” “the people of Yahweh, or “the pious, righteous, chosen,” and so on.” Ideally and sociologically, nascent Judaism, despite numerous factions and lines of thought, was a unity, and this ideal community, gathered around the Torah and the newly dedicated temple, was also organized as a community of faith. The most visible expression of the institution was the temple that the Judeans had to maintain by means of a temple tax.

The “tithe,” which ideally was levied to maintain the temple, has a lengthy posthistory in Judaism and Christianity, all the way to a popular church tax in Germany, amounting to 9 percent of the income tax levied. The prehistory of a tax such as this of all adult citizens for (nonroyal) sanctuaries is scarcely researched.¹⁵⁶ In any case, the second Israelite temple in Jerusalem no longer was a royal sanctuary but “belonged” to the community of Yahweh. We have already addressed the Persian subsidizing of the temple; it is to be construed as start-up financing at best. Hence the community somehow had to bear the cost for operating the supreme place for sacrifice and prayer. We hear of vol-

154. Representatives of the communities took regular turns in the sacrificial service; see Ismar Elbogen, *Der jüdische Gottesdienst in seiner geschichtlichen Entwicklung* (repr., Hildesheim: Olms, 1967), 237, 239.

155. See Shemuel Safrai, *Die Wallfahrt im Zeitalter des Zweiten Tempels* (Forschungen zum jüdisch-christlichen Dialog 3; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1981).

156. See Michael Jursa, *Der Tempelzehnt in Babylonien* (AOAT 254; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1998); see also Zwickel, *Der Tempelkult in Kanaan und Israel*, and other sources in the excursus “The Rise of Jerusalem as the Holy City” above.

untary gifts for the construction of the sanctuary; we know that certain parts of the animals brought by individuals as personal offerings or also of grain offerings had to be left for the priest on duty (see Lev 2:3; 6:9–11; 7:8–10, 14, 32–34). All of these things yield a great variety of rules and customs.¹⁵⁷ This variety becomes even more colorful when we take into account the instructions on the temple tax contained in the Hebrew writings, all of which most probably refer to the Second Temple, not to Solomon's. In Nehemiah, five of the eight obligations of the community (see §I.2 above) refer to the support of the temple; they are the most detailed of the entire biblical tradition:

We also lay on ourselves the obligation to charge ourselves yearly one-third of a shekel for the service of the house of God: for the rows of bread, the regular grain offering, the regular burnt offering, the Sabbaths, the new moons, the appointed festivals, the sacred donations and the sin offering to make atonement for Israel, and for all the work of the house of our God. (Neh 10:32–33)

The additional obligations refer to the necessary firewood (Neh 10:34) and to giving the firstfruits of the crops, fruit trees, as well as the firstborn of their sons and livestock (10:35–36). A summarizing order also adds the first of the dough and of the harvest of wine and olives (10:37a). Strangely enough, there is an additional reference to the further tithe given to the Levites, gathered from all their “rural towns” (10:37b). The other demands for the temple (see, e.g., Deut 14:22–29; 26:1–15; Lev 27:30–33; Num 18:21–31) are formulated from differing perspectives and for different objectives. In the present context, the only important element is that the Judaic citizen-temple-community is closely associated with the institution on Zion and had to carry the full responsibility for its support.¹⁵⁸

All of this sheds light on the great significance that was attributed to the religious organization of the new community. This fact finds its most obvious expression in the frequent mention of the gathering of all believers in Yahweh, the *qēhal yhwh/yisrā'el* (or such synonyms as *‘ēdā*, *‘am*, *‘ēṣā*). This people's gathering is referred to in many texts. It is able to become active politically or religiously. The worship-related gathering, as already indicated, is the original model of the synagogal assembly. Its liturgical purpose is clearly recognized, for instance, in Deut 29–31; Josh 23–24; and 1 Kgs 8, as well as in the Psalms

157. On the remuneration of priests in the laws concerning sacrifices in Leviticus, see under “Share of the Priests” in Erhard S. Gerstenberger, *Leviticus: A Commentary* (OTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996).

158. See Grabbe, *Yehud*, 209–16, 235–36.

(see Pss 95; 100; 118; 136), the prophetic books (e.g., Jer 31:8; 44:15; Mic 2:5; Joel 2:16), and, of course, Chronicles (e.g., 1 Chr 28:8; 29:1, 10, 20). The community has political and legal functions in, for example, Ezra 10:1, 8, 14; Neh 5:13. We observe that the postexilic community was constituted especially at events that required the participation of all the believers in Yahweh. It was a unique social and theological entity, a model for the later Jewish and Christian communities. The exilic community was called together by authorized representatives but frequently also voiced their own opinion over against the leadership. Whether or not there were similarly organized communities of faith in the Persian period, for instance, in the religion of Zoroaster, remains an open question. Faint references to a religious community such as this can be found in the ancient layers of the Avesta.

II.3.4. ECONOMY; LOCAL POLITICS

Broshi, Magen. "Estimating the Population of Ancient Jerusalem," *BAR* 4.2 (1978): 10–15. **Broshi**, and Israel Finkelstein. "The Population of Palestine in Iron Age II," *BASOR* 287 (1992): 47–60. **Carter**, Charles E. *The Emergence of Yehud in the Persian Period* (JSOTSup 294; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999). **Finkelstein**, Israel. *The Archaeology of the Israelite Settlement* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1988). **Dandamaev**, Muhammad A. *Slavery in Babylonia from Nabopolassar to Alexander the Great (626–331B.C.)* (trans. Victoria A. Powell; De Kalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1984). **Grabbe**, Lester L. *Yehud: A History of the Persian Province of Judah* (LSTS 47; New York: T&T Clark, 2004). **Hopkins**, David. C. *The Highlands of Canaan: Agricultural Life in the Early Iron Age* (SWBA 3; Sheffield: Almond, 1985). **Kessler**, Rainer. *The Social History of Ancient Israel: An Introduction* (trans. Linda M. Maloney; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008). **Kippenberg**, Hans G. *Religion und Klassenbildung im antiken Judäa* (SUNT 14; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1978). **Klengel**, Horst. *Handel und Händler im Alten Orient* (Vienna: Böhlhaus, 1979). **Kreissig**, Heinz. *Die sozialökonomische Situation in Juda zur Achämenidenzeit* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1973). **Lipschits**, Oded, and Joseph Blenkinsopp, eds. *Judah and the Judeans in the Neo-Babylonian Period* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2003). **Schäfer-Lichtenberg**, Christa. *Stadt und Eidgenossenschaft im Alten Testament* (BZAW 156; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1983). **Zaccagnini**, Carlo, ed. *Production and Consumption in the Ancient Near East* (Budapest: Chaire d'Égyptologie de l'Univ. Eötvös Lorand, 1989).

How can one conceive of the economic situation of the Judeans during the Persian period? What possibilities did peasants and citizens have to share in the exchange of goods? What resultant burdens were there for families? Are we able to estimate the people's standard of living and to compare it with

ours? We have emphasized several times already that the bulk of the population in Judah lived on an economy of agriculture and livestock, in other words, an economy of subsistence. Only parts of the land can be cultivated based on rainfall. Where the annual average of rain is below 300 mm, the water supply calls for human ingenuity (building terraces, reservoirs, irrigation systems), if crops are to be harvested at all. In part, at least in the spring, after sufficient winter rains, herding small animals makes use of regions in which agriculture is no longer possible. Peasants and shepherds strove for self-sufficiency as much as possible. Most of the necessities of life could be satisfied on one's own, such as food, clothing, housing, technology, education, and hygiene. A few items remained that would be desired, such as objects of metal, perhaps seed, breeding animals, luxury items, and ceremonial objects. These could be obtained only by bartering or purchase; for this purpose, people needed their own surplus production of agricultural goods that could be offered in exchange. Since the Judean farmers were also subject to taxation, of course, and had to pay temple taxes as well, their production had to exceed their personal use. From the rural perspective, therefore, the public economy was only of limited necessity, although still indispensably necessary.

Things were already different in the urban milieu. Manual laborers, traders, and officials who no longer engaged in farming were able to satisfy their need of essentials only by turning to the market. The first two groups at least first had to obtain raw materials and technical skills and then move the manufactured or purchased products to the areas of need and sell them at a reasonable price. Officials had their only "salary," which in Persia (see §II.2.4 above) was paid in kind. Thus, residents in towns were completely dependent on economic exchange. No wonder that traders (or producers) came to Jerusalem in droves to sell their goods, according to Neh 13:15–16, for instance. An indicator of the increasing trade is also the fact that the minting of coins was invented in the Persian period (by Greeks in Asia Minor?), which made exchange considerably easier.

The population of the province of Judah is estimated to have included between 80 and 90 percent rural families; about 10 percent of the people lived in the capital Jerusalem, most of whom probably no longer had an agricultural basis of livelihood. In the villages, the production was mainly grain, wine, and oil (see, e.g., Deut 12:17; 14:23; 18:4; Neh 13:12). These essential foods were used for trading. To be added were all kinds of marketable articles of daily and longer-term needs. Various skilled trades were known: people who worked with metal, wood, stone, textiles, and earthenware. Typical families, of course, sought to produce as many consumer goods as possible by themselves. On the other hand, the royal courts during the preexilic period and the administrative authorities and the temple officials after the demise of

the monarchy attracted the best skilled workers, for they had the most contracts to award. The construction accounts in the books of Kings make no secret of the fact that technical know-how was in short supply in Israel. They commissioned Hiram of Tyre to fell and deliver the necessary timber of Lebanon (1 Kgs 5:15–26; Solomon paid with grain and oil, v. 25) and imported construction specialists (7:13–14) for the building of the temple. In a similar context, craftsmen in art and architects also appear already at the construction of the tent of meeting at Mount Sinai. The respective texts, however, belong to the postexilic period; the top leader of the construction for the tent, chosen by Yahweh, was called Bezalel and had the particularly encompassing God-given ability to handle all of the materials skillfully, namely, “gold, silver, bronze, and stones” (Exod 31:2–5); Oholiab was his assistant (31:6). Both men, with their dozens of areas of trade, were responsible for the entire installation of the tent (i.e., temple), along with the inventory. The idealized directors of the work betray by their programmatic pseudonyms (Bezalel = “in the shadow of El”; Oholiab = “father is my tent”) that in the Persian period there was an indigenous Judean tradition of skilled workers and artists. The Jerusalem temple surely was a substantial employer and played a role in the provincial economy, regardless of whether it owned more or less real estate and possibly had income from properties. In this context, the question of the distribution of property in Yehud is of general importance; nominally all of the land, even in the conquered regions, belonged to the Persian emperor (see Neh 9:36–37: “Here we are, slaves to this day—slaves in the land that you gave to our ancestors to enjoy its fruit and its good gifts. Its rich yield goes to the kings...”).¹⁵⁹ The custom, however, was that peasant families lived on the family property¹⁶⁰ and paid taxes to the king until they possibly became financially insolvent. We do not know how frequently this happened. Under favorable climatic conditions and in times of peace, the farmers presumably fared well. The integrated administration of the Persian Empire and the loss of national boundaries in part brought advantages to trade and industry in the provinces. At excavations in Palestine, one thus encounters contradictory findings that show decline and up-turn “side-by-side.”¹⁶¹

159. To what extent the Persian *ḥaṭru* economy (the feudal distribution of land by the emperor, with the condition of providing recruits), which is also documented in Mesopotamia, had moved westward, cannot be determined. See note 103 above.

160. In Lev 25, the ideal is the stability of the distribution of property under the premise that “all the land belongs to Yahweh!” Only properties in town can be sold permanently (25:29–30).

161. Weippert, *Palästina in vorhellenistischer Zeit*, 707: The “modest articles for everyday use” attest to “the distance of the province from the centers of the realm,” while

Overall, Judah was not a particularly ideal area, whether agriculturally or in craftsmanship and commercial enterprises. According to the meager sources, the inhabitants eked out a mediocre existence. In times of crisis (war, drought, locust plague, etc.; see Gen 41:53–57; Joel 1–2; Jer 14:1–6), the hardship became life-threatening. Famine-related migrations always were vivid experiences of ancient people in the so-called Fertile Crescent. In the Hebrew Scriptures we encounter them quite frequently (Gen 40–42; Ruth 1; 1 Sam 22:3–4; 2 Kgs 8:1–3).

In the Persian epoch, the economic situation in Palestine also seems to have been at times precarious. In any case, the book of Nehemiah, with its major emphasis on social obligations, raises this impression; however, Neh 5 mentions not only the natural causes of the impoverishment of major segments of the population but also the crisis precipitated or intensified by debt servicing and tax burdens:

Now there was a great outcry of the people and of their wives against their Jewish kin. For there were those who said, “With our sons and daughters, we are many; we must get grain, so that we may eat and stay alive.” There were also those who said, “We are having to pledge our fields, our vineyards, and our houses in order to get grain during the famine.” And there were those who said, “We are having to borrow money on our fields and vineyards to pay the king’s tax.” Now our flesh is the same as that of our kindred; our children are the same as their children; and yet we are forcing our sons and daughters to be slaves, and some of our daughters have been ravished; we are powerless, and our fields and vineyards now belong to others.” (Neh 5:1–5; cf. 9:36–37)

We cannot read this text either as the formal record of a single famine during the period of Nehemiah’s office or generalize it to the extent that it is a valid depiction of the social situation of the Judeans during two centuries of Persian rule. Presumably the truth is found in the middle. The economy of the province of Judah was susceptible to natural disasters and political upheavals. It was not able to produce big surpluses and pursue an extensive economy of provisions, and the pressure of the Persian system of taxation, plus the intra-Judean temple tax, may well have driven people to despair at times. This may also have resulted in protest gatherings against the “Jewish brothers” who exploited the situation and made a lot of money out of the peasants who were drowning in debts.

the luxury articles found “allow the orientation of the provincial upper strata by the standards of capital cities to be recognized.” Kessler, *Social History of Ancient Israel*, addresses the change in the social structures in the province of Yehud in detail.

EXCURSUS: DEBT AND DEBT RELIEF IN THE ANCIENT EAST

The social structures of the Near Eastern societies were substantially based on the much older system of family and kinship, in spite of centuries of urbanization. The integration of the individual in his or her kinship group was the actual warranty for a humane life, especially providing care in one's old age, but we may assume a substantially lower life expectancy than in today's Western industrial countries. The solidarity of the family supported and enveloped the individual from the cradle to the grave; if the family was deprived of the basics of life, there remained only begging, prostitution, or banditry as an escape. In all areas of the ancient Near East, this is the fundamental prerequisite for human life. In times of special need, the contrasts between rich and poor deepened, resulting in proper "class societies."¹⁶² The loss of property, increasingly precipitated by economic bankruptcy, was a foundational problem (proletarianization: migration of the impoverished to the cities). Since the second millennium, there was a credit economy in Babylon (at the outset with natural produce, later with weighed precious metals, and then, in Palestine toward the end of the Persian rule, with minted money), which for many people involved turned a pitfall during bad times.

Of course, in the course of the formation of secondary societies there also arose ideas and structures that were intended to fend off the impoverishment of the masses. Even governmental bodies developed and practiced thoughts of neighborly help and social welfare, which latched on to the person of the king, for instance. Concepts of "justice" and "help for the weak" had been in vogue since time immemorial. A famous example is the prologue of King Hammurabi to his collection of "laws" emphasizing the care of the poor, but the consciousness of having to intervene in a resolute way when parts of the population fared badly and to fight tendencies of impoverishment preventively reaches deep into Sumerian culture and religion. However, the governments limited themselves to stemming the worst excesses of capitalist moneymaking. Thus the interest rate was restricted by the government, and the instrument of "debt-slavery," authorizing the creditor to have members of the debtor's family work off the amounts that had not been paid back (see Exod 21:1–11), was restricted to the extent that maximum times for compulsory labor were established independent of the amount of the debt. In the Code of Hammurabi, it was three years; in the case of ancient Israel, a debt

162. Kippenberg, *Religion und Klassenbildung*; Dandamaev, *Slavery in Babylonia*; R. Kessler, "Zur israelitischen Löserinstitution," in *Schuld und Schulden* (ed. Marlene Crüsemann and Willy Schottroff; Munich: Kaiser, 1992); Rainer Kessler, "Frühkapitalismus, Rentenkapitalismus, Tributarismus, antike Klassengesellschaft," *EvT* 54 (1994): 413–27.

slave could originally lose freedom for six years. The detailed regulations of Lev 25, with contemporary modification, for retiring the debt, returning the property, and restoring the personal freedom are an extremely important example of the regulating intervention of the superordinate society. Nevertheless, we must also recognize from this example that the formative Judean community no longer functioned on the governmental level but on the level of the confessional community, understood as a “people of brothers” (and sisters?) and established between family, clan, and local community, on the one hand, and the imperial structures, on the other. The Yahweh community of the Persian era, in the new structuring of its ethical norms, adopted numerous elements from the thinking of family and clan. However, the monarchical concern for righteousness and world order was the force behind the contemporary regulations that we find in Lev 25:

If anyone of your kin falls into difficulty and sells a piece of property, then the next of kin shall come and redeem what the relative has sold. (Lev 25:25)

If any of your kin fall into difficulty and become dependent on you, you shall support them; they shall live with you as though resident aliens. You shall not lend them your money at interest taken in advance, or provide them food at a profit. (Lev 25:36–37)

The protection of the economically weak was a main concern of the nascent community of Yahweh. The ideal of righteousness and protection existing in the ancient Near East, which in the governmental realm arose rather from the hierarchical thought of world order, became an instrument in Israel for defining conceptually the ancient solidarity of family and brotherhood and to translate it into action.

The province of Judah does not seem to have played a particularly large economic role in the Persian Empire. First, the subsistence economy of the inhabitants was essential. Second, from the perspective of the people at that time, taxes and dues had to be paid. In addition, according to the evidence of archaeological discoveries,¹⁶³ there was moderate exchange by trade with other regions and provinces. Mineral resources were minimally available (copper? salt at the Dead Sea?). Special products, such as fragrances (En Gedi), were precious commodities. Agriculture provided olives, wine, and grain, but apparently the surplus over against the population’s personal use was marginal.

163. See Hopkins, *The Highlands of Canaan*, 241–50; Dandamaev and Lukonin, *Culture and Social Institutions*, 130–52; Carter, *Emergence of Yehud*, 247–48, 288–94; and Grabbe, *Yehud*, 189–208.

II.3.5. TECHNOLOGY AND CULTURE

To the extent that the necessary excavations and investigations have already been conducted, archaeology today is able to report very vividly and with surprising detail on the status of civilization that certain nations had attained, even if there are, for the most part, no literary witnesses. Household utensils made of clay, metal, or other durable materials in part have survived the times. Reminders of buildings give testimony of the way and quality of life. Objects of various kinds placed in graves shed light on domestic activities, as well as on war practices and religious activities. Occasionally food remains and large quantities of animal bones in rubbish pits have come to light, providing us with information about eating habits. Depictions of human figures, deities, plants, and living things reveal attitudes to the environment, world-views, and the people's goals in life.

All in all, the material legacies of the period depict a post-Iron Age culture that, owing to its integration into the Persian Empire and the openness of the provincial boundaries, "in contrast to the Iron IIC-age ... again adopted an 'international' character."¹⁶⁴ The economic power of the (non-Judean) coastal region with its hinterland, the Shephelah, was clearly larger than that of the population in the mountainous regions; this can already be seen from the type of construction and quality of artifacts. Judah was constituted above all by the arid mountain ridge and the western, desert-like wadis toward the Jordan Valley and the Dead Sea. The finds indicate, however, that it was possible to work with stone, metal, clay, wool, and flax almost anywhere. Local workshops can be identified. Domestic production, as already noted, was still in vogue in many areas. Factories were able to thrive only where more particular skills and costly production facilities were necessary. Smelting of copper or iron was completely unprofitable for normal farms. Armchair legs, made of bronze in form of lion's paws, bowls, pitchers, and jewelry in gold and silver have often been found. Figures of stone, figurines of clay or metal, and ceramics of all kinds come from numerous Palestinian excavations and native workshops.

Among the fashionable peculiarities of the time, small incense altars have emerged in large quantities; their number exceeds what would be used in sacred shrines and perhaps points in the direction of cultic practices in homes. Trade with East African producers of incense, which was made easier in the Persian Empire and led to a reduced price of the material, promoted its increased use.¹⁶⁵ The use of contemporary seals in Judah indicates a certain

164. Weippert, *Palästina in vorhellenistischer Zeit*, 706.

165. Weippert, *Palästina in vorhellenistischer Zeit*, 715–17; Othmar Keel and Christoph Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses and Images*, §220.

agreement with the surrounding provinces.¹⁶⁶ Conversely, researchers are of the opinion that they are able to identify a “strong development toward noniconic practices” because relatively many seals are equipped only with inscriptions, not with images of deities.¹⁶⁷

For archaeologists and historians, the type of burial of the dead and of burial objects is always instructive. Ethnic, religious, and social peculiarities, of course, can often be deduced from graves. For the province of Yehud, there is little peculiarity. In hilly Judah the dead were preferably buried in rock caves, at least in the case of families that could afford a natural or carved-out grave of this kind. Poorer people used a simple burial.¹⁶⁸ As is evident from its broad use, the Persians preferred simple “box-graves,” in other words, graves in soil with an interior lining made of stone or tiles, covered with a stone slab.¹⁶⁹

For the province of Judah, the archaeological discoveries overall bring to light the portrait of a population living in tranquility and, in terms of civilization, sharing in the blessings of the time with moderation. No monumental buildings have come to light (in Jerusalem, however, excavations are possible only with severe restrictions; the Temple Mount is entirely taboo). In any case, Nehemiah’s walls cannot be uncovered either. Treasures of gold are not to be expected in the province; the administrative unit of Judah had no major economic potential. Inscriptions from Judah are not at all numerous and have surfaced only with minimal textual content (jug handles, inscribed seals, ostraca, and coins). Most witnesses of the time originated from non-Judean fringe areas, such as coastal cities or the northern Jordan valley.¹⁷⁰ In any case, the finds reveal how much Judah was embedded in the technical culture, civilization, economy, and religion of the greater region of Syria-Palestine. The competency of local craftsmen (§II.3.4) mentioned in the previous section is indeed an indicator that the tiny province of Judah had not lost the connection to its neighboring regions.

166. See Keel and Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses and Images*, 373–91. The authors identify the period from 587–450 B.C.E. as “Iron Age III.”

167. Ibid., §225; Nahman Avigad, *Bullae and Seals from a Post-exilic Judean Archive* (Qedem 4; Jerusalem: Institute of Archaeology, Hebrew University, 1976).

168. See Weippert, *Palästina in vorhellenistischer Zeit*, 703–4, 706.

169. Weippert, *Palästina in vorhellenistischer Zeit*, 705–6; David Ilan, “Burial Sites,” *OEANE* 1:384–86; Byron R. McCane, “Burial Techniques,” *OEANE* 1:386–87; Elisabeth Bloch-Smith, “Cave Tombs,” *OEANE* 1:443–44; idem, *Judahite Burial Practices and Beliefs about the Dead* (JSOTSup 123; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), esp. “Tomb Types,” 25–62.

170. See the lists in Weippert, *Palästina in vorhellenistischer Zeit*, 694–97; Carter, *Emergence of Yehud*, 259–83; and Grabbe, *Yehud*, 54–69.

II.3.6. FOLK RELIGION AND TEMPLE

Archaeological finds and biblical texts also enlighten us regarding the people's belief. The official portrait of the period presents the Yahweh religion as the only legitimate religious confession. Both Ezra and Nehemiah have an ongoing struggle against the tendencies of apostasy and secularization. In addition, there are factions and trends within the Judean community. However, in the biblical texts the focal point is the unequivocally clear claim of Yahweh being the only deity to be worshiped. By means of the Torah, Yahweh has created an instrument of communication, and Jerusalem is his residence and place of worship. Every member of the community has to commit to the unconditional worship of Yahweh.

As already in the preexilic era, so the discernible reality here belies the orthodox claims of the Hebrew Bible. Even in the newly constituted community of faith, there was no homogeneous religion of Yahweh (this will become even clearer in the documents of Elephantine; see §II.4.2 below). Indeed, it cannot be expected to be otherwise, given the complexity of the religious trends, the traditions handed down, as well as the social and regional groupings. Alongside the official temple cult and its theology of holiness, one recognizes amateurish, less temple-oriented factions in the Judean community of faith. But within and underneath the "official," competing confessions, there existed a popular belief that fed on all kinds of archaic, contemporary, and cultural sources. The biblical writings themselves attest to this:

I held out my hands all day long to a rebellious people, who walk in a way that is not good, following their own devices; a people who provoke me to my face continually, sacrificing in gardens and offering incense on bricks; who sit inside tombs, and spend the night in secret places, who eat swine's flesh, with broth of abominable things in their vessels; who say, "Keep to yourself, do not come near me, for I am too holy for you." These are a smoke in my nostrils, a fire that burns all day long. (Isa 65:2–5)

It is difficult to identify the cultic practice being denounced, for the language condemns the alleged rivals from an attitude of absolute certainty. This kind of reproach is common in the situation of rival defenders of faith, where the opponents are charged with the most awful suspicions imaginable. Part of this is the consumption of pork and other unclean food. Of interest is the description of the locations in which the despised rivals practice their cults: on rooftops (astral components?), gardens (fertility cults?), tombs (ancestor worship? consulting the dead?), and so on. Astral religions were booming especially in the Persian period, as the designation "God of heaven" for Yahweh (and Ahura Mazda) demonstrates. The hymnal inser-

tions in the book of Amos, if they originated in our period, show a certain “astralization”¹⁷¹ of the general conceptions of faith (see Amos 4:13; 5:8–9; 9:5–6).

Characteristics of a popular opposition against the strict proclamation of the Torah by the leading Judean elements can be gained in outline form from other biblical writings. The Deuteronomic condemnation of cults on “high places” (*bāmôt*) may primarily refer back to the royal period, but perhaps some particular local cults may also have existed in the Second Temple period. For instance, the exclusion of mantics and exorcists by the authoritative word of Moses in Deut 18:9–13 is a fairly sure sign that such popular mediators of divine powers still existed in Judah at the time of the Deuteronomist. In works like Chronicles, the primary concern is the hegemony of orthodox orientations (Levites, priests), hence competing factions, not popular religion. Prophetic deviants are denounced in such texts as Zech 13 and Ezek 13. In short, underground there clearly were layers of belief—as in all well-known “official” religions—that had to be classified as heterodox by every orthodox position and were detested by all leading powers. The time of the Reformation in Germany or of any other period in the history of Christianity in any country can furnish us with illustrative material for this situation. Wherever religious communities appeal to a personal confession to a deity and make this constitutive, but do not admit any more simple family or ethnic ties as sufficient ground of membership, the danger of confessional formation of groups is extremely great.

Curiously, the major festivals and pilgrimages, although actually organized by the leadership of the community, who set the tone, are also part of popular religion, because they always contain much popular thought and rituals in which the people liked to participate. The pilgrimages to the major festivals began with the rise of Jerusalem and the preferential status of the Second Temple (exclusive place of sacrifice).¹⁷² Especially the Passover and the Feast of Tabernacles became the major joint events, partly official and partly domestic, to which throngs of pilgrims flocked to Jerusalem. The foreshadowing of the development of these festivals can be clearly recognized in the work of Chronicles, where the seasonal gatherings of Israel are projected already into the period of the kings:

171. Keel and others use this term frequently; see Keel and Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses and Images*, §§174–88 and 239; idem, “Jahwe und die Sonnengottheit von Jerusalem,” in *Ein Gott allein?* (ed. Walter Dietrich and Martin A. Klopfenstein; OBO 139; Fribourg: Universitätsverlag; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1994), 269–306.

172. See Shemuel Safrai, *Die Wallfahrt im Zeitalter des Zweiten Tempels* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1981).

Hezekiah sent word to all Israel and Judah, and wrote letters also to Ephraim and Manasseh, that they should come to the house of the LORD at Jerusalem, to keep the Passover to the LORD the God of Israel.... So they decreed to make a proclamation throughout all Israel, from Beersheba to Dan, that the people should come and keep the Passover to the LORD the God of Israel, at Jerusalem. (2 Chr 30:1, 5; cf. 35:1–19)

An entire group of psalms, the “songs of ascent,” Pss 120–134, seems to have been used by pilgrims en route to Jerusalem. The texts are likely of differing origin, but the headings added at the time of the compilation of this group of psalms uniformly mention the pilgrimage as the common, new life setting. Within some songs rings the fascination of the city of God and the eager anticipation of the pilgrims to reach the destination (see Pss 121; 122 and the songs of Zion of Pss 46; 48; 74). Accounts about the number of pilgrims attending the festivals in Jerusalem are not available until the work of the Chroniclers. But they represent stereotypical, almost formulaic portrayals (see above). For this reason we are unable to extract from them any details about the course, motivations, ritual practice, and so on. This much is certain, however: in the postexilic period Jerusalem had gained the rank of a holy city of pilgrimage for the Judaic population and made greater and greater use of it (see Ps 87): “If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand wither! Let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth, if I do not remember you, if I do not set Jerusalem above my highest joy” (137:5–6).

Many other references to pilgrimages in the Psalms may originally have referred not to Jerusalem but to other sanctuaries, such as Shiloh (1 Sam 1–2). In the postexilic period, however, they surely had been reinterpreted to refer to the now unique city (see Pss 15; 24; 55:15). From all the songs that sing about Jerusalem and Zion, one gains the impression that the bond with the habitation of Yahweh had sunk deeply into the consciousness of the community. The official requirement of all male members “to appear before Yahweh” three times per year (Exod 23:17; 34:23–24; Deut 16:16–17) apparently made use of the popular desire to celebrate festivals and the age-old need to go to sacred places regularly. This requirement to journey to Jerusalem annually for the three harvest festivals seems exaggerated for peasants, unless they lived in proximity to the city. An annual cycle, as 1 Sam 1:3; 20:6, suggests, may have been closer to reality. Reasons for the threefold obligation, as in Exod 34:24, reveal the origin of the requirement, originating from the theological arsenal, and were to establish a theologically coherent order. In any case, pilgrimage to a sacred place is anchored deeply in Israel’s popular tradition and was transferred purposefully and exclusively to Jerusalem in the postexilic period.

Alongside the adoption of popular views and practices into the “valid” religion, there was the separation from anything uncontrollable that existed

next to the official ritual. “Intellectual” leaders of the community have always tended to suspect popular religion as “superstition” and apostasy from Yahweh, that is, from God, as for instance in Deut 18:9–13, Isa 65–66, and Jer 44. Unless we are completely wrong, however, the debate between different schools of thought concerning the worship of Yahweh in the early Jewish community was more dangerous than that of a spontaneous popular belief.

II.4. THE DIASPORA IN BABYLON AND EGYPT

See also the bibliography on §II.3. **Becking**, Bob. “Die Gottheiten der Juden in Elephantine,” in *Der eine Gott und die Götter* (ed. Manfred Oeming and K. Schmid; ATANT 82; Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 2003), 203–26. **Coogan**, Michael D. *West Semitic Personal Names in the Murašû Documents* (HSM 7; Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press for Harvard Semitic Museum, 1976). **Cowley**, Arthur E. *Aramaic Papyri of the Fifth Century B.C.* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1923). **Eph'al**, Israel. “On the Political and Social Organization of the Jews in Babylonian Exile,” *ZDMG* 5 (1983): 106–12. **Kraeling**, Emil G. *The Brooklyn Museum Aramaic Papyri* (New Haven: Yale University Press for the Brooklyn Museum, 1953). **Garbini**, Giovanni. *Il ritorno dall'esilio babilonese* (Studia biblia 129; Brescia: Paideia, 2001). **Grelot**, Pierre. *Documents araméens d'Égypte* (LAPO 5; Paris: Cerf, 1972). **Joannès**, Francis, and André Lemaire, “Trois tablettes cunéiformes à onomastique ouest-sémitique,” *Transeu* 17 (1999): 17–34. **Knauf**, Ernst Axel. “Elephantine und das vorbiblische Judentum,” in *Religion und Religionskontakte im Zeitalter der Achämeniden* (ed. Reinhard G. Kratz; Gütersloh: Kaiser, 2002), 179–88. **Porten**, Bezalel. *Archives from Elephantine: The Life of an Ancient Military Colony* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1968). **Porten**. *Jews of Elephantine and Arameans of Syene: Aramaic Texts with Translation* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, Dept. of the History of the Jewish People, 1974). **Porten**. *The Elephantine Papyri in English* (DMOA 22; Leiden: Brill, 1996). **Porten**, and Ada Yardeni. *Textbook of Aramaic Documents from Ancient Egypt* (4 vols.; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1986–1999). **Sachau**, Eduard. *Aramäische Papyri und Ostraka aus einer jüdischen Militär-Kolonie zu Elephantine* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1911). **Silverman**, Michael H. *Religious Values in the Jewish Proper Names at Elephantine* (AOAT 217; Kevelaer: Butzon & Bercker; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1985). **Smith**, Daniel L. *The Religion of the Landless: The Social Context of the Babylonian Exile* (Bloomington, Ind.: Meyer-Stone, 1989). **Stolper**, Matthew W. *Entrepreneurs and Empire: The Murašû Archive, the Murašû Firm and the Persian Rule in Babylonia* (UNHAI 54; Leiden: Nederlands Historisch-Archaeologisch Instituut te Istanbul, 1985). **Zadok**, Ran. *On the West Semites in Babylonia during the Chaldaean and Achaemenian Periods* (Jerusalem: Wanaarta, 1978). **Zadok**. *The Jews in Babylonia in the Chaldaean and Achaemenian Periods according to the Babylonian Sources* (Haifa: University of Haifa, 1979).

II.4.1. EXILES IN BABYLON

After 597 B.C.E., the victorious Babylonian army repeatedly had deported small percentages of the Judean population to Babylon (see 2 Kgs 24:14–16; 25:11; Jer 52:28–30) and forced them to settle there as closed communities.¹⁷³ Unfortunately, for several centuries there are no verifiable historical sources about their geographical location and the organization of the newly established communities, although the Babylonian colony played a major role in later Jewish history. It culminated in the collection of the Babylonian Talmud, revolving around the theological schools of Pumbedita, Nehardea, and Sura between 500 and 800 C.E. Yet the early settlements and social roles of the deportees who were liberated by Cyrus are not identifiable historically. However, in the archival materials of the Babylonian firm Murašû it is possible to identify traces of Jewish contemporaries. Conspicuous among the numerous names of individuals in these business documents are, first of all, those of a Western Semitic mould, approximately 14 percent of the total number of names.¹⁷⁴ Following earlier studies, Michael D. Coogan ascertains more accurate numbers. According to his investigation, 157 Western Semitic names are available, among them 25 with the theophoric element of *yahu*.¹⁷⁵ This indicates the presence of a Western Semitic social stratum that apparently was able to participate fully in the economic life of the Babylonian/Persian province in the second half of the sixth century and during the fifth century B.C.E. This statistic also demonstrates that this stratum involved individuals of Jewish origin as well. These names also suggest the existence of communities of Yahweh in Babylonia that, based on the deportations, must have come about in the early sixth century B.C.E. (see Jer 29, etc.). From the business archives, there are at least two families that can be deduced, those of *yadi'yaw* and *ṭobyaw*, each of which shows four members with names containing the name of Yahweh.¹⁷⁶ Conversely, however, it is not necessarily possible to

173. See Rainer Albertz, *Israel in Exile: The History and Literature of the Sixth Century B.C.E.* (trans. David Green; SBL SBL 3; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 74–90.

174. According to Briant, “The Murašû archives also demonstrate that personal names are not an absolute guide to ethnic origin.... 71% (463) of the seals are held by men with Babylonian names...; 14% [= 96] are men of West Semitic origin” (*From Cyrus to Alexander*, 724).

175. Coogan, *West Semitic Personal Names*, 49ff., 52–53: the Yahwistic element of the name occurs four times as a prefix (e.g., ^{ld}*ya-a-ḥu-ú-na-tan* = Jonathan) and twenty-one times affectionately (in the form of *-yaw* = *yaḥu* or ^d*ya-a-ma*, *-ya-ma*, *-a-ma*, as in *ṭobyaw*, for instance).

176. Coogan, *West Semitic Personal Names*, 119–20.

conclude from the remaining names of the firm's clientele, whether Western Semitic or Babylonian, that they were not part of the Jewish community. After all, Zerubbabel and Sheshbazar also were leading Jews.

Whether one likes it or not, what remains for us are mainly the biblical sources that are able to provide more or less clear answers to our questions (see Albertz, *Israel in Exile*, 98–111). They are to be interpreted with the normal caution. From Ezra-Nehemiah and Ezekiel, for instance, we learn that Babylonian exiles lived alongside one another in five settlements—Tel-abib by the river Chebar (Ezek 3:15); Tel-harsha; Tel-melah; Cherub Addan; and Immer (Ezra 2:59; Neh 7:61)—as well as Casiphia (Ezra 8:17). The locations cannot be determined with certainty, or they are untraceable. The passing on of such names probably contributed to the formation of legends. Archaeologically verified locations have a greater claim of being authentic, as in the case of the “city of Judah” documented in cuneiform script.¹⁷⁷ However, its location is also unknown. As mentioned previously, the Judeans enjoyed a certain independence in their foreign environment; their elders administered the local affairs of the community. Regardless of the gloomy atmosphere and the thought of vengeance in Ps 137, the unavoidable trauma of the loss of home and prestige, and the occasional horror on account of an unclean, abominable land (see Ezra 4:13; Zech 5:5–11), those exiled from their home seem to have led a tolerable life. Even one of their first leaders bears a Babylonian name: Zerubbabel. In any case, the (fictitious) prophet Jeremiah encourages the exiles in a letter to have a constructive attitude toward the rulers:

Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare. (Jer 29:4–7)

The advice surely belongs to a later period, when the horrors of the deportation had already been forgotten to some extent. Hence the letter declares a remarkably extensive integration, contradicting all dogmas of separation, in the foreign society, and the centuries of an ongoing presence of Jewish communities in Mesopotamia attests to the success of this strategy. Consequently, the many Old Testament texts urging a return to the native land

177. Joannès and Lemaire, “Trois tablettes cunéiformes,” 17ff.

and the burning hope for the restoration of the Judean monarchy represent only one side of the coin. After three generations of residence in Babylon, and given the declarations of freedom of movement by the Persian government, a sizeable number of the exiles did not consider severing the roots they had put down there. At the end of the sixth century, they presumably had come to terms culturally, economically, and perhaps in part also religiously with the multicultural society in Mesopotamia and found a comfortable livelihood. That being said, colonies of emigrants that exceed a certain critical mass of persons tend to practice their own traditions more emphatically than usual in the country of origin. They are more aware of their origin, language, culture, and religion than many who never left their home country. Even if they no longer bother to think seriously about returning home, they are loath to relinquish their national and cultural identity. Such mental dispositions, pressing for restoration, can be demonstrated in many forms among emigrants throughout time.

Under these circumstances, it is not surprising that the significance of the Babylonian Diaspora for the entire confessional community of Yahweh in the fifth and fourth century B.C.E. exceeded the proportional number of deportees by far. Many Old Testament texts attest to this fact. In the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, the entire dynamic of the reconstruction begins with the returnees. Whereas in the accounts of 2 Kgs 25:11 and Jer 52:28–30 it still appears as if the elite, guilty of war and defeat, had been deported as punishment, this image changes quickly in the later traditions. Already Jer 24 compares those who remained at home with bad figs and the deportees with very good ones (24:4–10). The implication is that the evaluation of the deportation was reversed, probably under the strong influence of the Babylonian colony. Hence tensions between those who remained in their home country and those who returned from exile were natural. In particular, the issue involved the ancient claims of ownership of the land. Was the property to be returned to the families who turned up in Judah again after three generations? Many passages in the Hebrew canon clearly defend the case of the returnees; they are said to be the people who actually had been loyal to Yahweh, whereas those who had remained at home were guilty of all kinds of deviations from the faith-related norms and practices (see, e.g., Ezek 11:15–21; 33:23–29; Jer 41:1–10; Isa 40:27–31; 59:1–15; Ezra 4:1–5; 6:21). The exiles, on the other hand, had preserved the pure faith and now were preferred by Yahweh.

This emerging self-perception certainly was not altogether unfounded. Since the cultivation of tradition among minorities in a foreign environment is generally very intensive, it may also be assumed, on the basis of the extant witnesses, that the Babylonian *golah* had a major share in the collection of

traditions. That the entire Pentateuch had been collated by the exilic communities is not very credible. Apart from a preference for exilic situations (e.g., in the patriarchal narratives and in Exodus), there is little evidence for narrative or theological coloring specifically from the Persian period. Or might we lack the sensibility for an historical classification such as this? What does it look like with reference to the origin of the sacrificial requirements and the purity code in Leviticus and in the case of the prophet Ezekiel? Is it conceivable that unemployed priests in exilic communities recorded the regulations received, in preparation for the restoration of sacred places and ceremonies? However the respective questions are to be answered, it is certain that the returnees exerted their influence and expressed their conceptions of community and religious practices vigorously since the early Persian period.

From the obvious significance of the returnees, therefore, it is possible to infer the spiritual power of the Babylonian community, as well as from the evident statements of the tradition in view of the transmission and re-formation to the continuing Yahweh communities in Babylon. On the civilian level, the semiautonomous Judean villages escaped into the Persian period and gained a presumably greater scope with extended economic options. As far as the religious and cultic context is concerned, a strengthening of personal responsibility is definitely to be assumed, given the Persians' well-known, more liberal politics of religion. Since Babylon was an ancient cultural center and the Persian traditions also came to full blossom there, the Judean minority was confronted with the highest intellectual and spiritual challenges of the time. To this the Priestly parts of the Pentateuch or Ezekiel provide an eloquent witness (see, e.g., §§III.1.1.3 and III.2.2.4 below). We can assume that the economic and political situation of the communities in Mesopotamia offered sufficient scope for the intellectual debate and reflection on their identity. Thus the Judean leaders of the community of that time—the elders, priests, prophets, teachers, and scribes—just like at home, devoted themselves to the cultivation of the Yahweh traditions and the formation of civil and religious ways of life. Organizing judicial, cultic, and scholastic gatherings and committees is an obvious necessity in such situations. Unfortunately, however, we are unaware of any concrete details. Just as Neh 8 attests to an early Torah-oriented form of worship for Jerusalem, there also must have existed analogous cultic events in the Babylonian settlements. Just as Ruth 4 suggests the existence of a local authority for the civil jurisdiction of Jerusalem, judicial bodies are also to be assumed for the communities of the Diaspora. The wisdom literature of the canon implies in general that Yahweh communities everywhere produced popular and scholastic textbooks. In the same way, the Old Testament liturgical literature should not be seen as an indicator for a central temple institution but rather as indication of the differing places

of origin for religious observance in the vast Persian Empire. Psalm 137 reveals a Mesopotamian background, Ps 120 perhaps that of Asia Minor and Arabia, Ps 104 certainly an Egyptian and Ps 42:7 a Lebanese one. More than assumptions and analogies cannot be ventured for the Jewish communities in Babylon; nevertheless, the influence of Babylonian groups and personalities (see also Ezra and Nehemiah) in the history of the Old Testament speaks plainly.

II.4.2. THE MILITARY COLONY OF ELEPHANTINE

The historical events of the sixth and fifth century B.C.E. in the Near East precipitated extensive population migrations that we are only marginally able to know or reconstruct. Like many of their contemporaries in other regions, people in the tiny province of Judah were kept on the run by the armies of the major powers, as well as by marauders of small neighboring people groups, by economic and natural catastrophes. It was not only Babylon that became a foreign, new country for the ancient Judeans; an unknown number of Israelites sought shelter and food beyond the Jordan. Ishmael, the murderer of the governor Gedaliah, fled to the Ammonites with his followers (Jer 41:15). The book of Ruth tells the story of a family migrating to the area of the Moabites because of a famine. We do not know about all of the locations to which Judean emigrants went to settle. In the nature of things, we must also reckon with migrations to the fertile land of the Nile (see Gen 40–50). Trade routes and likely all kinds of orally communicated information and exotic stories might have increased the readiness of people suffering deprivation to try their luck at the great river during special crises or out of adventurism.

II.4.2.1. Flight to Egypt?

Not only in Babylon and east of the Jordan did people from ancient Israel find a new home, but occasionally the eyes of those who wanted or had to set out for “other shores” turned to the southwest. The biblical tradition is filled with indications that over time Egypt was considered a sanctuary offering food and protection (see, e.g., Gen 41:57: “all the world came to ... Egypt;” 1 Kgs 11:40; Jer 26:21–23; 41:16–18; 42:1–17; 44:1; Matt 2:13–15). Locations in which Judean emigrants are said to have lived are also mentioned (Jer 44:1). However, only the remarkable discoveries of papyrus documents since 1893, followed by systematic archaeological excavations at the turn of the century, have brought to light a Jewish community of the Diaspora within an ancient fortified town on the Nile island of Elephantine, on the southern boundary of

Egypt's place of origin and situated at the first cataract. Thus for the first and only time until now a Yahweh faith-community of the Persian period, with its everyday and cultic life, has become known—an event in the history of religion and culture that can scarcely be overestimated.

For centuries the island in the Nile served as a frontier bulwark and transfer center for trade with Nubia. Exactly when and under what circumstances a Jewish mercenary force (often called Yeb in the texts) moved into the fortress remains unclear. In any case, already in 525 B.C.E. Cambyses discovered a community with a temple of Yahweh. For this reason the time of entry of the Judean soldiers (who thought of themselves also as Arameans on account of their language) goes back as far as the seventh century. In this case the quashing of the Assyrian wars in Israel presumably had been a reason for families from Judah to emigrate. In any case, the documents discovered uniquely shed light on the civil and cultic life of the confessional community around the god Yahu (= Yahweh) during the fifth century B.C.E.

A quick survey of the available material¹⁷⁸ may elucidate the scope of the discoveries. The excavations, apart from later Greek, Coptic, and Latin texts, yielded about one hundred papyri in hieratic, demotic, and Aramaic script (52 items of the latter) from the fifth century B.C.E., in addition to several hundred ostraca or inscriptions on jugs. For us, of course, the Aramaic documents attract the most interest, since they come from Jewish citizens. Two bundles of eleven and twelve sheets, respectively, represent purely private family archives: marriage, property, and loan contracts that offer insight into the history of two kinship groups. They are known as the Mibtahiah and the Ananiah archives, named for the most prominent protagonists. The one mentioned first is an exceptionally active woman of the upper strata, while the second one is a lower employee of the temple who married an Egyptian slave-woman who remained the owner's property until his death.¹⁷⁹ Another independent archive contains ten papyri and is named after the owner, Jedaniah. Since this Jedaniah obviously had a leadership function in the Jewish community, the letters he collected were especially those with communal importance; they deal with questions about the temple of Yahweh in Elephan-

178. Following the early publications of the papyrus texts by Eduard Sachau, A. E. Cowley, Emil G. Kraeling, and others, Porten has presented a comprehensive edition (Porten and Yardeni, *Textbook of Aramaic Documents*) and also made the originals accessible in English (Porten, *The Elephantine Papyri in English*); see also Wilhelmus C. Delsman, "Aramäische Dokumente aus Elephantine," *TUAT* 1.3:253–63; Walter Beyerlin, *Near Eastern Religious Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (trans. John Bowden; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978), 252.

179. See Porten, *Archives from Elephantine*, 200–234.

tine, determining the correct Passover date, and the like. The senders were mostly Jewish individuals in authority, including a representative, called Hananiah, of the cultic community of Jerusalem or from elsewhere, from the year 419 B.C.E., writing about the date and ritual of the Passover. The collection also contains two drafted letters by Jedaniah and the priests of Yahweh at Elephantine to Bagoas, the governor of Judah. They were written in 407 B.C.E. and requested official assistance from the Persian authorities on the matter of “restoring the destroyed temple of Yahweh.” Both the Judean and the Samaritan governor respond to the letter of request; their letters express solidarity with the Jews in Elephantine, but they advise Bagoas that only incense and grain offerings, no blood sacrifices, should be offered in a rebuilt temple of Yahweh.

The three archives mentioned make up the bulk of the extant Aramaic documents. Given their contents, the owners of the archives and their environment without a doubt are to be identified as Jewish communities of faith; the names of the main and supporting actors containing a reference to Yahweh are a further reliable piece of evidence. We are introduced to an actual community that in many ways clearly does not agree with the expectations one has of a Jewish faith community based on the Torah of Moses. Associated with this also is the fact that the extant Aramaic writings do not even mention the Torah of Moses or even his name at all and that among the papyri there is not a single, however small fragment of a canonical writing to be found. As far as literary pieces in the legacy of the military colony and of the faith community are concerned, there are merely the Words of Ahiqar, a famous wise man,¹⁸⁰ and the copy of the famous Darius inscription of Behistun. Is it possible that the absence of the bases for Jewish life, which are so essential for religion, is merely accidental? Did the Yahweh community, existing so distant from the center of Jerusalem, have special status, or did it represent the “normal case” of a Jewish Diaspora community?

II.4.2.2. Everyday Life and Social Structure

The main purpose of the fortress Yeb on Elephantine and of the town Syene, situated at the other, eastern shore, was to protect the southern Egyptian border, to secure the traffic of caravans and ships southward and northward, and to maintain contact with the rulers, that is, the governors in Nubia. In

180. See Ingo Kottsieper, “Die Geschichte und die Sprüche des weisen Achiqar,” *TUAT* 3.2:320–47; idem, *Die Sprache der Ahiqarsprüche* (BZAW 194; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1990).

fifth-century Persia, which comes to light in the Aramaic papyri, Elephantine and Syene were subject to the satrap of Memphis; the name occurring most frequently is that of Arsames (Persian: Aršāma), a long-standing regional ruler known from his own decrees. Hierarchically structured, the Persian government ordered the fortunes of individual cities and military posts via provincial governors. According to the evidence of personal names, all of the decisive points of coordination were generally occupied by Persians. This was also true for the commanders in Elephantine and Syene, including the troops, each the size of a company. The name of one of the Persian commanders of the fortress was Vidranga. He played a part in the destruction of the temple of Yahweh in Elephantine. The strictly regimented bureaucracy in the Persian Empire was also felt in the satrapy of Egypt. Imperial storerooms distributed exact rations and wages; they took care of collecting the taxes on time. Persian registrars watched over the distribution of property. Government lawyers dealt with the empire-related cases.

The military organization of the two garrisons of Elephantine and Syene can be deduced from the documents. The companies of mercenaries were ethnically mixed; they were comprised mostly of Egyptians, Syrians, and Jews, with Elephantine itself seeming to have had a larger contingent of Jews and Egyptians, while Syene had more Syrians. The concentration of Jews in Elephantine is surely correlated with the existence of the sanctuary of Yahweh there. The income of soldiers and their officers was strictly regulated. It is not possible to gather this completely from the papyri, but it can be supplemented on the basis of parallel Persian and Greek sources. Generally soldiers were paid in kind (especially grain, meat, beer) and silver (coins).¹⁸¹ The service demanded from the soldiers extended to all kinds of protective functions. We hear nothing concrete about the surely necessary military training, including technical and physical exercises.

Civilian structures develop around the inner organizational hub of military colonies of all times and regions. Mercenaries restricted by location have families who need an infrastructure of craftsmanship and trade that makes community life viable. Already in the possession of property, the civil demand asserts itself. While fortifications and facilities used militarily were subject to the imperial administration, family accommodations in the city of Elephantine were privately owned. Documents of sale and inheritance describe precisely the location of properties, mention the adjoining owners, and have every transaction witnessed by a number of civilian witnesses. In the documents, even the temple of Yahu is mentioned as a neighbor. Thus they attest

181. See Porten, *Archives from Elephantine*, 72–74.

to the fully personal right of disposal of property. The only requirement was to be registered with the authorities. The living conditions within the walled city were tight. The inner area of the city had a diameter of barely 200 meters. The houses stood close together, in which an estimated one thousand people lived in the fifth century B.C.E. The interior area of a house amounted to 4 by 12 meters.¹⁸² Unfortunately, excavation revealed only limited data of architectural and urban development interest, because the archaeologists focused their attention on possible papyrus finds and other artifacts.

In matters of personal and family law, too, the state—the military command in Elephantine—did not intervene. The two archives mentioned above, those of Mibtahiah and of Ananiah, are a treasure trove for today's social-scientific and juridical research. The Mibtahiah collection covers events from the years 471 to 410 B.C.E.¹⁸³ and extends over three generations. A marriage contract between Mibtahiah's father Mahseiah and her second husband Ešhor shows remarkably equal positions of wife and husband in the community of Yahweh of that time and establishes inheritance claims.

EXCERPT FROM THE MARRIAGE CONTRACT OF MIBTAHIAH (435 B.C.E.)

(Lines 1–8): On the 24th [of] Tishri, [that is, day] 6 of the month of Epeiph, [y]ear [16 of Artaxerx]es [the] king, said Ešhor son of Dje[ḥo], a builder of the king, to Mah[seiah, an A]ramean of Syene of the detachment of Varyazata, saying: I [c]ame to your house (and asked you) to give me your daughter Mipta(h)iah for wifehood. She is my wife and I am her husband from this day and forever. I gave you (as) *mohar* for your daughter Miptahiah: [silver], 5 shekels by the stone(weight)s of [the] king. It came into you and your heart was satisfied herein. [Your daughter] Miptahiah brought in to me in (ERASURE; your) her hand: silver money 1 karsh 2 shekels by the stone(-weight)s of the king, silver 2 q(uarters) to the 10. She brought into me in her hand: 1 new garment of wool, striped with dye doubly-well; it was (in) length 8 cubits by 5 (in width), worth (in) silver 2 karsh shekels by the stone(-weight)s of the king.... (This is followed by a detailed list of their personal items:

182. See *ibid.*, 94–96.

183. The following is drawn from an unpublished manuscript of Saul Olyan that he kindly made available to me; on the texts, see Porten, *The Elephantine Papyri in English*, 152–201.

garments, toiletries, kitchen utensils, bedroom furnishings, each with a reference to its precise value).

(Lines 17–36): Tomorrow or (the) n[ex]t day, should Ešhor die not having a child, male or female, from Mipta[h]iah his wife, it is Miptahiah (who) has right to the house of Ešhor and [hi]s goods and his property and all that he has on the face of the earth, all of it. Tomorrow or (the next) day, should Miptahiah die not having a child, male or female, from Ešhor her husband, it is Ešhor (who) shall inherit from her her goods and her property.

Tomorrow o[r] (the) next day, should Miptahiah stand up in an assembly and say: “I hated Ešhor my husband,” silver of hatred is on her head. She shall place upon the balance-scale and weigh out to Ešhor silver, 6[+1] (=7) shekels, 2 q(uarters), and all that she brought in in her hand she shall take out, from straw to string, and go away wherever she desires, without suit or without process. Tomorrow or (the) next day, should Ešhor stand up in an assembly and say: “I hated my [wif]e Miptahiah,” her mohar [will be] lost and all that she brought in in her hand she shall take out, from straw to string, on one day in one stroke, and go away wherever she desires, without suit or without process.

And [who]ever shall stand up against Miptahiah to expel her from the house of Ešhor and his goods and his property, shall give her silver, 20 karsh, and do to her the law of this document. And I shall not be able to say: “I have another wife besides Mipta(h)iah and other children besides the children whom Miptahiah shall bear to me.” If I say: “I have other chi[ldren] and wife besides Miptahiah and her children,” I shall give to Miptahiah silver, 20 karsh by the stone(-weight)s of the king. And I shall not be able to re[lease] my goods and my property from Miptahiah. And should I remove them from her (ERASURE: in accordance with [this] document but), I shall give to Miptahiah [silve]r, 20 karsh by the stone(-weight)s of the king.

Porten, *The Elephantine Papyri in English*, B28, 177–83.

The structures of the patrilocal and patriarchal society can be recognized clearly. The document that follows after line 37, written by the Jewish scribe, Nathan son of Ananiah (as dictated by Ešhor, as Porten assumes?), mentions Ešhor as the husband of Mibtahiah, who receives the bride from the father and describes her dowry as part of the patrimonial ownership that comes “to the house of Ešhor.” On the other hand, both partners have equal rights to articulate divorce without any substantiation (in an “assembly” of citizens!),

and both wife and husband are mutually entitled to inherit without any strictures. The separation of property takes effect according to the principle that the party responsible is liable for the damages. It further appears that the bridal price and the wedding dowry do not simply become the husband's personal property but instead belong to the patrilocal household and, if needed, revert back to the wife.

Other documents confirm that Mibtahiah herself owned property, that as an independent legal entity she was able to conduct and settle legal action, and, in the case of personal slaves, could bequeath her possessions autonomously to her two sons. In a document Mibtahiah swears,¹⁸⁴ not by Yahweh but by Sati, the goddess of the first cataract and the spouse of Khnum (the Jewish community at times was in conflict with the priests of Khnum of Elephantine!). At the very least, this demonstrates a very loose interpretation of the Deuteronomic command regarding exclusive worship of Yahweh, if not complete ignorance of such stipulations. Also of interest is that the second husband of Mibtahiah, Eshor, apparently at a later point in time joined the Jewish community and changed his name to Nathan. Noteworthy in the archive of Ananiah is the 449 B.C.E. marriage, which has already been mentioned, between the temple employee and an Egyptian female slave by the name of Tamet (or Tapamet), who belonged to the Jew Meshullam. The contract was made by Ananiah and Meshullam, who was aware of the rights of guardianship over his slave. Only after more than twenty years was Tamet to be granted freedom by Meshullam in the case of his death (427 B.C.E.), while a certain childhood relationship between Tamet and Zaccur, Meshullam's son, remained intact, whereby she was obligated to care for him. A form of marriage like this cannot be deduced from the canonical writings; by means of marriage, fathers relinquished their rights over their daughters (except for certain agreements of protection; see Gen 31:48–50) to the new sons-in-law.

The family archives provide deep insights into the personal life of Jewish people in the satrapy of Egypt and allow us to follow in detail and for decades the history of clans, especially from the perspective of ownership of property, the status of wealth, marriage relationships, and matters of inheritance. No biblical source offers us such concentrated, authentic information from these aspects of life. The burning question remains as to what extent the discernible conditions of life can be compared with those of the Jewish communities in Palestine and Babylon.

184. Porten, *The Elephantine Papyri in English*, 189 (= B30, lines 4–7; Peu, the son of Pahe, cites this oath of Mibtahiah). In the context of Yahweh swearing oaths is common (e.g., Porten, *The Elephantine Papyri in English*, B 24, 4–7, 11).

II.4.2.3. Confession of Yahweh and Cult

The Jewish inhabitants of the fortified city of Elephantine can be identified with relative ease, given their theophoric names (*yhw* for Yahweh). Of course, the God-related particle in the proper name is no absolutely certain indicator of the religious affiliation; some of those given profane names are nevertheless members of the Jewish community, and those bearing a Yahweh-related name can theoretically also be of a different religious orientation. However, in a high percentage of cases the rule applies: the Yahweh element speaks for membership in a Jewish community. About 160 different theophoric names are documented in the Aramaic papyri.¹⁸⁵ Other theophoric elements, attested frequently in the canonical writings (e.g., El, Baal), are unknown in Elephantine. Of interest and perhaps a sign of a conversion practice is that non-Jewish parents occasionally have children with names containing the name of Yahweh.

Apart from personal names, Yahweh also occurs, although always in the abbreviated form *yhw*, in letters and documents as the deity by whose name oaths are sworn or whose temple is being discussed. Lists that have been preserved cite sacrificial gifts and contributions for the community of Yahweh. The life of the community seems to revolve around the God of Israel without even the slightest trace of religious, canonical Yahweh literature, without prayers, hymns, stories, or commandments from the Judean tradition. The only cultic traces are the temple of Yahweh, the discussion about the “proper” Passover, and the list of contributions for the upkeep of the service of Yahweh.

The temple of Yahweh, which was actually not allowed at all, according to Deut 12, continued to exist alongside other sanctuaries in Elephantine. Already Cambyses is said to have found it there (525 B.C.E.). However, it was destroyed by rival adherents of Khnum in 410 B.C.E. Despite some petitions to the authorities and apparently despite limited consent by the Jerusalem authorities (and the full support of Samaria) it was never rebuilt.

REBUILDING OF THE TEMPLE: REQUEST AND RESPONSE

To our lord Bagohi, governor of Judah, your servants Jedoniah and his companions, the priests in the fortress of Yeb: may especially the God of Heaven always look after the welfare of our lord, and may he grant you favor in the presence of King Darius and to the sons of the house (of the

185. See Porten, *Archives from Elephantine*, 135–46.

king) a thousand times more than now! And may he give you long life, and may you be cheerful and happy at all times.

Now this is what your servant Jedaniah and his companions are saying: In the month of Tammuz, in the 14th year of King Darius, the priests of the god Knub entered into a conspiracy with Widrang who is the governor here: "The temple of Yahu, the god of the fortress Yeb, is to be removed!" Subsequently that Widrang, the cad (?), sent the following letter to his son Nephayan, who was colonel of the fortress of Syene: "The temple in the fortress of Yeb is to be destroyed!" In response Nephayan brought up the Egyptians with other troops; when they arrived at the fortress of Yeb with their weapons, they forced their way into the temple, destroyed it down to the ground, and broke the stone pillars that were there. Further, they destroyed five stone gates made of square stone blocks in that temple, but their doors they left....

Now your servant Jedaniah and his companions and the Jews, all the citizens of Yeb likewise, say the following: "If it pleases our lord, see to that temple, that it be (re)built (again), since they do not permit us to build it! Look at those here in Egypt who are entitled to your goodness and kindness! See to it that a letter from you be sent to them concerning the temple of the god Yahu, that it may be rebuilt in the fortress just as it was built earlier. And grain offerings, incense offerings, and burnt offerings shall be offered in your name, and we shall pray for you always, we, our wives and children and the Jews, all who are here, when it happens that that temple is (re)built...."

Bagoas responds via a messenger:

Memorandum concerning what Bagohi and Delaja said to me. Memorandum stating the following: You are to say before Arsham in Egypt concerning the house of the altar of the God of Heaven that was built in the fortress Yeb long before Cambyeses, which Widrang, the cad (?), destroyed in the 14th year of king Darius: It is to be built again at the place where it was earlier, and grain offerings and offerings of incense are allowed to be offered on that altar, just as it was practiced before.

Following Kurt Galling, *Textbuch zur Geschichte Israels* (2nd ed.; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1968), 85–88.

Thus for the community, the temple of Yahweh at Elephantine was the center of spiritual life. In the documents Yahweh himself is occasion-

ally described as “the god who dwells in the fortress Yeb.”¹⁸⁶ Priests care for the temple, but they apparently neither have anything to do with the tribe of Levi nor are descendants of Aaron or Zadok. There is no trace at all of any reference to the sacred traditions of Israel. Abraham, Moses, Sinai and Torah, Jacob, and his sons seem to be unknown. Is this perhaps the reason for the destruction of the possible temple archives together with the temple? In any case, the excavators have not been able to identify any remains of the temple of Yahweh, in contrast to the structures for Satis and Khnum.¹⁸⁷ Of course, the careless approach of the researchers and the random depositing of the rubble may have contributed to the Achaemenid city plan not having been fully mapped out. The extant texts clearly speak of a very stately building that apparently had stone pillars (in contrast to the customary use of mud bricks), cut entrance portals, and a cedar roof (see box above). To all appearances, Jedaniah himself was not a priest. He is mentioned prior to the Jewish cult functionaries but remains without any professional or rank-related attribute. This is followed by the anonymous listing of the functionaries serving at the temple. They are responsible for the routine sacrifices and likely are also responsible for the annual festivals (Passover!). Beyond this, we do not know whether they also served the gathered community with readings and liturgy (cf. Neh 8). From some of the proper names (Shab-betai), a high regard for the Sabbath may be inferred at best. The lists of sacrifices from the archives of Jedaniah document that about 111 Jews of the community of Elephantine, among them thirty women, contributed a total of 318 shekels of silver for the work of the temple, namely, 126 shekel for the service of Yahweh, 70 for the worship of Eshembetel, and 120 for Anabetel (2 remaining shekel are not designated, just as the fragmentary nature of the text leaves many questions open).¹⁸⁸ The debate about the division of the contributions for three different cultic tasks has not yet been settled. Are there three different deities that were worshiped next to Yahu in the temple of Yahweh at Elephantine? Are they manifestations of the one God or hypos-

186. So Kraeling, *Brooklyn Museum Aramaic Papyri*, papyrus 12.2; cf. Porten, *The Elephantine Papyri in English*, B19.6; B36.2; B43.2 etc.; Porten, *Archives from Elephantine*, 109.

187. See Porten, *Archives from Elephantine*, 109–11; Walter E. Niederberger, *Der Chnumtempel Nektanebos II* (Elephantine XX; Archäologische Veröffentlichungen 96; Mainz: von Zabern, 1999).

188. See Porten and Yardeni, *Textbook of Aramaic Documents*, pt. 3, 3:15; Porten, *Archives from Elephantine*, 160–64; cf. Ernst Axel Knauf, “Elephantine und das vorbiblische Judentum,” 181; he counts 128 contributions; in the context of the total amount of 318 shekels, 31 proper names are missing.

tases of sacred places or numina?¹⁸⁹ In any case, the division of the cultic activities is most remarkable; it seems to be in direct contradiction to the monotheistic worship demanded in Deuteronomy.

The Aramaic papyri of Elephantine show us a Yahweh community of its own ilk. It maintains contact with Jerusalem; the distant home is part of its own identity (see below), but Yahweh, the God they have in common, dwells in Elephantine, receives comprehensive temple service, is represented by community leaders of the type of Jedaniah, by a local priesthood, and also by vergers such as Ananiah. The community pays a temple tax and celebrates such well-known Yahweh festivals as the Passover. The regulations of the latter may not have been sufficiently familiar in distant Egypt, yet the community at home (or a Jew residing in Memphis?) instructs them through a certain Hananiah concerning the correct dates and ritual procedures.¹⁹⁰ The cultic rites, addressed to three different divine entities, attest to an understanding of the universal God of heaven that cannot be grasped by means of a mechanically numeric monotheism. In view of these Yahweh theologies associated with Elephantine, the canonical monotheism that emerges especially in Deutero-Isaiah and Deuteronomy becomes questionable as far as its binding nature is concerned.¹⁹¹

II.4.2.4. Relationship to Jerusalem

The relationships of the Jewish community of Elephantine to the “religious capital” of Jerusalem and the position of the Egyptian Diaspora in the “global association” of the Yahweh community has been referred to several times already. They call for a summarizing evaluation.

The research of more than a century on the Elephantine papyri and ostraca has led to the awareness that the vital reality of Jewish communities in the Persian period does not necessarily agree with the portrait of nascent Judaism that we are able to ascertain from the canonical writings. As a matter

189. See Porten, *Archives from Elephantine*, 173–79; Olyan renders Eshembetel as “Name of the house of God” and Anabetel as “Sign of the house of God.” Most experts, however, argue for a female deity assigned to Yahweh, e.g., W. Röllig; Knauf, “Elephantine und das vorbiblische Judentum,” 184–86; M. Görg, *NBL* 1:513; and Becking, “Die Gottheiten der Juden in Elephantine.”

190. See Porten, *The Elephantine Papyri in English*, 125–26; idem, *Archives from Elephantine*, 128–33. The text of the letter is also provided in Delsman, “Aramäische Dokumente aus Elephantine,” *TUAT* 1.3:253.

191. Cf. my attempt at presenting the multiple layers of belief in God in the Old Testament on the basis of social history, in Gerstenberger, *Theologies in the Old Testament*.

of course, however, most experts start with the view that the community structures and statements of faith of the Hebrew Scriptures are the only valid, assumed norm. Accordingly, the Pentateuch and the other developing "Holy Scriptures" of Judaism are thought to have been binding for all scattered communities of Yahweh; at the least, they reflected the worthwhile obligation for believers in Yahweh throughout the world. From this perspective, the contours of the Yahweh community in Elephantine and its practice of faith can only be construed as being of exotic, peripheral importance. Decisive deviations from the Deuteronomic and Priestly model of belief in Yahweh are too conspicuous. The question is whether we should not place our prejudicial assessment of the relationship between communities and expressions of faith in Babylon and Jerusalem, on the one hand, and Elephantine, on the other, on a different basis, if we want to do justice at all to the level of knowledge in view of the analysis of the discovered documents and the reevaluation of the canonical writings.¹⁹²

In a concrete way, the relationship of the communities of southern Egypt and of the home province of Judah can be studied by means of the "ecclesiastical" questions argued between them. One of the issues is the date and content of the celebration of the Passover. This much is clear: on both sides, there is a certain basic consensus on desiring common resolutions or even that this is worth striving for as a matter of course. In the community of Elephantine, a "natural" recognition of the acknowledged authority of the brothers at Jerusalem can be observed (but is not verbalized). For their part, the leadership of the community of Jerusalem cites the normative rites of the Passover with unfeigned sincerity, agreeing in large part with those contained in the Pentateuch. However, at an important point such as this, this literary source is not brought to bear as a witness. Was the existence of a binding writing already commonplace to the extent that they were able to do without scriptural support? This is hardly the case. More likely is an alternative conclusion: the emerging binding canon, or its first part, the Pentateuch, had not yet been elevated to the universal standard for all Jewish communities in the world. Fixed traditions were formed, especially in the Babylonian Diaspora and in the communities of Jerusalem and Judah, but what we have before us in its supposedly absolute claim in the canonical writings, especially in the Pentateuch, are rather local forms of belief in Yahweh and of the Yahweh cult as they developed in Palestine and Mesopotamia. Other foreign communities, wherever they existed in the Persian era, were far less bound to the norms

192. Critical inquiries in this direction come, for instance, from Knauf, "Elephantine und das vorbiblische Judentum," 185–88; Grabbe, *Yehud*, 318–19, 352.

being formed in the canonical literature—and this intentional and deliberate, with knowledge and agreement on both sides. The Holy Scriptures collected in the Persian era certainly already enjoyed great authority in the heartland and in the Babylonian Diaspora but were not yet considered to be binding in other Jewish communities in the empire. The lack of any reference to Moses and to Scripture in the Aramaic documents from Elephantine can scarcely be explained otherwise.

Especially the correspondence between Elephantine and Jerusalem concerning the “rebuilding of the destroyed temple of Yahweh” shows this state of affairs as well. From the perspective of the Deuteronomic texts on the centralization of the worship of Yahweh exclusively in Jerusalem, no one would get the idea that any kind of sacrificial cult for Yahweh among Jews in foreign territories would have been at all conceivable, but the Elephantine documents tell us authentically and irrefutably that a full sacrificial cult at and in “the house of Yahweh in Elephantine,” in which the God of ancient Israel thus owned a further dwelling place apart from Jerusalem, existed unchallenged for at least a century. Is the planned rebuilding of the temple with the condition of a restricted sacrificial service to grain offerings and incense to be taken as a sign of a demand on the part of Jerusalem, pointing to a Deuteronomic centralization? Hardly, for according to the Deuteronomic conception a second dwelling place of Yahweh in Elephantine was as unrealistic as in the earlier Judean Arad. The discernible reality of Jewish life in the Persian period forces us to understand that universal claims of validity of the Torah handed down are not to be taken as literally for that time as they would like to be taken. In the practice of a religiously structured life, the Jewish communities in the Persian period were much more self-sufficient than we can imagine. Further, from the self-sufficiency of the individual communities that with a casual matter-of-fact disposition also makes the mother community in Jerusalem aware of their heterodox life in letters and memorandums, it may even be possible to conclude that the religious norms in the Pentateuch were valid for Judean and Babylonian believers. At no point are we able to reckon with homogenous rules of faith and cult, carried through by a powerful central authority. A Jewish central authority did not exist at that time and never has existed since then. The claims for binding nature and exclusive validity, which are expressed in certain biblical texts and are mostly directed against competing groups, are really always particular projections, longings for omnipotence, as it were, like those that ideologically charged people and “schools” like to formulate in the heat of the debate. As theologians involved personally, because we are affected by the debates of the Persian period, we should have sufficient distance from the historical events that we do not take the claims of exclusiveness, such as that of the Deuteronomians and the Deu-

teronomists, at nonhistorical face value and construct from this an eternal right to truth. We would also do a disservice to the defenders of the right to sole representation of the time, since we would elevate them implicitly to suprahistorical heroes. It is not appropriate to do this to people, including those who proclaim Yahweh's truths, in accountability to sober biblical anthropology.

The two complexes of questions relative to the Passover and the building of the temple, which have been addressed openly in the extant documents and furthermore the tripartite division of the cultic tasks for different divine beings, must be a lesson for us. They qualify our universalistic conceptions of the Torah and the communities of Yahweh. The reality of the Jewish confessional community in the two centuries of Persian rule was less homogenous than what we tend to attribute to it. There was a remarkable range of Jewish religious life, extending to syncretistic cults, liberal forms of marriages, diverse concepts of office, competing spirituality, and so forth. To a certain extent, the variety of the Jewish spirituality can already be discerned in the Hebrew Scriptures. Rebellions by priestly families against the supremacy of elites in the cities (see Lev 10; Num 16) and differing cultic practices in the central community, fiercely opposed by the "official" side (Deut 18:9–13; Isa 65:1–7; 66:3–4), are clear signs of the heterogeneity of faith in Yahweh in the canonical realm as well. The discovery of the papyri of Elephantine has reduced the assumed homogenous portrait of faith in Yahweh in the Persian period completely to absurdity. The environment of life and faith of our spiritual ancestors of that time, accessible to us by means of biblical exegesis and archaeologically obtained insights, now also needs to play a part in the evaluation of their theological statements. Texts are based on lived reality and live in processes of communication, then as well as today. Consequently, texts and confessions of faith are tied up with the respective premise of life, and every interpretation of texts has to take up the main *Sitz im Leben* of text and interpretation into theological reflection.

III. BIBLICAL LITERATURE OF THE PERIOD

In most instances the precise dating of biblical writings is difficult. This also applies to the compositions that can be placed in the Persian period with some confidence. We need to differentiate between texts that emerged in the period under discussion and others that originated in earlier periods in their basic substance but later experienced a significant revision, in other words, that led to their final form. Both categories of scriptural witnesses are subject to a fairly substantial diversity of opinions and hypotheses. As already indicated, the core of the writings originating in the Persian Empire is comprised of the stories of the standardizing works of 1 and 2 Chronicles, together with Ezra and Nehemiah, of course, the Priestly writing of the Pentateuch, the prophetic books of Haggai and Zechariah, as well as “Trito-Isaiah” (Isa 56–66), and surely parts of the “Ketubim” (Psalms, Proverbs, Megilloth), whose chronological pinpointing and literary boundaries, however, are extremely uncertain. Revisions can possibly be discovered in other parts of the Pentateuch (e.g., the “Yahwist,” if he existed at all), in the “Major” and many “Minor” prophets. Thus almost all the Hebrew writings of the Old Testament and the minor Aramaic parts in Ezra are important for the Persian period, with the exception of the so-called Deuteronomic/Deuteronomistic layers of the Pentateuch and of the “historical books,”¹ and, as has been shown, in the “late writings” of the Hebrew Bible that originated in a Hellenistic context

1. Yet even in regard to the Deuteronomic/Deuteronomistic composition and redaction there are some voices that relegate them chronologically to the Second Temple period, e.g., Hans D. Hoffmann, *Reform und Reformen* (ATANT 66; Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 1980); John Van Seters, *In Search of History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983); Thomas Römer, ed., *The Future of the Deuteronomistic History* (BETL 147; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2000); Jochen Nentel, *Retelling the Torah* (JSOTSup 403; New York: T&T Clark, 2004); on locating them in the century of the exile, see Rainer Albertz, *Israel in Exile* (SBL 3; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 271–302.

(see Ernst Haag, *Das hellenistische Zeitalter*, BibEnc 9). Especially the final form of the essential canon of the Torah, however, should have emerged under Persian rule, regardless of how one construes the participation of Ezra and the imperial government.

III.1. ORIGINAL WRITINGS

Already in the first chapter we characterized some of the works that are to be discussed now, especially with regard to their historical portrait of the Persian period. Now it is necessary to focus on these writings as a whole, without unnecessary repetition and regard for their themes and to consider them in keeping with their intentions, life settings, and situations in which they are used. Their embedding in the historical and social environment is an important aspect in this investigation. We would like to know what, why, and how a given complex of text was recorded, has been preserved literarily, and for what purpose. Hence we are concerned with a part of a critical introduction to the Old Testament.

III.1.1. NARRATIVE AND STANDARDIZING ASPECTS

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III.1.1.1. Chronicles

After Old Testament research for a long time had assumed a common author behind the books of the Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah, in more recent times a separate origin of these writings is often adopted. In this instance, too, however, the individual authorship is relatively unimportant, since all biblical writings are rather texts to be utilized—texts that at least in the process of tradition were changed many times following collective interests. For this reason we may easily assume for our purposes that the historical narratives now available in these four writings emerged in the same surroundings and over longer periods of time but entirely within the Persian period. What characteristics and aims can be discerned?

The two books of Chronicles sketch the history of the world from Adam (1 Chr 1:1) to the rise of Cyrus (2 Chr 36:22–23), followed without a gap by the narratives of the book of Ezra-Nehemiah.² For our understanding as outsiders, far removed in terms of time, however, the huge arch from the creation of the world to the period of the Achaemenids appears to be filled arbitrarily with texts of various types and predominantly with events from the vicinity of Judah and Jerusalem to the extent that many questions remain about the purpose of these writings. The quandaries begin with the amazement at the Judean community having deemed it necessary at all to posit a second major outline of history alongside the ones already available in the Pentateuch and in the Deuteronomistic writings. In part, the Chronicist tradents adopted the older texts verbatim. This is easily demonstrated in the synoptic methodology. There can be no doubt that the Torah and the

2. In the Hebrew canon, this sequence is curiously changed, because Ezra-Nehemiah is placed before Chronicles.

“earlier prophets” were already extant. But why, then, the massively changed new edition of a kind of “salvation history of the Judean community” whose roots reach back to primeval times? Was it not possible to be content with the Torah (and a prophetic view of history) as a canonical corpus, as the Samaritans did consistently,³ probably since the end of the fourth century B.C.E.?

A glance at the overall structure of the “chronistic word” may at least provide some indications of the motivations of the Judean writers and community leaders of the Persian period. The main emphasis of their collecting and literary activities is on the period of the kings of Judah, while excluding almost everything handed down in 1 and 2 Kings about the former northern kingdom or its leading tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh. In the worldview of the Chroniclers, the demise of the monarchy in the Assyrian assault of 722 B.C.E. is no longer significant. According to the brief report in 1 Chr 10:1–14, King Saul was nothing but the first ruler who failed, whose inheritance was assumed immediately by David (1 Chr 11). There is nothing about Saul’s rise, successes, and tragic illness or blindness (see 1 Sam 9–15). The kings of the northern kingdom, who in part were far superior kings to the Davidic descendants economically and politically (e.g., Ahab, Jeroboam II), are mentioned merely parenthetically as antagonists or partners of their colleagues in Jerusalem. Hence the erasures in the given portrait of history are most interesting.

Even more striking, however, are the main emphases that the Chronistic tradents establish themselves. A third (or more?) of the literary material is “unique,” and this indicates directly what was the main concern of those responsible in the Persian period. With his actions and institutions, David fills almost the entire first book of Chronicles, namely, 1 Chr 11–29. The detailed history of David’s rise and succession of 1 Sam 16–2 Sam 20 dwindles in 1 Chr 10–11; 13–21 to a few citations handed down from the Deuteronomistic tradition. These largely verbatim borrowings of older portrayals refer to the building of the temple in Jerusalem. Hence David appears as a monarch who, alongside his successful wars, focused on establishing the central sanctuary. But since Solomon was the actual builder of the temple of Yahweh (2 Sam 7:1–13) already in the extant literature and only the preparatory erection of an altar on the later site of the temple remained for David (2 Sam 24:18–25), the Chroniclers emphasized this ver-

3. See Ferdinand Dexinger and Reinhard Pummer, eds., *Die Samaritaner* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1992); Nathan Schur, *History of the Samaritans* (2nd ed.; BEATAJ 18; New York: Lang, 1994).

sion but endeavored to make it more plausible. The Deuteronomic tradition had seen the hesitation of Yahweh dwelling in an established building as the reason for the delay of the building plans, instead of moving about “in a tent and a tabernacle” (2 Sam 7:6–7). The old refusal to build the temple, derived from (still-vivid?) nomadic circumstances is now replaced by a cultic dismissal of David.

But the word of the LORD came to me, saying, “You have shed much blood and have waged great wars; you shall not build a house to my name, because you have shed so much blood in my sight on the earth. See, a son shall be born to you; he shall be a man of peace. I will give him peace from all his enemies on every side; for his name shall be Solomon, and I will give him peace and quiet to Israel in his days. He shall build a house for my name. He shall be a son to me, and I will be a father to him, and I will establish his royal throne in Israel forever.” (1 Chr 22:8–10)

While in 2 Sam 7:11 David himself is granted “rest” (*nûaḥ*, *hiphil*: “cause to rest”), the Chronistic text plays on the word “Solomon” (*šēlōmōh*) and places the focus on him alone in “peace [*šālōm*] and quiet to Israel.” In the Chronistic understanding, David nevertheless remains the outstanding organizer of the temple-community, especially with regard to the cultic officials. In 1 Chr 23–27 he orders the structure of the personnel for the Second Temple and his administration, sorted by the heads of families, as is appropriate for a patriarchal society. The genealogical “portico” (Oeming: 1 Chr 1–9) that is placed first in 1 Chronicles essentially has the same direction, so that the main emphasis of the entire book rests on the registration and arrangement of the temple community. If the lists of returnees from Babylon are added, handed down in Ezra 2 and Neh 7, and the texts in 2 Chronicles concerned with the income and functions of the priests are also taken into account (cf. 2 Chr 30:13–20; 31:2–7), the central issue of the entire Chronistic tradition is the concern for community membership, community structure, and especially the Levitical priestly ordering around and in the Jerusalem sanctuary. Over against this the political military history of the period of the kings fades in significance. The awareness of the latter always rises when decisions are pending about the building of the temple or rules about personnel and liturgy, as in the case of the inauguration of the cultic songs per se (1 Chr 16), for instance, or of the military victory won over the Ammonites and Moabites under Jehoshaphat by means of liturgical acts (2 Chr 20).

The Chroniclers also formulate their concerns in many speeches and prayers, usually placed on the lips of kings, that are concerned with the temple and liturgical order but that probably represent the type of speech

used by the early Jewish community.⁴ This applies to 1 Chronicles already, where David speaks like a community leader and obligates especially his son Solomon⁵ to uphold the cultic rules that were to be in force for life during the Persian (!) period:

David said further to his son Solomon, "Be strong and of good courage, and act. Do not be afraid or dismayed; for the LORD God, my God, is with you. He will not fail you or forsake you, until all the work for the service of the house of the LORD is finished. Here are the divisions of the priests and the Levites for all the service of the house of God; and with you in all the work will be every volunteer who has skill for any kind of service; the officers and all the people will also be wholly at your command. (1 Chr 28:20–21)

In this great ceremony of handing over (1 Chr 28–29), this personal encouragement for Solomon is preceded by an address to the "secular" authorities (1 Chr 28:1–10) and the formal index of the future furnishing of the temple (28:11–19). This is followed by the main address of the departing king to the "whole assembly" (1 Chr 29:1–8), as well as his prayer of praise in the form of a psalm (1 Chr 29:10–19) with an appeal to the whole assembly to bless the Lord (29:20). The report about sacrifices and jovial celebration in honor of Solomon, who had been anointed, again concludes the composition (29:21–22). All of this reads like excerpts from a presentation of a community worship service. Actually, all that is missing is the reading of the Torah (cf. Neh 8). Speeches, prayers, and praise are the fundamental elements of the early Jewish gatherings of the community.

For the Chronistic tradition, therefore, King David was first of all the great organizer of the cultic life of Jerusalem. He indeed gathered a powerful army around an elite corps (see 1 Chr 12), fought against many enemies, and established the kingdom that Yahweh willed and promoted (1 Chr 14:2: "his kingdom was highly exalted for the sake of his people Israel").

However, David's wars are subordinate to the real purpose of his leadership. The spoils benefit the furnishing of the temple (1 Chr 18:8; 22:14), and the entire endeavor of the chosen king is focused on providing Yahweh with

4. See Plöger, "Reden und Gebete"; von Rad, "Levitical Sermon;" De Vries, *I and II Chronicles*, *passim*.

5. See de Vries, *I and II Chronicles*, 215–31, who titles this section "Solomon's Investiture." See also Japhet, *Chronicles*, 482: "Chapters 28:1–29:25 form one unit, relating the enthronement of Solomon and focusing on one ceremonial occasion." The reference to the proximity of the community liturgy is missing, however. Still, Japhet stresses that at this point the Chroniclers consciously depart from the presentation in 1 Kgs 1–2 and present their own conception of the ceremony (483).

a worthy home in Jerusalem. In keeping with the behavior of a community leader, that is, in stark contrast to monarchic practices (cf. 2 Sam 16:15–17:14; 1 Kgs 12), David assembles the faithful and presents to them (and to those responsible, who are designated as *śārīm* and *nəgîdīm*, “commanders” and “leaders”) the plan for bringing the forgotten ark of the covenant into the capital (1 Chr 13:1–4). The community (*qāhāl*) emphatically agrees (13:4), followed by the king’s respective actions (cf. 2 Sam 6:1–11, where David reacts autonomously, entirely in keeping with monarchic values). The installation of the ark in the “holy tent” of the wilderness tradition deserves a few lines in the Deuteronomist account (2 Sam 6:17–19), whereas the Chroniclers devote two entire chapters to it (1 Chr 15–16). The specific instructions of the Priestly writing about the access to the ark and its handling (see Num 18; 3:27–32; 4:1–16) are applied, and the assignment of the Levites to the ark by name as its carriers and as liturgists (!) is a primary interest in the view of things in the Persian period. Here also an anachronistic “democratic” (rather, community-oriented) feature is conspicuous. The king delegates the election of the functionaries to the Levitical families: “David also commanded the chiefs of the Levites to appoint their kindred as the singers to play on musical instruments, on harps and lyres and cymbals, to raise loud sounds of joy. So the Levites appointed Heman son of Joel; and of his kindred, Asaph son of Berechiah; and of the sons of Merari, their kindred, Ethan son of Kushaiah” (1 Chr 15:16–17).

In keeping with the complexity of chronistic traditions, the account has a modified, perhaps also older, parallel in 1 Chr 16:4–6:

He [David] appointed certain of the Levites as ministers before the ark of the LORD, the God of Israel. Asaph was the chief, and second to him Zechariah, Jeiel, Shemiramoth, Jehiel, Mattithiah, Eliab, Benaiah, Obed-edom, and Jeiel, with harps and lyres; Asaph was to sound the cymbals, and the priests Benaiah and Jahaziel were to blow trumpets regularly before the ark of the covenant of God.⁶

Clearly the details differ on the composition of the “ministries,” the distribution and assignment of tasks to the Levites and priests, and hence have been handed down controversially. Clashing claims definitely also surface in many texts of the time (see Lev 10; Num 12; 16). However, the consistent meaning of the Chroniclers’ tradition is that David brought about the structure of the

6. The list of singers is also handed down in differing versions elsewhere; see Hartmut Gese, “Zur Geschichte der Kultsänger am Zweiten Tempel” (1963), in idem, *Vom Sinai zum Zion* (BEvT 64; Munich: Kaiser, 1974), 147–84.

personnel of the Second Temple prior to its construction. Chapters 23–26 of 1 Chronicles then lay out all of the Levitical and priestly divisions and functions, once again in the tried and tested form of lists (cf. 1 Chr 1–9). They will have to be addressed again at a later point. For the moment, the concern is the Davidic grounds for the temple hierarchy and the valid worship of the community. Thus, 1 Chr 16 recounts the initiation of the singing by “Asaph and his kindred” (1 Chr 16:7) for the first time. A song comprised of parts of Pss 105, 96, 106, and 107 leading to the well-known expression of praise, “O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever,” and the community’s response (1 Chr 16:34–36), appears as an exemplary piece of Levitical liturgy. Nowhere else in Old Testament narrative contexts do we have an example like this of early psalm-related Jewish worship practice, despite multiple examples of songs and prayers embedded in stories. Perhaps this chapter represents an authentic fragment of choral singing in a worship context from the Persian period.

David’s penultimate action for the aspired building of the temple, in dependence upon 2 Sam 24, is the decision concerning the location of the sanctuary. Throughout the ancient Near East the selection of a construction site was an extremely important matter. This pericope shows this very clearly. The dwelling place for the deity cannot be built at just any place. The Chroniclers take up the Deuteronomic tradition associated with the punishment of David on account of the illegal census (1 Chr 21). They place great stress on the choice of the location via the account of the fire of Yahweh consuming David’s offering (21:26) and the terrifying appearance of an angel (21:20, 27–30). Then they specify the significance of the purchase of the site from the “Jebusite” Ornan with regard to the building of the future temple: “Then David said, ‘Here shall be the house of the LORD God and here the altar of burnt offering for Israel’” (1 Chr 22:1). David’s final act on behalf of his son is the provision of materials for the house of Yahweh (1 Chr 22:2–5, 14). Now the handing over of the major task to his successor Solomon can take place in two phases (22:6–19; 28–29).

For the temple community, the son plays the role of the executor of the will. He faithfully carries out David’s plans and erects the building that is still missing for the waiting servants of the cult (2 Chr 1–9). In this context, Solomon hardly gains a Chronistic profile of his own. Rather, the Chroniclers adopt the already-existing portrait of the wise and powerful monarch whom Yahweh blesses with worldly possessions precisely because of his intellectual qualities (2 Chr 1:7–13; 9:1–28). The painstakingly precise adherence to all the measurements of the building and the construction of all the structural components and the cultic utensils are central to the Judean community of the Persian period (2 Chr 3–4; cf. Exod 25–31). However, the Chronistic por-

trayal is not congruent with the Deuteronomistic one (1 Kgs 6; 7:15–51); at times it seems condensed, and sometimes its emphasis differs slightly as well. Nevertheless, the two accounts essentially agree. Numerous formulations are identical, so that the literary unity becomes a matter of course. Hence the question is to what extent the two also reflect the factual situation of the Second Temple. If we assume this as given for the Chronistic part, the date of the Deuteronomistic one cannot be moved back to the period when there was no temple. In this case, the latter apparently also presupposes the restored sanctuary.

This is seen not least in the description of the dedicatory celebrations that lead to the great prayer of the temple's dedication in 1 Kgs 8 and 2 Chr 6. In the context of the ceremonies proper, the Chroniclers highlight the regular functions of the priests and Levites (see the insertion in 1 Chr 5:11–13). The lavish offerings are mentioned in both versions, while the Chroniclers add the favorite motif of the fire falling from heaven (2 Chr 7:1; cf. 1 Kgs 18:38; Lev 9:24). It demonstrates the divine authorization of the temple, the worship of God, and the community even more emphatically and wonderfully than the appearance of the "glory" of Yahweh. Above all, however, the prayer and action of the consecrating king and the evident assessment of the temple as "a house of prayer"⁷ agree in both versions, with slight shifts in details (cf. 1 Kgs 8:1–9:9 with 2 Chr 5:2–7:22). The seven petitions of the king refer entirely to prayers of an individual or of the people of Israel, with the fifth one amazingly referring to the naturalized foreigner (2 Chr 6:32–33 = 1 Kgs 8:41–43). These prayers of need and petition are understood as offered at the temple in Jerusalem or toward the holy place from far away (2 Chr 6:22, 24, 26, 29, 32, 34, 37–38); this is a typical assumption of the postexilic period, when the temple had regained and expanded its functions. Only in the period of a fully functioning sanctuary is a purpose such as this of the temple of Jerusalem meaningful. In a particular way (alongside its function as a place of sacrifice?), it is a place of prayer for believers who are present, but it is also a clear-cut indicator of the direction for all who wanted to communicate with Yahweh in distant lands (see Dan 6:11). A minor Chronistic insertion in the available text sheds light on the liturgical practices:

Solomon had made a bronze platform [*kiyyôr*] five cubits long, five cubits wide, and three cubits high and had set it in the court; and he stood on it.

7. The express designation "house of prayer" (for all nations!) comes from Isa 56:7; in 2 Chr 7:12 it is possibly contradicted consciously with the designation "house of sacrifice." Yet the content of the great dedicatory prayer is restricted to the function of prayer in the case of the Chroniclers as well (2 Chr 6:18–39).

Then he knelt on his knees in the presence of the whole assembly of Israel and spread out his hands toward heaven. (2 Chr 6:13)

The “platform” (a very Protestant idea!) occurs only here in the Old Testament; it may suggest something like the pedestal for reading or preaching that later came to be called *bāmâ*. In this case it would point to a veiled reference to a further synagogal feature in the period of the Second Temple. Otherwise the portrayals of the dedication do not differ significantly from the Deuteronomistic ones in 1 Kgs 5–7.⁸ The temple, worship, prayer, and the community, postexilic in its organization, are central. King Solomon functions as contemporary leader, preacher, and prayer leader: “Then he fell on his knees ... and spread out his hands toward heaven” (see above, 2 Chr 6:13–14).⁹ The appearance of the king concludes with a powerful epiphany of God (2 Chr 7:1–3): fire from heaven consumes the sacrificial animals and the *kābôd Yhwh*, the “terrifying radiance of Yahweh,” fills the entire temple. The assembled members of the community bowed down “on the pavement with their faces to the ground and worshiped and gave thanks to the LORD, saying, ‘For he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever’” (2 Chr 6:3). Going beyond the Deuteronomistic parallel, the Chronistic account locates the dedication of the temple precisely in the Judean community’s calendar of festivals. The feast days add up exactly in such a way that Solomon is able to dismiss the joyful gathering in accordance with Lev 23:34–36, 39–43 on the twenty-third day of the seventh month, at the conclusion of the Feast of Tabernacles (2 Chr 7:9–10). The entire portrayal of the historical dedication of the temple feeds on contemporary, postexilic experiences and conceptions of the temple, the performances of worship, and the structures of the community.

In the Chronistic work, the span of time between Solomon’s death and the subsequent division of the kingdom (approximately 926 B.C.E.) and the end of the Judean monarchy (587 B.C.E.) proceeded according to the criteria of the Deuteronomistic work (1 Kgs 12–2 Kgs 25), that is, between the (Judean) governments of Rehoboam and Josiah, as a political and military development consistently to the end of Judean autonomy. But this secular framework of events is derived only very selectively from the older traditions, supplemented only scarcely by assumptions of their own (or perhaps based on awareness of sources?) (2 Chr 10–36). The concrete cause of the division of the kingdom (excessive taxation on the part of the government of Jerusa-

8. See, e.g., De Vries, *Chronicles*, 257–60.

9. Similarly already in 1 Kgs 6:14, 54, 55, where the king explicitly also “blesses” the people. Apparently this priestly function is attributed to him only reluctantly by the Chroniclers (cf. 2 Chr 6:3).

lem) still appears in the Deuteronomistic reading (2 Chr 10:1–19), but for the Chroniclers the larger and actually also more successful northern kingdom completely disappears from the scene. Beginning with 2 Chr 11, the history of the people of God is restricted to Judah and Jerusalem. Here the minor episode of a prophet called Shemaiah, who opposed a fratricidal war and indeed gained a hearing (1 Kgs 12:21–24 = 2 Chr 11:1–4), is virtually an ideal divine providence legitimizing the northern state. Of course, the critical reader asks whether this was original with the Chroniclers or with the Deuteronomists.

The remainder of the history of the kings (2 Chr 10–36) appears in a light entirely its own, clearly showing the color and nuancing of the Persian period. The given frame of the books of the kings (1 Kgs 12–2 Kgs 25), with some notes of the type of annals about beginnings and ends of reigns of the twenty Judean kings following Solomon, along with select episodes, is indeed retained. Not one of David's successors is omitted; not even Athaliah, the foreign usurper of the Davidic throne (2 Chr 22:10–12; 23:12–15) is suppressed. Nevertheless, the Chronistic tradents often treat the older material with breath-taking independence. Like Saul, David, and Solomon before them, they also bring their own emphases to bear in Judah's particular history, at times emphatically against the extant accounts of the kings. The perspective (how could it be otherwise?) is determined by the situation of Judah and of the Judean community in the fourth century B.C.E. Here the community of Yahweh, gathered around the temple and the Torah, is emphatically in the foreground of all the interests.

If it is true that the Chronistic work voices early scribal erudition (e.g., Willi), already the consistent omission of the history of the northern kingdom is astonishing. Two large blocks of narrative of the kings (1 Kgs 15:25–22:40; 22:52–2 Kgs 8:15), about fifteen complete chapters in all, are left out completely, although they also contain the narratives about the prophets Elijah and Elisha. Otherwise the Chroniclers are keen on prophetic protest and comfort. In this case they are indifferent to Yahweh's guidance through his representatives. After all, it happened in the defunct north, for which apparently not a single tear was shed in the Jerusalem of that time. Likewise, the rigid pattern of debasement of the northern state ("sins of Rehoboam"; see, e.g., 1 Kgs 14:16; 15:30; 16:31; 2 Kgs 3:3; 10:31; 13:2, 11), which is popular in the books of Kings as well, hardly lingers in the Chronistic work. The ancient kingdom of Israel is not even important in virtual reality. Theologically the Judean kings are generally marked more sympathetically. With the help of Yahweh, they achieve many successes about which the books of the kings have nothing to say (cf. 2 Chr 11:5–23 with 1 Kgs 14:21–31 on Rehoboam; 2 Chr 13:1–23 with 1 Kgs 15:1–8 on Abijam; and 2 Chr 14–16 with 1 Kgs 15:9–24 on Asa). Occasionally, after very promising beginnings, they end up in divine

judgment; serious illnesses especially are reckoned as divine judgment (see 2 Chr 21:18–19 on Jehoram; 2 Chr 26:19–21 on Uzziah; the parallel reference in 1 Kgs 15:5 only laconically mentions the king's leprosy). The rejection of individual rulers, however, does not have the basically catastrophic consequences as those found in the Deuteronomic portrayal. In several instances the kings repent of their initial unfaithfulness to Yahweh and his Torah, the most spectacular case being Manasseh. His reign of fifty-five years, which evidently had been very blessed, was grounds for the orthodox theologians to bestow on him the conversion to a faithful worshiper of Yahweh:

Manasseh misled Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that they did more evil than the nations whom the LORD had destroyed before the people of Israel. The LORD spoke to Manasseh and to his people, but they gave no heed. Therefore the LORD brought against them the commanders of the army of the king of Assyria, who took Manasseh captive in manacles, bound him with fetters, and brought him to Babylon. While he was in distress, he entreated the favor of the LORD and humbled himself greatly before the God of his ancestors. He prayed to him, and God received his entreaty, heard his plea, and restored him again to Jerusalem and to his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the LORD indeed was God. (2 Chr 33:9–13)

A child-like, fanciful belief in miracles, far from any political reality, dictates the theologically shaped sequence of events. Thus it happens that the overall historical perspective of the Judean monarchical period demonstrates an up-and-down pattern of political successes granted by Yahweh in keeping with the degree of obedience to the Torah. Time and again the God of Israel grants victory over enemies, sometimes less because it was earned and more on account of compassion. Occasionally Jerusalem's brother state to the north is also included. Trapped by an ambush of the more powerful army of Jeroboam, "They cried out to the LORD, and the priests blew the trumpets. Then the people of Judah raised the battle shout, and when the people of Judah shouted, God defeated Jeroboam and all Israel before Abijah and Judah" (2 Chr 13:14b–15; 500,000 Israelites are killed, 13:17).

Ultimately, trust in God is decisive for the community. Every "apostasy" from Yahweh leads the people astray and has consequences for their welfare. This is basically a personal theological perspective that has its real locus in small, confessional communities and has not been demonstrably successful, either in the latter or on the state level. As a doctrine of faith, the correlation between action and health, however, has always been extremely influential.

At this point let us turn to the concerns of the Chroniclers as such. As already indicated, they were concerned with the identity and existence of the Judean Yahwistic family of faith. The cultic-ritual life of the Judean com-

munity overshadows the political events and shapes the literary portrayal at critical points. As an example, the first element is expressed primarily in the Jehoshaphat narrative. In other episodes of 2 Chronicles as well, war is no longer a matter of politics but of an act of faith (see 2 Chr 14:10–12; 20). The king, oppressed by external enemies, prays (20:5–12); he uses the collective form of petition in the first-person plural (“O LORD, God of our ancestors ... Did you not, O our God, drive out the inhabitants of this land...? If disaster comes upon us ... O our God, will you not execute judgment upon them? For we are powerless,” 20:6, 7, 9, 12). While the language is prosaic, the structure and content of the prayer agree with the pattern of the corporate lament. The king acts in the presence of the community gathered for worship (20:13). In the community, Jahaziel, a descendant of Asaph, now receives the Spirit of God, who answers Jehoshaphat’s petition virtually in keeping with an oracle of salvation:

Listen, all Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem, and King Jehoshaphat: Thus says the LORD to you: “Do not fear or be dismayed at this great multitude, for the battle is not yours but God’s. Tomorrow go down against them.... This battle is not for you to fight; take position, stand still, and see the victory of the LORD on your behalf, O Judah and Jerusalem.” Do not fear or be dismayed; tomorrow go out against them, and the LORD will be with you. (20:15–17)

The king and the community prostrate themselves (falling down with one’s face to the ground, 20:18), and the Levitical choirs “praise the LORD, the God of Israel, with a very loud voice” (20:19). After an encouraging address by Jehoshaphat the following morning, the community moves into battle, led by singers who “sing to the LORD and praise him in holy splendor.... As they began to sing and praise, the LORD set an ambush against the Ammonites, Moab, and Mount Seir.” The hostile troops destroy one another. Corpses and much booty were left behind (20:20–25).

The theological-spiritual perspective is important. Because Yahweh, the powerful God of Israel, stands by his chosen community and personally fights for them, everything depends upon the presence of this potent God. The liturgical context, that is, the petition of the worshiping community, brings about Yahweh’s participation in the broadest sense of the term. He is present, and the fate of the community touches him; he intervenes actively in the battle and causes the utter defeat of the aggressors. For the Chroniclers, of course, the scenario is already in the distant past. In the Persian Empire, it was hardly possible for Judah to have experienced this massive hostile threat from neighboring peoples. Hence a fictitious military situation is conjured up that rather obscures the actual reality in the fourth century B.C.E. Still, it

is conceivable that, under the conditions of the peace of the Persian Empire and of the monopoly of power on the part of the world power, local conflicts between provinces or ethnic groups possibly were in fact dealt with by means of worship-related action. The solemn cursing of enemies is indeed broadly attested in the history of religion as well. In any case, the liturgical elements emerging from 2 Chr 20 show us how community worship was practiced in ancient Judah. The prayer of petition, an address (by prophets or leaders of the community?), prostration, and songs of praise were part of the common cultic ritual. Any reference to sacrificial acts is conspicuous by absence. Might this be an accident? Animal sacrifices, of course, belonged to the rituals associated with major festivals (see below), but it seems that a rite limited to word, gestures, and music was practiced as well (cf. Neh 8). Especially the life setting emphasized in the text, that is, the active participation of the gathered community, is noteworthy. "All Judah" gather together, with "their little ones, their wives and their children" (2 Chr 20:13), or "all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem" (20:18; cf. 20:5, 15). The *qāhāl*, the "community," is just as constitutive for the event as the proper execution of the liturgical petition ritual by the prayer leader and the regular intonation of the praise of God by the Levitical choirs (cf. 1 Chr 16:7–36).

The passages in the Chronistic structure that address special worship events and again clearly reveal some liturgical elements of the time lead us a little deeper into worship-related practices in the fourth century B.C.E. By means of the normative regulation of the choral singing, as already intimated, David introduced the presentation of psalms in the life of the community. The dedication of the temple under Solomon provided the occasion to promote the prayer leader and intercessor of the community (2 Chr 6:3–42) and to reinforce the role of priests and Levites (2 Chr 5:4–5, 7, 11–14; 7:6). In the case of the Chroniclers, Asa's zeal for reform is fanned by means of the message of the otherwise unknown prophet Azariah (2 Chr 15:1–7). Above all else, the altar of the Jerusalem temple is repaired (15:8), followed by a general meeting of the population of Judah, as well as a number of sympathizers from the northern tribes (15:9). The community then orders appropriate sacrifices to be brought (presumably from the booty following the successful battle against the Cushites). At the apex of the account, the covenant is renewed between the people and Yahweh: "They entered into a covenant to seek the LORD, the God of their ancestors, with all their heart and with all their soul. Whoever would not seek the LORD, the God of Israel, should be put to death, whether young or old, man or woman" (15:12–13). This ritual is carried out with "a loud voice, with shouting, and with trumpets and with horns" (15:14). Our tradents consider the covenant with Yahweh to be in need of renewal again and again because each time it involves a new obligation to Yahweh and

to one another (1 Chr 16:14–22; 2 Chr 13:5; 21:7; 23:3, 16; 34:31–32). Their immediate success with the new obligation lends validity to the intent: “All Judah rejoiced over the oath; ... and had sought him with their whole desire and he was found by them, and the LORD gave them rest all around” (2 Chr 15:15). About the reality of such covenants in ancient Judah, of course, we have no direct references. Yet the Chronistic writings seem to indicate that the Judean community thought very highly of the renewal of covenant conditions upon which agreement was reached. They seriously wanted and were determined to obey God (and his Torah) again with full personal effort.

Both in the Deuteronomistic and the Chronistic tradition King Hezekiah is the main character in the service of the confessing community of Yahweh (cf. 2 Chr 29–32 with 2 Kgs 18–20), except that the motivations and profiles of the two portraits are quite different. In 2 Chronicles, the liturgical, spiritual reformer is prominent, whereas in the portrayal in 2 Kings the Assyrian wars and the illness of Hezekiah are the central theme. Hence for the Chroniclers the restoration of the temple and the sacrificial praxis are in the foreground (2 Chr 29:3–16). Further, there is the normal activity of the priests and Levites, who often pose a problem in the Chronistic corpus. The extravagant cost of the rededication (2 Chr 30:2) corresponds with the well-known regulations in the Torah (cf. the sin offering of the priest and the sin offering of the congregation in Lev 4:2–21, etc.). It takes place beginning with the first day of the month (2 Chr 29:17), so that the Passover can follow in accordance with the regulations. Yet because of problems with the schedule, it has to be postponed for a month (2 Chr 30:2). The king sends messengers to all the Israelite areas. In a written decree he orders all believers in Yahweh, including the regions of Ephraim and Manasseh, to the Passover in Jerusalem. The response is tremendous: “Many people came together in Jerusalem..., a very large assembly” (2 Chr 30:13). The priests and Levites fulfill their obligations (2 Chr 30:15–27) and work well together; the Levites indeed receive a special commendation from Hezekiah (30:32). The community is extremely pleased with the renewal of the Passover, for apparently there had not been a regular Passover since the time of Solomon (30:26). As an exception, the number of days to keep the festival is doubled (30:23). Then Hezekiah regulates the income of the temple personnel and orders storerooms to be prepared in the temple precincts for the contributions in kind (2 Chr 31:2–18). The problem with the Assyrians and the illness of Hezekiah remain only as an appendage (2 Chr 32).

Like David and Solomon before him and Josiah after him, Hezekiah, in the Chronistic work, is regarded as the outstanding cultic reorganizer of his people, the faith community of Yahweh. His significance is shown to be exemplary in that he is able to set aside the purity code for those celebrating

the Passover (cf. Exod 12:43–49; 19:10–11; Lev 23:3–8) completely in agreement with Yahweh (2 Chr 30:17–20). He appeals to the formula of “goodness and mercy,” which is well-known from worship contexts (2 Chr 30:18–19). Thus the Passover signals an important point in the ancient Hebrew calendar of festivals. Together with the repeated “renewal” of the Passover under Josiah in 2 Chr 35:1, 7–19, this results in a certain main focus in this harvest and remembrance festival. The other explicitly envisaged annual event in conjunction with the dedication of the Solomonic temple (2 Chr 7:8–10) is the Feast of Tabernacles. The evidence demonstrates that for the community of that time the cycle of annual festivals was no minor matter. To be integrated into a definite cycle of major gatherings, worship opportunities, and accompanying rituals, at least for those handing down the Chronistic tradition, belonged to the important support and characteristics of a life in conformity with Yahweh. The festivals have a confessional character and are intended to strengthen the community’s identity and personal faith. For the Chroniclers, the irregularly celebrated covenantal renewals with Yahweh and the celebrations of lament and petition, which were announced equally irregularly, belonged to the fixed provision of cultic responsibility that every member of the community had to adopt.

The Passover, however, as already indicated, seems to have been very much in the foreground of interest. It was celebrated in Jerusalem as a pilgrim festival; the pilgrimage was maintained for centuries. The reason for the twofold witness to a resumption of the apparently forgotten custom in 2 Chr 30 and 35 may be a genuine double tradition. Kings (2 Kgs 23:21–23) accords King Josiah with the honor of having retrieved the Passover from oblivion. Accordingly, it had not been properly celebrated since the time of the judges (23:22). The Chroniclers did not want to contradict this tradition. They adopted it and arranged it in keeping with their own understanding (2 Chr 35:1–19); no real Passover had been kept since the prophet Samuel (35:18). Their main concern is that the priests and Levites perform their service in accordance with the Torah (35:2–6, 10–17). The functions, obligations, and rights of the actors, according to 1 Chr 23–26, 2 Chr 5:2–14, and other texts, are subdivided in keeping with differing kinds of service. In addition, the sacrificial gifts of the king and the senior officials of the state and the temple are important (2 Chr 35:7–9). All things considered, Josiah’s revival of the Passover is a religio-political measure that presumably reflects the communal affairs of the fourth century B.C.E.

In conjunction with this, what is the situation with the reinstatement of the Passover by Hezekiah (2 Chr 30)? The Passover allegedly had been celebrated for the last time under King Solomon, four hundred years earlier (30:26). But as a ruler who was faithful to Yahweh, Hezekiah also reactivated

the temple and the worship of Yahweh already in 2 Kgs 18:1–6. Chronistically, this act is taken up in 2 Chr 29. This is augmented by the king's special action concerning the Passover ritual; clearly the backdrop is the endeavor to stress appropriately the current significance of this first great annual festival. It is striking that Hezekiah has to overcome such strong, time-consuming objections until the Passover sacrifices can begin in Jerusalem that the prescribed date (the fourteenth day of the first month, Lev 23:5) elapses and the celebrations have to begin after a month's delay (2 Chr 30:2–3). Then the duration of the festival is extended spontaneously for an additional seven days. Both departures from the regulations of the Torah (plus a third one mentioned below) are so serious that Hezekiah's Passover can no longer be deemed a fully authorized service. Precisely for this reason the Chroniclers seemingly recognized the tradition of Hezekiah's Passover as a forerunner of Josiah's reform but cannot grant it complete legitimacy. The delay of the celebrations (30:2–3) also seems added, since there is no interest in this problem in the remainder of the chapter. On the contrary, the cultic event proceeds in a relatively relaxed manner, with the priests and Levites functioning legitimately, except for the fact that participants from the northern tribes are not prepared ("cleansed," 30:18) in conformity with the regulations. Hezekiah obtains Yahweh's forgiveness and toleration of the incorrect cultic practice (30:18–20). It seems as if the peculiarities in the conduct of the festival go back to the Chroniclers. Already in his first year in office they attribute to this important reformer king an imperfect attempt at a cultic reform after the restoration of the temple. The undertaking involves dimensions encompassing all of Israel (couriers invite the northern tribes, 30:10), and the practical-theological paradigm is called "return" to Yahweh, in order that the "prisoners" or "deportees" might be pardoned and return to their native land (30:8–9). Thus the Chroniclers produce a profile of their own for the Hezekiah pericope and thereby augment the narrative of Josiah in 2 Chr 35.

The question arises how this kind of revised outline of Israelite-Judean history functions under communal and worship-related aspects and in what context of life it arose. The situation that modern observers unconsciously assume for biblical collections is that of the scholarly school of scribes. As usual in the modern era, it is assumed that intellectuals who were proficient in writing produced literature for "academic" (or private) use. How otherwise should a work be explained that unfolded the universal history of the time from Adam to Cyrus? The cultic perspective had to be useful to the pious reader, who was edified by the tome during his or her hours of leisure. But it is precisely the dominance of spiritual, theological, and liturgical perspectives that suggests the assumption that the Chronistic work arose in a context other than personal erudition and edification and that it was used for

varied purposes. In its focus on the infrastructure of the religious community of Judah, the historical material was well-suited for building identity in the cultic community of Jerusalem and its branches in the Diaspora. Ancient traditions about kings, prophets, and teachers of the Torah are adopted and reshaped for the contemporary situation. Each chapter of Chronicles presents to the Yahweh community existing in the Persian Empire the way in which their predecessors had established and ordered their shared community of faith. The rules, rites, and structures valid now were considered to have originated mostly in the time of David and Solomon (partly in contrast to the Deuteronomic and the remaining pentateuchal construction of history, which recognizes only Moses as the founder of the ordinances).

Given the powerful relevance of the portrayed history for the reality of the fourth century, it is no wonder that the historical images, right down to the minutest detail, are given in the coloring of the later period. Kings function as military commanders, as was their historical role, but this role does not carry far; it is also lessened in favor of Yahweh's own effectiveness in foreign-affairs conflicts. Of much greater significance is a king's work as a leader or organizer of the community. Kings call the community together for worship and address it in the context of spiritual functions; hence, far beyond the ancient Middle Eastern role of building a temple (state cult!), they are responsible for the confessional community. In their rivalry, too, priests and Levites are marked according to the distribution of tasks associated with the subsequent, Second Temple. We know little, however, about the priestly structure in the First Temple. But it may be assumed that during the period of the monarchy a pure state cult was practiced in Jerusalem that virtually excluded the participation of the community. The Second Temple, however, was not only the place for sacrifices but also a "house of prayer" for believers, their pilgrimage destination, and apparently also the place of instruction in the Torah.¹⁰ Prophets and "judges" are very significant in Chronicles. They represent the active intervention of the God who long ago manifested himself in the Torah of Moses. Both offices are therefore effective via the will of God available in written form. They embody his living interpretation. On the other hand, and in contrast to Ezra-Nehemiah, writers and scribes cannot be located in the Chronistic work. Wherever writers appear in the Chronicles,

10. Temple-related functions before and after the exile are relatively unclear. To what extent did the sanctuary of Jerusalem, the sacrificial site par excellence, also become a "house of prayer," the place for the reading of the Torah and the "center of the community"? See Grabbe, *Yehud*, 216–30. As of when can the existence of synagogues be expected? See Menahem Haran, *Temple and Temple-Service in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978).

they fulfill purely administrative tasks, mainly at the royal court; this is also true if Levites work in this profession (see 1 Chr 24:6; 2 Chr 34:13).

The language and literary forms in the two books of Chronicles also are influenced strongly by community-related patterns. In any case, this is a legitimate assumption. Speeches and prayers run through and structure the portrayal of history more and differently than in the Deuteronomistic work of history. This has already been observed repeatedly.¹¹ Only the social-historical evaluation of the fact remains to be clarified. In my view, the following may in all probability be observed: The worship-related forms of speech (prayers, speeches, oracles, sermons, etc.) used predominantly by the Chroniclers point to the early Jewish community life. Chronistic literature was formed within this setting, or at least was in close proximity to it. From this point, it is only a short step to the supposition that it also served the goals of community life, whether in strictly cultic or didactically oriented gatherings. In order to anticipate later arrangements and concepts, literature such as the Chronistic texts, which were tailored to the needs of the community, was probably produced and used in the "house of prayer" (later synagogue) and/or in the "house of instruction." Thus Chronicles can only marginally be rated as historical sources. However, its value is inestimably high as a source concerning the customs and traditions, institutions and offices, and ethical and theological perspectives of the postexilic Judean community.

III.1.1.2. Ezra and Nehemiah

In contrast to the two books of Chronicles, Ezra-Nehemiah deals with history that lies much closer, namely, sections of the Persian era. When 2 Chronicles ends with the takeover by Cyrus, Ezra 1:1–4 follows immediately with the so-called edict of Cyrus ordering the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem. The content of the book of Ezra-Nehemiah has already been addressed sufficiently in §§I.1 and II.3. Here the only concern is to investigate this contemporary document in terms of its function and use. These two features provide the origin of the book.

The book of Ezra-Nehemiah comes from the fifth to the fourth centuries. It does not yet contain any reference to Hellenistic influences but clearly has Persian connotations. The account about the building of the temple in Ezra 4:6–6:18 belongs to the Imperial Aramaic language, which was considered an official idiom. It is indeed possible that official documents were included; nevertheless, in principle one should reckon with the narrative being fictitious.

11. See De Vries, *I and II Chronicles*, 17–20 and 108 n. 155 above.

While the Hebrew text is the foundation for the book, the Aramaic embedding is to demonstrate a high degree of historical authenticity. The general outline of the political events serves the same purpose: all the power issues from the central government, with the great-king at its helm; he has the sole decision-making authority. The enormous empire is subdivided into administrative districts, satrapies, and provinces. The fortunes of Jerusalem and its cultic community are decided at the Persian court in distant Susa. Owing to the powerful help of Yahweh, the Persian rulers concern themselves with the temple and the people of the land of the Jews. They protect those willing to undertake the reconstruction and order everything necessary to be provided.

Contemporary literary forms are reflected abundantly in Ezra-Nehemiah. Isolated cases surely date back to earlier periods, yet specific forms seem to have been created precisely in the Persian period. Thus the science of lists has deep roots in the ancient Orient.¹² The genealogically structured lists of "returnees" in Ezra 2 and Neh 7 are shaped to confirm the affiliation with the confessional community of Yahweh and to confirm the status of the individual groups within the community. Compared to the Deuteronomic and Chronistic examples, speeches and prayers have their own character; this can best be shown in the major litanies of repentance of Ezra and Nehemiah (Ezra 9; Neh 9) or in the deep sighs of Nehemiah (Neh 13:14, 22b, 29, 31b). These texts position the community leader at the center as the one who bears the responsibility, as the leading light. With passionate care he acts for the community of believers in Yahweh. His concern is the impeccable character of the believers in regard to Torah and the purity of the individual, as well as that of the community.

Particularly striking are the accounts that have been taken up in the books under the name of Ezra and of Nehemiah and perhaps form their basis.¹³ The so-called "memoirs" in part are given in the first person of the one reporting (Ezra 7:27–9:15 [occasionally the communal "we" appears]; Neh 1:1–7:5; sporadically in 12:27–13:31). The dispute about the authenticity of these "sources" is fairly pointless. It cannot be decided strictly on a literary basis. Assuming general considerations about the purpose of "documents" such as this, it may be possible to emphasize that reports to the Persian emperor may have been the obligation of emissaries of the royal court, but there is practi-

12. Cf. A. Cavigneaux, "Lexikalische Listen," *RIA* 6:609–41; Oeming, *Das wahre Israel*, 9–36; Robert R. Wilson, *Genealogy and History in the Biblical World* (YNER 7; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977); De Vries, *I and II Chronicles*, 21–94.

13. On introductory matters, see, e.g., J. Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 35–72; G. Steins, "Die Bücher Esra und Nehemia," in Erich Zenger et al., *Einleitung in das Alte Testament* (2nd ed.; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1995), 175–83.

cally no chance of rediscovering such original writings. Likewise, access to the royal archives for the authors of the book of Ezra-Nehemiah can hardly be assumed. Quite apart from the original documents, the historicity of the commissioning of Ezra and Nehemiah by the king remains at best undecided. More probable is a purposeful construction of those pericopes (Ezra 7:1–10; Neh 1:1–2:9) from the perspective of the community in Jerusalem. Even if we deem the authenticity of the “memoirs” to be impossible to demonstrate and ultimately consider it irrelevant, the use of the genre is most significant. More than anyone else before them in the tradition of the Hebrew writings, the authors of the book become involved in the culture of writing and the political conditions of the Persian period. Especially in the diplomatic, legal, and religious context it was apparently common to produce legal and other documents intended to preserve and proclaim important matters. Esther 1:22, 2 Chr 30:6, and other references also point to written messages, and the Torah, as a matter of course, is used as a foundational written document. The authors of Ezra-Nehemiah treat this literary involvement as normal, and the commonly known genre of the report (“memoirs”; as already mentioned, the accounting system was extremely well-developed in ancient Persia¹⁴) was good enough for them to reinforce the idea that the important events concerning the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the introduction of the Torah had been fully agreed upon with the central government. For this purpose, even the imperial archives are engaged. Imperial edicts by the Achaemenid rulers accompany the Judean returnees and emissaries; they provide their actions with the necessary political support (Ezra 1:2–4; 4:17–22 [upon accusation by the opponents of Judah: 4:9–16]; 6:2–5, 6–12 [upon a statement by the opponents: 5:7–17]; 7:11–26; Neh 2:6–9 [report style]; and letters by the opponents: Neh 6:5–7). These writings, allegedly rendered true to the original, are probably partly drafted in keeping with the Persian style but also show numerous peculiarities of Jewish literature. Above all they betray specifically Judean interests to the core. It seems, for instance, that the direct, caring address to Ezra (Ezra 7:25) or the command issued to completely uninvolved people to pay temple dues to the Jerusalem sanctuary (Ezra 1:4)¹⁵ represent Judean matters far more than is conceivable in a royal edict of the time. The

14. On the administrative tablets of Persepolis, see Koch, *Es kündigt Dareios der König*, 25–67.

15. These “free-will” taxes for Yahweh und his community are reminiscent of the Egyptians who at the exodus gave the Israelites silver, gold, and other goods as compensation and initial aid (Exod 11:2; 13:35). Presumably other motifs of the Ezra-Nehemiah narrative can be understood as constructions obtained from the literary sources; cf. the position of Nehemiah at the royal court with that of Joseph in Egypt.

attempt to provide their own writings and their own community with the luster of Persian authority and Persian goodwill is obvious.¹⁶

Conversely, however, the Israelite traditions find acceptance and further development as well. This is particularly true of the decisive section of Neh 8–10, which brings to light the constitution of the Yahweh community after the troubles and dangers of the rebuilding. The reading of the Torah by Ezra in Neh 8, as already noted, is a reflection of the practiced liturgy of the fourth century. The worship of the community, or also the festival service of the Torah community, must have been fairly analogous: the gathering of all the members (Neh 8:1); the reading of the Torah by scribal authorities from a “platform” (8:2–4); the community listening, responding, and worshiping (8:3, 6); translation and interpretation of what was read (8:7–8); continued reading and teaching from the Torah (8:13–14, 18; 9:3); celebrating the Feast of Tabernacles (8:14–18); several phases of the ceremony of repentance (9:1–37); and obligation to the Torah (“covenant agreement”?, 10:1–40). The liturgical proceedings described are unmistakably in an ancient Israelite tradition. To a large extent, however, they show distinctly contemporary peculiarities.

In the line of tradition of Neh 8–10, there are pericopes of covenant agreement from the literary complex of Sinai, the people’s assemblies of Deut 29–31 and Josh 24, as well as the rediscovery of the Torah in 2 Kgs 22–23. Whereas the various passages of the Sinai-related pericope stage the initial giving of the Torah, all of the Deuteronomic accounts of covenant agreements assume this and postulate categorically unswerving loyalty to the expression of Yahweh’s will (see programmatically Deut 29:9–28). Nehemiah 8–10 likewise attests to the extant, complete Torah but sees a decidedly new beginning that does not use the term *bērīt* (“covenant”; cf. *‘āmānâ*, “firm agreement,” 10:1). Still, this new beginning legitimizes festivals, liturgy, and hierarchy afresh and culminates in the very concrete self-obligation of all believers in Yahweh to cooperate actively in maintaining the community and the temple. Integral parts are the prohibition of marriage with regard to the “peoples of the land,” the protection of the Sabbath and the commandment to release slaves in the seventh year, the temple tax, offerings associated with the first-born, and the support of the priests (Neh 10:31–38). No other section of the Hebrew writings lists in such detail the positive and momentarily most relevant demands of the community. The Decalogue and the table of curses, for instance, tend to exclude forbidden behavior destructive to the community

16. Grabbe justifiably does not grow weary of pointing out such prejudice on the part of the Judean tradents. Briant, too, takes a critical stance in evaluating Greek sources; with regard to the biblical witnesses, he shows a relatively greater degree of tolerance.

by largely negative formulations. Likewise, the positively formulated collections of requirements in the Book of the Covenant, the Holiness Code, and Deuteronomy are much more general. They do not focus on a specific situation and therefore give the impression that they represent traditional material developed over longer periods of time. The self-obligations of Neh 10, however, clearly belong to the community of the Second Temple in Jerusalem and reflect the conditions of the fifth and fourth centuries in the Persian Empire.

That the early Jewish community was the originator of the text discussed can also be shown impressively with the frequent “we” formulation. The extensive prayer of repentance in Neh 9, which apparently represents an important element of the contemporary worship liturgy (cf. Ezra 9; Dan 9; Ps 106), as well as the ceremony of commitment, pointedly present the first-person plural as the collective voice of the community as a whole. Now, in conjunction with the memoirs genre in Ezra-Nehemiah, it may be argued that “we” should be read as an expanded “I” of the prayer leader, that is, the leader of the community or liturgist. Even if this were applicable in this instance, the fiction of a community expressing itself jointly would also be very interesting and of considerable heuristic value, for “we”-formulations are not all that common in ancient biblical (or in ancient oriental) literature. Even this simple idea is still able to reflect a liturgical reality. The example of the “we” psalms teaches us that at least in specific liturgical texts the community as a whole could participate.¹⁷

A relevant self-obligation of the Jerusalem community of faith based on the reading of the Torah and the Feast of Tabernacles, undertaken in a basic way, established the new beginning of the Judean community. This is the focus of the work of Ezra-Nehemiah. The census of the population of the city, the clerical ranks being emphatically included, the dedication of the wall, and measures of purification and separation (all of it in Neh 11–13) arise from the covenant act. This is exemplified, for instance, in the linking of religious-political action with the reading of the Torah in Neh 13:1–3:

On that day they read from the book of Moses in the hearing of the people, and in it was found written that no Ammonite or Moabite should ever enter the assembly of God, because they did not meet the Israelites with bread and water but hired Balaam against them to curse them—yet our God turned

17. With regard to the Psalms, this phenomenon has been investigated; see J. Scharbert, “Das ‘Wir’ in den Psalmen,” in *Freude an der Weisung des Herrn* (ed. Ernst Haag and Frank-Lothar Hossfeld; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1986), 297–324; Klaus Seybold, “Das ‘Wir’ in den Asaphpsalmen,” *Neue Wege der Psalmenforschung* (ed. Klaus Seybold and Erich Zenger; Freiburg: Herder, 1994), 143–55.

the curse into a blessing. When the people heard the law, they separated from Israel all those of foreign descent.

This is a situationally conditioned exegesis of Deut 23:4–6 without any regard of verses 8–9, which turned out diametrically different in Isa 56:1–8, for instance. For the writers and tradents of the passage in Nehemiah, the separation was of paramount importance and divinely willed. The Torah and the temple belonged to the Jews alone and hence were not made for all nations.

III.1.1.3. Priestly Writings

Blenkinsopp, Joseph. "The Structure of P," *CBQ* 38 (1976): 275–92. **Blum**, Erhard. *Studien zur Komposition des Pentateuch* (BZAW 189; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1990). **Brueggemann**, Walter. "The Kerygma of the Priestly Writers," *ZAW* 84 (1972): 397–414. **Crüsemann**, Frank. *The Torah: Theology and Social History of Old Testament Law* (trans. Allan W. Mahnke; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996). **Gorman**, Frank H. *The Ideology of Ritual, Space, Time and Status in the Priestly Theology* (JSOTSup 91; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990). **Hossfeld**, F. L. "Volk Gottes als 'Versammlung,'" in *Unterwegs zur Kirche* (ed. Josef Schreiner; QD 110; Freiburg: Herder, 1987), 123–42. **Hurvitz**, A. "Dating the Priestly Source in the Light of the Historical Study of Biblical Hebrew," *ZAW* 100 (1988): 88–100. **Janowski**, Bernd. *Sühne als Heilsgeschehen* (WMANT 55; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1982). **Knohl**, Israel. *The Sanctuary of Silence: The Priestly Torah and the Holiness School* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995). **Mosis**, Rudolf. "Gen 9:1–7: Funktion und Bedeutung innerhalb der priester-schriftlichen Urgeschichte," *BZ* 3 (1994): 195–228. **Noth**, Martin. *Überlieferungsgeschichte des Pentateuch* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1949). **Pola**, Thomas. *Die ursprüngliche Priesterschrift* (WMANT 70; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1995). **Struppe**, Ursula. *Die Herrlichkeit Jahwes in der Priesterschrift* (ÖBS 9; Klosterneuburg: Österreichisches Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1988). **Utzschneider**, Helmut. *Das Heiligtum und das Gesetz* (OBO 77; Freiburg: Universitätsverlag; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1988). **Weimar**, Peter. "Gen 17 und die priesterschriftliche Abrahamsgeschichte," *ZAW* 100 (1988): 22–60. **Wellhausen**, Julius. *Prolegomena to the History of Israel* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994). **Zenger**, Erich. "Priesterschrift," *TRE* 27:435–46. **Zevit**, Ziony. "The Priestly Redaction and Interpretation of the Plague Narrative in Exodus," *JQR* 66 (1975/76): 193–211.

During the period of the monarchy (ca. 980–587 B.C.E.), the priesthood of the royal court and the temple played a major role, especially on the governmental level. The state's Yahweh cult had been the spiritual component preserving the state, supporting the Davidic dynasty, and promoting the Judean consciousness of identity. The familial and local cults with their respective professional personnel had always been responsible for the practice of religion in everyday life, from the domestic cult to the shrines and festivals

associated with hills. With the beginning of the exile and the end of the monarchy (see Albertz, *Israel in Exile*), this picture changes fundamentally. The leading lights of the priesthood went into exile, and, as representatives of the tradition, alongside elders of clans, former royal officials, scribes, sages, and prophets, they became pillars of the new community structure. These religious functionaries, greatly concerned with genealogical continuity, became very active and sought to fill the leadership offices of the newly emerging religious community. Some indicators point to fierce rivalry between groups of spiritual provenance (see Lev 10; Num 12; 16). Priestly circles brought their rules, passed down from antiquity, into play for dealing with sacred matters and expanded them in view of the new structure and situation of the faith community; in other words, they skillfully adapted the traditional system of norms to the changed situation and constellation of power in the community of faith in Yahweh.

Since Julius Wellhausen, it has been considered relatively certain in Old Testament scholarship that a coherent Priestly layer of literature, that is, a redaction with sacral focus of the growing canonical material, can be clearly identified. For our purposes it is relatively unimportant whether, as assumed earlier, the Priestly writing (P)¹⁸ ever existed as a separate work or whether an extensive priestly revision was carried out.¹⁹ If the latter were also the case, the extensive insertions in already-existing narratives are necessarily to be regarded as an independent literary product. Equally unimportant at this point is whether the Deuteronomistic layer or editing of the Pentateuch preceded or followed the former.²⁰ Most scholars are able to agree on situating the Priestly part of the Torah in the late sixth and/or early fifth century B.C.E., and this alone is relevant in the present context.

The beginning of the Priestly shaping of the text is clearly tangible in the Hebrew canon: it is the creation narrative in Gen 1 with its conspicuous position, which has substantially influenced the interpretation of the entire Jewish and Christian corpus of writings. The end of the Priestly writing in the Pentateuch remains controversial. Is it Deut 34:7–9, the reference to the death of Moses and Joshua's succession, or the pithy references to the sig-

18. See Zenger, "Priesterschrift"; Zenger et al., *Einleitung*, 89–108; Knohl, *Sanctuary of Silence*; Pola, *Die ursprüngliche Priesterschrift*.

19. See Blum, *Die Komposition der Vaetergeschichte* (WMANT 57; Neukirchen: Neukirchener, 1984), 420–58; idem, *Studien zur Komposition des Pentateuch*, *passim*.

20. Rearrangements of the traditional chronology (Yahwist–Elohist–Deuteronomy–Priestly writing) in part appeal to Hans H. Schmid, *Der sogenannte Jahwist* (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 1976); John Van Seters, *Prologue to History: The Yahwist as Historian in Genesis* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1992); and Christoph Levin, *Der Yahwist* (FRLANT 157; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993).

nificance of the tabernacle in Josh 18:1 and 19:51, or certain passages in the books of Leviticus (e.g., 9:24) or Numbers, following which only third- and fourth-level additions from the Priestly circles can still be observed?²¹ I leave this question unresolved as well and limit myself to presenting clearly recognizable main themes of the priestly guild or of their influenced groups in the community, against the backdrop of the Persian Empire and especially of the Babylonian sphere, which must have been the immediate context of the Jewish communities during the time frame in question. Generally it can be pointed out that Priestly authors and tradents express “a predilection for elements insinuating a structure of the world, history and life,” as well as an urgent “interest in cultic and ritual phenomena.”²²

Overall, the Priestly writing and the Hebrew canon begin with a theologically and, by biblical standards, scientifically most thoroughly reflected creation account. In the wake of Babylonian-Sumerian ideas, the beginning of the world was watery chaos. Darkness that was hostile to life dominated. Any clear order was still lacking. The work of the creator God (in the Priestly writing generally called *ēlōhîm* [“God”] to begin with) is focused on cosmic ordering; it is a titanic work of probing and classifying conditions that are more conducive to life and living creatures. It is by the sheer force of command that the creator constructs light, for permanent darkness is lethal (Gen 1:3–5). Then, in five additional work days, this is followed by the creation of the firmament, the earth, the heavenly bodies, the sea creatures and birds, the animals of the dry land, and the human (Gen 1:6–31). In the Babylonian Atramhasis Epic the universal human, Adam, has a formal analogy (*edimmu*, I:215, 217, 230),²³ except that the Priestly *homo sapiens* is given ruling functions rather than those of a slave. The creation of the material world ends with the (self-gratifying?) verdict: “God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good” (Gen 1:31a). Already in the week of cosmic creation, the seventh day is intended as a day of rest, the Sabbath (albeit only

21. See K. Elliger, “Sinn und Ursprung der priesterlichen Geschichtserzählung,” in *Kleine Schriften zum Alten Testament* (ed. Hartmut Gese und Otto Kaiser; ThB 32; Munich: Kaiser, 1966), 174–98; Norbert Lohfink, “Die Priesterschrift und die Geschichte,” in idem, *Studien zum Pentateuch* (SBAB 4; Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1988), 213–53; and Pola, *Die ursprüngliche Priesterschrift*, 213–98; cf. 339–49.

22. Zenger et al., *Einleitung*, 91.

23. See W. von Soden, “Der Mensch bescheidet sich nicht,” in *Symbolae Biblicae et Mesopotamicae* (ed. M. A. Beek et al.; Leiden: Brill, 1973), 349–58. The Sumerian term *idim* is ambiguous. Von Soden refers to the variants “Wildmensch”—raw human and “Urmensch”—Ur-human (Akkad. *lullû*), the latter of whom is capable of thinking and planning and hence is able to develop (see I:223, pp. 352–53).

alluded to in the verb!): “And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested [*šābat*] on the seventh day from all the work that he had done” (Gen 2:2).

Compared to the Babylonian creation epic *Enuma Elish*,²⁴ the ancient traditional elements (victory over the chaos, separation of the upper and nether waters, structure of the earth, creation of the heavenly bodies, shaping of the human, etc.) are extremely condensed. God issues the command, and immediately what was commanded becomes reality. The narrative imagination is completely absent. However, the framework of the creation and the structure of the world is familiar from the myths of Mesopotamia. The middle acts of creation of the Priestly account are akin to those of the Mesopotamian myths. The first and seventh acts of Yahweh’s creation seem to come from another source. The notion that before any ordering of the visible cosmos light has to be present as the counterpart to darkness may have come from the Persian environment. There light and darkness, fire and cold are cosmic antagonists.²⁵ According to the Priestly tradition, God’s work on the seventh day is the “Sabbath,” which became the overarching identity marker of the newly forming community of Yahweh in the period of the Second Temple. Especially this point, in conjunction with the structure of weeks, impressively demonstrates the Judean adaptation of ancient Near Eastern materials. The structure of seven days basically goes back to the lunar phases and in part was already observed in the Sumerian-Babylonian cultic system.²⁶ The full implementation of a seven-day, continuous arrangement of the work week that ultimately was independent of the lunar cycle, however, must be attributed to the Jewish community (according to our current understanding).

On balance, the Priestly work of the Hebrew canon presupposes ancient oriental myths about the beginnings of the world. It is based on universalistic conceptions that can only have emerged in the major cultures of that time with their first empires that encompassed, or at least had the inten-

24. See W. G. Lambert, “Enuma Elish,” *TUAT* 3:565–602. For other myths of origin, see Andrew George, *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (New York: Penguin, 2000); Stephanie Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989); and Benjamin R. Foster, *From Distant Days* (Bethesda: CDL, 1995).

25. See Stausberg, *Die Religion Zarathushtras*, 1:96: “Aša is considered like light, very beautiful ... and is associated with fire”; 1:97: “The fundamental act of cosmogony is the creation of Aša.... This is followed by establishing the way of the sun and the stars and the increasing and decreasing of the moon is regulated.”

26. See Walther Sallaberger, *Der kultische Kalender der Ur III-Zeit* (2 vols.; UAVA 7/1–2; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1993): lunar holidays were observed since the third millennium B.C.E. (see 1:37–63).

tion to encompass, the known orbit of the world. Such universal, unifying conceptions of God, the world, and the human in the ancient Near East are demonstrable since the third millennium B.C.E. One God is the responsible creator and designer; all political power issues from a supreme deity in a centralist-monarchic manner. The image of the human of the Judean Priestly tradents, however, is postmonarchic; not the king but the human as such assumes the role of the almost divine vice-ruler on earth (Gen 1:26–28; cf. Ps 8). Cosmology and anthropology correspond to the experiences of the Judeans in the Babylonian exile and later; the imperial cultures and religions of the time provide the intellectual framework for the Priestly model of creation. The detailed shaping corresponds with the life situations of the scattered Judean faith community. In place of Marduk or Ahura Mazda, their own God rises as the ruler of the world. The work of creation unfolds in keeping with the weekly cultic calendar of six days of work and the hallowed day of rest. Because of the lack of a royal dynasty of his own, the human as such becomes God's governor on earth. There is a hierarchy of values in the closed habitation of the world: plants, (heavenly bodies), aquatic animals, birds, land animals (subdivided into domestic animals, small animals, game), the human. The human is the ruler and beneficiary of everything within his reach, and the whole world is organized in his favor and categorized by "kinds" in order that God's governor can busy himself and potentially also be able to bring his sacrificial offering to the deity. Although a paradisiacal togetherness still exists (Gen 1:29–30) and is not done away with until after the flood via the license to kill (Gen 9:1–4), the need for the sacrificial practice is already intimated in the commission to govern in Gen 1:26–28.

The flood motif is encountered several times in ancient Near Eastern myths. In Sumerian-Babylonian myths the noise of people disturbs the rest of the gods, so they decide on destruction. The Priestly tradents apparently have traditions available about a (moral, religious?) corruption of humanity (Gen 6:11–12) and/or the inexplicable, disastrous ambivalence of the people (Gen 11:1–9). In any case, the Priestly writers narrate coherently about the catastrophe of the end of the world, which only Noah and his clan escape, together with pairs of creatures taken into the ark (Gen 6:9–22; 7:6, 11, 13–21, 24; 8:1–5, 13–19; 9:1–17, 28–29).²⁷ The flood programmatically destroys everything alive; together with the rescued creatures, Noah is able

27. Thus the traditional apportionment of the verses to the Priestly layer. It is not clear why Gen 7:1–10 with its emphasis on the seven clean pairs of animals and the further meaning of the number seven are often attributed to a non-Priestly source. See Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1–11: A Continental Commentary* (trans. John J. Scullion; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 395–98, 427–29.

to begin a new period of human history under the rainbow as the sign of promise: God enters a permanent covenant with humans, and the global destruction will not recur (Gen 9:8–17). The order to multiply given in the creation pericope is reiterated (9:7), while the release of animals as food for humans, that is, the implied permission to kill (9:3), signals clear distinctions in the way of life for Noah's descendants. A foundational commandment of the sacrificial cult is established already in the initial phase of the Noahic age: humans are not to eat blood (9:4; cf. Lev 17:10–14). The Priestly writers continue with the history of humanity. For them, the creation and the flood are universal divine acts that, in the mental horizon of the universal empires of the ancient Near East, they adopt as a matter of course as their theological conception of the world.

The same integral creative will is seen in the Priestly genealogies and the associated genealogical structures in Gen 5 and 11, as well as in the list of nations in Gen 10:1–32. If humanity has only one common family tree, all particular lineages go back to one starting point, to Adam and Eve, the primeval couple. No nation is able to reclaim a separate act of creation. This idea alone demonstrates a strict, consistent argumentation of an epoch that took the oneness of God and the world seriously. Perhaps the Persian theologians were the mentors of a radical monistic anthropology such as this. Already in the oldest Gathas of the Avesta, the human simply is the addressee of the divine trusts, not an ethnically singled-out subject. In the same way, the Priestly authors of the genealogies also establish the development of the human race from Adam to Noah (Gen 5:3–32). Like a heading, the list reiterates the statement about humankind being made in the likeness of God and about their gender (5:1–2), then follows the flood. In the same formulaic style, slightly abridged, it continues after the catastrophe involving humanity, but now focused on Shem, the eldest son of Noah and hence on that third of humanity in which the Israelites found themselves as “Semites”:

These are the descendants of Shem. When Shem was one hundred years old, he became the father of Arpachshad two years after the flood, and Shem lived after the birth of Arpachshad five hundred years and had other sons and daughters. When Arpachshad had lived thirty-five years, he became the father of Shelah, and Arpachshad lived after the birth of Shelah four hundred three years and had other sons and daughters. (Gen 11:10–13)

Now the genealogy moves strictly from Shem to the Mesopotamian clan of Terah and his three sons: Abram, Nahor, and Haran (Gen 11:26). On the one hand, the two genealogies mentioned in summary point out the development of humankind as a whole; on the other, they point to Abraham, Israel's progenitor. Universality and particularity merge in the developmental scheme of

the Priestly circles. Between the two genealogical lists there is the so-called table of nations, a listing of ethnicities that, according to the understanding of the time, arose from the three sons of Noah (Gen 10). Shem, Ham, and Japheth represent humanity as a whole: "and from these the nations spread abroad on the earth after the flood" (10:32). The manner of listing all inhabitants of the world according to their ethnicities, hence of establishing a comprehensive map of nations, is best understood as coming from the royal inscriptions and corresponding collections of sculptures of ancient oriental emperors. The super-kings, especially the Achaemenids, frequently bequeathed upon posterity lists of cities and countries; they ordered delegations bringing tributes to be presented in stone reliefs and thus proclaimed themselves as the rulers of the world and the vice-regents of their deities to whom no one was to object as an expression of religious piety. This type of portrayal of nations, therefore, is most developed in the Persian Empire. In the stairwell to the imperial audience hall of Darius, the Apadana hall of Persepolis, the groups of nations approaching upright and armed, bringing gifts to the emperor, can still be seen today. Carefully distinguished by their national or tribal characteristics (clothing, typical weapons, items made by artisans, hairstyles, house pets, etc.), twenty-nine delegations approach Darius on his throne, who graciously observes them coming.²⁸ The entire half-relief is a portrayal, understood as *pars pro toto*, to be sure, of the universal empire presided over by the Persian emperor in the name of his god Ahura Mazda. Genesis 10 has the same purpose: to portray the totality of the community of nations on earth. In the Priestly tradition, each of the three Noahic ethnic groups receives the concluding, globalizing, and only slightly varying note: "These are the descendants of Japheth [and Ham and Shem, respectively] in their lands, with their own language, by their families, in their nations" (Gen 10:5, 20, 32). The genealogical systematizing of the population of the world by tribal criteria seems to be a peculiarity of the Judean Priestly reflection.

After the flood, despite the universal orientation of Gen 10, history moves toward the progenitor of Israel. The Priestly circles report about him in Gen 17 and thereby duplicate a similar tradition about the covenant in Gen 15. The specific Priestly perspective is particularly clear in the parallelism of the two texts. Abraham receives a revelation from God similarly to Jacob and Moses (Gen 17:1–2; cf. Gen 35:9–13; Exod 6:2–3). He is to become the progenitor of many nations; the sign of the covenant is the circumcision

28. A detailed description of the imposing picture is offered by Koch, *Es kündigt Dareios der König*, 93–114; see also xviii and 63–64 above.

of all male descendants (Gen 17:3–22). Alongside the semi-legitimate child of the Egyptian slave Hagar, a special promise assures Abraham of a natural son, Isaac, birthed by the Israelite woman Sara (17:19, 21). He becomes the true bearer of the “everlasting” promise, while Ishmael, the son of the Egyptian woman, continues to participate in the blessing of the ancestor (17:20). In the ethnic context of the exilic and postexilic period, this means that the Judean priests do not entirely relinquish the horizon of the nations reflected in the promises of Yahweh. They do not withdraw in an undiluted way to a single, pure lineage but acknowledge the emanation of the blessing of God upon other nations. By means of the title “ancestor of a multitude [*hāmôn*, “noisy crowd”] of nations” (17:4–5), which is to be reflected in the new name of the progenitor (Abraham instead of Abram), the Priestly theologians want to express nothing more. A certain openness with respect to the surrounding community of nations, even with regard to the “Ishmaelites,” who in part are perceived as hostile (see Judg 8:24; Ps 83:7), can be perceived. According to the Priestly tradents, the religious community of the later Judeans is already constituted in the patriarchal period. The “everlasting” covenant between Yahweh and the community of Israel is “set up,” “established,” by God in that distant prehistoric time.

Following the Sabbath, established in the context of creation, circumcision becomes a second outward sacramental sign. By all available accounts, both identity markers had de facto only become important in the exilic to postexilic period for the “people of Yahweh” that was being constituted. By nature, identity markers delimit their bearers from other groupings practicing different peculiarities. Subsequently, the covenant between Yahweh and Abraham, celebrated in Gen 17, is a step, or rather *the* step, in the particular existence of spiritual Israel, undertaken and lived in the period of the Second Temple in the universal, pluralist empire of the Persians.

There have been many theological debates on the numerous “covenants” in the Priestly writing. Especially according to the Reformed understanding (John Calvin), the Priestly circles in their work established a (new) constitution of the relationship between God and humans at four historical cornerstones: in the creation, following the flood, in the Abrahamic covenant, and at Sinai. The term “covenant” does indeed occur in three texts—Gen 9:8–11; 17:2–21; and Exod 6:2–8—albeit in differing dimensions. Apparently the Priestly tradents wanted to establish the Abrahamic covenant as the central date; above and below it, comparable to various layers of colors in polychromatic print, are situated the other standardizing requirements of relationship between Yahweh and Israel, that is, humanity as a whole.

The important thing is that the Priestly theologians of the exilic and postexilic period portrayed neither humanity nor the particular community

of Israel in monarchical patterns but rather as a network and genealogical tree of clans and nations. They create a portrait of a universal, patriarchal civil society in which progenitors determine the position of their respective ethnic group. The history of the world moves toward Abraham, the founder of the community of the circumcised, without relinquishing a basic openness for other nations. In societies with a monarchic constitution in the ancient Orient, including the period of Israel's monarchy, the royal progenitor does indeed also appear as the founder of the dynasty. The ideological support system, however, regularly includes the commissioning by the monarchic deity, the bestowal of divine power, and the promise of authority and protection by the supreme deity. In the Abrahamic promise, only a small remainder of these insignia of monarchic authorization has remained, in view of the real impotence of the early Jewish community, namely, a change in view of the future:

I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. I will establish my covenant between me and you, and your offspring after you throughout their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. And I will give you, and to your offspring after you, the land where you are now an alien, all the land of Canaan, for a perpetual holding; and I will be their God. (Gen 17:6–8)

Abraham's principal wife, Sarah, is included explicitly in this promise:²⁹ "I will bless her, and moreover I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall give rise to nations; kings of peoples shall come from her" (Gen 17:16).

The issue is the history of the world and the people in the shape of a family. This agrees with the social structures that were constitutive for spiritual Israel in the exilic and postexilic period. For the priests, the genealogies of David and Zadok as found in the Chronistic work or the family trees of Moses do not have the same natural position as the civilian, lay-oriented origins of Abraham. "Abraham is our father!" (see Isa 63:16) might have been the confession of these circles. The "kings" who turn up as descendants of the progenitor is a gesture of respect for the one-time dynasty of David. Perhaps there are also reverential attitudes that resonate over against the ruling emperors or possible messianic figures.

29. Irmtraud Fischer, *Die Erzelter Israel* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1994), 366–70, nevertheless refers correctly to a "patriarchalizing shift" in the Priestly work (370).

For the theologians with a Priestly orientation in the exilic and postexilic period, the Mosaic era receives particular attention. In Egypt, Yahweh's claim to power is decided over against the pragmatically existent world-ruler. Moses receives the task of liberation from his God (Exod 6:2–13) and is given Aaron as assistant in communication (7:1–7). Pharaoh challenges Yahweh and fails in the direct comparison of the magicians of both confessions (Exod 7:8–13, 19–22; 8:1–3, 12–15; 9:8–12). The count of five miraculous signs or plagues—snake, blood, frogs, flies, boils—fits well with punitive sanctions encountered elsewhere in the Priestly work (see Lev 26). The killing of the firstborn in Egypt belongs to another story for the priests. It is placed entirely into the tradition of the Passover. After circumcision, this festival is a further cornerstone of the developing ritual system of the early community (Exod 11:9–12, 20).

In its narrative form, the Sinai event as such is apparently of less interest to the Priestly writers. There is no imaginative portrayal, unless one wants to see a covenantal account of Priestly inspiration, with sacrifice and sprinkling of blood, in Exod 24:1–8.³⁰ Otherwise, what remains is only the appearance of Yahweh on the mountain as a central event (Exod 24:15b–18a), which, in turn, serves as the basis for the enormously expanded communication of Yahweh's will to Moses and Israel (Exod 25–31; 35–40; Leviticus; parts of Numbers). Undoubtedly, the bulk of the Priestly traditions is contained in these sections of the Pentateuch. However, they deal with instructions of implementation for the practical life of the exilic and postexilic community of faith. They are predicated upon the election of Abraham and upon the promises given to him by Yahweh. For the Priestly tradents, it was not the people's stay at Sinai that brought the new beginning of the community of Yahweh; the constitution of the community is based on Abraham and the introduction of circumcision. Now the people of God, who have existed for a long time already, learn about the details of life with Yahweh. Why does this occur this late? The Priestly circle cannot be denied a sense for historical development. The relationship between God and Yahweh, readily described as "the God" (*hā'ēlōhīm*) prior to Moses, developed over a long period of time. An awareness of change, development, and dynamics in the history of humanity

30. The course of the Priestly source in the Sinai pericope is not entirely clear. Traditionally it is assumed that the priests did not celebrate the covenant expressly a second time but instead spoke of Yahweh dwelling in the community (in the temple) or, more precisely, of his coming in glory (Exod 24:15b–18a). In his *kābôd*, he dwelled among his people. The difficulties with linking Exod 24:3–8 with any source whatsoever are discussed, e.g., by Brevard S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974), 92–93.

comes to the fore. The Mosaic period provides the community with the decisive system of order by which they are to live. This foundational structure of norms, requirements, and behavior is communicated at Sinai and embedded in the memory. It is to apply without exception from now on but also continues to be in need of renewed explanation and discussion in keeping with the realization of changeability.

In the huge, multilayered collection of material between the commissioning of Moses (Exod 6) and the end of the book of Numbers, there are about forty-five chapters that certainly are to be attributed to the Priestly work. Remarkably, Moses, who does not carry out any sustained priestly functions, although he is of the tribe of Levi, plays the main role for the priests. Aaron is merely his spokesman and subordinate to him throughout. In the overwhelming majority of all the P texts, Moses is Yahweh's contact. He communicates the will of God to his brother, the priest and progenitor of the temple priesthood in Jerusalem. The mediating situation is literarily expanded in a "baroque" way (Gerhard von Rad); it continues endlessly between Israel's arrival at Mount Sinai (Exod 19:1–2) and the departure from there (Num 10:11–12). The Priestly circles are responsible for this arrangement; they obviously assume that the religious community of Israel received its essential, spiritual, and cultic equipment precisely at that legendary holy mountain, the location of which has never been ascertained with historical accuracy. Other geographical settings of Yahweh's dwelling and place of revelation (Horeb, Mount Seir, Marah [on the latter, see Exod 15:25–26]) are pushed into the background by the powerful tradition of Sinai. The Priestly version has been firmly established in the Judeo-Christian tradition. What did the originators of the Sinai complex, who emphatically assume the covenant began with the ancestral fathers and mothers (Exod 6:4), intend to communicate to their (post)exilic audience?

These originators project the religious-cultic conditions following the exile and the period of the Second Temple of Judea back to that distant time in the desert with Moses being their charismatic leader. This is already a literary and theological stroke of genius in and of itself: How is it possible at all to compare the living conditions of a people traversing the wilderness (the fictitious number of sojourners fit for battle, hence apart from the Levites, women, children, and elderly, numbered 603,550, according to Num 1:46) with those of the remaining population of Judah in the late sixth and fifth centuries B.C.E.? Creative priests of the late period allow the episode of the ancestors of the wilderness to take along a true-to-scale, portable model of the temple of Jerusalem, including all of the essential utensils, just as they were available on the familiar Temple Mount (Exod 25–31; 35–40)—a brilliant idea (see especially Exod 26 and 36)! Select Levite families take care

of and transport the model sanctuary (Num 4). Equipped like this with the sacred dwelling place in which Yahweh's glory has a secure abode, namely, in the holy of holies, on the *kappōret*, the "mercy seat,"³¹ the people are able to journey confidently to the Promised Land and practice the regulations, orientations, and rules that have been communicated in detail.

The sequence of themes or liturgical segments of the agenda addressed in the Priestly work from Exod 6 to Lev 9 also makes good sense according to our ideas of rules. Moses receives Yahweh's mission to lead his people out of slavery; as a leader of the people or the community, equipped with supernatural power by Yahweh, he fights against the power of Egypt in the form of its pharaoh and then enters into direct contact with the universal God on Mount Sinai. The first thing that Yahweh decrees for his faithful ones through Moses is the plan for the tent of meeting, his sacred "dwelling" among the Israelites (Exod 25–31). By means of repeating all of the particulars, the detailed draft is carefully turned into reality by Moses and various experts (Exod 35–40). A narrative piece (Exod 35:1–36:7) integrates the construction of the "tabernacle" into the situation at Sinai. Interestingly, this transition begins with the reiteration of the Sabbath commandment (Exod 35:1–3; cf. 31:12–17), as though this most central norm, according to Priestly practice, clearly frames the episode of the second reception of the Decalogue and the golden calf (Exod 32–34). The preparations for the erection of the tent of meeting focus on the financing of the labor in the middle of the wilderness and the preparation of the craftsmen who need very special expertise ("wisdom"). In the Deuteronomistic accounts of the building of the temple and the palace in Jerusalem, the request is for Phoenician experts at this juncture. In the Priestly portrayal, all Israelite men and women with their financial and personal gifts lend their support on the do-it-yourself level (Exod 35:22–29). The emphatic participation of the women, who originally (following an archaic example?) had rendered a religious service with "mirrors,"³² is noteworthy and accords with the creation adage "male and female he created them" (Gen 1:27). Finally, the Spirit-filled chief craftsmen are mentioned by name—Bezalel and Oholiab—with names that sound slightly different, perhaps constructed with reference to the construction of the tent, and are associated

31. According to Luther; others translate it as "cover" (Zurich Bible, Good News, and Martin Noth, *Das zweite Buch Mose, Exodus* [ATD 5; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1959]). This is the absolutely holiest place of the temple, the combustion chamber of the holy place, at which the most intensive, for humans unbearable, encounter with God takes place, according to the Priestly understanding; see Exod 40:17–38.

32. Exod 38:8; cf. 2 Sam 2:22; see also Urs Winter, *Frau und Göttin* (OBO 53; Fribourg: Universitätsverlag, 1983), 58–65.

with the tribes of Judah and Dan (Exod 35:30–36:3). They recruited countless helpers, and then the great work could commence.

The model of the temple, made up of tapestry and wooden poles, is built quickly. In a somewhat modified sequence over against the planning instructions, this is followed by the important inventory of the sacred tent, including especially the ark of the covenant, with the *kappōret*, housed in the innermost compartment and dwelling place of Yahweh proper. As with the later original construction in Jerusalem, the altar of burnt offering goes in front of the temple-tent. It is made of wood overlaid with bronze (Exod 38:1–7); the fiction of the wilderness wandering, during which buildings made of stone are not permitted (portability of the object), is retained. In the end, the production of the sacred vestments for the priesthood, with all the insignia and symbols, must not be missing. After Moses inspects and approves the overall work in its component parts (Exod 39:32–43), the construction can begin. In his “glory” (this is the well-known divine “radiance of honor,” the aureole of majesty, known for thousands of years in the ancient Orient), Yahweh can move into his dwelling place, and the cultic work can begin (Exod 40). The reference to the burnt offering presented (40:29) seems hasty, however, since the cult can scarcely precede the coming of the presence of God.

This concern is taken into account in the instruction concerning the regulations of the offerings. This is necessary in order for the great induction service, led by Aaron and his sons (Lev 9), to be able to take place at all, following their appropriate and involved ordination by Moses (Lev 8). The Priestly interest is expressed strongly in all of the themes and texts from Exod 6 to Lev 9. The temple and the sacrifice are in the foreground so dominantly that at the apex of the portrayal the focus of worship seems to be entirely on the cultic offerings reserved for the clerics (sin offering, burnt offering, and peace offering). There is not a word about singing hymns, prayers, or Scripture readings, as is the case in Neh 8 and the Deuteronomistic religious covenantal assemblies (e.g., Josh 24; Deut 29–31). The great service of Solomon’s consecration (1 Kgs 8) has an extensive verbal part (prayer, blessing) in which the temple is designated especially as a “house of prayer” for believers. The sacrificial ceremony appears almost as an appendix to the verbal liturgy (8:62–64). In Lev 9, the constitutive service of the postexilic community, perhaps a deliberate reconstruction of the dedicatory acts associated with the rebuilt temple in 515 B.C.E., the central theme is the correct implementation of the previously listed laws pertaining to sacrifices and nothing else. On the other hand, the contemporary reader also senses that the concern here is not only the knowledge and privileged information of the priestly insider. The instructions about the mainly priestly activities also apply to the community. They are formulated so as to be intelligible to all; believers in Yahweh are

present (Lev 8:4–5), and Moses includes them in the cultic process. We will need to deal further with the impression of a community-based orientation.

It seems odd that, following the initial service of the Aaronides, the solemn picture of the early days is immediately disturbed by clerical discord. To be precise, the sons of the high priest, Nadab and Abihu, who actually are honorable sons and heirs of the only legitimate lineage in P (see Exod 6:23; 24:1, 9; 28:1; 1 Chr 5:29), “each took his censer, put fire in it, and laid incense on it; and they offered unholy fire before the LORD, such as he had not commanded them” (Lev 10:1). This is a mysterious note: Could this different element, irreconcilable with Yahweh’s fire-related glory (cf. 10:2), be attributed to another deity, perhaps even to the Persian Ahura Mazda worshiped in the temples of fire? Be that as it may, a profound cultic, theological division in the postexilic community becomes apparent. The internal rivalry in the Judean, Babylonian, and Egyptian communities of Yahweh is also an otherwise attested fact. This is difficult to reconstruct in detail, however.³³ Texts parallel to Lev 10 are found in Num 12 and 16, Third Isaiah (Isa 56–66), and some other writings that also contain traces of profound religious discussions stemming from the claim of respective, exclusive orthopraxy. Splits such as those of the Samaritans and the Qumran community mark the drifting apart of differing orientations of faith and confession within emerging Judaism. Hence with the revolts of the older sons of Aaron, the Priestly tradents have a historical situation of their own time in mind, which, just as in the case of all legitimate dynasties of office and cultic structures, is anchored in the normative primeval time.

The decisive new, worship-related construction of the temple community is followed by a series of collections or criteria ordering the community’s life, such as the purity laws, that is, prohibitions against touching, ingesting, or doing unclean things (Lev 11–15) and thereby becoming alienated from what is sacred. The regulations apply to all members of the community, not only to temple personnel; the concerns are correct nutrition (meat), genital secretions, certain sicknesses, and infestations of mold in houses. Also discussed are important customs associated with rituals and festivals; with the determination peculiar to the priests, they in part are established “for ever” (Lev 16–18; 20–25).³⁴ However, at the center of all cultic, ritual instructions there is a chapter with a peculiarly ethical orientation. From the perspective

33. See Smith, *Palestinian Parties and Politics*; from a critical perspective, see Grabbe, *Yehud*, 256–61 (“opposition ... seems rather overdone”).

34. The scholarly debate on the special existence and the nature of the “Holiness Code” (Lev 17–26) is largely within academia; it presupposes trust in some authors or at least literary circles; see Henry T. C. Sun, “An Investigation into the Compositional Integ-

of our conceptual patterns, it may be identified as a “community catechism.”³⁵ Viewed from the perspective of Lev 19, the surrounding texts may fall into the same category. The basic principle of the remarkable collection of norms, functioning like a heading, states, “You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy” (19:2). Form-critically, prohibitive formulations dominate, as they also occur in the Decalogue and related catalogs of norms.³⁶ They provide the members of the community with the basic ethical and cultic values, which in our text are preceded by honoring the parents and the Sabbath commandment (both expressed positively in the imperative mood, as in the Decalogue), as well as the prohibition against idols (19:3–4). Further on follow the catalogs of prohibitions, partly formulated in the plural and partly in the singular, which already have been regarded as slightly deformed decalogues (Sigmund Mowinckel), in Lev 19:11–18, 26–32. Their association with the standard propositions of the Decalogue is beyond doubt:

You shall not steal; you shall not deal falsely; and you shall not lie to one another. And you shall not swear falsely by my name, profaning the name of your God: I am the LORD. You shall not defraud your neighbor; you shall not steal; and you shall not keep for yourself the wages of a laborer until morning. You shall not revile the deaf or put a stumbling block before the blind; you shall fear your God: I am the LORD. (19:11–14)

Between sections of prohibitions there are casuistically formulated cultic and ritual instructions, for instance, on handling sacrificial meat (19:5–8), harvest gleanings (19:9–10), an adulterer (19:20–22: ritual atonement!), young fruit trees (19:23–25: ritual circumcision!), and the resident alien (19:33–34: “you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt”). Some orders seem archaic, such as the taboo of mixed breeding (19:19), the prohibition against eating blood, fortune-telling, and certain bereavement rituals (19:26–28, 31), while others are modern until the present (e.g., the love commandment with regard to tribal relatives and aliens, 19:18, 34). In short, the rules of life summarized in Lev 19, although they address only parts of reality, penetrate deeply into the day-to-day life of those addressed. They regulate the social and cultic conduct of the members of the community of that time to a far greater extent than any other text of the Hebrew tradition. The

city of the So-Called Holiness Code (Leviticus 17–26)” (Ph.D. diss., Claremont Graduate School, 1990).

35. Gerstenberger, *Leviticus*, 238–61.

36. Erhard S. Gerstenberger, *Wesen und Herkunft des “apodiktischen Rechts”* (WMANT 20; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1965; repr., Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 2009).

community being set apart for, that is, corresponding to, Yahweh is the premise of all regulations. From the demand for holiness arise all of the particular conditions. Turning to the exclusive, holy God as such signifies turning away from the "nonentities," those insubstantial other deities or powers (19:4). They are inherently hollow, merely manufactured by humans and deceptive. In very similar expressions, the Persian Avesta is able to compare the true God with lying beings. In Lev 19 there is no polemic against national, "other" deities, such as those found in Lev 18:3, 24–29; 20:1–5, 23–26 or in the Deuteronomistic work. Yahweh is the sovereign, universal Lord who is responsible for Israel. After each passage the tradents insert like a refrain: "I am Yahweh, your God" (Lev 19:4, 10, 12, 14, 18, 25, 28, 30, 31, 32, 33, 37)—a powerful liturgical demonstration of the absolute claim of ownership.

Leviticus 21 and 22 deal with matters concerning the priests, albeit in such a way that the interests and a certain control function of the community also become visible. The reminders of the conduct of the cultic servant are largely of a public kind (customs associated with grief, burial of the dead, choosing a wife, physical defects, eating sacred food, selecting sacrificial animals, etc.). From a purely formal perspective, both segments are exhortations Moses addressed to the priests (Lev 21:1; 22:1–2), yet the concluding forms encompass the entire community (Lev 21:24; 22:31–33). The extensive collections on the structuring of the events of the year and the seasonal festivals (Lev 23; 25; cf. 16–17) again are very important for the entire community. Without a fixed structure for the agricultural events, ancient people were at loose ends. Survival depended upon sufficient harvests, and the yield of fields, vineyards, and herds could not be harvested without the cooperation of the deities. The priestly (possibly shamanistic, prophetic) expertise was necessary to establish the days of the festivals correctly and to organize them ritually to please God. Leviticus 23 is a festival calendar for the entire agricultural year, as it already appears several times in the pre-Priestly tradition (see Exod 23:10–19; Deut 15:1–16:17). The threefold harvest festival, with Num 28–29 regarded as a further parallel, offers us a good opportunity to recognize the peculiarities of the Priestly festival calendar. The basic structure of the Passover, the Festival of Weeks, and the Festival of Booths is extant in all the texts; after all, it also informs the annual cycle of the Christian calendar even today. Also mentioned is a cycle of higher value, namely, the Sabbatical (fallow) Year in Exod 23:10–11, the Sabbatical Year (remission of debts; Deut 15:1–18), and the Year of Jubilee (Lev 25). Yet the details, as well as the ordering of individual regulations in the postexilic period (Leviticus!), are considerably different from the two exilic (?) or preexilic (?) festival calendars. We may offer just a few particularly important points.

In Deut 15–16 the Sabbath plays no part and in Exod 23:12 is perhaps only an echo of the Decalogue (Exod 20:8–11; cf. 34:21). In the latter pericope, the

weekly obligation of rest seems to be inserted between the commandments regarding the festivals in a curiously unmotivated way (Exod 34:18, 21–23). The Levitical calendar, however, begins programmatically: “These are the appointed festivals of the LORD that you shall proclaim as holy convocations, my appointed festivals” (Lev 23:2). Quite unexpectedly the passage continues with the Sabbath: “Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of complete rest,³⁷ a holy convocation; you shall do no work: it is a Sabbath to the LORD throughout your settlements” (23:3). As if the Sabbath commandment were an insertion for the tradents as well, 23:4 reiterates the introductory statement, “These are the appointed festivals of the LORD, the holy convocations...,” then, in keeping with the ancient pattern, switches to the Festival of the Passover and Unleavened Bread (23:5–6). Yet the instructions for implementation that follow attest to the fact that the Priestly regulation of the Sabbath was not inserted into the calendar as an erratic intrusion. Unlike any other calendar of festivals, the prohibition of work and the obligation to assemble³⁸ are also required for the seasonal festivals now (23:7–8, 21, 24–25, 30–31, 35–36, 39). Like a net, the regulation of the Sabbath settles on all the other times of festivals and rituals.³⁹ It determines the events liturgically and theologically. The seventh month in particular is worked out liturgically to the last detail (23:23–43). The first day begins with “trumpet blasts,” unlike at any other festival (23:24). Until today the tenth day is the most important sacred day in the annual cycle as a whole, namely, Yom Kippur (23:27), and from the fifteenth to the seventeenth day the great fall festival takes place, originally dedicated to the grape and fruit harvest (23:34–36, 39–43, note the twofold mention of this festival, interrupted by a premature concluding reference in 23:37–38). The result is enlightening: the Priestly tradents have expanded the older tradition of three⁴⁰ annual festivals; they also systematized and subordinated it to the rule of the commandment of the Sabbath. The prescribed sacrifices are given special consideration. Thereby they provided the community of Yahweh with a corset of liturgical events. It forms the basis of the Jewish calendar of the year even today and has only partly been expanded by subsequent festivals (e.g., Purim and Hanukkah). As in most Priestly traditions,

37. *Šabbat šabbātôn* occurs only in Lev 23 and 16:31; 25:4–5; Exod 16:23; 31:15; 35:2. See E. Haag, *TDOT* 14:396.

38. The word *miqrāʾ* (“summons, proclamation”) apparently has the quality of “place of assembly”; see H. Lamberty-Zielinski, *TDOT* 13:110.

39. J. Milgrom, *Leviticus: A New Translation* (AB 3–3B; New York: Doubleday, 1991–2001), 1:19ff., 27–28, 2:1350–52.

40. Exod 23:14, 17; Deut 16:16. In Lev 23, this standard number understandably is no longer to be found.

it is clear again that the calendar of festivals was not recorded as professional knowledge of the liturgical experts but has been given to the community as a whole for its orientation. This is the intent of the introduction, concluding reference, and the intermittent formulations (23:2, 43, 10, 23, 31), as well as the pervasive direct address in the second-person plural that they control.

In the pre-Priestly calendars, the year of fallowness (i.e., of remission) precedes the seasonal cycle. This is particularly meaningful in the case of the year of fallowness (Exod 23:10–11), for the agricultural practices provide the backdrop for all the festivals. However, already in the book of Exodus, as well as in Deuteronomy (15:1–18: setting slaves free in the seventh year), the motif of reinstatement of an earlier condition is only marginally linked with the annually recurring festivals. In the calendar of Lev 23, the chapter dealing with restitution (Lev 25) follows some materials that are loosely sprinkled in (thus our impression that Lev 24 has to do with the arrangement of the temple and an example of the crime of blaspheming God) but then massively and with great breadth, as well as in a new, very peculiar manner. The fallowness every seventh year (Lev 25:3–7, 19–22) is connected to the release of (Hebrew!) slaves on account of indebtedness and the restoration of mortgaged property rights (25:8–23). The major difference over against the earlier analogous arrangements, however, is the seven-year cycle that is relinquished for one of fifty years:

And you shall hallow the fiftieth year, and you shall proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you: you shall return, every one of you to your family. That fiftieth year shall be a jubilee for you: you shall not sow, or reap the after-growth, or harvest the unpruned vines. For it is a jubilee; it shall be holy to you: you shall eat only what the field itself produces. [*In this time frame, property rights can only be "sold" in keeping with the anticipated harvest, for*] ... the land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine; with me you are but aliens and tenants. Throughout the land that you hold, you shall provide for the redemption of the land. (25:10–12, 23–24)

This declaration of principle is followed by six subordinate cases, each introduced with a conditional clause and articulated with precision, for redeeming or returning slaves or property (25:25–55). Thus this great chapter of the Priestly Year of Jubilee (ram's horn) develops a magnificent, unique vision of the general remission of debt every fiftieth year. It has undergone a fascinating history of application and continues to have an effect until the present.⁴¹

41. Cf. the "holy" years of the Catholic Church and the "Campaign 2000" for the debt-release of the poorest countries; see Erhard S. Gerstenberger, "... zu lösen die Gebun-

A few important observations on Lev 25 have to suffice at this point. They reveal much about the social structure of the Yahweh community during the Persian period. Release and return of property after fifty years take place on the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur, 25:9). Analogously to Lev 23, 24, the ceremony is to be introduced with loud trumpet sounds. Thus the arrangement of Jubilee is closely linked with the festival calendar. Yom Kippur, only concerned with offerings in Lev 16 and 23:27–32, receives a very different dimension here. It becomes a unique, perhaps utopian, vehicle for social balance. Whether or not this radical land reform, occurring every fifty years, was ever carried out consistently cannot be ascertained, given our historical distance and the insufficient sources. Figures based on experience tend to militate against it. The episode of the liberation of slaves under King Zedekiah (Jer 34:8–22) also has to caution us against treating such socioeconomic ideas as institutional reality. What is certain is that a very strong spirit of societal responsibility was abroad in the draft of a periodic restitution of ideal social conditions, given its ever so Priestly structure. As in Lev 19, this responsibility is wrapped in a ritual fabric. The regulations concerning the year of remission are fundamentally anchored in that ominous “Sabbath for the land” (Lev 25:2–4; cf. 26:34–35), providing the sacred soil with “rest” against agricultural abuse. The liberation of indentured slaves, originally intended to occur every seven years, is now postponed to the fiftieth year (25:8–11). Yet the possibilities of purchasing one’s freedom in this otherwise unrealistically long period are emphasized: the indentured slave himself (25:26–27, 49) or his clan (25:25, 47–53) are authorized to act; the annually reduced amount owed can make the redemption of the enslaved member of the family easier. That the indentured slave theoretically (and for theological reasons!) is to be treated like a hired worker (25:39–42, 53), and thus is able to earn money, supports the option of redemption, of course. Similar criteria apply in the case of real estate. Allowance is made for early redemption (25:25). In the city, a special right of repurchase, limited to one year, is in force. Subsequently in the city the teaching of the Year of Jubilee is annulled for reasons of securing property rights in general; the owner of a house or property is guaranteed his (family) possession in perpetuity (25:29). Outside the city, however, permanent landholding remains emphatically prohibited (25:31). We see how the real constraints of city life cancel the theological utopia that the soil is Yahweh’s property and only to be used in a kind of leasehold arrangement (25:23–24). The same also occurs in Lev 25 in the con-

denen,” in *Kampagne Erlassjahr 2000: Entwicklung braucht Entschuldung* (ed. Kirchlicher Entwicklungsdienst der EKHn; Frankfurt, 1999), 59–96; see also above, Excursus on “Debt and Debt Release” following §II.3.4.

text of a second sensitive situation. In the Priestly traditions, naturalized aliens occasionally are granted full rights (Exod 12:48–49; Lev 18:26; 19:33–34; 24:16, 22, etc.)—achievements of humanity that transcend by far everything modern democracies have achieved in this area until now. But if the issue is solid property rights and human rights, the noble, altruistic principle is quickly forgotten. An ethnically tinted domestic and foreign morality gains ground:

As for the male and female slaves whom you may have, it is from the nations around you that you may acquire male and female slaves. You may also acquire them from among the aliens residing with you and from their families that are with you who have been born in your land, and they may be your property. You may keep them as a possession for your children after you, for them to inherit as property. These you may treat as slaves, but as for your fellow Israelites, no one shall rule over the other with harshness. (25:44–46)

Theological vision and lived reality are far apart in the biblical texts.

In the remaining chapters of Leviticus and Numbers there still is a multitude of themes pointing to the situation of the (post)exilic Judean communities in Jerusalem/Judah and in the Diaspora of the time. One of the problems, for instance, was the legitimacy of functioning Levites and priests in the Chronicist writings (Num 3–4; 18) and the resultant rivalries and power struggles of the time (Num 12; 16). Further issues are the supplements to Levitical regulations concerning sacrifices and purity (Num 5; 15; 28–29), the financial safeguarding of the sanctuary (Num 7), and the neglected religious offices and functions to date (Num 6). In short, the Priestly traditions clearly focused on anchoring, ordering, and orienting the relevant community structures and everyday life within them in the Persian period in the normative situation of Sinai. Israel camps at the mountain of God and through the mediation of Moses (the consistent wording is “Yahweh said to Moses: ‘Speak with the Israelites and tell them’”) receives the carefully stylized instructions for actions in force forever, as it befits the community existing as a “holy” community in the immediate vicinity and presence of God.

For us this poses especially the question of the extent to which the numerous requirements of a sacral and ethical kind in the Priestly traditions of the Pentateuch, in addition to which perhaps similar passages in Ezekiel may be consulted, provide for us information about the social structure, worship, and theology of the postexilic community. Social historical analyses and reconstructions have not yet made much headway in scholarship.⁴² Yet espe-

42. See Kippenberg, *Religion und Klassenbildung*; Kreissig, *Die sozialökonomische Situation*; Weinberg, “Die Agrarverhältnisse,” idem, “Citizen-Temple Community”; Rainer

cially from the standardizations of the Priestly Sinai pericope, which points to their own time so clearly, one should expect information about the structures, institutions, living conditions, and theological concepts of the literary time of origin.

In our cultural realm, when social structures are the issue, one first tends to think of the authority structure that every human group inevitably shows. The initial overall impression of the Priestly writings is the following: Yahweh instructs his community. The concluding self-identifying formula, "I am Yahweh, your God," especially in Lev 19, is reminiscent of a direct theocracy. The community, listening and called upon to heed divine orders, is assumed everywhere. The instructing voice of Yahweh does not come from heaven or from the thorn bush, however, but is rather mediated through people with varying roles and offices. Other individuals, such as Miriam (Num 12) or the seventy charismatic elders (Num 11:16–30), perhaps also the presumptuous priests in Lev 10 and Num 16, are in competition with the authority of Moses. In the mainstream of the tradition, however, his authority seems to be essentially binding. But what postexilic authority hides behind Moses? In the book of Ezra-Nehemiah, it is the "writer," in other words, the "scribe," who in some way gives the orders. He is able to present the sacred texts but also to guard, copy, and actualize them ritually. The priests seem to be subordinate to him, and Ezra probably was stylized as a priest only secondarily. Although in the Priestly layers (different from the Deuteronomistic ones!) the literary formulation and the resultant reading of the divine norms hardly plays a part (Exod 24:7), the extensive collections of regulations nevertheless definitely make a literary impression, given their precise, technical style. The frequent concluding remarks ("these are the regulations/commandments for..."; see Lev 7:37–38; 11:46; 13:59; 14:54–57; 15:32–33; 27:34, etc.) are part of a literary type (colophons). This may mean that in the Priestly perspective the scribes and literary guardians of the tradition are the highest community leaders. They are behind the "I" of God who provides all the orders at Sinai. They are the mediators of the word, not the priests taking care of the cult. The inclusion of the community as a hearing and occasionally cooperating and decision-making body underscores the portrait not of a monarchic but rather a religious and lay body organized in a variety of offices. The scribes, however, remain hidden behind the texts.⁴³ Only the cultic system with the "offering" being the focal point is presented broadly. A (cultic!) opposition is

Kessler, "Frühkapitalismus," *EvT* 54 (1994): 413–27; idem, *Social History*; Berquist, *Judaism in Persia's Shadow*; Grabbe, *Yehud*.

43. See Veijola, *Moses Erben* (at §III.2.1).

not intended. Rival groups did indeed exist, but they were illegitimate. The spiritual gifting of the elders in Num 11 points to a prophetic element only from a distance (11:29; cf. Joel 3:1–2). In the context of the Priestly writing, the Spirit of Yahweh superficially aids in the assumption of difficult administrative services. The Spirit-permeated office of the Nazirite (Num 6) is based on a vow of self-consecration and obviously can involve various functions (see 6:21). On the political-juridical level, the judges and mediators, so important in the Deuteronomistic work, are missing. If a criminal act that has not yet been established in the tradition is to be settled, the case is taken to Moses. He waits for a divine decision, and the “whole community” becomes the body executing the divine will (Lev 24:10–23). The infrastructure of Israel as a whole is marked by a traditional system of tribes (see Num 1; 2; 7, etc.). Leaders are called *nšî'im* (“princes,” Num 7) or occasionally *sārîm* (military “leaders,” Num 31:14, 48–54, etc.). The “heads of ancestral houses” (Num 7:2; 17:18; 31:26; 36:1) are probably responsible for the subordination to the respective tribes. A fixed ordering of the tribes such as this, especially following the dispersions of the population of the exilic period, seems rather ideological and artificial than a representation of reality. Overall, then, we get the impression of a structured religious community that, as a whole, is focused entirely on Yahweh, his communicated word, the cult he deserves, as well as the everyday life directed by his will. The authority structure is not regulated only by means of the offices described. Rather, the entire community as the group, addressed in the second-person plural (occasionally, in an individualizing way, in the second-person singular), comes into view and is an entity *sui generis*.

The housing and living conditions of the community of Yahweh show through in many texts. “Israel” lives in a fairly large number of “settlements” or “towns” (see Lev 23:3, 14, 17, 21, 31, etc.) and in Jerusalem, of course. That the Babylonian Diaspora is also in view in this context is shown clearly in the catalogue of warnings in Lev 26:14–32, anticipating the dispersion among the nations as a culmination (26:32). Despite all the concentration on the temple and the temple-citizen-community, the spatial scattering of the community seems to be already in place; problems associated with pilgrimages, for instance, are not mentioned in the festival calendars. Agriculture is the livelihood of the members of the community. Animals and harvests play a significant part. In the case of personal offerings, the offerer brings animals of his own to the temple, where they have to be tested for their suitability; the priest carries out only the blood rite at the altar (see Lev 3:1–2). At least the intellectual elite live in Jerusalem and in an urban milieu. A concentration of theological reflection such as in the Priestly stratum cannot be found in the country. The money economy partly has

already replaced the exchange of goods (see Lev 5:15; 27). Social distinctions can be sensed even in the sacrificial criteria: in place of a sheep, the poor are able to bring a turtledove or a pigeon as an atoning gift (Lev 1:14; 5:7). Especially in Lev 19 the social requirements show a high degree of intracommunal responsibility for those who are socially weak, physically impaired, or alien sojourners. Nevertheless, it can happen that in keeping with the contemporary mentality (fear of demons, fear of taboo, risk of infection) those especially marked by divine punishment are excluded from the community (see Lev 13:45–46). Otherwise there are strong family ties, as we learn from genealogical references but also from the ancient list of “prohibited levels of family relations,” with Priestly adaptations, in Lev 18. Sexual intercourse within a clan living together is tightly regulated; in other words, it is restricted by means of strong taboos. The long-term relationship of families must not be threatened. Beyond this, however, the local community of Yahweh remains the most important point of reference in which all of the cultic, religious, and interpersonal life takes place. The “neighbor” is not the family member but the fellow believer, especially in the local context. From a sociological perspective, the parochial community still existing today, albeit under different conditions, took shape in that postexilic period of Israel.

The passages in Ezekiel and other prophetic writings referring to the temple and the priestly service have to be taken into consideration in this context. They belong to the Priestly tradition of the formative Jewish communities. As an example we may refer to Ezek 8 with its gloomy portrait of the abused sanctuary. Community leaders and women carry out abhorrent, illegitimate cultic rituals and thus bring a high degree of impurity into the hallowed halls. Yahweh’s dwelling place is irreparably violated. In taking a glance at Ezek 40–48, the text illustrates the rebuilding of the temple and of the holy city of Jerusalem in a comprehensive vision.⁴⁴ On the whole, the details of the intended rules agree with the Priestly conceptions of purity and the sanctuary in the books of Leviticus and Numbers. A debate concerning the valid priestly lineages is reminiscent of similar discussions in the books of Chronicles. The structure and settlement of the holy city are developed from the Priestly concept of the sanctuary. Thus it is possible to gain the impression from the Priestly layers of the Old Testament that the

44. The temporal setting of the book of Ezekiel is debated; cf. Alberty, *Israel in Exile*, 346–52. Alberty, too, takes the view that the efforts for “the reorganization of the community in Palestine in chapters 40–48 make sense only at a time when people felt a new beginning to be imminent, following the fall of the Babylonian Empire in 539 at the earliest but probably not until Cambyse’s Egyptian campaign in 525” (352).

new community of believers in Yahweh that developed in the Persian period takes on a form strongly shaped by the Priestly *kābôd* theology in which Yahweh assumes his central place in the Jerusalem sanctuary in inaccessible splendor.⁴⁵ A closer analysis of the respective literary layers, however, as emphasized above, indicates the following: the Priestly concerns are embedded in broader community structures, among which the Mosaic literary tradition proves to be dominant. Both the tradition of the sanctuary and of interpretation, however, are only conceivable in the urban milieu, whether in Palestine or in the Diaspora. From the sociological perspective, the Yahweh community as we encounter it in multilayered form in the Hebrew writings is an urban phenomenon, even if people from the rural spheres of life in the urban hinterland also belonged to the community. According to the evidence in the extant writings, the latter did not set the tone. Both the priestly and the scribal activities within the framework of the community presuppose an urban culture. The fact that this observation cannot denote a uniform theology and structure of the Jewish community, however, has already been shown in an evaluation of the documents from Elephantine (see §II.4.2 above).

III.1.1.4. Novellas (Joseph, Ruth, Jonah)

Alter, Robert. *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981). **Berlin**, Adele. *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* (Bible and Literature Series 9; Sheffield: Almond, 1983). **Coats**, George W. *Saga, Legend, Tale, Novella, Fable: Narrative Form in Old Testament Literature* (JSOTSup 35; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1985). **Davies**, Phillip A. *Scribes and Schools: The Canonization of the Hebrew Scriptures* (Library of Ancient Israel; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998), esp. 142–51. **Dietrich**, Walter. *Die Josepherzählung als Novelle und Geschichtsschreibung* (BThSt 14; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1989). **Ebach**, Jürgen. *Kassandra und Jona* (Frankfurt: Athenäum, 1987). **Fischer**, Irmtraud. *Rut* (HTKAT; Freiburg: Herder, 2001). **Golka**, Friedemann W. *Joseph—biblische Gestalt und literarische Figur: Thomas Mann's Beitrag zur Bibellexege* (Stuttgart: Calwer, 2002). **Gow**, Murray D. *The Book of Ruth: Its Structure, Theme, and Purpose* (Leicester: Apollos, 1992). **Lux**, Rüdiger. *Jona, Prophet zwischen "Verweigerung" und "Gehorsam": Eine erzählanalytische Studie* (FRLANT 162; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1994). **Meinold**, Arnt. "Die Gattung der Josephsgeschichte und des Esterbuches: Diasporanovelle I und II," *ZAW* 87 (1975): 306–23; 88 (1976): 72–93. **Mesters**, Carlos. *Der Fall Ruth*

45. Cf. Friedhelm Hartenstein, *Die Unzugänglichkeit Gottes im Heiligtum : Jesaja 6 und der Wohnort JHWHs in der Jerusalemer Kulttradition* (WMANT 75; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1997).

(Erlangen: Verlag der Ev.-Luth. Mission, 1988). **Redford**, Donald B. *A Study of the Biblical Story of Joseph (Genesis 37–50)* (VTSup 20; Leiden: Brill, 1970). **Seebass**, Horst. *Josephgeschichte (37,1–50,26)*. Vol. 3 of *Genesis* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2000). **Simon**, Ulrich. *Jona: Ein jüdischer Kommentar* (SBS 157; Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1994).

The literary works presented thus far are relatively clearly associated with the social structures of Israel and the historical circumstances of the Persian period. This is only marginally the case with regard to the three “novelistic” literary pieces of the Old Testament. The basic questions are the following: What genre(s) does this concern? How is their life setting and purpose to be determined? Did such devotional literature, targeting a private readership, already exist in the Judean community in the Persian period, or must we classify the novelistic literature completely differently? The narrative pieces mentioned, the story of Joseph and the books of Ruth and Jonah, seem to represent high-level literature. Yet the further question is also appropriate: Were such extensive, stylistically as well as theologically mature compositions passed on orally to begin with and fixed literarily only at a later point in time? In the contemporary discussion, one tends toward a literary original form of the respective complexes of text, but this immediately presupposes an advanced literary culture disseminated in Israel, which we generally only assume in the Hellenistic period. Its rise in the late Persian Empire in about the second half of the fourth century cannot be excluded, however. In this case, our three “novellas”⁴⁶ would have to be placed into this period for simply formal reasons.

Based on our understanding, novellas are medium-sized literary works that pay attention to an elaborately constructed frame of action and within this frame model the acting figures with sensitivity as typically human protagonists. The goal of this portrayal is an edifying model of human life that makes one think and has an educational effect. So far, so good. We must take into account, however, that our understanding of using literary works does not coincide with its counterpart in the biblical era. For this reason the life setting of every text is the decisive criterion for a determination of the genre.

46. The term, of course, belongs to modern literary studies (see André Jolles, *Einfache Formen* [7th ed.; Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1968]) but can be used with prudence here as well. The warning against “minimization” and “trivialization” of the texts (Fischer, *Rut*, 77–85) is to be taken seriously. Yet the literary genre does not exclude the midrashic intention of the narrators.

The story of Joseph (Gen 37–50) is strikingly different from the remaining patriarchal narratives. Superficially it addresses family problems: Jacob's relationship with his favorite son Joseph and the arrogance of the latter over against his brothers. In the narrative, the internal family tensions are skillfully and psychologically transferred via the sale of the unloved braggart to Egypt in the southern empire. In an extraordinary way, Joseph experiences the deepest humiliation in the prison of Pharaoh and a wondrous ascent to become the vizier of Egypt. He saves the people of the Nile and thereby at the same time his own family from death by starvation. In accordance with wise understanding, the feuds with the brothers can be settled, Jacob dies in peace and can be buried in Palestine, and his clan continues to enjoy a secure life in Egyptian prosperity (Gen 50:1–21). Meanwhile, the idyllic family and the family tensions do not bear the primary emphasis; they are not the reason for narrators and tradents to shape and pass on the Joseph material. All individual and interpersonal references in the composition have a certain dimension of social depth from the start. Joseph's internal claim to power has something to do with that of the tribe with the same name. The striking ascent of Joseph, the slave, to become the redemptive regent of the world power Egypt, established mysteriously and without great fanfares by Yahweh, must have something to do with Israel's and Judah's faith in the one universal God. From these two facts alone arises the difficult question about the approximate time frame of the narrative. Opinions vary widely. They vacillate between the prestate and postexilic time. The basic intellectual and theological features of the novella favor the late period of the Old Testament. They provide the entire outline of the character of a universal, cosmopolitan worldview in which tiny Israel already mediates the life-saving impulses of his God to the legendary world power of Egypt. Salvation does not come from Egypt but moves toward the Egyptians and saves people from death by drought. That Joseph, in other words, a representative of middle-Palestinian tribes, is the mediator of life certainly does not have to point back to the time when the northern kingdom of Israel was setting the tone in the Palestinian realm. Joseph is not equipped with royal authority but rather with authority associated with wisdom and astrology; he fits the type of a magician rather than that of a political protagonist. To this extent he does not reflect the monarchical period and conception but that of the bourgeois of the exilic and postexilic period. Furthermore, the Joseph narrative is completely embedded in the literary context of the narrative of the patriarchal parents and the exodus. It has connecting functions and in particulars also refers back to the preceding narrative circles, for instance, in the characterization of Joseph's brothers or a patriarch's preference for the younger son even though he was not the legal heir. It also provides the desired contrasting

background for the motif of Israel's oppression under a subsequent pharaoh who "did not know Joseph" (Exod 1:8). Thus there are good reasons for placing the Joseph novella in the Judah of the Persian period.⁴⁷

At this point it is worthwhile to glance with one eye at the book of Esther, which probably originated in the Hellenistic period, since its legendary reflection and overall perspective of the world, including the theodicy of history in favor of Israel, are even further removed from the argued Babylonian scene than the one we assume for the Joseph narrative. Esther shows features that are to be construed as a further development of the paradigms situated in the Joseph narrative.

While Mordecai functions as a figure in the background, Esther, over against Haman, "the fool," Esther represents the "beautiful, wise woman" who conquers death and furthers life as a personification of wisdom. As a female Joseph-figure, she is a utopian role model for all who live in foreign parts (Diaspora), on the one hand, and take up the struggle for their survival themselves, on the other.⁴⁸

In the Esther novella, the universal God of Israel is not even mentioned. Nevertheless, by means of the beautiful, wise Jewess he holds the entire powerful Persian Empire in his hand, just as he ruled Egypt through Joseph. This may well be the message of the two perfectly structured stories. In this universal breadth, it is only possible since the integration of Judah into the imperial structures of the ancient Orient. Further, the book of Esther follows the model of the narrative of Joseph and, in turn, is adopted by the narratives of Daniel that follow still later.

The novellas of Joseph and Esther deal with the problem of world dominion as it was experienced from the perspective of a tiny religious minority in the multinational empires of the time. The book of Ruth deals with completely different topics, such as the levirate marriage, matrilinear succession, proceedings with proselytes, and the genealogical table of David, and thus is also completely rooted in the social structures and living conditions of the exilic and postexilic community of the Diaspora. The basic problems again are cast stylistically and literarily in a perfect form. The finely spun structure of

47. Thus, even if only marginally substantiated, Meinhold, "Die Gattung der Josephsgeschichte"; Redford, *Study of the Biblical Story of Joseph*; H. P. Müller, "Die weisheitliche Lehrerzählung im Alten Testament und seiner Umwelt," *WO* 9 (1977/78): 77–98; differently Blum, *Studien zur Komposition des Pentateuch*, 234–44; Dietrich, *Die Josepherzählung als Novelle*.

48. Erich Zenger et al., *Einleitung in das alte Testament* (5th ed.; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2004), 207.

the plot is developed as family-related story. After years of drought-induced exile, the widow Naomi returns with her Moabite daughter-in-law to Bethlehem, the home of her husband. There she skillfully sets up Ruth's liaison with the wealthy farmer Boaz. He is a distant relative who is nevertheless obligated to redeem her. The inevitable happens: Boaz falls in love with Ruth and takes her to be his wife. This resolves the problem of Elimelech's family: the male offspring of Ruth is considered the son of Naomi (!) and thus only indirectly the son of Elimelech. Further complications are dealt with elegantly, namely, that the natural mother of Obed is a foreigner,⁴⁹ and this scion becomes the ancestor of David. One gets the impression that the decisions represented in the book of Ruth are consciously maintained in tension with other, traditional efforts of delimitation. Many passages read like a direct countercommentary on separatist Scripture references. The question arises whether the entire book of Ruth does not have a midrashic functions in the form of a literarily superior narrative, in other words, that it serves to comment on and counteract sacred scriptures already in circulation and use.⁵⁰

If these assumptions are applicable to some extent, the book of Ruth presents us with a further reflection of community life in the postexilic period. The large-scale politics and the universal faith in Yahweh do not play a part here. Instead, the hearers of the story of Ruth are concerned with existential problems of everyday life. How do things stand with regard to immigrated foreign women? Should they really be excluded from the Judean community, as some contemporaries demand? By no means, according to the tradents of the Ruth tradition, for even the family tree of David, the holy founding monarch,⁵¹ contains a Moabite. Do men have to meet their obligations in fathering descendants for deceased relatives and thereby assume the responsibility for a widow and a neighbor family? The obligation applies, but it is possible to elude it for good reasons (reduction of personal interests, e.g., Ruth 4:3–10; Deut 25:5–10). Is the repurchase of (mortgaged) real estate a practicable and ethically necessary matter? In postexilic Judah, the issue of real estate (ancestral property of a family!) must have been very important, otherwise it would not have received as much attention (see Lev 25; 27:16–25;

49. Over against this are practices and laws that intend to exclude foreign influence, especially on the part of Moab; see Deut 23:4–7; Num 25:1–9; Ezra 10; and Neh 13:1–3, 23–27.

50. Especially Irmtraud Fischer has substantiated this aspect carefully; see her commentary on Ruth in the HTKAT series. "Intertextuality" is a further key term: step by step Ruth deals with extant writings; see Fischer, *Ruth*, 47–48, 61–65, 81–85.

51. For most Judean contemporaries, the Davidic dynasty embodied the valid favor of Yahweh; see the Chronistic work but also 2 Sam 7 and Ps 89.

Num 27:1–11; 36). In short, communal life in the community of Yahweh produced numerous questions of faith and jurisprudence. The Priestly layers of the Old Testament react to the problems of life with collections of regulations resembling a catechism. They contain instructions for cultic, social, and moral behavior. The novellas choose an artistic literary form offering essential questions as exemplary story and propagating valid norms. Both are contained in the Torah-tradition.

The prophetic book of Jonah offers a further variant of reflection and orientation in narrative packaging. The literary form of this small book is unparalleled; it even offers a good measure of humor. The named prophet refuses to accept Yahweh's task of proclamation. He attempts to flee from the demand by the "highest God" and boards a ship for Tarshish in the extreme west of the world of that time. Yahweh, however, makes use of a storm, the pagan sailors, and the famous great fish to bring Jonah to his place of action, the Assyrian capital Nineveh. His sermon has a huge, completely unexpected success. The city with its inhabitants and animals repents, and then Jonah quarrels with God, who cancels the decision to destroy it. In an almost satirical manner, God once again teaches Jonah that retaliation cannot be the only principle of action:

You are concerned about the bush, for which you did not labor and which you did not grow; it came into being in a night and perished in a night. And should I not be concerned about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also many animals? (Jonah 4:10–11)

The narrative acts like a parody on obstinate, know-it-all prophets and theologians. Rigid received opinions about the justice and compassion of God, the inescapability of prophetic reprimand, as well as about the position and guilt of empires are not completely binding. There are divine digressions from the norm. A prophet has a specific task of proclamation, which can be cancelled, however, in the context of new historical developments. God acts neither mechanistically nor legalistically. His mercy penetrates even the walls to other nations; genuine remorse and repentance also cancel serious offenses committed by political adversaries. The hints of the blessed, gracious, and compassionate, long-suffering God in Jewish liturgy (see Exod 34:6–7; Ps 103:8) also apply to Yahweh's foreign relations with foreign nations. How could a universal God deal otherwise with others who are not of one's very closest cradle? Hence prophetism and faith in God in the context of empires are being tested.

As can be observed in some other prophetic books, the Jonah narrative already assumes other traditions that are fixed literarily. The prophetic

oracles concerning foreign nations in Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel generally express uncompromising condemnation of foreign countries. Most of the time mention is made of Assyria or its king (Isa 14:24; 31:1–9; 37:21–29; Ezek 32:22–23). In some prophetic messages, especially in the book of Nahum, Nineveh is addressed pointedly about a single attack against this powerful enemy power: “A jealous and avenging God is the LORD, the LORD is avenging and wrathful; the LORD takes vengeance on his adversaries and rages against his enemies” (Nah 1:2).

The key terms “slow to anger” (1:3) and “good” (1:7) likewise appear in the text of Nahum, referring to those who love Yahweh and who “take refuge in him” (1:7), but not to his enemies. Thus the whole book of Nahum seems to be bent on the merciless destruction of Nineveh (as perhaps also in the original form of the composition of Zeph 1–3 [see Zeph 2:13], which later was reinterpreted as meaning Jerusalem). An annulment of the decision of judgment is out of the question. Yet it is precisely this point that the book of Jonah addresses. It seems to want to refute the hard line of Nahum. Conversely, the text of Nahum proclaims an almost Deuteronmistic theology of action and consequence: whoever repents will be pardoned (see Jer 18:7–8). Jonah shares the skepticism, in view of the prophet’s common sense and its genuine authorization by Yahweh, for instance, with Zech 13:3–6. Further, Jonah’s proximity to the liturgical language and imagination can be seen in the theme: the compassionate God who waives severe retaliation is central. Further, the psalm of thanksgiving inserted in Jonah 2 is reminiscent of the worshipful praise of the community. All in all, various links to other Old Testament texts and themes can be identified in the book of Jonah—a typical sign of scribal authorship and tradition. The book deals with the prophecy concerning the foreign nations of the time and presents Yahweh as sovereign and not exclusively focused on Israel and its native servants of God. The derision regarding a narrow-minded church-steeple theology cannot be ignored. The same is true of the sympathy for the repentant city of Nineveh.⁵² For the general awareness in Persian Judah and the communities of the Diaspora the following ensues: the questions of Israel’s particularity in a vast empire were being discussed and evaluated and answered in different ways. If in the book of Ezra-Nehemiah strict separation is demanded to the point of divorce of ethnically mixed marriages, then in Jonah, as well as in the book of Ruth and in the story of Joseph, the windows and doors open up for other cultures

52. Settlements of the size described, namely, “a three days’ walk across” (Jonah 1:3), 120,000 inhabitants, did not exist in ancient Palestine; see Volkmar Fritz, *Die Stadt im alten Israel* (Munich: Beck, 1990), 19, 39–54, 61–112.

and religions. A touch of this opening can also be sensed in Isa 19:23–24, for instance, which presumably also belongs to the time after the Babylonian victory of 587 B.C.E.:

On that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrian will come into Egypt, and the Egyptian into Assyria, and the Egyptians will worship with the Assyrians. On that day Israel will be the third with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth, whom the LORD of hosts has blessed, saying, "Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel my heritage."

At the conclusion of this section concerning the novellas of the Hebrew Bible, we want to ask the question again about what social structures can possibly be ascertained from the discussed texts. We do not have any direct references. Under the basic assumption that documents are always shaped by their situations of origin and use, suppositions on some points can be expressed in each case. The high literary quality of the three narratives, in keeping with the book-culture known to us today, possibly leads us to a private use of the texts. This would indicate an individualized reading culture and a corresponding structure of profession and leisure time on the part of (the elite?) society. With an analysis like this, however, we may possibly be on a wrong track suggested by modern concepts. The numerous intertextual references observed especially in Ruth and Jonah more likely point to scribal efforts delegated by a community. They presuppose a high degree of religious and literary specialization. In the figure of Ezra, perhaps also in the scribe Baruch in Jeremiah, we encounter such specialized tradents and developers of the sacred tradition for the first time. From them one might expect literary works that, in keeping with the customs of the time, were not intended for private reading in the first place but for use in the community. In this case these three novellas represented elevated texts for reading aloud; the only question is what institutional arrangements the community had to attract attention to these writings.⁵³

The themes and motifs examined provide a certain explanation about problems within society. As we have seen, the constitution and identity of the community of Yahweh are concerns that are given priority. The relation-

53. Davies places the three Hebrew novellas into the broader context of ancient narrative culture, from the Egyptian Sinuhe and Wen-Amon accounts to the Aramaic Ahiqar story to the Hellenistic novels under the heading "serious entertainment" (*Scribes and Schools*, 142–51). See also Berquist, *Judaism in Persia's Shadow*, 230–31. Widely lacking, however, is a more precise determination of the place where this literature was used.

ship to other ethnic and religious communities is an issue. The reliability of the Word of God and the doubtful nature of its human mediation concern the tradents. The spectrum of the topics addressed and the professional narrative, as well as internally critical treatment of the subject matter, attest to a high level of theological reflection. Concerning the audience we really hear nothing at all. Subliminally, however, those receiving the content are only conceivable as partners who follow the train of thought and join in the evaluation. They have to understand the numerous references to the current and discussed tradition. In the ongoing controversies regarding legal practices and theological positions, they have to form an opinion. From what we know about the epoch, bodies made up of elders, scribes but perhaps also the assembled community as a whole, are worth considering. While catechetical texts, as available in the Priestly texts of the Torah, seem to point to pedagogical institutions of the community, within or alongside the worship setting, the narratives discussed might refer to smaller, more educated groups. Nevertheless, the use by the community is surely not excluded. In all the imaginary institutional embeddings, the striking characteristic is the pedagogical and theological aim of the “novellas.”

III.1.2. PROPHETIC WRITINGS

III.1.2.1. Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi

Bauer, Lutz. *Zeit des Zweiten Tempels—Zeit der Gerechtigkeit* (BEATAJ 31; Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1992). **Beyse**, Karl-Martin. *Serubbabel und die Königserwartungen der Propheten Haggai und Sacharja* (AzTH 1/48; Stuttgart: Calwer, 1998). **Blenkinsopp**, Joseph. *A History of Prophecy in Israel* (rev. and enl.; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996). **Bousset**, Wilhelm. *Kyrios Christos* (trans. John F. Steely; Nashville: Abingdon, 1970). **Conrad**, Edgar W. *Zechariah* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999). **Day**, John, ed. *King and Messiah in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (JSOT-Sup 270; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998). **Delkurt**, Holger. *Sacharjas Nachtgesichte* (BZAW 302; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2000). **Fabry**, Heinz-Josef, and Klaus Scholtissek. *Der Messias* (NEB 5; Würzburg: Echter, 2002). **Gressmann**, Hugo. *Der Messias* (FRLANT 43; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1929). **Kessler**, John. *The Book of Haggai* (VTSup 91; Leiden: Brill, 2002). **Krieg**, Matthias. *Mutmassungen über Maleachi* (ATANT 80; Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 1993). **Pola**, Thomas. *Das Priestertum bei Sacharja* (FAT 35; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003). **Mowinckel**, Sigmund. *He That Cometh* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1956). **Renker**, Alwin. *Die Tora bei Maleachi* (FThSt 112; Freiburg: Herder, 1979). **Rose**, Wolter H. *Zemah und Zerubbabel* (JSOT-Sup 304; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000). **Santala**, Risto. *The Messiah in the Old Testament in the Light of Rabbinical Writings* (Jerusalem: Keren Ahvah Meshihit,

1992). **Schoeps**, Julius H., ed. *Geschichte, Messianismus und Zeitenwende* (Menora 11; Berlin: Philo, 2000). **Schreiber**, Stefan. *Gesalbter und König* (BZAW 105; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2000). **Seybold**, Klaus. *Bilder zum Tempelbau: Die Visionen des Propheten Sacharja* (SBS 70; Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1974). **Steck**, Odil H. *Der Abschluß der Prophetie im Alten Testament* (BThSt 17; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1991). **Tollington**, Janet E. *Tradition and Innovation in Haggai and Zechariah* (JSOTSup 150; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993). **Waschke**, Ernst-Joachim. *Der Gesalbte* (BZAW 306; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2001). **Willi-Plein**, Ina. *Prophetie im Ende: Untersuchungen zu Sach 9–14* (BBB 42; Köln: Hanstein, 1974).

The final three units of the Book of the Twelve are closely related thematically, theologically, and also in terms of some literary characteristics. Furthermore, they are placed in the Persian period (see Hag 1:1; Zech 1:1) by means of seemingly precise “original” dating. Nevertheless, a more fundamental observation regarding the prophetic literature of this period is necessary. The traditional plan of (written) prophecy, derived from the biblical chronological development, provides for a classical period of prophetic communication in three phases. According to the headings for the four prophetic books of Isaiah, Hosea, Amos, and Micah, the first one belongs in the second half of the eighth century B.C.E., approximately during the reign of the Judean kings Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, who for their part are explicitly mentioned either as a foursome or as a torso of an epoch-making group of four. Following the example of the prophets Elijah and Elisha, who were active in the ninth century, albeit in the northern kingdom of Israel and known only from the narrative tradition, the four standard-setting “writing” prophets are supposed to have received the tasks of “proclamation” in visions and auditions and passed them on to the respective king, elite circles, and population as a whole. In the following centuries, this archetype of spoken mediation is then said to have been personified once more in Jeremiah and Ezekiel, as well as some minor prophets, such as Zephaniah. In the headings associated with the books bearing their names, they are said to have been active in the final phase of the kingdom of Judah (King Josiah and successors). Subsequent to these first two phases of (literarily fixed) Yahweh prophecy, according to the biblical understanding the Spirit and the message apparently intervened less frequently and intensively in the fortunes of the people of Israel, except for the three prophets mentioned above: Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. They no longer appear in the classical confrontational pattern of prophet versus king but rather deal primarily with the temple and the community and its salvific expectation and are dated to the reign of the Persian king Darius. In the last few decades, this traditional picture of classical proclamation of Yahweh by men (and women!) who are continuously commissioned and preach spontaneously may turn out to be

the contextually consistent construct of the exilic and postexilic period.⁵⁴ Perhaps an initial period determining the prophetic standard never existed. In this case, the formulated concept of classical Yahweh word prophecy would be a theological system projected back into the Assyrian period. Thus there would have been a number of religious types of mediators but not the established recipient, preacher, and interpreter of the will of Yahweh. The community of Yahweh to which he could have directed the proclamation is conspicuous by its absence until the century of the exile. As the Mari prophecies clearly show, the king had only limited suitability for special messages from God. The men of God in all three of the Hebraic traditions show an increased tendency of turning to the community gathering around the Torah and Yahweh—a sure sign of a late development.

Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi fit the sketch suggested above; they emerged under Darius at the earliest and then attained their book form most likely in the Persian period. Malachi initially seems to have been anonymous sayings material and only later obtained its own artificial programmatic title (“my messenger”). Haggai and Zechariah are connected thematically by means of the account of the building of the temple, and Zech 9 and Mal 2–3 by means of the periodically introduced heading *maššā* “(reproachful) oracle” (Zech 9:1; 12:1; Mal 1:1). The literary emergence of this triad is certainly intriguing.⁵⁵ We may regard it as a relative whole in which the themes “temple–worship–eschatology–Torah” play an important part. The prophet Haggai fights for the rebuilding of the temple of Jerusalem: “Thus says the LORD of hosts: Consider how you have fared. Go up to the hills and bring wood and build the house, so that I may take pleasure in it and be honored, says the LORD” (Hag 1:7–8).

How closely the texts of the building of the temple are part of the actual restoration of the temple under Darius I is difficult to say. Haggai and Zechariah allegedly appeared in the second year of the king’s reign, hence around 519 B.C.E. According to Ezra 6:13–15, the building was completed and dedicated in the sixth year, namely, in 515 B.C.E., a date that has established itself

54. See especially Erhard S. Gerstenberger, “Ausblick,” in Josph Blenkinsopp, *Geschichte der Prophetie in Israel: Von den Anfängen bis zum hellenistischen Zeitalter* (trans. Erhard S. Gerstenberger; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1998), 260–90.

55. See Aaron Scharf, *Die Entstehung des Zwölfprophetenbuchs* (BZAW 260; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1998), 256–57, 291–303. For a different perspective, see James Nogalski, *Literary Precursors to the Book of the Twelve* (BZAW 217; New York: de Gruyter, 1993), 216–75; Ehud Ben Zvi “Twelve Prophetic Books or ‘The Twelve’: Some Preliminary Considerations,” in *Forming Prophetic Literature* (ed. James W. Watts et al.; JSOTSup 235; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 125–56, esp. 134–39.

almost without dissent in Old Testament scholarship. Ezra even refers to the two prophets (6:14; cf. Ezra 5:1–2). The precise date of the Second Temple's completion is not decisive, although its function in the community of faith in Israel and in the Persian Empire is. In both Ezra-Nehemiah and Haggai and Zechariah, the political leader Zerubbabel and the high priest Joshua are entrusted with the new setup of the cultic center (Ezra 3:5–6; Hag 1:1–6; Zech 4:8–10). The prophetic writings clearly integrate eschatological features with the new cultic order:

The word of the LORD came a second time to Haggai on the twenty-fourth day of the month: "Speak to Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, saying, 'I am about to shake the heavens and the earth and to overthrow the throne of kingdoms; I am about to destroy the strength of the kingdoms of the nations and overthrow the chariots and their riders; the horses and their riders shall fall, every one by the sword of a comrade. On that day, says the LORD of hosts, I will take you, O Zerubbabel my servant, son of Shealtiel, says the LORD, and make you like a signet ring; for I have chosen you, says the LORD of hosts.'" (Hag 2:20–23)

One who is anointed by Yahweh (i.e., two of them) will become rulers of Judah:

The word of the LORD came to me: Collect silver and gold from the exiles—from Heldai, Tobijah, and Jedaiah—who have arrived from Babylon, and go the same day to the house of Josiah son of Zephaniah. Take the silver and gold and make a crown and set it on the head of the high priest Joshua son of Jehozadak; say to him: "Thus says the LORD of hosts: Here is a man whose name is Branch, for he shall branch out in his place, and he shall build the temple of the LORD. It is he who shall build the temple of the LORD; he shall bear royal honor and shall sit upon his throne and rule. There shall be a priest by his throne, with peaceful understanding between the two of them." (Zech 6:9–13; cf. the idea of two leadership figures in 4:11–14: the two olive trees seen in 4:14 are "the two anointed ones")

The leadership of the Judean community obviously lies with two heads: the political leader Zerubbabel, clearly a Jewish resident in Babylon; and the "high priest" Jeshua or Joshua ben Jehozadak (the name varies in the texts but refers to the same individual). The title *hakkōhēn haggadōl* ("high priest, chief priest"; Hag 1:1; Zech 3:1) appears for the first time here and indicates the extraordinary significance of the Second Temple. Just as Ezra-Nehemiah describe the forces having a negative influence against the reconstruction, so Haggai and Zechariah foresee the internal doubts of the community of Yahweh. Apparently the contested priorities of the community's constitution

also express a conflict among the old established group and the returnees. The groups returning from the Babylonian exile naturally also brought with them their ideas emotionally ensuing from traditional values and hopes. This included the plan to redesignate the ancient sanctuary of the state associated with the period of the monarchy as the symbol of the newly emerging community of Yahweh and, with eschatological exuberance, possibly to turn it into a "house of prayer" for the brothers and sisters in the faith and the nations and to provide a central focal point for the necessary offerings, even more so for the Torah (Isa 2:3) in Yahweh's dwelling place. Those who had remained behind in Jerusalem opposed the religious pressure by means of pragmatic considerations: first the building of the residences, then that of the temple (Hag 1:2–4). They consider the provisional cultic service taking place as sufficient. For the Babylonian Jews, however, the furnishing and aura of the sanctuary are considered a reflection of loyalty to the faith. The issue here is more or less confidence in Yahweh, typical for emigrants who, with their criteria of identity, have to disassociate themselves from and assert themselves against other groups. In the Diaspora, if at all, religious zeal is always ablaze more ardently and fervently than in long-established communities. Those long established live more or less casually in the shell of their received customs, rites, and conceptions.

If the difference in mentality holds good for the cultic constitution, then this is perhaps also true in terms of the extreme expectation of the future, that is, the end, as indicated in the prophetic texts. The high priest receives a consecration with a promising future. The metaphor "Branch" (Zech 3:8; 6:11–12) suggests a presentiment of far-reaching developments.⁵⁶ The political leader and the spiritual counterpart are honored with the meaningful designation "anointed ones" and surrounded by mysterious symbols (lampstand and olive trees, Zech 4:2–3). The former is adorned with the honorary title "Yahweh's signet ring"; surely this means nothing less than vice-regent under Yahweh's leadership (Hag 2:23). In short, the prophetic texts reveal a universal outlook and a tense future expectation. Clearly, Yahweh's rule is to commence soon, and the Judean community will be completely restored. The community is to ascend to an outstanding position in the empire. Whether or not such future expectations were inspired or influenced by the Zoroastrian religion is yet to be investigated.

The glance into the eschatological future, however, is not completely dominant in the three prophetic writings mentioned. It is at least linked

56. See Mowinckel, *He That Cometh*, esp. 120, 159–65, 286–94, 456–57; Rose, *Zemah and Zerubbabel*.

with an awareness of tradition anticipating salvation from the distant past. The end time is known to be based on primeval time (Gunkel), and in the Israelite primeval time the Torah was enacted. Even if there are no references by name to Moses and Sinai, apart from the concluding note in Mal 3:22, which may possibly have been inserted later, the sacred teaching is nevertheless assumed: "For the lips of a priest should guard knowledge [*da'at*], and people should seek instruction [*tôrâ*] from his mouth, for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts" (Mal 2:7). The pair of opposites, "righteous"—"ungodly," which is typical for Torah-piety, dominates the discussion in many parts of the book (see Mal 3). The problem of the correct offering (Mal 1–2) belongs to the central concerns of the Pentateuch (see Lev 1–7). The ethics of brotherhood belongs to the most important content of the prophetic message (see Zech 7:7–10); threats of curses in written form are to prevent deviations from the path of the Torah (Zech 5:1–4). The messiah-king is "righteous" (Zech 9:9); the prophets are preachers of repentance (Zech 1:4) and, together with the priests, convey the Torah (Zech 7:1–2). Priests lead the services of lamentation (Zech 7:5). The Torah is never far from the "word."

EXCURSUS: MESSIAH AND THE END OF THE WORLD

The hope for a revival of the dynasty in the form of a descendant ("branch," Zech 3:8; 6:12; Jer 23:5; 33:15) is comprehensible only if the termination of the succession of rulers is already in the past. For this reason, practically all of the references to the appearance of a new Judaic ruler from the house of David are only conceivable after the decisive date of 587 B.C.E. (Mowinckel). The vivid, partly emotional references in prophetic writings speak for themselves. Amos 9:11 refers to the Davidic lineage as a "fallen booth" that is to be raised up; in common metaphorical language of the ancient Orient, Ezek 34:23–24 promises a "shepherd" bringing salvation, a new David. He will lead the united Israel under Yahweh's supervision. Isaiah 11:1 takes up the image of the tree sprouting anew, and Isa 9:5–6 heralds the birth of a royal child who will assume power and rule fully. Already the names of enthronement (9:5) promise effusively rich blessing. They guarantee that his reign will be "great" (universal?) and "peace" (*šālôm*), as well as "righteousness" (*šēdāqâ*), in this God-given government will endure forever (9:6). The king who stands for justice and righteousness in the name of God is an ideal thousands of years old in Near Eastern cultures. Zech 9:9–10; Pss 45:4–8; 72:1–8, and other references also describe this ancient monarchic quality of government, which in view of the future is new and absolutely dependable.

Jeremiah 23:5–6; 33:15–17 contrast favorably against earlier hopeless situations. The return of the earlier conditions of government also latches on to the hometown of the Davidic family, Bethlehem (Mic 5:1–3), and/or the original capital, Jerusalem/Zion (Mic 4:8). Thus various Old Testament texts attest that the demise of the monarchy of Judah had not simply been accepted as final in subsequent centuries. Time and again—we do not know how frequently and in which population groups—hope flared up that a descendant of David would restore the ancient conditions of power as a protégé and representative of Yahweh. The euphoric declaration in Isa 44:28; 45:1–6 that Cyrus is Yahweh's appointed Messiah probably applied only to the time of liberation from the Babylonian yoke (cf. Isa 55:8–9, where David appears on the scene again). The frequently expressed observation does indeed apply here as well: early Jewish future expectations do not depend on the figure of a new Davidic ruler. For long stretches in the relevant prophetic passages the discussion is only about God Yahweh who acts on behalf of his people.

To be sure, we must ask how expectations of the Messiah and the last days developed in the communities of the Persian period and in what intellectual-theological context they took shape. The experience of the national disaster clearly elicited fear and depression among the Judeans (see Isa 40:27; Pss 44:10–27; 89:39–52; 137; Isa 63–64). However, signs of a turn to the better (e.g., 2 Kgs 25:27–30; Isa 44:28; 45:1–4) fanned the sparks of hope tremendously, which normally also occur among defeated nations and ignite the will to rebuild. That this hope linked up with the Davidic dynasty here and there is to be expected. The further development toward a conception of the end and new beginning of world history, as we find it in many texts, seems to have been a specific feature of Persia-oriented cultural circles. Already in conjunction with the Davidic messianic figure voices are heard that see the ultimate bliss and peace of the world coming with the appearance of the Messiah. Salvation that appears paradisiacal makes the dangers of the wild animal kingdom (Isa 11:6–8; 65:25), sickness and premature death (Isa 65:20; Zech 8:4), and malicious and sinful acts (Isa 11:9; 65:22–23; Zech 13:1) disappear. Yahweh creates a new world with new, definite structures and full chances of life for everyone (see Isa 65:17; Zech 8:7–14; 14:8–11). Whether a messianic ruler is involved in the new creation or not remains a secondary question. The fact that a universal change for the future is expected in Judah and in the communities of the Diaspora should be discussed in the context of the Persian religions. Here a remarkable orientation toward future salvation becomes noticeable beginning with the earliest layers of the Avesta. An individual decision for the only god, Ahura Mazda, and his “righteousness” leads the believer on the path to paradise (hereafter). Groups and nations likewise are

increasingly held accountable; the Zoroastrian teaching develops the notion of a final judgment affecting all humans.

This perspective of the future is reflected in Old Testament eschatology. Perhaps the archetype of the perfect realm of life (see Gen 2) is shaped in keeping with the example of royal Persian pleasure gardens. At the end of their time, humans return to paradise. Transitory and enduring being are distinctive. Under the impression of this distinction, Judean theology in the Persian period begins to picture the anticipated restoration of the people of Yahweh (cf. Isa 8:23b–9:6) with the colors of infinity and permanence. The salvation that Yahweh works and offers takes on more general features and gradually impacts the whole earth. This becomes clearest in the “beginnings of apocalyptic” present, for instance, in Zech 1–8; Isa 24–27; and Ezek 38–39 (see §IV.3.4 below). The ancient Israelite conception of national salvation becomes broadened or universalized spatially, temporally, and socially in accordance with Persian thought.

III.1.2.2. Trito-Isaiah

Blenkinsopp, Joseph. *Isaiah 56–66* (AB 19B; New York: Doubleday, 2003). **Berges**, Ulrich. *Das Buch Jesaja: Komposition und Endgestalt* (HBS 16; Freiburg: Herder, 1998). **Croatto**, José S. Severino. *Imaginar el futuro: Estructura retórica y querigma del Tercer Isaías* (Buenos Aires: Grupo Editorial Lumen, 2001). **Dim**, Emmanuel U. *The Eschatological Implications of Isa 65 and 66 as the Conclusion of the Book of Isaiah* (Bible in History 3; Bern: Lang, 2005). **Emmendorffer**, Michael. *Der ferne Gott* (FAT 21; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998). **Fischer**, Irmtraud. *Wo ist Jahwe?* (SBS 19; Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1989). **Goldenstein**, Johannes. *Das Gebet der Gottesknechte* (WMANT 92; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2001). **Höffken**, Peter. *Jesaja: Der Stand der theologischen Diskussion* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchhandlung, 2004). **Hanson**, Paul D. *The Dawn of Apocalyptic* (rev. ed.; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979). **Lau**, Wolfgang. *Schriftgelehrte Prophetie in Jes 56–66* (BZAW 225; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1994). **O’Connell**, Robert H. *Concentricity and Continuity: The Literary Structure of Isaiah* (JSOTSup 188; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994). **Park**, Kyung-Chul. *Die Gerechtigkeit Israels und das Heil der Völker* (BEATAJ 52; Frankfurt: Lang, 2003). **Ruszkowski**, Leszek. *Volk und Gemeinde im Wandel* (FRLANT 191; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000). **Westermann**, Claus. *Isaiah 40–66* (trans. David M. G. Stalker; OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1969).

Since Bernhard Duhm, Isa 56–66 has traditionally been considered to be an originally independent work. The plethora of linguistic, literary, and theological associations of this third part of the excessively long scroll of Isaiah with the first two “books,” however, increasingly brings into view the possibility of tradition-historical and editorial growth. In any case, Isa 56–66 represents

a collection of texts dealing with specific problems and expectations of a (postexilic) community of Yahweh. Apparently the issue is no longer as much the questions of the return from exile (although this topic is still touched on in Isa 57:14) and the rebuilding (63:18; 64:9–10) but rather the internal order and the relationship to the environment of the day (Croatto). The collection reflects discussions about the correct worship of Yahweh, the significance of the temple, and the composition of the community. From a form-critical perspective, it is astonishing to see the many community-related, liturgical passages that strictly contradict the assumption of a purely literary origin of this group of texts.

In an emphatic departure from the “law of the community” in Deut 23:2–9, Isa 56:1–8 advocates receiving castrated men, eunuchs, and foreigners into the community of believers in Yahweh, as long as they observe the Sabbath commandment! A differentiation of aliens by ethnicities, as in Deuteronomy, is relinquished. Only the Sabbath is being discussed as a criterion of identity, indicating a late setting of the discussion. Curiously, however, any reference to circumcision, as, for instance, in Exod 12:43–48, is also conspicuous by its absence. Presumably this important postexilic mark of community membership is established in the reference to the “covenant” (Isa 56:4, 6):

And the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD, to minister to him, to love the name of the LORD, and to be his servants, all who keep the Sabbath, and do not profane it, and hold fast my covenant—these will I bring to my holy mountain and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples. Thus says the Lord God, who gathers the outcasts of Israel, I will gather others to them besides those already gathered. (Isa 56:6–8)

Given the commitment to the particular Yahweh-tradition, the cosmopolitan attitudes are remarkable; they may be compared with the universal horizon in the narratives of Jonah and Ruth. As a special orientation, the Sabbath commandment occurs once more in Isa 58:13–14.

Prophetic indictment dominates the pericope of Isa 57:1–3, as well as several other passages (see 56:9–12; 65:1–7; 66:3–4). The “children of a sorceress,” of “an adulterer,” and of “a whore” are addressed specifically (Isa 57:3). They are “children of transgression, the offspring of deceit” (57:4). In context, this can refer only to intracommunal opponents who are also addressed in Isa 65 and 66. In the perspective of the faithful tradents, they are on the wrong path. In Isa 57 they sacrifice to unidentified, foreign deities under “every green tree” (57:5; cf. Jer 2:20; Ezek 6:13; 1 Kgs 14:23 = standard reproach) and at other places in nature. In sexual imagery in which the apostates are

addressed as female beings, they join themselves to other deities (57:8; cf. Hos 4:12–14; Ezek 16; 23) and are guilty of breach of faith over against the only God to whom they are obliged. Isaiah 66:3–4 denounces a vague sacrificial practice mentioning neither location and circumstances nor the deities; Isa 65:3b–5 describes false sacrificial practices in more detail:

sacrificing in gardens and offering incense on bricks; who sit inside tombs and spend the night in secret places; who eat swine's flesh with broth of abominable things in their vessels; who say, "Keep to yourself; do not come near me, for I am too holy for you." These are a smoke in my nostrils, a fire that burns all day long.

The polemical allusions suggest minor, private cults, possibly devoted to the dead. Isaiah 65:11 even mentions by name two foreign deities to whom community members bring offerings: *gad* ("Fortune") and *mēnī* ("Destiny"). However, there is only marginal information about them (inscription in Palmyra: *gad* = "bringer of fortune"). Presumably the two beings venerated belong to the type of personal tutelary deity. In any case, the context makes clear that in the postexilic period the orthodox community of Yahweh battled all kinds of alien cults that were attractive to the Judeans. There was a plethora of religious options in the Persian Empire. It would not be going far enough to apply the restrictive concept of "Canaanite fertility cults" to the religious pluralism of the time to which the new Israel was exposed, though for certain communities the respective practices in closer proximity may have played a more significant part, of course, than more distant ones. Conversely, the long-distance effects upon the religious body of thought and cultic rituals promoted by trade and the military should not be underestimated.

Isaiah 58:1–12 raises the question of the correct practice of fasting and thereby posits a typical problem of the ritual of the exilic and postexilic community as a major theme. Collective fasting is a central element of celebratory laments in communal crises. It is inescapably part of the so-called rites of self-abasement, by means of which one intends to regain the attention and favor of the angry or inattentive deity. As a result of a locust plague, the priests call for a "holy fast" in Joel 1:14. The great city Nineveh repents in sack and ashes; the inhabitants fasted (Jonah 3:5). Here in Trito-Isaiah, the problem is spiritualized in a typical manner. This is developed in a didactically laid out dialogue of the complaining community with their God. The serious confessors of Yahweh immediately expect tangible results from their acts of fasting. By means of their complaints, they get a chance to speak directly: "Why do we fast, but you do not see? Why humble ourselves, but you do not notice?" (Isa 58:3). In response, God counters through the mouth of his (ministering) spokesman: "Look, you serve your own interests on your fast day and oppress

all your workers. Look, you fast only to quarrel and to fight and to strike with a wicked fist. Such fasting as you do today will not make your voice heard on high" (Isa 58:3b–4). In 58:6–10 this is followed with a positive content of the practice of fasting. God wants not only outward rituals reeled off on days of fasting but rather solidarity with the weak, oppressed, poor, and homeless, in short, with all those in need, expressed in action. This kind of ethical reinterpretation of ritual obligations is found frequently in the Hebrew writings (see Ps 50), in the New Testament (Matt 6:16; Mark 2:19), as well as in the Qur'an as instruction for Ramadan.⁵⁷ It is also found in more ancient Near Eastern and Egyptian ethics and appears in the Persian Avesta as well.⁵⁸ This means that ritual practices are frequently questioned with respect to the attitude and action of the actor. Apart from the ethicizing of ritual practices, the twofold promising pledge stands out: if solidarity is practiced in a fast, then "your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly; your vindicator shall go before you, the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard" (Isa 58:8; cf. 58:10b). The imagery of light belongs to the conceptions of liberation and change of fortune, as, for instance, in Isa 59:9–10; 60:1–3 and Isa 8:20–9:1.⁵⁹ It is as if Yahweh's response had to be celebrated with a procession, as suggested by the verbs of movement in Isa 58:8 and its parallels. The powers (light, healing, righteousness) granted by Yahweh and bringing salvation accompany successful prayers; the radiance of God (*kābôd*) appears to be the concrete, active agent of change. These divine effects have their analogies in Mesopotamia, as well as in the Persian religion, namely, in the shape of the *amesā spentas*. All of them signal forces of life that in our context lead to the restoration and blossoming of a suffering community, following the true, ethically oriented abstinence and act of repentance. Thus we are presented a theoretical model of a genuine service of repentance and petition. All other things being equal, this text intends to express that fasts, liturgies of supplication, and acts of solidarity are followed by expressions of gratitude to Yahweh, filled with the joy of life.

The extensive ritual of lamentation in Isa 63:7–64:12 offers a similar initial situation, albeit in the form of authentic liturgical texts. The laments and

57. See Sura 2:185 and the Islamic tradition. "Feeding the poor" is already a possible "substitute" in the Qur'an (Sura 2:184; cf. 2:177).

58. The later Zoroastrian religion rejects fasting as contempt for the good creation; see Stausberg, *Die Religion Zarathushtras*, 2:163, 364; Peter Gerlitz, "Fasten/Fasttage: I. Religionsgeschichtlich," *TRE* 11:44, 8–14 (reference to the Avesta: Vendidāt 48).

59. Only the book of Job also contains a similarly frequent use of the term "light" (Isa: 27 times, Job: 32 times). Light often becomes a metaphor for what is good, for life (see Job 30:26; 17:12–16).

petitions arranged here, being closely associated with the Psalms in their linguistic form and liturgical sequence, at least seem to be very close to a service to be postulated as postexilic. Isaiah 63:7–9 lauds Yahweh's gracious welfare for his people in bygone times in hymnal form. Verse 10 notes ingratitude and unfaithfulness, as well as Yahweh's reproachful reaction. Then the community's repentance occurs. Like a narrative, the text initially describes how the people inquire about Yahweh again (63:11–14: allusions to the exodus; the community's direct questions are cited; the anticipated first-person plural in 63:14a breaks the narrative style), that is, how they return to him. But then the text changes into a collective prayer of lamentation and petition addressing Yahweh directly and using primarily the first-person plural of the community, either through the one leading the prayer or in chorus. The formal and factual proximity to the lamentations of the people in the Psalter (or in other Hebrew writings) is always obvious,⁶⁰ even if the prayer clearly sets its own emphases. The praying community besieges Yahweh with questions of "where" and "why" and laments vehemently, albeit in general expressions, the defeat by the enemies, the destruction of the sanctuary and places of residence, as well as the God-forsakenness this manifests. The main argument for Yahweh now having to intervene on behalf of Israel is expressed as follows: "For you are our father, though Abraham does not know us and Israel does not acknowledge us; you, O LORD, are our father; our Redeemer from of old is your name" (Isa 63:16; cf. 64:7). Three times Yahweh's role as father is implored emphatically—an unusual manner of speaking for a community that predominantly appeals to the covenant with Yahweh and not to a familial relationship with God.⁶¹ Nevertheless all of the contours match the postexilic Persian period quite well. In the community, according to some layers of the text (e.g., the individual lamentations), there was a certain affinity to familial forms of religion; occasionally the name of the father is also used for Yahweh elsewhere (see Mal 2:10), and the civil, communal way of dealing with God strongly supports a late date for our pericope of the text. To be sure, we lack more emphatic acknowledgements of guilt such as those found in the prayers of repentance in Ezra 9 and Neh 9. Thus in Isa 58 and 63/64 we do not encounter any complete liturgies of worship but all the same important parts of such texts that evolved in living, communal processes of communication.

60. Fischer, *Wo ist Jahwe*, appropriately emphasizes this fact; see also Westermann, *Isaiah 40–66*, 385–98.

61. See Erhard S. Gerstenberger, *Yahweh—the Patriarch: Ancient Images of God and Feminist Theology* (trans. Frederick J. Gaiser; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 13–23.

Yet further parts of Third Isaiah can be assigned to the communal practice form-critically, albeit less stringently. Isaiah 59:1–8 is a (prophetic, Deuteronomistic) address of indictment against the community acting with a lack of solidarity. From a liturgical or rhetorical perspective, the change from direct speech in the second-person plural (59:1–3) to a neutral depiction in the third-person plural (59:4–8) does not have to represent a breach. The ethos applicable in the community has been violated frequently; hence a speaker calls the people to account, though without pointing directly to the Torah. In terms of content, fundamental correlations are clearly there. The following section, 59:9–15a, apparently is a response to the severe accusations. In the communal we-style, which is clear evidence for a liturgical embedding, the accused accept the responsibility. They also use the light-darkness metaphor, for instance: “we wait for light, and lo! there is darkness; ... we stumble at noon as in the twilight” (59:9–10); “for our transgressions before you are many, and our sins testify against us” (59:12). Thus a proper prayer of repentance with an extensive admission of guilt, in the sense of a postexilic theology of exclusiveness (cf. 59:12–13), sees the loss of “righteousness” and “salvation” (both intended in the comprehensive, existential sense, 59:9, 14) as the sole consequence of one’s behavior. Unlike in Isa 63–64, in this text God has the full right to allow his community to encounter serious difficulties (cf. Isa 59:1–3). If after confession we expect a turn for the better, however, the following text serves us only halfway. First it sharply emphasizes the divine resolution of reprisal once again (59:15b–19), before going into Israel’s pardon (59:20–21). This may lead to the conclusion that the last part of Isa 59 originated from a context with a different agenda or is in fact of one piece and bluntly focuses on the punishment of Israel’s enemies only in the early part (59:15b–19). The “armor of God” portrayed with the weapons of righteousness speaks rather for the latter option, for, as in Isa 63:1–6, Yahweh, with an entirely warlike disposition (cf. Exod 15:3; Isa 42:13—note the “warrior” attribute; Nah 1:2), likes to stand up against Israel’s enemies. Whether Isa 59 reflects a coherent liturgy, therefore, remains in doubt. Nevertheless, fragments of liturgical speech are certainly preserved in the text, especially in the prayer of repentance cited.

Chapters 60–62 form a thematic unit, and its style of speech is overwhelmingly given in the first-person singular. The person speaking is clearly Yahweh in fairly extensive sections, although the messenger or legitimizing formulas are missing. Conversely, however, an unknown human speaker is heard equally clearly. Throughout it is the city or the community of Jerusalem that is addressed. This can be determined especially from the use of many feminine singular forms, alongside a few references to place names (Zion). The salvific, newly established relationship of Yahweh to his “bride,

Zion" (62:4–5), then, is the thematic focal point. The introductory section of 60:1–3 practically serves as a heading and summary of content. For us it is an Advent-related text: "Arise, shine; for your light has come ... for darkness shall cover the earth and thick darkness the peoples; but the LORD will arise upon you, and his glory will appear over you."

The message of the return of the inhabitants of Jerusalem is taken up and heightened eschatologically. Nations will come as pilgrims and seek their salvation in the city of Yahweh. They provide development assistance. The city is in for everlasting peace; all inhabitants are allowed to enjoy it. Apparently Jerusalem ascends to worldwide political recognition: "You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the LORD and a royal diadem" (Isa 62:3). The entire section titled "Jerusalem will arise gloriously" is concluded with the theme of the return and the pilgrims (Isa 62:10–12), and precisely in the middle of it the Messiah motif emerges guardedly, in dependence upon the departing words of David (2 Sam 23:1–7) and the laws of release in the Pentateuch:

The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and release to the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort those who mourn. (Isa 61:1–2)

The anticipation of a glorious rebuilding of Jerusalem to become the seat of the Davidic vice-regent in the midst of the Persian Empire (which is not even deemed worthy of mention) inspires this "Jerusalem" composition. Its liturgical character, the strong emphasis on Yahweh, and the God of all the world who is speaking of himself and his relationship to Zion as the bridegroom are reminiscent of a festal proclamation. Perhaps the terrible section of Isa 63:1–6, with the God who treads the winepress, serves as background for the contrast of the peaceful, universal salvation (Isa 60–62) and the eschatological aspect, which is inconceivable without force. Thus he transitions beyond the ritual of lamentation of 63:7–64:11 to the concluding apocalyptic elements of Third Isaiah.

In an intercommunal context, the final two chapters portray the final account with the apostate believers in Yahweh (Isa 65:1–16; 66:3–4, 15–17, 24) and the realization of the eschatological salvation for the faithful community (Isa 65:13–16, 18–25; 66:5–14; cf. also §IV.3.4 below). All of this happens in the framework of a universal renewal of the world: "For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth" (Isa 65:17). The destiny of all nations is at stake and finds its fulfillment in Jerusalem (Isa 66:16, 18–22). This is an awesome picture in which the tiny community of those who, according to Blenkinsopp, called themselves "tremblers" (Isa 66:5; cf. "Quak-

ers,” “Shakers”), plays the central part. Persian conceptions of the world of light, judgment, and salvation are comparable to the thought patterns used in Third Isaiah.

III.1.2.3. Further Prophetic Writings?

Barton, John. *Joel and Obadiah* (OTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001). **Baumann**, Gerlinde. *Love and Violence: Marriage as Metaphor for the Relationship between YHWH and Israel in the Prophetic Books* (trans. Linda M. Maloney; Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2003). **Ben Zvi**, Ehud. *A Historical-Critical Study of the Book of Zephaniah* (BZAW 198; New York: de Gruyter, 1991). **Birch**, Bruce C. *Hosea, Joel, and Amos* (Westminster Bible Companion; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997). **Crenshaw**, James L. *Joel* (AB 24C; New York: Doubleday, 1995). **Dahmen**, Ulrich, and Gunther Fleischer. *Die Bücher Joel und Amos* (NSKAT 23/2; Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2001). **Dietrich**, Walter, and Milton Schwantes, eds. *Der Tag wird kommen* (SBS 170; Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1996). **García Martínez**, Florentino. *Wisdom and Apocalypticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls and in the Biblical Tradition* (BETL 168; Dudley, Mass.: Peeters, 2003). **Grabbe**, Lester L., and Robert D. Haak. *Knowing the End from the Beginning* (JSPSup 46; New York: T&T Clark, 2003). **MacQueen**, Larry R. *Joel and the Spirit* (JPTSup 8; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995). **Mason**, Rex. *Zephaniah, Habakkuk, Joel* (OTG 23; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994). **O'Brien**, Julia M. *Nahum* (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002). **Perlitt**, Lothar. *Die Propheten Nahum, Habakuk, Zephania* (ATD 25.1; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004). **Renkema**, John. *Obadiah* (Historical Commentary on the OT; Leuven: Peeters, 2000). **Sandy**, D. Brent. *Plowshares and Pruning Hooks* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2002). **Seybold**, Klaus. *Satirische Prophetie* (SBS 120; Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1985). **Seybold**. *Nahum, Habakuk, Zephania* (ZBK AT 24.2; Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 1991). **Simkins**, Ronald. *Yahweh's Activity in History and Nature in the Book of Joel* (ANET 10; Lewiston, N.Y.: Mellen, 1991). **Struppe**, Ursula. *Die Bücher Obadja, Jona* (NSKAT 24.1; Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1996). **Wagner**, Andreas. *Prophetie als Theologie* (FLANT 207; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004).

If we begin with the assumption that it was only Israel's "liberation" by the Persians that depicted the actual impetus for the composition and collection of sacred writings and for the setting up of a new community structure, the following supposition comes to mind: probably all Hebrew writings, except for small occasional compositions, owe their present, more or less canonical, form to the period of the Second Temple. For the collection and systematizing of the prophetic collection this might possibly mean the farewell to favorite theories according to which the classical prophets themselves or their "disciples" left literary records that subsequently were edited and expanded. One may have to consider more likely a construction of prophetic narratives,

sayings, and speeches working in retrospect with very sparse fragments of tradition.⁶² Hence, if we set aside the Deuteronomistic, historicizing headings of the books of the prophets, the question about their possible final form in the Persian period can be asked at least concerning the books of Joel, Obadiah, Nahum, Habakkuk and Zephaniah.

The book of Joel consists of a “liturgy in the event of a plague of locusts” (Joel 1–2) and eschatologically focused passages that perhaps are linked with the liturgy via the key term “day of Yahweh” (Joel 3–4). Especially this second part of the book reveals a future expectation the likes of which can hardly be demonstrated before the beginning of the Persian rule. To state it positively: only Persian religiosity presumably brings an “end-of-the-world mood” of this kind to the ancient Near East, in which such scenarios as that of Yahweh’s final judgment are able to develop: “Let the nations rouse themselves and come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat, for there I will sit to judge all the neighboring nations” (Joel 3:12; cf. the “valley of decision” in 3:14). Since the three chapters apparently belong together compositionally and in any case no serious evidence of a temporal shift is present, this small compilation is quite plausibly a product of the Persian period. The community of repentance and apocalyptic expectation that becomes visible fervently confesses its guilt and hopes, equally fervently for salvation and humiliation of their enemies by a gracious judge of the world. The concept of an outpouring of the Spirit on all members of the community, women and men alike (Joel 2:28–29; cf. Num 11:16–17, 26–29; Isa 44:3–5; Ezek 39:29), is associated with postexilic faith.⁶³

The tiny Obadiah fragment is a scattered piece of a lament against the southern neighbors, the Edomites, who in the sixth–fifth century B.C.E. were a seriously competing power for Judah.⁶⁴ Numerous prophetic sayings attest to the animosity of the Judeans against them (see Isa 21:11–15; Jer 49:7–11 [an exemplar for Obadiah?]; Ezek 35:1–15; Joel 4:19; Ps 137:7). If Obad 10–14 can be trusted, Edomite troops used the defeat of the Judeans by Babylon,

62. See Gerstenberger, “Ausblick,” in Blenkinsopp, *Geschichte*, 266–90.

63. The special literature on Joel and the Book of the Twelve is extensive; see Albertz, *Israel in Exile*, 204–5; Aaron Schart, *Die Entstehung des Zwölfprophetenbuches* (BZAW 260; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1998), 318–36; Paul L. Reddit and Aaron Schart, eds., *Thematic Threads in the Book of the Twelve* (BZAW 325; New York: de Gruyter, 2003); Marvin A. Sweeney, “The Place and Function of Joel in the Book of the Twelve,” in Reddit and Schart, *Thematic Threads*, 133–54. Many date the prophet to around 400 B.C.E.; see Jörg Jeremias, “Joel/Joelbuch,” *TRE* 17:91, 49–54.

64. Manfred Weippert, “Edom: Studien und Materialien zur Geschichte der Edomiter auf Grund schriftlicher und archäologischer Quellen” (Ph.D. diss.; Tübingen, 1971); Ernst Axel Knauf, “Supplementa Ismaelitica,” *BN* 45 (1988): 62–81.

either in 597 or 587 B.C.E., for the purpose of securing their share of the loot. Such information, however, cannot be verified historically. The biblical texts only attest clearly to the strained brotherhood between the two related ethnic groups. It is also the central theme in the relationship between the twin brothers Jacob and Esau (Gen 27) and critically incorporated genealogically (Gen 36). Evidently the irritations between Judah and Edom continued, indeed culminated, during the Persian period. For this reason the fragmented “book” of Obadiah may have originated during this era. We do not know how it came to be part of the Book of the Twelve. Possibly it was part of the Amos tradition originally and only became independent at a later point, when the “minor” prophets reached the number twelve and thereby posed a redactional challenge. If the question about the most probable historical context is posed, this idea points to the Persian period as well.

There are three small entities remaining in the Book of the Twelve that could easily contend for an origin in or editorial work during the Persian period. The final redactors and editors did not integrate Nahum and Habakkuk temporally by means of headings, and, according to the topics addressed, despite occasional, apparent association with the distant past, they are at home in the intellectual world of Judah during the period of the Second Temple. The third book, Zephaniah, in contrast to the redactional locus in the days of Josiah (Zeph 1:1), shows all the signs of a later origin and composition.

Overall Nahum portrays accusation, threat, and a song of victory against the Assyrian Empire, which had already collapsed under the pressure of the Medes and Babylonians in 612 B.C.E. Nineveh is presented as a world power hostile to God. It has become the symbol for arrogant and brutal global politics. Properly speaking, this can only be understood by hindsight; such processes of stereotyping historical powers take time. Generally they serve only subsequent generations as deterrent (more infrequently, exemplary) examples and often have the new masters in mind who follow in the footsteps of the ancient tyrants. A modern reconstruction of a historical Nahum who operated during the time of the Assyrian rule in the seventh century B.C.E. is therefore superfluous. The latter would hardly have had available this type of a mature portrait of the “murderous and whorish city of Nineveh” (see Nah 3:1–7). The question remains, then, whether the denunciation of the empire in the shape of the capital city of Assyria is to be understood as referring to the subsequent Babylonian power or to the Persian imperial power that followed a little later. (Should perhaps the Hellenistic period also be considered?) Both are possibilities; resistance against the Babylonian imperial politics is attested in many prophetic texts. Despite all of the euphoria about the liberation by the Persians in Deutero-Isaiah and in Ezra-Nehemiah, the

community of believers in Yahweh nevertheless experienced the mechanisms of exploitation by the new rulers (see Neh 9:32–37; interestingly, the misery began under the kings of Assyria and continues “until today,” 9:32). In my view, the language, symbolic universe, liturgical background, and the like as they appear in the book of Nahum rather support the composition and use of this writing in the Persian period. Apparently, using the book of Jonah by way of comparison, the attitude of the community of Yahweh toward the major powers was discussed a lot, especially during the Persian period. In this context, the book of Nahum functions antithetically to the book of Jonah, or vice versa: Jonah rather seems to react to the strict pronouncement of judgment against a “pagan power.” Nevertheless, both writings belong to the sphere of the debate about the right relationship of followers of Yahweh to a ruling world power. The striking marriage imagery,⁶⁵ too, applied to the relationship of Yahweh to his people and only secondarily diverted to a foreign nation, seems to me to be a genuine theological discovery of the postexilic period. This includes its applications in the books of Hosea and Jeremiah; they take place in the same temporal context as that found in the books of Ezekiel and Isaiah. In short, the book of Nahum may qualify as a product of the Persian period.

This is equally possible in the case of the book of Habakkuk.⁶⁶ The Neo-Babylonians (Chaldeans) appear at certain points in the text (Hab 1:6) without otherwise receiving further attention. The variety of surprisingly “civil” and “liturgical” forms of speech suggests a nongovernmental community of faith as a creative backdrop. The “woes” (Hab 2:4–20), for instance, focus on the term “civil” and on the ethos applicable to a community such as this. Together with numerous similar examples spread across the prophets, the Psalms, and the wisdom literature and their counterpart, the benedictions, they presumably originated in the educational institutions of the postexilic community.⁶⁷ Furthermore, the pericope in Habakkuk is full of reminiscences of the Torah tradition maintained in the confessional community of Judah. For example, “The righteous keeps on living by/on account of his faithfulness” (Hab 2:4b) connects with Gen 15:6; 18:22b–32. Warnings against exploiting the neighbor economically (Hab 2:6, 9, 12) have their counterpart in the social laws of the Pentateuch and in the regulations of human

65. See Baumann, *Love and Violence*; on Nahum, 209–12.

66. Albertz situates Habakkuk in the Persian period as well (*Israel in Exile*, 244–45), as does Perlitt, *Die Propheten Nahum, Habakuk, Zephania*, 43.

67. Establishing these texts in the rhetoric of mourning, which has been accepted broadly, has not yet convinced me; see Erhard S. Gerstenberger, “The Woe-Oracles of the Prophets,” *JBL* 81 (1962): 249–63.

coexistence (on the latter, cf. Amos 2:6–8; 4:1; 5:11–12; Isa 5:8–23; 10:1–2) assumed in the prophetic writings. The incrimination of cultic and moral misbehavior (Hab 2:15, 19) echoes passages such as Gen 9:21–27; 19:30–35 (alcohol and sexuality) or Jer 2:26–28 and Isa 44:17 (worship of inanimate objects). The woe oracles of Habakkuk apparently originated in the milieu of the community; originally they intended to keep the behavior of community members within accepted paths. The extant interpretations of the current text (Hab 2:7–8, 10–11, 13–14, 16–18) place the sayings in the broader political realm in which the postexilic community finds itself.

Other passages in Habakkuk have an explicitly worship-liturgical character. This includes the community's prayer in Hab 1:12–17, the introduction of which shows a typical formulation in the first-person plural (e.g., 1:12b Hebrew). Above all else, however, the psalm of Habakkuk (Hab 3) is a completely liturgical piece that resembles a copy from the Psalter.⁶⁸ Not only is its first line reminiscent of the headings of Pss 17, 86, 90, 102, and 142, for instance, but it also concludes, lacking any parallel in the Psalter, with technical cultic remarks (Hab 3:1, 19d). Is this framework a redactional hap-
penstance or a common sample of the psalm tradition? In terms of content, the description of the theophany⁶⁹ of Hab 3 also lines up with numerous texts in the Psalter (see, e.g., Pss 18; 50; 68; 77; 97). In the Persian period, the appearance of Yahweh in the turmoil of the elements, in light and judgment, had long distanced itself from the ancient rituals of tribal wars and is celebrated in the civil community (also in memory of the traditions of Moses and the mountain) and assumed eschatological features:

You split the earth with rivers. The mountains saw you and writhed; a torrent of water swept by; the deep gave forth its voice. The sun raised high its hands; the moon stood still in its exalted place, at the light of your arrows speeding by, at the gleam of your flashing spear. In fury you trod the earth, in anger you trampled nations. You came forth to save your people, to save your anointed. (Hab 3:9c–13a)

Quite a few formal and content-related observations, therefore, speak for the origin and use of Habakkuk's psalm in the community of the Persian period.

68. See Erhard S. Gerstenberger, "Psalms in the Book of the Twelve: How Misplaced Are They?" in Reddit and Schart, *Thematic Threads*, 72–89.

69. See Jörg Jeremias, *Theophanie: Die Geschichte einer alttestamentlichen Gattung* (2nd ed.; WMANT 10; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1977), 38–51; idem., *Kultprophetie und Gerichtsverkündigung in der späten Königszeit* (WMANT 35; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1970), 55–89.

This is also true of the introductory section of Hab 1:2–4. It is formed entirely as the lament component of an individual prayer of petition. Yet the content and the linguistic form point to a particular emergency. The petitioner is filled with consternation because of the internal condition of his community (1:3: wrongdoing, trouble, destruction, violence, strife, contention). He paints the consequences on the wall: “the *Torah* becomes slack”; justice is stifled (1:4). The basic structure of the community of Yahweh is in danger of breaking apart. If the book of Habakkuk was consciously composed together, this brief introductory section has the function of pointing the way. A teacher of the community laments ominous symptoms of decline. He implores Yahweh’s possible reaction and in so doing uses the Babylonian oppression, which is still remembered, as an element of threat (1:5–11). At this time prophets (Hab 1:1!) already have the function of proclaiming the Torah and keeping watch over the Torah. The rhetoric of the task of the watchman or lookout (Hab 2:1–4; cf. Ezek 3:17; 33:1–9) is part of this context. By means of his understanding of being a prophet, which permeates all three chapters, Habakkuk is also characterized as a writing of the later Old Testament community.

In the case of the book of Zephaniah,⁷⁰ we notice once again (perhaps in late redactional layers) an emphatic eschatological and apocalyptic mood that does not fit into the preexilic period. Hence it is impossible to have confidence in the historicizing heading of Zeph 1:1. According to the will of the redactors, it is intended only to underscore the disaster that was brewing over Josiah without having a hand in the matter. The dominant tone is struck right at the beginning of the book:

I will utterly sweep away everything from the face of the earth, says the LORD. I will sweep away humans and animals; I will sweep away the birds of the air and the fish of the sea. I will make the wicked stumble. I will cut off humanity from the face of the earth, says the LORD. (Zeph 1:2–3)

The destruction of all life is announced as in the “Isaiah apocalypse” (see Isa 24:1–6). Within the great final account the end of Judah and Jerusalem takes place, announced with eschatological phrases such as “On that day it will happen” (Zeph 1:10, 12) and “the day of the LORD is at hand” (1:7, 14). The passionate language has shaken and fascinated readers throughout the centuries:

70. See Dietrich and Schwantes, eds., *Der Tag wird kommen*; Marco Striek, *Das vor-deuteronomistische Zephaniahbuch* (BBET 29; Frankfurt: Lang, 1996); Michael H. Floyd, *Minor Prophets, Part 2* (FOTL 22; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 163–250.

The great day of the LORD is near, near and hastening fast; the sound of the day of the LORD is bitter, the warrior cries aloud there. That day will be a day of wrath, a day of distress and anguish, a day of ruin and devastation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness, a day of trumpet blast and battle cry. (Zeph 1:14–16a)

The reckoning of the only God and ruler of the world will not spare Judah and Jerusalem (Zeph 2:1–3; 3:1–5; cf. the disregard for the *torah* in 3:4). However, in the present text Yahweh's judgment is directed foremost against neighboring nations with a hostile bent (2:4–15; 3:8) and therefore toward the liberation of Judah and the salvation it will receive (3:6–20). Powerful promises of Yahweh are issued to his people; following the judgment they will also extend to the other nations (3:9–10). A roaring hymn of thanksgiving of the community concludes the liturgy of judgment:

Sing aloud, O daughter Zion; shout, O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter Jerusalem! The LORD has taken away the judgments against you; he has turned away your enemies. The King of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst; you shall fear disaster no more. On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: "Do not fear, O Zion; do not let your hands grow weak. The LORD, your God, is in your midst, a warrior who gives victory; he will rejoice over you with gladness, he will renew you in his love; he will exult over you with loud singing as on a day of festival." (Zeph 3:14–17)

All indicators support Zephaniah being composed of liturgical parts of text⁷¹ that reveal a certain progress in the plan of action. Somber announcements of a final judgment and all kinds of messages of threat and judgment against groups of Jerusalem's citizens are followed by the proclamation of Yahweh's intervention, mainly against Israel's oppressors. Yahweh's victory over all enemies is never in doubt; the liberation of the community is within reach. It is difficult to determine where exactly the life setting for this kind of eschatological celebration of joy was. The expectation of an imminent end of the world clearly releases an intensive hope for a comprehensive improvement of circumstances.

If we survey the number of prophetic writings that may have originated, or probably did originate, in the Persian period, their number is impressive. The bulk of the text of the Book of the Twelve can be recognized as shaped by the Judean community of the Second Temple. The characteristic theological concerns of the time dominate the statements. It is indeed difficult to

71. See Erhard S. Gerstenberger, "Der Hymnus der Befreiung im Zefanjabuch," in Dietrich and Schwantes, *Der Tag wird kommen*, 102–12.

distinguish between the communities in the home country and in the Diaspora. The serious differences of the early years following the liberation by the Persians probably soon dissipated in the province of Yehud as well. In turn, following the testimony of Ezra-Nehemiah, the tensions with the province of Samaria and other neighboring regions become more prominent. In all of the late parts of the Book of the Twelve, the individual prophetic figures (“authors”) move into the background. Many names could be programmatic fiction (Malachi, Obadiah, Joel, etc.). Conversely, the postexilic community of Yahweh with its rituals emerges all the more clearly behind the “prophetic” sayings. The community commissioned functional texts, as it were, and with them shaped the communal communication. Thereby the phenomenon of the prophetic shifted to the communal use, the literary expression, and the interpretation of authoritative traditions.⁷²

III.1.3. POETICAL, LITURGICAL WRITINGS

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72. In Old Testament scholarship one increasingly considers a “scribal” type of prophecy which seems to be strictly opposite the type of a messenger of Yahweh who is directly commissioned; cf. Jörg Jeremias, “Gelehrte Prophetie,” in *Vergegenwärtigungen des Alten Testaments* (ed. Christoph. Bultmann et al.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2002), 97–111; Wagner, *Prophetie*; Odil Hannes Steck, *Der Abschluss der Prophetie im Alten Testament* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1991).

Human, Dirk J., and Cas J. A. Vos, eds. *Psalms and Liturgy* (JSOTSup 410; New York: T&T Clark, 2004). **Irsigler**, Hubert, and Eberhard Bons, eds. *Mythisches in biblischer Bildsprache* (QD 209; Freiburg: Herder, 2004). **Jacobsen**, Rolf A. "Many Are Saying": *The Function of Direct Discourse in the Hebrew Psalter* (JSOTSup 397; London: T&T Clark, 2004). **Kippenberg**, Hans G. *Religion und Klassenbildung im antiken Judäa* (2nd ed.; SUNT 14; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1978). **Levin**, Christoph. "Das Gebetsbuch der Gerechten," *ZTK* 90 (1993): 355–81. **Lohfink**, Norbert. "Psalmengebet und Psalterredaktion," *AWL* 34 (1992): 1–22. **Loretz**, Oswald. *Psalmstudien* (BZAW 309; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2002). **Mandolfo**, Carleen. *God in the Dock* (JSOTSup 357; London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002). **Mathys**, Hans-Peter. *Dichter und Beter: Theologen aus spätalttestamentlicher Zeit* (FAT 9; Fribourg: Universitätsverlag; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1994). **Millard**, Matthias. *Die Komposition des Psalters: Ein formgeschichtlicher Ansatz* (FAT 9; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1994). **Miller**, Patrick D. *They Cried to the Lord: The Form and Theology of Biblical Prayer* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994). **Schökel**, Luis Alonso. *A Manual of Hebrew Poetics* (trans. Luis Alonso Schökel and Adrian Graffy; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1988). **Seybold**, Klaus. *Poetik der Psalmen* (Poetologische Studien zum AT 1; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2003). **Seybold** and Erich Zenger. *Neue Wege der Psalmenforschung* (2nd ed.; HBS 1; Freiburg: Herder, 1995). **Siqueira**, Tércio Machado. *Salmos de Coré* (Estudos Biblicos 76; Petrópolis: Vozes, 2002). **Siqueira**. *Salmos de Asaf* (Estudos Biblicos 81; Petrópolis: Vozes, 2004). **Smith**, Morton. *Palestinian Parties and Politics That Shaped the Old Testament* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971). **Trudinger**, Peter L. *The Psalms of the Tamid Service* (VTSup 98; Leiden: Brill, 2004). **Wilson**, Gerald H. *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter* (SBLDS 76; Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1985). **Zenger**, Erich, ed. *Der Psalter in Judentum und Christentum* (HBS 18; Freiburg: Herder, 1998). **Zenger**, ed. *Ritual und Poesie* (ed.; HBS 36; Freiburg: Herder, 2003).

The sacral poetry of the Old Testament, which we often attempt to understand more precisely by means of such designations as "prayers," "hymns," "lyrics," and "liturgies," is even more difficult to classify temporally than narrative and prophetic compositions. In part this is due to the presumably stronger historical references in nonpoetic texts and the tendency also to establish such from a later perspective. On the other hand, the liturgical texts, because of their extensive use, are like worn-down pebbles; the concrete uniqueness has generally been lost because it has only a symbolic value as a role model at best. Thus we typically depend on formal and content-related clues in dating poetic pieces, and the opinions of experts vary significantly in individual cases. What is certain to some extent is that in the Persian period collections of psalms materialized, likely for various liturgical usage and by no means for the sphere of the temple only, and that the Psalter as a whole, and hence its Torah-oriented division into five parts as well, received its final form in the Hellenistic period at the earliest.

III.1.3.1. Collections of Psalms

For the Psalter, historicizing attempts at locating individual psalms can be discussed quickly. The headings of many individual texts intend to establish a historical (and ideal, theological-liturgical) relationship to David, the king of the harp. The attempts are very interesting in view of the ancient tradents and editors, but they have no (literary-)historical value at all for the units of text. Allusions to particular temporal events, such as in Pss 137 or 44, 74, 83, 89, 95, 132, do not yield much. They could also be formulated retrospectively. Conversely, the well-worn functional texts are chock-full of condensed experiences of history and faith, suggesting a longer tradition. For our purposes, it is best to examine the history of the origin of the Psalter from the perspective of the Persian epoch. Observations about the history of theology and ideology are especially able to provide support.

The book of Psalms obviously originated out of partial collections over a longer period of time. In the current discussion, determining the individual levels of redaction is a matter of dispute, and it is best to avoid pinpointing them too narrowly. Nevertheless, the following possible chronology becomes apparent for partial collections that most probably belong to the sixth and fifth centuries: psalms of Asaph and Korah, various Davidic collections, songs of pilgrimage, special songs of praise, and Yahweh-kingship psalms. Whether there were thematically shaped redactions beyond this, such as “messianic,” “eschatological,” or “Torah-oriented” ones, is a question not to be considered yet. If we have to reckon with such revisions at all, they may possibly be allocated to the post-Persian period.

To Asaph and Korah are attributed twenty-four songs in the titles of the psalms, twelve for each singer; Asaph is said to have composed Pss 50, 73–83 and Korah Pss 42–49, 84–85, 87–88. Whether the details are reliable is an open question. It is noteworthy that the respective psalms no longer sit alongside one another in two blocks but are separated by other texts. The collections have a certain theological profile; in the case of Korah, for instance, there are several songs with a connection to Zion and the postexilic theology of Zion (Pss 46; 48; 84; 87; possibly also Pss 42–43; 45; 47). For Asaph, the reduced share in individual songs of lament and thanksgiving may be highlighted (see Ps 73). This corresponds with the predominance of community-related prayers, occasionally in the first-person plural form (see Pss 75; 79; 80; 81) and the first-person-singular discourse of Yahweh (see Pss 50; 81), which is to be construed homiletically. Findings from Chronicles support this assessment to a certain extent. The Levites Asaph and Korah are progenitors of important clans of temple singers (1 Chr 6:7, 24; 16:5, 7; 2 Chr 20:14, 19). Possibly there is a historically reliable recollection behind

this view of things. In this case individual clans would also have been responsible for particular worship-related liturgies, festivals, or sacrifices in the Second Temple. The other possibility is only remotely feasible but is supported by anthropological data and some pieces of circumstantial evidence. In the ancient Near East there had been the profession of the “incantation priest” (Akkadian: *āšipu*; Sumerian: *mašmašu*) for thousands of years. While he was associated with a temple, he functioned largely also as a freelance ritual healer.⁷³ His expertise was in exorcisms and conjurations of illness, which he carried out in or on the house of the patient.⁷⁴ The priest had the rituals and prayers for a special service such as this. He had the patient recite a prayer of lament and petition line by line, presumably following a thorough diagnosis of the symptoms of the disease or of evil omens.

Since the collections of Asaph and Korah also contain an element of lamentations for the individual (see Pss 42–43; 49; 73; 88), and since the attribution of headings ensues quite late from the perspective of the community, hence giving preference to collective texts, a profession like that of the “incantation priest” can be imagined in Israel as well. The Old Testament offers vague indications of such ritual healers (men of God and likely also women of God) who were willing to make home visits, for instance, in the figures of Elijah and Elisha, who even raised the dead (1 Kgs 17:17–24; 2 Kgs 4:18–37; 5:1–14), or of Isaiah (Isa 38). That Levites such as Asaph, Korah, Heman (Ps 88:1), and Ethan (Ps 89:1), and not the legendary prophets Elijah, Elisha, and Isaiah, were associated with the traditional practice of prayer in the later tradition probably has to do with the priority of more recent liturgies at the temple and in the community. In the backdrop of the genesis of the collection of Psalms, the figure of a ritual healer (shaman), a man of God or conjuror, should indeed be included.

David truly does serve as the great model for the prayers and hymns of the nascent Jewish communities. In their headings no less than seventy-three psalms of the Masoretic edition mention the singer-king as the author,

73. See Werner Mayer, *Untersuchungen zur Formensprache der babylonischen “Gebetsbeschwörungen”* (Studia Pohl, Series maior 5; Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1976), 59–66; Stefan M. Maul, *Zukunftsbewältigung: Eine Untersuchung altorientalischen Denkens anhand der babylonisch-assyrischen Löserituale* (Namburbi) (Baghdader Forschungen 18; Mainz: von Zabern, 1994), 67–71; Jean Bottéro, “Magie. In Mesopotamien,” *RIA* 7:200–234, esp. 225–28.

74. See Erhard S. Gerstenberger, *Der bittende Mensch: Bitritual und Klagelied des Einzelnen im Alten Testament* (WMANT 51; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1980), esp. ch. 2.2: “Das Gebet in der babylonischen Beschwörung,” 64–112; Maul, *Zukunftsbewältigung*, esp. 67–70.

that is, as the example and hence also as the prayer leader. The Septuagint adds several others to their number. In the literary tradition, David has nothing to do with sickness and healing at all (except in 1 Sam 16:14–23). The Chronistic work perceives him as the great organizer of the community's worship (see 1 Chr 16, where Asaph appears as the lead singer in v. 37) and the mentor of the Levites associated with the temple. The reference to David in the various partial collections (Pss 3–41; 51–70; 108–110; 138–145) and the individual texts of Pss 86; 101; 103; 122; 124; 131; 133 cultivates this image of the king. The colophon following Ps 72, which is itself attributed to Solomon, the son (Ps 71 lacks a heading altogether), probably represents the end of the Davidic collection of Pss 51–70. It has a unique profile and importance: "The prayers of David son of Jesse are ended" (Ps 72:20). In this manner ancient writers did in fact conclude their collections. However, we do not know to what group of psalms this signature once belonged. This much is clear, however: in the Judean tradition, David was the great song writer who set the tone, without his activity having been tied to certain psalm genres. The partial collections mentioned contain a motley blend of liturgical prayers; of course, the presence of "wisdom poems," which are yet to be discussed, is not exactly profuse here.

Do the many Davidic collections have a profile of their own? Precisely the two strongest collections (Pss 3–41; 51–70), also identified as the first and second Psalter of David, encompass a certain range of liturgical texts.

The majority of hymns and prayers can be classified among the individual songs of lament and thanksgiving; of the fifty-nine individual psalms, about thirty-five can be attributed to this category. Thirteen Davidic psalms establish a special relationship to the story of the king's enthronement in 1 and 2 Samuel (Pss 3; 7; 18; 34; 51–52; 54; 56–57; 59–60; 63; 142). Twelve of these biographical references are found within the two major Davidic collections. All of the references show especially the suffering, persecuted individual, not the organizer and king. This is probably the locus of the mystery of the Davidic attributions in general: the (postexilic?) tradents were especially interested in the exemplary emergencies that agreed with the tone and content of the individual's laments. Persecuted, guilt-ridden, in mortal danger, battling against internal and external foes—in these ways the portrait of the early David presented itself in the narrative tradition. Only in Pss 18:1 and 60:1 does the rescued, triumphant claimant to the throne appear. Both psalms take up the traditions of Israel's victory. The great majority of biographical notes on David, however, speak of the miserable, endangered individual. In both collections they reinforce the character of the lament and petition. Hence the two Davidic collections of Pss 3–41 and 51–70 fit in prudently with this leadership figure. Thus they confirm parentheti-

cally that songs of lament and the accompanying songs of salvation were used very broadly by suffering individuals in the postexilic community. The specific healing practice for individuals in mortal danger, attested in the ancient Near East and beyond it in tribal societies of all times (in modernity it continues in the garb of medical, psychological, and psycho-therapeutic practice), was a foundational theological and practical concern for the postexilic community as well. The basic pattern of lament, expression of confidence, and petition⁷⁵ survives the various social organizational forms in Israel. The newly structured community of Yahweh of the Persian period allows the interests of its own time, environment, and theology to have some influence (see, e.g., Pss 12; 102) but freely uses the extant textual pattern for relevant events. How the postexilic ceremonies of healing for sufferers were handled ritually, what experts of rituals assumed the leadership in that period, whether there was an integration into the liturgies of the community now, in place of the strict earlier family context—all this and more is open to question. The so-called songs of ascent (Pss 120–134), a special group of songs of praise (hallelujah- and *tôdâ*-psalms: Pss 111–113; 117–118; 135–136; 146–150), as well as the Yahweh-kingship psalms, which at times have been hotly debated (Pss 47; 93; 95–100), reflect, in their own specific ways, the theological and human concerns of the postexilic community under Persian supremacy. Here, too, in every case the individual texts are probably founded on earlier stages, yet they are adapted to the new parameters of the community and its environment dominated by Persia.

The so-called songs of ascents mentioned initially represent a mixed collection. Lament, encouragement, hymnal elements, statements of trust, thanksgiving, instruction, blessing, confession, and so forth express themselves side by side. The constantly recurring heading of “a song of ascents” (i.e., to Jerusalem) suggests the common use for all texts in conjunction with times of pilgrimage during the period of the Second Temple. Deuteronomy already had established the temple of Jerusalem as the only place of sacrifice (Deut 12:11–14), and the ancient rule, which earlier probably had referred to local sanctuaries, little by little was also applied to Jerusalem: “Three times in the year you shall hold a festival for me.... Three times in the year all your males shall appear before the Lord GOD” (Exod 23:14, 17; cf. 34:23). Only Deuteronomy adds to the general commandment on festivals, “at the

75. For a more detailed portrayal of the individual components of a personal song of lament and thanksgiving in the Old Testament and in Babylonian prayers of patients, see Gerstenberger, *Der bittende Mensch*; and idem, *Psalms*.

place that he will choose,” and thereby unequivocally means Jerusalem (Deut 16:16).

Thus the idea and practice of pilgrimages was birthed at the latest in the sixth century. But it makes good sense primarily in the Persian period, for only after 515 B.C.E. were worship and sacrifice possible at the rebuilt temple. That it was established at that time to sing psalms on the way to the holy city is not attested directly anywhere but is suggested by means of the headings of the pilgrimage collection. The other possible explanation of the heading *šir hamma'alôt* as a “song of steps,” namely, to be sung on the steps to the temple, is less convincing. Ultimately the content of a series of “psalms of pilgrimage” also fits very well the situation of pilgrims. Some songs, for instance, speak explicitly of the aura of Jerusalem; on their way the sojourners need protection and security. Divine help comes only from the area of the temple, not from some hilly heights or sanctuaries on hills (Ps 121). Then follows the joyous arrival at the place of blessing:

I was glad when they said to me, “Let us go to the house of the LORD!” Our feet are standing within your gates, O Jerusalem. Jerusalem—built as a city that is bound firmly together. To it the tribes go up, the tribes of the LORD, as was decreed for Israel, to give thanks to the name of the LORD. For there the thrones for judgment were set up, the thrones of the house of David. (Ps 122:1b–5)

Solidarity with Jerusalem and its temple is also expressed in Pss 125, 127, 132, and 134, so that the pilgrimage psalms overall witness to a distinctive longing for Zion. This sentiment is also apparent in other texts of the Psalter, of course, as a comparison of Pss 84 and 87 or of 46, 48, and 74 will show, for example. To this extent the following applies to the psalms of Zion in the Psalter generally: we need to ask ourselves from what point in time the intensive theology focused on Yahweh’s dwelling place in Jerusalem was even feasible in its personal variant. In my view, an individualized spirituality of this kind, which has long left behind the ancient myths of the mountain of God and the armies of the enemy surging closer, presupposes an exilic-postexilic development to personal faith in God in a close, local community of Yahweh. If this is correct, at least the songs of Zion with a personal coloring are to be seen as poetry from the period of the Second Temple. Since they enjoy a position of prime importance in the collection of “pilgrimage psalms” and the pilgrimages to the main festivals of the year established themselves in the same period of time, it is also possible that the collection largely consists of contemporary poetry. At any rate, the occurrence of domestic genre painting in some psalms (123; 127; 128; 131; 133) is conspicuous as well. The benedictions of the family, both actually and metaphorically, come across

as the highest gifts from God for Yahweh-believers. This is a phenomenon unique to the pilgrimage psalms.

The special songs of praise beginning with calls for praise and thanksgiving are concentrated in the two final “books” of the Psalter. If we add texts beginning with the imperative of *brk* [“bless”] (Pss 103; 104) to those beginning with *hll* [“rejoice”] and *ydh* [“give thanks”] (Pss 105–107; 111–113; 117–118; 135–136; 146–150), we get an impressive corpus of seventeen texts of various lengths and topics, all of them intended for praise by individuals and the community. We know the use of the Hallel (Pss 113–118) in the Pass-over celebration already from the New Testament period (see Matt 26:30). In later synagogue service this block was used for many different festive events.⁷⁶ The practice may well reach back into the Persian period and even before. Typical topics and concerns of piety are Israel’s election by Yahweh, the people’s historical experiences with their God, the amazing demonstrations of mercy in creation and the preservation of the world, and, again as in the collections discussed previously, the personal human destiny before this God. The world is viewed from the perspective of the individual’s understanding of faith. From the beginning the human is a tiny creature standing over against the universal-almighty God.

For he knows how we were made; he remembers that we are dust.

As for mortals, their days are like grass; they flourish like a flower of the field;

For the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place knows it no more.

(Ps 103:14–16; cf. 90:4–6; Isa 40:6–8)

The transitoriness of human life becomes a problem, yet the assurance of the merciful presence of God, the security in an overall world order, providing reason for effusive praise, is characteristic of all songs of praise in many variations. Psalm 104 describes the establishment of a world congenial to life by Yahweh taming the chaotic floods. The tamed water makes life possible for all creatures. Humanity also receives its niche, as do the lion, the wild goat, birds, and fish. The caring Creator gives “them their food in due season” (104:27). God has demonstrated his care for Israel decisively in history, not least through liberation from Egypt (Ps 105). Even in the face of negligent and rebellious behavior by his followers, he was not deterred from standing by his covenant (Ps 106). How much a formal acknowledgment of guilt (106:6), probably in the context of worship, contributes to relief, remains

76. See Ismar Elbogen, *Der jüdische Gottesdienst in seiner geschichtlichen Entwicklung* (Ohm’s Paperbacks 30; repr., Hildesheim: Ohm, 1967), e.g., 125, 137–38, 249.

an open question. The palmist recognizes God's change of heart (106:45), and this is the reason for the communal hymn (106:48). Yet the individual is equally affected. Owing to God's goodness, the individual too is saved time and again (Ps 107) and may offer a hymn of thanksgiving. In the acrostic poems of Pss 111 and 112 (also in Ps 145), the postexilic community of faith expresses itself perhaps most potently. The individual is singing in the midst of those celebrating. The experiences of both are articulated in the choir of praise. From the praise for the wondrous works of Yahweh flow blessing and prosperity (cf. Ps 112). The praise of God constitutes the world (cf. Ps 118:1–4; 148). No wonder the sound in the songs of praise mentioned is as complex and full as this. The community of the Second Temple discovered the power of praise in an exceptional way, and in the final compilation of the Psalter the dynamic collections of praise were not placed at the end unintentionally. In this way we directly obtain a picture of the praying and singing community in worship during the Persian period.

In their own unique way the Yahweh-kingship hymns (Pss 47; 93; 95–100) permit a glance into the time and life setting of the postexilic followers of Yahweh. In the case of these hymns, too, the question is whether they originated entirely during this period of time or represent revisions of earlier texts. The latter is normally assumed. In this case the psalms depicting Yahweh as the universal, omnipotent ruler in lavish kingship terminology come from the Davidic dynastic tradition. If the other applies, the concepts of God would rather be developed from the imperial perspectives of a Babylonian and Persian provenance. Contrary to current practice, I would rather plead for basing the imperial theology concerning Yahweh on the parameter of the ancient Near Eastern concepts of the royal rule of an imperial God who outshines everything and everyone.⁷⁷ In the back of this there is the simple consideration that the kingship traditions of Israel presumably came to an end in the exilic events. In the true sense of the word, they were no longer adequate to be cherished in Judah after the defeat by the Babylonians. We may justifiably doubt that there even are unadulterated traditions of both the Israelite and Judaic monarchies. What we do find are predominantly voices critical of kingship, as, for instance, in the Deuteronomistic work of history and such messianically developed dynastic texts as 2 Sam 7 (cf. Ps 89). However, this process of extrapolating an Israelite kingship ideology was also affected by Babylonian-Persian influence. If this is applicable to the area

77. See Erhard S. Gerstenberger, "‘World Dominion’ in Yahweh-Kingship Psalms," *HBT* 23 (2001): 192–210; Erich Zenger, "Theophanien des Königsgottes JHWH," in idem, ed., *Ritual und Poesie*, 163–90.

of the ideology of statehood, we must also assume, consciously or unconsciously, the influence of the ancient Near Eastern ideals of power on the God-king conceptions that developed in parallel. In this regard, political and divine display of power goes hand in hand. To the extent that the formation of global empires succeeded, in keeping with the geopolitical understanding of the time (cf. the empires of Akkad and the Third Dynasty of Ur), the notion of a supreme, world-shaping God was no longer put aside. Over the centuries and in successive empires the conception of the “king of kings,” “king of the four areas of the world,” or “king of totality” was deepened in the political realm. Accordingly, the national and imperial deity (Enlil, Marduk, Ashur, Ahura Mazda [the latter without royal title]) became the great royal deity to whom the whole world was subject. His vice-regent was the emperor who carried out the will of the supreme deity. The subjected nations had to muster minor kings and deities at best. No one, not even in ancient Israel, would with a right mind have claimed such universal significance for his or her own state. Fed by subsequent glorification, the most extensive territorial claims of David, the ideal king, amount to Palestine and Syria, between the major powers on the Nile and the Euphrates (Josh 1; 4; 2 Sam 8:1–14; 1 Kgs 4:21 [Solomon]).⁷⁸

The Neo-Babylonians and Persians⁷⁹ participated fully in these ancient Near Eastern concepts of major and minor kingdoms. The royal titles traditionally emphasize the universal scope of the imperial territory. Concerning Ahura Mazda specifically, there are no monarchic statements of rule, yet the Persian kings receive the clear mission of a salutary ordering of the world from the “Lord of Wisdom” (Ahura Mazda), as, for example, in the classic monumental inscription of Behistun that Darius I had carved into the rock face alongside and under the scene of the triumphant final victory over nine “liar kings.” The introduction (§§1–9) strongly portrays the commissioning of Darius I by the god of the empire, Ahura Mazda: “Ahura Mazda has bestowed upon me this rule as king. Ahura Mazda supported me until I had achieved this dominion. I hold this dominion in accordance with the will of Ahura Mazda” (§9).⁸⁰ The king of Persia is considered to be “the greatest of kings” among a host of rulers who are only nominally comparable, and Ahura

78. “From sea to sea” and “to the ends of the earth” in Ps 72:8 already is a messianic heightening belonging to the context of Pss 2, 110 etc.

79. See Ahn, *Religiöse Herrscherlegitimation im achämenidischen Iran*; Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 202–54.

80. Cited following the ancient Persian version, translated by Hinz, *TUAT* 1.4:424.

Mazda is “the greatest of gods.”⁸¹ All rule of order is derived singularly and universally from him (see §IV.3 below).

A comparative glance at the Zoroastrian Gathas may conclude these reflections on the expressions of Yahweh’s rule. In contrast to imperial rhetoric, the Old Avestian texts rarely use the language of power or demand obedience to Ahura Mazda. To be sure, some statements sound hierarchical: “And when Thou tellest me: ‘With foresight thou reachest truth,’ then Thou givest me orders (which will) not (be) disobeyed.”⁸² Occasionally one resorts to the imagery of war: “This I ask Thee, tell me plainly, O Ahura, in case Thou hast power (to do so) in order to protect me with truth: When the two warring hosts will confront each other because of those rules which Thou wishest to establish, O Wise One, to which side of the two (sides), to whom wilt Thou assign the victory?”⁸³ Overall, however, the following applies: a political and monarchic dimension does not exist in the Gāthās. Ahura Mazda is never addressed as king. He is the “creator” of all things; especially in the beginning he made the “truth,” the “foundational cosmic order” (cf. Yasna 37:1; 43:5):

This I ask Thee, tell me plainly, O Ahura:
Who (is) through (His) begetting the primal father of Truth?
Who assigned the course of the sun and of the stars (its proper place)?
Who (is He) through whom the moon (now) waxes, now wanes? (Yasna
44:3; Humbach, *Gāthās of Zarathustra*, 1:157)

The answer to such rhetorical questions (as in the book of Job!) as such is clear. Apart from Ahura Mazda himself, who is the most frequently mentioned and praiseworthy being (Yasna 37:4), *Aša* (“truth, harmony, order”) is the power transcending the world. It asserts itself through wisdom, good thought, right-mindedness, and other *ameša spentas*.

Integrity and immortality both (serve) Thee as food. By the power of good thought, right-mindedness along with truth makes [*sic!*] grow both, stability and might. With (all) these, Thou makest (our) enemies tremble, O Wise One. (Yasna 34:11; Humbach, *Gāthās of Zarathustra*, 1:142)

Divine power is effective in the discourse of wisdom, in the decision for the “best good,” in the spiritual defense against demons and temptations—always in the framework of individual faith. The Persian rulers also capitalized on

81. Cited in Ahn, *Religiöse Herrscherlegitimation im achämenidischen Iran*, 181–82.

82. Yasna 43:12, following Humbach, *Gāthās of Zarathustra*, 1:159.

83. Yasna 44:15, Humbach, *Gāthās of Zarathustra*, 1:161.

this very “private” religion for their power-related purposes. In many Old Testament psalms the rhetoric of power has been adopted with reference to Yahweh.

The following result may be emphasized: the types of psalms developed from very different life situations, such as the context of the family, neighborly community, as well as tribal and national organization. The postexilic community adopted the various types and edited them for their own communicative and worship-related purposes. Thus the collection of the Psalter took place gradually in written form in the context and in keeping with the needs of the community.

III.1.3.2. Types of Psalms

In the collections of psalms discussed thus far, the question concerning the older tradition remains undecided. Theoretically it is possible that completely new versions of the texts are extant or, more likely, we are dealing with partial revisions of genres that were handed down. In addition, the question may be posed whether there is a specific new type of psalm that developed in the Persian period in the emerging Judean communities of faith or that can be considered as particularly characteristic for them. In my view, an unambiguous answer is possible: together with the time-conditioned organizational form of the new community of Yahweh and its special synagogue worship, there also emerged specific categories of psalms. They can be united under the liturgical, worship-focused aspect of “instruction.” The Old Testament psalms that come from the institution of the community’s instruction belong to this basic genre. In reality, psalms generally associated with “wisdom,” “teaching,” “sermon,” “meditation,” “reflection,” or “Torah” are to be seen in the direct context of the instruction of the community in the emerging synagogue structure. I consider the following thirty-two texts as belonging to these “instructional psalms”: Pss 1; 9–10; 14; 34; 37; 39; 49; 50; 52–53; 58; 62; 73; 75; 78; 81; 90–91; 95; 101; 105–107; 111–112; 114–115; 119; 127–128; 139; 149. The association with the category mentioned is debatable; assumed are the emergence and use of this type in communal, liturgical situations of instruction. The relatively regular distribution of the examples across the entire Psalter supports the insertion of these contemporary compositions in the underlying partial collections. While there was sufficient traditional material available for the “old” types of psalms, such as songs of lament and thanksgiving and hymns, the community leaders, or the commissioned experts of the time, had to compose new texts for communal instruction. They were able to depend at best in a rudimentary way only on available “instructions” in the familiar or local

area. Worship-related instruction for the community may well have been a novelty of the exilic community.

EXCURSUS: COMMUNAL INSTRUCTION AS LIFE SETTING

The so-called wisdom schools and the communal “didactic psalms” are here to be considered. Experts in the exegesis of the Psalms have always been hard put to explain the *Sitz im Leben* of the “wisdom psalms.” Many follow the example of Sigmund Mowinckel, who attributes the late, reflective texts of the Psalter to “erudite psalmography.” In his opinion, the authors were closely associated with the scribal school attached to the temple but worked in an academic, private, and noncultic realm.⁸⁴ Much has been written about the profession of writers and scholars conceived in this way, and that by contemporary brothers and sisters of the guild. Modern scholars deem the material dependence of ancient scribes on (mostly illiterate) rulers and the intellectual autonomy, as well as their high level of skill expressed, to be important. The scribal schools were unique places of education. Their teachers represented the true intellectual elite of the time, whose ideas have survived in the literature of the ancient Orient.⁸⁵ It is undeniable that teachers of wisdom and scribal schools are documented in the sources since Sumerian times. Since these texts had both cultural and religious meaning, the following basic hermeneutical rule is rarely reflected upon, namely, that today’s interpreters massively project their own reality into ancient conditions. Further, because fascinated academic readers of relevant biblical and other texts perceive a special affinity to the former intellectual, literary elite, the portrait of ancient writers and their “academic” environment easily turns out to be in keeping with the model of contemporary literary culture. Protestant exegetes of the Bible, for instance, will generally identify less with kings and priests than with prophets and teachers of wisdom. At times one may ask to what extent portraits of Old Testament sages have been developed as a direct reproduction of the researching, learning, and writing of modern scholars in their study.⁸⁶ This

84. Sigmund Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship* (trans. and rev. D. R. Ap-Thomas; 2 vols.; New York: Abingdon, 1962), 2:104, 109–10.

85. See the enthusiastic portrait of the “scribal class” in Davies, *Scribes and Schools*, 17–19. See also the standard work of André Lemaire, *Les Écoles et la formation de la Bible dans l'ancien Israël* (OBO 39; Fribourg: Universitätsverlag; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1981).

86. See, e.g., Christina Spaller, *Die Geschichte des Buches ist die Geschichte seiner Auslöschung* (Exegese in unserer Zeit 7; Münster: Lit, 2001), 167–75.

is not surprising, since the past is always and quite inescapably constructed with the concepts of the present. Yet the uncritical self-portrait in the guise of history must be picked up as an important theme in scholarship. This is particularly true of the figure and role of the sage in the ancient Near East. In the case of the wisdom poems of the Psalter argued here, the attribution of the texts to individual ancient scholars seems to have replaced the focal point in worship-related liturgies that had been given from the start. This occurred much at the expense of plausibility: How, then, does the personal poetry of the sages become part of the collections of psalms later on? Or does the late, erudite poetry subsequently transform all other types into devotional personal reading material? In any case, representatives of individual poetry of wisdom find it very difficult to explain the existence of meditative and instructional psalms in the corpus as a whole.⁸⁷ While the existence of “didactic psalms” is a powerful clue for the orienting functions of the community, direct references to corresponding practices are very indistinct in the biblical texts. The figure of Ezra offers something concrete: he is the “scribe” and “scholar” par excellence, and he acts in the name and on behalf of the community of Yahweh (Neh 8). Something similar can be said about the scribe Baruch, whose function as Jeremiah’s personal secretary seems quite anachronistic. His figure much more likely may be understood to be an expert working for the (postexilic) community (see Jer 36; 45). The prophetess Huldah also shows characteristics of a scribal expert; how otherwise could she be approached for an expert statement (2 Kgs 22:8–20)? The figure of Moses may serve as a further piece of evidence. In his office as “community leader,” the prototype of the one who is commissioned by Yahweh continually appears as one who puts Torah—God’s instruction—in writing and proclaims it as official (esp. Deut 29–31). Thus it is precisely Moses who becomes the prototype of the “scribe” and “teacher” who functions in direct service of the living community. He is far removed indeed from a distinct position of a scholar. The constitution of the community under the circumstances of the Persian period assumed the teaching function for the profession of the scribe, and what had been recorded as holy tradition from the start served the instruction of the community exclusively. Hence it is not surprising that the didactic psalms in the Psalter demonstrate close proximity

87. Fritz Stolz, *Psalmen im nachkultischen Raum* (ThSt 129; Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 1983), may serve as an example. The author correctly describes the new religious community formation of the Judeans in Palestine and in the Diaspora. “Their worship, in which making things certain and didactically meaningful represent elementary processes, could be characterized as ‘school service’” (29). In his opinion, however, under the influence of “private” wisdom, worship was completely severed from the temple cult with its sacrifices—a division of religious reality based on Protestant prejudice.

to pentateuchal themes, on the one hand, and, on the other, also to ancient popular wisdom (proverbs, maxims of life) and the skeptical school discussions (didactic speeches, problem-related poems).

It is worth the effort at least to examine more closely some important themes of the "didactic psalms" that presumably were produced in the Persian period. They divulge remarkably much about the internal condition of the communities in which they were used. Lived and reflected piety is embedded in the social structures and behavioral patterns of everyday existence and of religious rituals. Apart from the narrative texts (Ezra, Nehemiah) and the fragmentary archives gained archaeologically (e.g., at Elephantine), these psalms provide the best insight into the internal constitution of the postexilic community. As an adaptation of the intimacy of the prayers of the Psalms that Martin Luther (preface to the Psalter, 1545) and Hermann Gunkel (foreword to his commentary on the Psalms, 1926) extolled, it could be said: "Here you can gaze into the heart of the Yahweh community." Therefore, the following outline is very significant for the overall portrayal of the Judean faith in the Persian period.

Over against the older psalms of lament and thanksgiving there appears a changed attitude to life and death in many texts of the postexilic period. The earlier petitions for rescue from mortal danger and the corresponding thanksgiving focused on regaining life and on celebrating the new beginning. Now we encounter texts lamenting the transitoriness and defenselessness of an individual life in common expressions (see especially Pss 39; 49; 90; 139).

LORD, let me know my end,
and what is the measure of my days;
let me know how fleeting my life is.
You have made my days a few handbreadths,
And my lifetime is as nothing in your sight.
Surely everyone stands as a mere breath.
Surely everyone goes about like a shadow.
Surely for nothing they are in turmoil.
They heap up and do not know who will gather. (Ps 39:4–6; cf. Job 7:7–10)

A lamenting tone is unmistakable, yet the issue is not an actual, concrete danger on account of illness, slander, persecution, and the like but the transitoriness of human existence and God's enduring time. Psalm 90 uses this aspect of life impressively as its central theme. It brings into play the wrath of God because of the "guilt" (inevitably?) accumulated (90:7–9) and deduces from this the brief lifespan of seventy to eighty years at the most (90:10). The lifetime that trickles away quickly appears to be a problem of the time. In the magnificent Psalm 139 the general existential insecurity under the haunt-

ing, inescapable presence of Yahweh is touched on as reason for the lament: "where can I flee from your presence" (139:7)?

In all three texts the concern is the praying individual. A substantial paradigm shift seems to have taken place over against the older laments of the individual. Whereas during the earlier, casual-familial tradition the needy presumably struggled for rescue and rehabilitation in the circle of their closest neighbors and under the leadership of an expert in rituals, the pious individual now (in the midst of the local community?) is on his or her own. The ancient family clan is no longer the basic religious entity to which everyone naturally belongs. Each believer in Yahweh is on his or her own and has to deal with the decision for the God of the new religious community independently. In part, the community does indeed take on a protective function that the individual needs, yet it is the individual conduct over against Yahweh and the neighbors (fellow believers) that determines the status of the one praying. Does the pray-er belong to the "righteous" or to those who behave obstreperously over against God? From the individualization of faith and the full responsibility that one can only bear personally arises a concern that had not been known previously: for one's own existence before the highest God. The personal decision for or against the one praying is the central issue of this new disposition of faith.⁸⁸ Faithfulness to the Torah becomes the standard (see Ps 119). Painful questions, however, cannot be silenced completely, even by attestations of faith. A certain skepticism spreads that naturally is also rampant in culture overall, in other words, beyond the boundaries of Israel and Judah. In the realm of Near Eastern culture, deficiencies of constancy and security are common human experiences in the second half of the first millennium B.C.E.⁸⁹ They often shape people's thinking. The radical change in societal structure and spirituality can be identified concretely in Judah: the ancient belief in various tutelary deities, linked with families and clans, has been superseded by a personal relationship with Yahweh, the God of "Israel,"

88. To what extent the believer's decisive situation is extant in the Zoroastrian religion in particular would have to be examined more closely; see Stausberg, *Die Religion Zarathushtras*, 1:124–28. In the more recent Avestian texts the believers' "decisions of choice" (*fravaši*) are honored as beings. The differentiation between the good and evil world and the clear decision for Ahura Mazda are essential for all people. In particular, it implies the rejection of demons (1:130–50). Following the earthly life, it is the spiritual biography of every person that determines acceptance into paradise (1:144–50).

89. The prevailing negative mood with regard to the work of the deities, justice, and purpose of life become noticeable in many "pessimistic" literary works of the Near East in the first millennium B.C.E.; see §III.1.3.3 below.

who at the same time is the universal Lord of the world.⁹⁰ The subject of faith is no longer the family unit but the individual confessor of Yahweh in association with the community.

Under these circumstances, transitoriness becomes a serious challenge for the subject of faith standing relatively alone. In earlier times the continued existence of the (patriarchal) family was regarded as a token of the goodwill of the deity. The hope for "eternality" is expressed most clearly in the affirmations of continuance for dynasts. Genealogies of families testify to the same rootedness in the past and confidence in the future. With the loss of the ancient family faith and the focus on the individual relationship with God, the religiously relevant time dwindles to the individual's phase of life. It is not the faith of the forebears or grandchildren that supports the devout individual; only one's own respective decisions and deeds are the foundation. The believer is en route with a one-person kayak, and that in dangerous waters. The journey of life is brief and arduous, filled with depressing situations. The goal is blurred, and, in contrast to Persian-Avestian witnesses, there is no paradise yet in sight. In the Old Testament, belief in the resurrection becomes noticeable timidly only in Dan 12:2, that is, in the late Hellenistic period. The Psalter does not give the slightest indication of this later theological solution to the problem. In an insecure and vain existence such as this, what is objectionable can easily be explained as the "wrath" of God, whether as reaction to "sin" or misbehavior or as indeterminable, arbitrary, or sovereign action of the majestic God. The responsibility of God, however, was an insufficient explanation for experienced misery.

Closely linked with the state of the believer is the question about the powers causing sorrow and death. In the world of that time, fear and affliction had to be explained by means of the influence of personal powers from the human sphere and the superhuman-demonic realm. Scientific insights into disease-causing agents did not yet exist. Hence it was evil people from nearby or somewhat farther away who were actively doing harm to the sufferer. The lament that even the solidarity of the family is being betrayed goes back to the older psalms of petition (Pss 41:6–10; 55:13–15). Indeed, the old genre of the individual song of lament is permeated with such incantations of enemies, occasionally shifting into the demonic; examples of this are the dog metaphors (e.g., Pss 22:17 [NRSV 16]; 59:7, 15 [NRSV 6, 14]) or the reference to demons of fever and sickness (Ps 91:5–6). Slander, false accusation, and defamation of character by those who are close, indicating a breach of the obligation of solidarity, play an important part. Given all the similarity

90. See Gerstenberger, *Theologies in the Old Testament*, 207–72.

between the two, the difference between older and more recent laments is due to the fact that earlier the descriptions of the enemies focused on the concrete emergency of a “patient.” The expert in rituals had to diagnose the causes of the problem in the respective case and prepare corresponding prayers for the sick in the “private” (case-related) service of petition. In the individual laments of the postexilic period, the one praying (or an entire group of sufferers) gets a chance to speak; they generally suffer under the conditions of life of their time—and this in the framework of the normative conceptions of the threat of death and possibilities of rescue. The crisis seems to be generalized, and the misery is inherent in the system. Unbearable social conditions, for instance, come into view quite clearly. The economically powerful use their superiority for unscrupulous exploitation of those who are weaker:

In arrogance the wicked persecute the poor—
let them be caught in the schemes they have devised.
For the wicked boast of the desires of their heart;
Those greedy for gain curse and renounce the LORD.
In the pride of their countenance the wicked say,
“God will not seek it out”;
all their thoughts are, “There is no God.” (Ps 10:2–4)

In what follows this psalm dramatically describes the wheeling and dealing of the rich oppressors (10:5–11). Other “psalms of the poor” (Pss 37; 49; 73) are highly poetical, language-conscious texts that may well have been used liturgically. They broaden the basis for our perception of the “theology of the poor” in the Psalter. Such passages as Neh 5 and Lev 25 illustrate the situation and attest to the community’s countermeasures to stem social impoverishment. The financial need of the Persian bureaucracies and armies was huge. At the latest since the imperial reform of Darius, the tax authorities, perhaps their private collectors, worked with amazing precision and severity. The people in the provinces suffered because of the fixed taxes and special obligations for the army and the administration. This resulted in the impoverishment of larger segments of the population, which, as experience shows, also yields gains for a narrower, collaborating elite stratum of the native population. The psalms mentioned reflect a general economic crisis in which the gap between the poor and the rich opens up beyond the traditionally well-known measures. Entire communities become destitute; the beneficiaries who can be discerned immediately (Neh 5 and Lev 25 assume indebtedness and bankruptcy of many family businesses⁹¹) are rich bankers among their own people.

⁹¹ Kippenberg, *Religion und Klassenbildung*, *passim*.

Now, recognizing a social conflict in the Judean communities of the postexilic period by no means exhausts the matter. The wrongdoers in the community, who are bent on destroying the community and thus also the individual adherent of Yahweh, are also “enemies” of Yahweh at the same time, for God wants his people as a whole to prosper and for not a single one of them to fall prey to the harsh, exploitative power of a money-lender or tax collector. The communities of Yahweh developed a strong consciousness of solidarity among themselves. Whoever violates it consciously opposes the will of their mutual God. It is no accident that the exploiters of Ps 10 and others are portrayed as godless brutes. They think they can ignore the community obligation ordered by Yahweh. For the orthodox observer of this scene, this means that these brutal profiteers not only cynically accept the misery and death of their fellow parishioners, but beyond this they position themselves outside any justifiable practice of faith. Their confession argues that “there is no God!” or that “God does not see us” (Ps 10:2–6); in other words, he is ineffective and irrelevant. Thus also in Ps 73:3–12: for the pious who are suffering, the sting is in the fact that the oppressors’ blasphemous misdeeds are tolerated for a long time before God punishes them (73:18–20, 27). The problem of the justice of God is posited thereby; it agrees with the intellectual climate of the time (see §III.2.3.2 below).

The distance from this kind of characterization of the enemies as God’s adversary to the actual exclusion of unpopular, guilty opponents is negligible. Whoever flagrantly violates the social order willed by God will also be shown to act illegally in other aspects of life. Disregard for ritual requirements, ignoring genealogically documented rights, departures from the festival agenda—each breach of norms can trigger tendencies of division or exclusion. Already in Isa 56–66 we encountered factions who excluded and condemned one another. The Psalter adds the pair of opposites of the righteous (*ṣaddiqîm*) and the godless (*rěšā’îm*). It pervades the final redaction of the book but seems to be anchored especially in the didactic psalms.⁹² Statistics indeed offer little that is striking. The designation “righteous one,” referring to people, that is, members of the community of Yahweh, is found forty-three times in the Psalter.⁹³ Only Pss 1, 34, 37, 38 use the term twice or more frequently; Pss 14, 52, 58, 75, 112 show one occurrence each. It is

92. Cf. Levin, “Das Gebetsbuch der Gerechten.”

93. In addition, Yahweh is designated as “just” nine times. The 52 occurrences of the adjective in the Psalter compare with a total of 206 occurrences in the Old Testament. Superficially this is only a slightly higher use of the term. But if one takes into consideration the specific meaning of a “confessing member of the community of Yahweh,” this concept of “the righteous one” is almost entirely limited to the Psalter (cf. the use else-

worth noting that the term “righteous one” is missing altogether in the longest psalm of the Psalter, although almost every verse refers to such a person. Only Yahweh received the attribute “righteous” (Pss 119; 137).⁹⁴ The only stronger concentration of the adjective occurs in Ps 37. Six times the “righteous” is juxtaposed antithetically to the “wicked,” as in Proverbs (37:12, 16–17, 21, 32, 38–39). Three times the righteous one is the center of attention (37:25, 29–30). It should be obvious that the follower of Yahweh functions as the righteous one in this psalm (37:3–7, 25–31, 37).

In the case of opposition by the unrighteous or “sinner”/“wicked,” the situation becomes clearer. The term occurs eighty-two times in the Psalter, always with regard to people, namely, the hostile opponent of the one praying. With thirteen occurrences, the psalm mentioned above, Ps 37, has the largest share of *rěšā'im*. The didactic text literally wears itself out on the evil enemies. An insuperable gulf is placed between the righteous and the wicked. Only the annihilation of the wicked and the full recognition of the friends of Yahweh can resolve the problem of unrighteousness. As already mentioned, the social question is also part of this. In reality, this concerns the ownership of property in Ps 37 (see 37:9, 11, 22 but also 37:18–19, 25), which represents the normal basis of safeguarding life in antiquity. In poverty, the answer is reliance upon Yahweh, the God who saves, who sympathizes with the wretched. The wicked who seem to be so successful will perish.

Apart from Ps 37, there are also other didactic poems that deal with the “wicked” in more detail: Pss 9–10 (eight occurrences); 119 (six); 1 (four!); 75 (three); and 73; 82; 112 (two each). Incidentally, seven texts in our group also mention the “sinner” explicitly. This means that fifteen texts of the didactic poems deal with such enemies. Forty times they use the incriminating term. This amounts to about half of all the occurrences in the Psalms. Hence a tenth of the Psalms contain 50 percent of all the references to the “wicked.” This remarkable concentration suggests contemporary constellations. The people described in this manner are not foreigners; they are close to the speaker. They act as individuals but belong to a designated group; the many occurrences in the plural cannot be explained otherwise. From the perspective of the psalmists, the wicked excluded themselves by their conduct over against

where: Gen 18:22–33; Ezek 18:5–29). The frequent use in Proverbs probably functions on a different level.

94. The lack of labels for the human “righteous” person is more than compensated for by means of numerous “I” and “he” sayings, which indicate the exemplary follower of Yahweh as the faithful observer of God’s will. “Before I was humbled I went astray, but now I keep your word.... The arrogant smear me with lies, but with my whole heart I keep your precepts. Their hearts are fat and gross, but I delight in your law” (Ps 119:67, 69, 70).

the community and Yahweh. They have become “nonpersons” who can only be encountered with a wish for destruction. In contrast to the condemnations and curses of the ancient laments of the individual, the death wishes are now directed against the entire group of “godless” (see Ps 37:2, 9–10, 15, 17, 20, 22, 28, 34, 36, 38 and many other references). The ideology of “exterminating all evil,” which already plays a part in the Deuteronomistic writings, is occasionally shown to advantage without inhibition.⁹⁵ The group understanding of the opponents, who stand irreconcilable over against the “righteous,” suggests tensions or divisions in the community (see §II.3.1 above). Even if the curses of the “others” were hyped rhetoric, they bring to light a mechanism of separation and exclusion⁹⁶ that can only end in a breach of community or already presupposes it. The separation of the Qumran community from the mother “church” in Jerusalem, with the respective rhetoric of enmity, is a later example of the same phenomenon.⁹⁷ Therefore, the theological-spiritual fragmentation of Judaism began no later than with the institution of the Second Temple.

In the community that bequeathed the Psalter and the didactic psalms to us, a consolidation around the God Yahweh took place. Priority was given to the individual confessor of Yahweh as the subject of faith. But such as one was not isolated and autonomous, as in our secularized Western societies, but embedded in the fellowship of believers, the people of Yahweh, the community. Therefore, the identity of the follower of Yahweh to be discussed now has two sides. For one, it is a question of the respective personal consciousness of being secure in one’s God. Further, since a solipsistic life of faith was still unknown, the constitution and sensitivities of the community as the outward corset or protective realm of the individual was an essential complement for the confessor. Without a community, the best of the righteous was lost; ten righteous ones constituted a group that was capable of functioning and liturgically effective (see Gen 18:32).

95. In Ps 37 alone the verb *krt niphāl* (to be “cut off”) appears five times; it also occurs in Deuteronomy with this meaning; see Gerhard F. Hasel, *TDOT* 7:339–52, esp. 347–49 (“extermination formula”: only the removal of the individual from his group is considered). A critical examination of wishes for extermination in the Psalter is lacking.

96. At this point it would be imperative to consult contemporary studies on formation of identity, group behavior, marginalization of minorities, and scenarios of enmity and conflict. Social psychology, behavioral research, and cultural anthropology have much to contribute to this topic.

97. See Hartmut Stegemann, *Die Essener, Qumran, Johannes der Täufer und Jesus* (Freiburg: Herder, 1993), 198–213, 229–31. That Judaism prior to the Maccabean schism had been a “fairly homogenous entity” (Stegemann, 198), however, is refuted by Isa 56–66, the late “enemy-psalms,” the struggles for the priestly office (cf. Lev 10; Num 16), etc.

First, with regard to security in the “shadow of the wings of [originally *sērāpīm*] Yahweh” (Pss 17:8; 36:8 [NRSV 7]; 57:2 [NRSV 1]; 61:5 [NRSV 4]; 63:8 [NRSV 7]; 91:4),⁹⁸ age-old experiences of trust, situated in the religion of the family, are alive in parochial spirituality. A number of very short psalms are completely at home in the domestic, albeit not other-worldly (!) idyll (Pss 123; 127–128; 131; 133). The didactic character of these texts is not directly obvious; in part, they are found in the address of the prayer. Nevertheless, they undoubtedly belong to the surroundings of the late community psalms. The “benedictions” (cf. “Happy are those who...” in Pss 112:1; 119:1–2; 127:5; 128:1, etc.) are forms of speech used in instruction. This is also shown in the subtle linking of domestic and communal connotations:

O LORD, my heart is not lifted up, my eyes are not raised too high;
 I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me.
 But I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with its mother;
 my soul is like the weaned child that is with me.
 O Israel, hope in the LORD from this time on and forevermore. (Ps 131)

The power of the metaphor persuades immediately. The relationship with God is like that of a child-mother relationship, and this most personal human experience serves as an example for the entire community. Also, the metaphor of the maid/slave (Ps 123) who lives in perfect harmony with the master and mistress was suitable for clarifying the relationship with God at that time. Significant, as in many other we-psalms, are the communal first-person plural and the frontal position against arrogant exploiters probably in their own ranks (123:2–4). The private social conditions or primary structures are extremely important for the postexilic community. It draws vitality and theological illustrative material from them. The individual believer still exists in his family; he obtains the solid framework for his life of faith in the community and yet is personally responsible for his own fortune. Here the blessing of Yahweh is seen in the closest surroundings (Ps 128): the wife—a “fruitful vine” and the children—“freshly planted olive shoots” (128:3); the nearness and blessing of Yahweh from Zion—this is the epitome of happiness.

The primeval trust in the personal God was situated in ancient family religions and tested over millennia, before flowing into the larger human

98. See Silvia Schroer, “Im Schatten deiner Flügel,” in *„Ihr Völker alle, klatscht in die Hände!“: Festschrift für Erhard S. Gerstenberger zum 65. Geburtstag* (ed. R. Kessler; Münster: Lit, 1997), 296–316. For good reasons the author argues for Yahweh being compared with a vulture protecting and nurturing its brood in an exemplary, maternal manner (300ff.).

associations of faith and becoming active especially in the Judean communities of the Persian period. Forerunners are the affirmations and songs of confidence of the Psalter, which still move authentically in the familial sphere and the specific services of petition (see Pss 4; 11; 23, etc.).⁹⁹ The transition to the communal song of confidence is marked in Ps 62, for instance. The personal confession of being in the good hands of God is followed by the sermonic encouragement, addressed to the audience, in 62:8: “Trust in him at all times, O people,¹⁰⁰ pour out your heart before him; God is a refuge for us.”

As a whole, the expressions of trust by the individual are also oriented toward the experiences and dimensions of the God who works on the domestic and familial level. They do not need any national history of salvation, indeed, no historical tradition at all. This feature of the religion of small groups persisted in the exilic/postexilic community. Yahweh is the personal (i.e., familial) deity who cares for the individual. The prototypical potential of trust, which is also expressed in personal names (designations of rescue, refuge, and protection), lends support to the one who prays. For this reason he is able to turn to the “community” in Ps 62 and pass on his confidence. Using direct speech he appeals to all listeners to practice the same trust in God. By means of a statement of confession in the first-person plural, he then joins together with those present, “God is a refuge for us!” (62:8c) and concludes with a vivid reference to God’s power and compassion (62:12). The wealth of confidence helps the individual but originates from the common treasure of traditions of families and clans and therefore is also to benefit the community as a whole.

The counterpart of individual faith in Yahweh and of the decision for Yahweh is precisely the community’s faith that cannot be relinquished. This faith has grown afresh in the exilic and postexilic period. As far as we know, “confessional” Yahweh communities did not yet exist in the preexilic period. Family cults and local cults did indeed exist alongside and under the royal cult of the state,¹⁰¹ but the community of Yahweh, in the sense of a nonofficial religious fellowship based on personal decision, only came about after the loss of sovereignty. The compulsion for reorganization following the Babylonian takeover brought about the remarkable new creation. In a certain way,

99. For details, see Gerstenberger, *Psalms*, vol. 2, “Glossary,” s.v. “Affirmation of Confidence,” “Song of Confidence,” and the respective psalms noted.

100. The MT has *bēkol ’et ’ām*, “at all times, people”; the LXX presupposes the wording “the whole community” (*kol ’adat ’ām*).

101. For more detailed reasons for this argument, see Gerstenberger, *Theologies in the Old Testament*, 25–91, 161–205.

the founding of the community of Yahweh also was the reason and prerequisite for the development of personal faith.

The ancient devout worshippers had always been very conscious of this fact. For this reason they celebrated Yahweh, the Lord of his chosen people, in their community instructions. They dated the foundational event of Israel's election—how could it be otherwise—in the past. But they were not so presumptuous as to set the beginning of the world and the beginning of the community of Yahweh as synonymous. But depending on the local perspective and tradition, the theologians named Abraham, Jacob, Moses, David, and Ezra as the decisive figures who had mediated the relationship with God permanently. The continuing tradition worked the various legends of origin in the so-called “historical books” of the Old Testament into a coherent salvation-history scenario. The didactic psalms partly fall back upon the already extant historical accounts but certainly also reflect a profile of their own.

Historical retrospection always offers something didactic. Otherwise, why would someone narrate the past, if not with the implicit intention of passing on its knowledge, anchoring the present in earlier events, and communicating their heritage and identity to the youth? The line of separation between praise-oriented historical psalms with an implicit intention of instructing and explicit didactic poems is certainly fluid. It is to be moored to the factual use of the texts, and the latter is reflected in the forms and contents of the communication. Psalms 78, 105, and 106, designated above as special didactic psalms, reflect a clear tendency toward instruction. Psalm 78:1–4 is a perfect “didactic opening” (“Give ear, O my people, to my teaching,” 78:1), comparable to Deut 32:1–3; Ps 50:7; and other texts. Likewise, Ps 105 from the start is understood against the background of “remembrance” (“Remember the wonderful works he has done, his miracles, and the judgments he has uttered,” 105:5). Ps 106, for its part, following a call for thanksgiving and a hymnal question (“Who can utter the mighty doings of the LORD...?” 106:22), begins with a typical didactic benediction (106:23). The episodes of the history of faith subsequently addressed (106:27c–39) are portrayed as urgent, warning examples. In 106:240–47 they are continued to the psalmist's present, evaluated and appropriated.¹⁰²

Probably the major Psalms 105 and 106 were deliberately brought together in the growing Psalter. In pointedly differing ways they take up the tradition of salvation history available in characteristic form, probably

102. For details on the didactic intentions of the psalms mentioned, see Gerstenberger, *Psalms*. See also J. Clinton McCann Jr., “The Psalms as Instruction,” *Int* 46 (1992): 117–28.

already in writing. The essential fact is the covenant with the people of Israel, which, as a priority, includes the promise of the land—a burning matter of concern for the exilic generations.

O offspring of his servant Abraham, children of Jacob, his chosen ones.
 He is the LORD our God; his judgments are in all the earth.
 He is mindful of his covenant forever, of the word that he commanded, for a
 thousand generations,
 the covenant that he made with Abraham, his sworn promise to Isaac,
 which he confirmed to Jacob as a statute, to Israel as an everlasting cov-
 enant,
 saying, "To you I will give the land of Canaan as your portion for an inheri-
 tance." (Ps 105:6–11)

In a loose connection to the patriarchal narratives, the Joseph story, and the exodus events (Gen 12–Exod 16), the tradents then set forth their vivid instruction on Yahweh's caring leadership of the people, who carries out his promises to Israel in spite of all of the unpleasantness of world politics. Yahweh watched over the chosen people in the time of the migration of the patriarchs (105:14–15). He caused an Egyptian pharaoh to make Joseph the vizier, in order for Israel to obtain a secure place of refuge, so as to keep them from starvation (105:16–23). Yahweh tamed Egypt's subsequent ruler by means of the plagues (105:28–36), so that he might release Israel from slavery (105:37–38). This is the most detailed episode, not that of the deliverance at the Reed Sea, which is only mentioned vaguely in 105:39. The provision of food and water in the wilderness (105:40–41) is the final example of divine care in this psalm. The lesson drawn from the history of salvation forms the conclusion: because of the care Yahweh showed, "they might keep his statutes and observe his *tôrôt* ["guidelines," i.e., laws]" (105:45).

As in Pss 135 and 136, the history of Israel with its God, Yahweh, appears in glorious splendor here. The chosen episodes of the past attest (in the canonical sequence, with the events at Sinai) to God's unique goodwill toward the descendents of Abraham. Moses and Aaron function as the great miracle workers and leaders but not explicitly as the lawmakers, adjudicators, and priests. Yahweh is above and behind everything that happens, without moving his universal authority into the limelight (cf. 105:7 with the Yahweh-royal psalms). The exodus out of Egypt and the giving of the land in Canaan are the main features of the divine leadership. The overall portrait of Yahweh's goodwill for Israel is bold, popular, and rousing, not theological, reflective, and dealing with problems. Unbridled joy and assurance of victory run through the psalm. The enjoyment of their own land and of the (captured cultural) goods accepted from the previous inhabitants pervade

everything. For the psalmist it is “a delight to live,” because Yahweh almost naturally cares for his chosen people. Where does this extraordinarily positive assessment of life and the relationship with God come from? Why are breaches, hostilities, and catastrophes only mentioned in a way that they have been overcome and are no longer relevant (105:14, 16–17, 25)? Distress and hostility are dark background material, in front of which the salutary interventions of Yahweh and the well-being of his people light up all the brighter. The facts of the case can only be explained by means of the contexts in which the psalm was used. In many festivals, especially during harvest time, military victories or personal experiences of good fortune (e.g., *rites de passage*), joy, and gratitude were called for. The dark sides of life and of the deity had to come second. In such situations the message that “Yahweh is well-disposed toward us! He cares for us!” is crucial. The instructions were allowed or had to focus on the affirmation of life. There are Klesmer-songs from the Jewish ghettos that articulate joy and the will to survive even in the face of mortal danger. The use of such historical psalms is also conceivable in the context of instructing children or young people. Pedagogues like for them to imagine the positive chances of life and the attainable fortune. As always, a didactic psalm of pure joy of faith, full of rejoicing over successful, fulfilled divine promises, has a specific life setting in a real world filled with suffering and complications. It cannot be read as a dogmatic statement for all situations in life.

The “twin” to Ps 105 is of an entirely different kind. According to its content Ps 106 belongs to the major prayers of repentance of the people (cf. Ezra 9; Neh 9; Dan 9).¹⁰³ From a formal perspective, the psalm contains formulations of petitions in the first-person singular (106:4–5) and plural (106:47), the communal confession (“we ... have sinned,” 106:6), and a retrospective glance at the history of breaking away from Yahweh who time and again had taken the trouble over his people (106:7–39). Especially in this latter part, as in the didactic opening formulations already mentioned in 106:2–3, pedagogical tendencies are noticeable. The list of transgressions committed by the fathers, but inwardly assimilated and equally answered for by the living generation, is dreadful. It ends with the sullying of the land received as a gift:

They sacrificed their sons and their daughters to the demons;
they poured out innocent blood, the blood of their sons and daughters,
whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan; and the land was polluted with
blood.

103. See Rainer Kessler, “Das kollektive Schuldbekenntnis im Alten Testament,” *EvT* 56 (1996): 29–43.

Thus they became unclean by their acts and prostituted themselves in their doings. (106:37–39)

The considerable series of misdeeds has been distilled out of the extant traditions at the time in a most unconventional way. Apparently a canonical sequence does not matter; the books of Exodus to Numbers, as well as some passages from Deuteronomy, are the basis for the homiletically didactic portrayal. Yahweh is the savior from the distress at the Reed Sea (106:10) and in the wilderness (106:15), but he also punishes severely (106:17–18, 23, 26–27). Moses steps into the breach (106:23), as does Phinehas, the zealous priest of Num 25:6–15 (106:30–31). Every historical event is addressed and evaluated separately. No literary or liturgical pattern is used. Deuteronomistic perspectives, as well as those of the Priestly writings, dominate, though the individual statements also bear a “personal” note. The catalog of transgressions turns into the common reproach of not having driven out the Canaanites completely (106:34–36; cf. Deut 7:1–2; 12:2–3; Judg 1:28; 2:23; 3:6, etc.). This is followed by the passage cited above concerning the sully of the land on account of the sacrifices to Molech (106:37–39; cf. Lev 18:21, 24–29; 20:2–5; 2 Kgs 21:6, 16). While 106:34–36 probably reflect the exilic period,¹⁰⁴ it is especially the section of 106:37–39, apart from the reference to the scattering among the nations in 106:27, that opens up the view into the postexilic present: Yahweh punishes through the deportations (106:40–42) but then is merciful with his community, inclines the oppressors to mildness, and the change in fortune is palpable (106:43–46). The concluding petition of the worshipping community (we-form!) once again, in liturgical language, confirms the longing for the return and reunification (106:47). Thus, under the consciousness of guilt by the postexilic community, the medley of incriminating episodes of the past becomes a homiletic-didactic address. The offenses of the people have always been serious; they endure and provoke just punishment from Yahweh. Especially the exile among the nations was and is the rightful recompense for Israel’s failures. But Yahweh’s patience and grace survive the worst storms and lead to a happy ending: “For their sake he remembered his covenant and showed compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love. He caused them to be pitied by all who held them captive” (106:45–46)—a reference to the turn of events since Cyrus.

Psalms 78 follows a similar tenor. It also reflects Israel’s guilt in history and ends with Yahweh’s redemptive act for his people. Yet the chosen time frame is a different one, and the hermeneutical location of the psalmist seems

104. The vocabulary betrays exilic perspectives; cf. Ps 106:35 with Ezra 9:2, etc.

to be in the period of the kings of Judah. The sequence of the episodes serving as warnings first moves from the exodus to the acquisition of the land (78:12–55) and hence encompasses the classic “salvation” of the distant Mosaic past. But then, prior to and following this block of history, which certainly shows a Deuteronomistic form, there appear comments about “Ephraim” (78:9–11) and the unfaithfulness of Israel (78:56–58), which lead to the divine judgment on Shiloh (78:59–64) and to the rejection of Joseph and Judah’s election, with David at the helm (78:62–72). In a tailoring of this kind, the preexilic origin and use of the psalm seem to be almost obvious, yet appearances are deceptive. The Deuteronomistic phases of Yahweh’s salvific action with regard to Israel, the rebelliousness and contrariness of the people, God’s punishment, the conversion of those afflicted, and new demonstrations of Yahweh’s grace is recognized too well as a historical principle of construction. The entire theme of Israel’s exclusive faithfulness over against Yahweh is rooted in the late theology of Yahweh’s uniqueness. After the major deportations of the early sixth century, the “captivity” of 78:61 does not sound like the capturing of the ark of God in 1 Sam 4:21. The text as a whole rather points to the exilic/postexilic period.¹⁰⁵ In this case the late psalmists would have rated the elevation of Judah and David, over against the northern tribes, paradigmatically as a victory of their own affair. Perhaps there is some text missing in the form handed down, for the psalm ends very atypically with the description of the positive reign of David (78:72) without any conclusion or liturgical wording to mark its end.

Despite all of the questions that the text poses, already most clearly in its introduction, Ps 78 reveals itself to be a didactic address. A speaker introduces himself and the intent of his address (78:1–8). With all the desired clarity this is a didactic address, clearly identifying the psalmist’s intention and the function of the text. The “old stories” make up “instruction,” and instruction is nothing more than Torah (78:1, 5). An expert presents it to a gathering; he addresses the audience directly. His argument for the lesson in history is that knowledge from and about one’s own past must not be forgotten. Why not? The presenter probably would respond that this past with Israel’s God constitutes the present. The essential norm of life, Yahweh’s instruction to his people, how and where they are to live, can only be ascertained from the tradition. The issue is solid knowledge and learning of the divine will. Fathers have long passed it on to the sons (78:3, 5). The issue is

105. Frank-Lothar Hossfeld correctly points to the literary-historical analysis and the postexilic portrait of David, which render a preexilic date impossible; see Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalmen 51–100*, 429.

adhering to Yahweh's directives (78:7), and the fathers themselves provide deterrent examples of fickleness and apostasy. Hence the basic paradigm of the teaching is the following: learn from history! Do not allow anything to dissuade you from faithfulness to Yahweh! Do not sink into the old patterns of the will's self-assertion, of open rebellion against God! Do not ignore the good times, for God's sake, that Yahweh has granted you! Do not get carried away with your own high-handedness, your self-praise, or other illusions! Insubordination is counterproductive and leads nowhere. Yahweh is the only focal point for personal and communal identification. The attitude called for is "to be faithful [*němnâ*] to God with one's 'spirit' [will, mind: *rûah*]" (78:8d). (The choice of words is also reminiscent of ancient Persian devotion formulas; cf. Yasna 27:13–15). An enduring decision for Yahweh is the goal of instruction.

Confession seems to be a specific feature of postexilic faithfulness. Comparable with Ps 78—all the commentaries point this out—the great prayers of repentance in Ezra 9, Neh 9, and Dan 9 place all the emphasis on a confession of sins that encompasses history and the contemporary present: "From the days of our ancestors to this day we have been deep in guilt" (Ezra 9:7; the prayer then turns to thanksgiving because Yahweh has saved a remnant). Nehemiah first cites Yahweh's favors in the period of Abraham and of Moses and continues: "But they and our ancestors acted presumptuously and stiffened their necks" (Neh 9:16, followed by episodes of turning away and God's renewed compassion until the entrance into Canaan). "Nevertheless, they were disobedient and rebelled against you and cast your law [*tôrâ*] behind their backs and killed your prophets" (9:26). The consequence was the deportations to Babylon. Once again Israel cries out for help and is pardoned, has a relapse and is granted an amnesty—an almost endless chain of turning away and restitution (9:27–31). The negative view of history, formerly inaugurated by the Deuteronomist, is dominant in Nehemiah; it instructs to teach lamenting, trusting, and petitioning and thus is a direct parallel to the historical didactic psalms (see Neh 9, esp. 9:32–37). The confession occupies a permanent place (9:33–35). The ending of Nehemiah's prayer is quite nonliturgical, concluding with a description of the distress (9:36–37: exploitation of Judah by "the kings"); we would expect petition, vow, and praise as the conclusion. The reappraisal of the past, however, in the awareness of an enduring history of transgressions of the people of Yahweh is clear. The depth-dimensional awareness of sin increasingly finds expression in Daniel: "we have sinned and done wrong, acted wickedly and rebelled" (Dan 9:5; the repetition and intensification of the confession is found in 9:6–15). Since the emergence of the Deuteronomistic interpretation and theology of history, the culpable failure of the people evidently has become a long-running issue and, incidentally,

continues to have an effect in many Protestant strands in modern times. As our three didactic psalms show, this became a preferred topos of instruction, even over against other traditions that attribute the responsibility for the catastrophe to Yahweh (cf. Pss 44; 89) or those that leave open the question of the cause of the collapse (cf. Pss 66:10–12; 124:3–7; 137, etc.).

Another important example of the teaching concerning the history of Israel's rebellion against Yahweh is Deut 32. The "song of Moses" is already treated as a document of faith of the first order by the redactors, intended to serve the admonishing and warning instruction (see the introductory paragraph of Deut 31:19–22, 30). Thus for the reader "this song" is already a fixed concept prior to its citation in Deut 32:1–43. It clearly has the position of an important piece of catechetical teaching, and following the verbatim recitation the redactor states it once more: "Moses came and recited all the words of this song in the hearing of the people" (Deut 32:44); immediately following he impressed upon them the need for loyalty to Yahweh (32:46–47). For this reason the relation of song and Torah is not very easily understood. What is certain is that the song of Moses must have had an exceedingly important function. At times it may even have competed with the narrated or enacted Torah. However it may be assessed literarily and theologically,¹⁰⁶ the basic tenor of the history of Israel's turning away from Yahweh, which we encounter in Pss 78 and 106, is also present here. Of course, it is thoroughly modulated in independent vocabulary and with specific concepts. Yahweh "found" Israel in the wilderness like a foundling; "he shielded him, cared for him, guarded him as the apple of his eye. As an eagle stirs up its nest and hovers over its young; as it spreads its wings, takes them up, and bears them aloft on its pinions..." (Deut 32:10–11). The song depicts the early days of "Israel" in mythical rather than historical images (32:12–14): "Jeshurun grew fat and kicked. You grew fat, bloated, and gorged! He abandoned God who made him and scoffed at the Rock of his salvation" (32:15). Once more, in direct speech: "You were unmindful of the Rock that bore you; you forgot the God who gave you birth" (32:18). Yahweh reacts to this in a lengthy reprimand (32:20–33), destining exile and foreign rule for the disloyal people. Beginning with 32:34 a drastic change in favor of the wrong-headed people opens up: Yahweh promises vengeance for suffering endured (32:34–42). An appeal to the nations to worship Yahweh concludes the psalm. Different from Neh 9 and Dan 9, but comparable to Ezra 9 and Ps 106, affliction and oppression are overcome.

106. The discussion of Deut 32 is conducted controversially; see Otto Eissfeldt, *Das Lied des Mose Deuteronomium 32,1–43* (Berlin: Akademie, 1958); Paul Sanders, *The Provenance of Deuteronomy 32* (OtSt 37; Leiden: Brill, 1996).

The paradigm "From the beginning Israel bears serious guilt" is of central importance in all the examples. As a lesson it plays a major role at least in certain contexts. What were the occasions for the recitation? We ought to think of postexilic laments, for in the century of the exile the worship agendas do not seem to have emphasized the notion of guilt.¹⁰⁷ Instead, the motif "guilt of the fathers" is in full swing in the fifth century B.C.E. Whether or not it is possible to speak of an "obsession with guilt" is an open question. The dogmatic, anthropologically reinforced reception of the consciousness of sin probably did not arise prior to Christianity. Paul was a prominent theoretician of the general condition of sin: "For there is no distinction, since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:22b–23). The doctrine of the total depravity of all humans becomes a broad stream of tradition in Christianity, which continues via Augustine, Luther, and Calvin to Karl Barth. The postexilic didactic psalms cannot be accused of an "ideology of guilt." This is further supported by such texts as Ps 105, or also Pss 44; 89, and Isa 63:7–64:10, which also do not contain an orientation of guilt. However, the motif of historical guilt has a special place in the reflective instruction of the Persian period.

At this juncture the question about the intellectual-religious climate of the Persian period is also appropriate. Had there been a comparable consciousness of common sinfulness and impurity in the Zoroastrian belief, which had to be atoned for by repentance? The religion of Zoroaster has an ethical and ritual orientation: it provides for the possibility of repentance for an individual's wrong decisions and offenses. Further, dividing history into epochs developed from the Old Avestian tradition, showing awareness of phases of purity and fortune as well as of demonic power and darkness. Both points reflect a certain affinity to the Israelite construction of the history of sin, since the days of the forefathers and of the exhortations to repentance for the purpose of improving the relationship with God. The Avestian "overcoming of evil," however, remains largely couched in the demonic.¹⁰⁸

In the postexilic community, Yahweh is the center of personal and communal faith. Everything revolves around him, his holiness and righteousness, his compassion, goodwill, and help. Compared to earlier periods of history and social structures, habits, and value systems, Israel's reality of life changed considerably because of the founding phase made possible by Persian policy. The radical changes also demand a new way of thinking theologically. The

107. See Albertz, *Israel in Exile*, 139–60.

108. See Stausberg, *Die Religion Zarathushtras*, 1:135–53; Boyce, *History of Zoroastrianism* 1:85–129.

presence of God can no longer be experienced in their own state-sponsored cult and in the existing local shrines on hills and family cults being practiced alongside. Yahweh, the war deity, who was at home in the tribal association and the monarchic nation-state, is no longer relevant. Instead, Yahweh became a God of indigenous and scattered minority groups who were worked out to the last detail in parochial and patriarchal terms. He also became a God who holds together faraway communities between Elephantine in Egypt and the Jewish settlements near Babylon. His presence is experienced less through cultic theophany, prophetic mission, or military relief action than through the practice and reducing to writing of various traditions, as well as through encountering the new, imperial environment.

In constructing and collecting the sacred writings, Persian religious teachers such as Zoroaster and his disciples may have preceded. In any case, the use of the art of writing for religious purposes in Mesopotamia, thousands of years old, was in the air. Already since the times of Sumer (third millennium B.C.E.) temples and priesthoods in part recorded rituals, prayers, and other religious genres, against the resistance of those who considered the oral transmission of texts important. Perhaps it was the purpose of communicating long-distance more effectively in larger states that served as a trigger for the written form. The thoroughly organized Persian postal service may serve as an example. In Mesopotamia, canonical collections of omens, incantations, and prayers existed already in the first millennium B.C.E.¹⁰⁹ Yet collections of texts in written form for communities of faith did not exist until the Persian period. After sporadic preliminary exercises in the chancelleries of the kings and the possible school of the temple in Jerusalem, Israel presumably ventured fully into its own traditions. The stories about Moses, his commission in Egypt, and his encounters with God at Mount Sinai (Horeb) became foundational documents of the religious community. Further, the instruction Moses received from Yahweh, analogous to the revelations of Ahura Mazda experienced by Zoroaster, developed into the essential founding statutes. The Torah, as well as the didactic poetry for liturgical use associated with the Torah, became the comprehensive orientation for the community. Scrolls, that is to say, books, increasingly took the place of cultic or prophetic encounters with God. In this context the historical elements must not be ignored; the revelation of the Torah was not a unique and completed act, as texts such as Exod 20:1; 21:1; Deut 5:31; 6:1; 28:58, 61, 69; 30:10 apparently presuppose.

109. See Maul, *Zukunftsbewältigung*; Graham Cunningham, "Deliver Me from Evil": *Mesopotamian Incantations 2500–1500* (Studia Pohl, Series maior 17; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1997); Annette Zgoll, *Die Kunst des Betens* (AOAT 308; Münster: Ugarit Verlag, 2003).

Rather, generations collaborated in the formation of the ordinances for the life of the community and the personal realm. The layers of the Pentateuch can be recognized clearly. Moses and Ezra are worlds apart. The layers are still reflected in the didactic psalms addressing the gift of the Torah (Pss 1; 19; 50; 119), which became a manifestation of Torah themselves.

Initially (after the onset of the exile) or under certain communal conditions the discussion was mainly about the covenant between Yahweh and Israel, that is, about the beginning of a close, contractually organized relationship between the Judean remnant and their God (see Pss 50:5; 78:10; 105:8–10). The binding ceremony could be arranged very concretely as a meal fellowship with God himself (Exod 24:9–11). A relationship of trust and dependence is beginning. Of course, the orientations for the entire way of life, in the personal, communal, and cultic realms, attract one's attention. What, then, is the correct will of God? For many situations there is no regulation; hence one must ask Yahweh for supplemental guidance (see Lev 24:12). Generally, however, the following applies: the Torah is the great gift to the community that needs clear direction by God:

The law [*tôrâ*] of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul;
the decrees of the LORD are sure, making wise the simple;
the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart;
the commandment of the LORD is clear, enlightening the eyes. (Ps 19:7–8)

The great acrostic Torah-psalm 119 sings of the wonderful gift of instruction but at the same time allows temptations and difficulties of life under Yahweh's orientation to shine through. Distress and uncertainty by all means are real experiences of life:

My soul languishes for your salvation; I hope in your word.
My eyes fail with watching for your promise; I ask, "When will you comfort me?"
For I have become like a wineskin in the smoke, yet I have not forgotten your statutes.
How long must your servant endure? When will you judge those who persecute me?
The arrogant have dug pitfalls for me; they flout your law.
All your commandments are enduring; I am persecuted without cause; help me!
They have almost made an end of me on earth, but I have not forsaken your precepts.
In your steadfast love spare my life, so that I may keep the decrees of your mouth. (Ps 119:81–88)

Petitions follow; the sound of confession and praise permeates all of the sections. The main concern is the socializing of the young man in the Torah. Thereby his life is to obtain a firm foundation and a clear orientation. Consequently, the I-sayings declaring support for Yahweh and his instruction are the foundational motive of this exemplary didactic psalm (see, e.g., 119:97–104). The one who prays gains wisdom, indeed, he “understands more than the aged,” for he adheres to the Torah (119:100). He declares himself publicly for life with Yahweh.

With the confessional element we have reached a provisional conclusion. How is it that an ethnic and religious minority in the Persian Empire emphasized the confessional character of faith more and more strongly? What is the public commitment to a very specific deity all about? To begin with, the facts need to be described. In the Psalter, especially in the “didactic poems” of the instructional psalms, we find a considerable number of personal and communal declarations that are formulated directly or indirectly, the content of which is the unconditional affiliation to Yahweh. In older texts the “confession” can be expressed in the succinct statement: “You are (he is) my (personal) God” (see Pss 31:14; 40:18; 63:8; 71:1–3; 143:10). In the context of individual prayers of lament and petition, the function of this statement is affirmative; the deity is to be engaged to be in solidarity with the petitioner. The community of later times calls upon Yahweh in the same sense: “Yet, O LORD, you are our father” (Isa 64:8). It professes its allegiance to him in such statements as “Yahweh is our God” or “You, Yahweh, are our God” (see Pss 8:1, 10; 18:32; 48:15; 81:2; 95:7; 105:7; 113:5). The desire of confessing Yahweh can also issue into other contexts, especially into praise and thanksgiving. The postexilic psalms always reflect a pedagogical intent as well (see Pss 34:4, 9, 19, 23; 52:10–11; 58:12; 62:7–8; 73:28; 75:10–11; 90:1b; 95:3).

Like Ps 75, so Ps 52 develops loyalty to God by means of a contrast to the godless. This fact needs to be acknowledged; as already mentioned, it presupposes certain sociohistorical constellations. Opposing groups dispute the speakers’ right to a relationship with God. Again the reaction is a wish for annihilation against the enemies (52:7). The confessing righteous one, however, is on the side of the good and righteous God. The godless one has built on power and possession—that one will perish (52:8). The confession of Yahweh, on the other hand, marks the only true attitude to life. The acrostically arranged Pss 111 and 112 also present matters in this manner. The first one is a didactic hymn, while the second one joins in the beatitudes addressed to the community and portrays the ideal of the righteous:

I will give thanks to the LORD with my whole heart,
in the company of the upright, in the congregation.

Great are the works of the LORD, studied by all who delight in them. (Ps 111:1–2)

It is well with those who deal generously and lend,
 who conduct their affairs with justice.
 For the righteous will never be moved; they will be remembered forever.
 They are not afraid of evil tidings; their hearts are firm, secure in the LORD.
 (Ps 112:5–7)

Faithfulness to Yahweh pays off, for God reciprocates with blessing and prosperity. “Confession” means to take on a firm position in a clearly defined community; it denotes acknowledging the particular God as one’s personal patron. In a pluralistic world of thought, such as that of the Persian Empire, this means the rejection of other deities. In the writings of the time, this is often dealt with in a radically polemical way (see Ps 115:3–8; Isa 44:9–10).¹¹⁰ The praise of Yahweh, on the other hand, intensifies to visions of the future. Then those who confess Yahweh will experience his victory over all hostile powers. They themselves join in the divine judgment: they will “execute vengeance on the nations” (Ps 149:7). Pure jubilation seals the great feat of Yahweh (149:1–3). A militant, eschatological self-consciousness of the “saints” (e.g., “faithful,” “devout,” “confessors”) becomes apparent. For his chosen community, Yahweh is the God who saves; he reverses the fate of the oppressed minority. Those who belong to him conquer their oppressors militarily. God’s verdict is documented in writing (149:9). Are holy Scriptures, prophetic revelations of God, intended here? Presumably so; how should the written form be understood otherwise? The problem of the enemies is also difficult. The Old Testament writings contain numerous accusations and threats of punishment, declarations of punishment and oracles against the Babylonians, Assyrians, and Egyptians. The Persian government is not explicitly cited as oppressive anywhere. It is true that Neh 9:36–37 laments the foreign rule and Neh 5 paints a vivid picture of economic impoverishment, but direct confrontations are conspicuous by their absence, and the positive descriptions of the Persian imperial government dominate in Ezra and Nehemiah. In spite of these findings, Ps 149, with its militancy, can be claimed for the Persian rule. The confession of Yahweh implies the rejection of other, competing deities and claims to power in the immediate surrounding of the Judean community. In the same way that the conflict with the center of administration (and religion) of Samaria—and perhaps with the support of

110. Horst-Dietrich Preuss, *Verspottung fremder Religionen im Alten Testament* (BWANT 92; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1971).

the imperial government—is dealt with in public (see Ezra 4–6; Neh 3–6), many other contrasts to the neighboring nations may have been virulent and may have been dealt with in liturgical ceremonies. The description of the hostile powers as “kings” and “nobles” (Ps 149:8) is liturgically appropriate, even if the official use of language rather refers to “administrators” and “governors.”

But for whom, before whom, and for what purpose are confessions voiced to the God of the community? What sociological function do such texts have, intending to produce and maintain affiliation? Statements of faith, as well as symbols and acts of confessing behavior, probably always have both an internal and an external thrust. For the community as such, they represent an internal support structure, making a meaningful coordination and cooperation of people possible at all. The confession is the internal code to which everyone is obligated. In the multiracial mix of the Persian Empire of the time, Yahweh and his Torah were the indispensable reference points for the community of the Judeans at home and in the Diaspora. Cults associated with families and clans were no longer sufficient to consolidate the community of Yahweh. Tribal and national institutions had perished. What remained was the confessional community to which one had to profess solidarity specifically. Analogical conditions apparently were also extant in the belief in Zoroaster,¹¹¹ for the oldest elements of the Avesta, as already mentioned, put much in concrete terms about the personal decision of each individual for the good found in Ahura Mazda, the Ameša Spenta, and all who fight against the lie. Turning to the good powers has to be repeated and solidified constantly, namely, in (cultic as well as mundane) deeds, perhaps also in words. The first impetus for the formation of confessional communities probably began as a result of the demise of the state of Judah, for in the preexilic period any discernable motivations for a development are nonexistent. The full implementation of this concept probably came no earlier than in the Persian period. However, we still know too little about the social history of the epoch. For this reason we cannot move beyond assumptions.

Outwardly the confession delimits over against other communities and thereby also secures the identity of the confessors with reference to similar groups. This addresses a fundamental issue that is not yet resolved at all: How should we construe the religious structure in the empire of the Achae-menids from the perspective of the dominated nations? We had observed above (SII.2) that the imperial government did not allow any doubt to arise

111. Investigations of the social structure of the Persian Zoroaster communities are scarcely available; Stausberg, *Die Religion Zarathushtras*, 1:11 n. 37, refers to Dariusch Rafiy, *Politische und soziale Implikationen des Zarathustrismus* (EHS 31, 397; Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1999).

concerning the priority of the god Ahura Mazda, while granting religious autonomy to the provinces to a large extent. This is only a general assessment, however, and expresses nothing about the socioreligious reality in detail. How were people-groups, communities, and religious groups organized *de facto*, and how did they identify themselves in the heartland and in the provinces? Did the community of faith based on personal conviction become accepted in keeping with the model of the followers of Zoroaster and of the community of Yahweh, and did it lead to changes in the religious model based on ethnicity? It is remarkable that in the polemics of the Old Testament, which we may date to the Persian period (see, e.g., Trito-Isaiah, parts of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, Zechariah, Malachi, and the collections of Psalms), the confessional character of other, competing communities receives only marginal expression, if at all, and that there is no direct reference to the vicinity of or threats by the Persian religions. On the contrary, many theological statements about and toward Yahweh seem to harmonize with Zoroastrian formulations, if not their contents. The noniconic nature of God, a controversial issue for Judean theologians in conflict with Babylonian and Palestinian-Syrian cults, rather effects a common denominator in the Persian context. This also applies to such perspectives as truth and lie, light and darkness, the high esteem for wisdom, the lay-element in the community, the structures for executive, the sacrificial practices or their absence, and eschatology. If it seems possible that Persian governments also saw the religion of the all-wise Ahura Mazda realized in the form of other religions, then this relative tolerance may also have brought about an acceptance of the religion of the state and its communities. In this case a sharp disassociation from Zoroastrianism would not have been necessary in Judah and would indeed have been ignored in the tradition. Overall the contours of the Yahweh community, as they become apparent in the didactic psalms, bear “modern” features and are thus different from the Priestly tradition. They match the portrait of a confessional association within which every individual has to make a decision for the God who is to be worshiped exclusively. The topics that concerned people at that time ranged from fear of death to eschatological hope, from showing solidarity in communal behavior to disassociation from foreign deities. Individual believers lived within the protective realm of the parochial community, which continues to exist today as a basic model in the Judeo-Christian tradition.

III.1.3.3. Collections of Proverbs, Wisdom

Alster, Bendt. *Studies in Sumerian Proverbs* (Mesopotamia 3; Copenhagen: Akademisk, 1975). **Baumann**, Gerlinde. *Die Weisheitsgestalt in Proverbien 1–9* (FAT 16; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1996). **Blenkinsopp**, Joseph. *Sage, Priest, Prophet* (Lou-

isville: Westminster John Knox, 1995). **Brunner**, Hellmut. *Altägyptische Weisheit* (Zurich: Artemis, 1988). **Camp**, Claudia K. *Wisdom and the Feminine in the Book of Proverbs* (Bible and Literature Series 11; Decatur, Ga.: Almond, 1985). **Ernst**, Alexander B. *Weisheitliche Kulkritik* (BThSt 23; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1994). **Jacobson**, Arland D. "Proverbs and Social Control: A New Paradigm for Wisdom Studies," in *Gnosticism and the Early Christian World* (ed. James E. Goehring et al.; Sonoma, Calif.: Polebridge, 1990), 75–88. **Kaiser**, Otto. *Gottes und der Menschen Weisheit* (BZAW 261; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1998). **Lambert**, Wilfred G. *Babylonian Wisdom Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1960). **Lang**, Bernhard. *Die weisheitliche Lehrrede* (SBS 54; Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1972). **Löning**, Karl, ed. *Rettendes Wissen* (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2002). **Maier**, Christi. *Die "fremde Frau" in Proverbien 1–9* (OBO 144; Fribourg: Universitätsverlag, 1995). **Meinhold**, Arndt. *Die Sprüche* (ZBKAT 16; Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 1991). **Müller**, Achim. *Proverbien 1–9: Der Weisheit neue Kleider* (BZAW 291; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2000). **Rad**, Gerhard von. *Weisheit in Israel* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1970). **Reventlow**, Henning Graf. *Weisheit, Ethos und Gebot* (BThSt 43; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2001). **Römheld**, Diethard. *Wege der Weisheit: Die Lehren Amenemopes und Proverbien 22,17–24,22* (BZAW 184; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1989). **Schröer**, Silvia. "Die göttliche Weisheit und der nachexilische Monotheismus," in *Der eine Gott und die Göttin* (ed. Marie Theres Wacker; QD 135; Freiburg: Herder, 1991), 151–82. **Scoralick**, Ruth. *Einzelspruch und Sammlung: Komposition im Buch der Sprichwörter Kapitel 10–15* (BZAW 232; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1995). **Shupak**, Nili. *Where Can Wisdom Be Found?* (OBO 130; Fribourg: Universitätsverlag; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993). **Whybray**, Roger N. *Wealth and Poverty in the Book of Proverbs* (JSOTSup 99; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990). **Yoder**, Christine E. *Wisdom as Woman of Substance* (BZAW 304; New York: de Gruyter, 2000). See also the bibliography under §III.2.3.3.

Determining the age and time of composition of wisdom-related literature is even more difficult than we have observed in the narrative, legal, and prophetic literary traditions, for ancient Near Eastern wisdom in the first place did not originate in scholarly environments but had its actual, deep, indeed archaic roots in everyday life. Based on the observation of painful and relished daily experience alone, aphorisms have been distilled since time immemorial,¹¹² which later found their way into oral and written collections. It is obvious that, in this development of common human reflection about the *conditio humana*, experts on wisdom, in the form of teachers in scribal schools, royal advisers, and interpreters of the ever-present omens, also contributed to building up the form and content of popular sayings or quota-

112. Collections of proverbs are extant already from the Sumerian period, and there surely were proverbs already before then; cf. Alster, *Studies in Sumerian Proverbs*; W. H. P. Römer, "Sumerische Weisheits- und Schultexte," *TUAT* 3.1:17–67; G. Burkard, I. Shirun-Grumach, and H. J. Thissen, "Ägyptische Weisheitstexte," *TUAT* 3.2:191–319.

tions. However, the essence of the ancient wisdom tradition was and remains the traditional aphorism and as such is compactly present in the Old Testament writings, especially in Prov 10–29. In terms of style and content, such literary works as Prov 1–9, Job, and Qoheleth have shifted and clearly point in the direction of professional handling and therefore need to be examined separately.¹¹³

It remains extremely difficult to classify both branches of the wisdom tradition in a reasonable way in the literary and social history of the biblical traditions. Everyday experience seems to be influenced even less than in the liturgical tradition discussed above by the so-called “historical events” and the ups and downs of political arguments. This is not to say that individual human tragedies remained unaffected by the course of the larger history. Everyone knows how much people suffer under armed conflicts and perhaps have a sense of more important value following triumphal victories by their group. The issue of such experience, which finds expression in wisdom-oriented sayings, is not momentary sorrows or joys such as these. Rather, the individual events the proverbs handed down to us¹¹⁴ distill summations of particular experiences that are often painful. A proverb does not emphasize what happened to a person in a particular situation or what someone uniquely inflicted upon himself or herself under given conditions, even if the external form of the aphorism might give such an impression. Rather, an aphorism summarizes the experience of many people; it does not presuppose any historically unique situations nor strict individual calamities. It recognizes typical, repetitive starting positions, reckons with consistent behavior by the actors, and reaches conclusions that are applicable for generations. Anthropological constants that transcend culture come to light; even from the distance of millennia they sometimes not only find understanding in our very different world but in fact can be regarded as having hit the nail on the head. To us, ancient statements about human emotions and character traits, for example, often seem to be extremely relevant. Under these circumstances, temporal delimitations of proverbs are almost impossible. Only if concomitant phenomena of primeval human behavior should emerge that are more short-term and definable historically and culturally might there be hope for a more precise determination of the period.

Thus, determining the age of individual proverbs is quite hopeless. Collections of proverbs, on the other hand, can possibly be classified more easily

113. They also have their own history of tradition apart from Israel; cf. Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature*; Wolfgang von Soden, “Akkadische Weisheitstexte,” *TUAT* 3.1:110–88.

114. See Erhard S. Gerstenberger, “Proverbia,” *TRE* 27:583–90.

historically, because they perhaps indicate general stylistic or redactional characteristics. In the book of Proverbs, for instance, various partial headings turn up. They reflect a certain endeavor to anchor the following group of proverbs in ancient Israelite history. "The proverbs of Solomon..." is the dominant ascription (Prov 1:1a; 10:1a; 25:1a). It agrees with the portrait of Solomon as the internationally superior, wise ruler developed in the books of Kings (see 1 Kgs 3; 5:9–14; 10). Especially his authorship of proverbs and songs (5:12) is adopted and confirmed in the headings of the Proverbs. As with all of the headings added editorially, the question is when such ascriptions and dates were assigned. As a rule, they originated at the time when collections of texts were first put in writing and added to the canon of existing texts. At any rate, in the case of the Proverbs and the remaining wisdom literature of the Old Testament, all of them belonging to the third and most recent part of the canon, we need to think of a relatively late epoch of compiling texts relevant to the community.

Alongside the references to Solomon, the extended heading in Prov 25:1 is conspicuous: "These are other proverbs of Solomon that the officials of King Hezekiah of Judah copied" ('*tq*, *hiphil*: "set out, move away, transfer, hence collect"; others: "adopt"). This is a unique editorial note in the Old Testament. Ever since the Deuteronomistic construction of history, King Hezekiah is regarded as one of the outstanding, law-abiding monarchs of Judah.¹¹⁵ He is supposed to have reformed both cult and life in Israel in terms of later devotion to the Torah (see 2 Kgs 18:4–7). This image of a ruler pleasing to Yahweh might have been the cause for also wanting to be indebted to him for this otherwise unattested collection of proverbs. In this case, the wisdom aphorisms would have religious value. Whoever is concerned with this kind of popular material and even orders it to be documented in writing does not act merely as a curator of monuments and guardian of culture but surely with a divine commission. However, the consciousness of having to sift through, collect, and pass on in writing ancient tradition on the orders of Yahweh hardly developed with this intensity during the period of the kings but more likely only occurred since the exile. Thus the heading of Prov 25:1 would be evidence for an exilic-postexilic location of Scripture. It assumes correctly that proverbial material was collected over centuries. The kings of

115. See 2 Kgs 18–20; Isa 38; Ludger Camp, *Hiskija und Hiskijabild* (Altenberge: Telos, 1990); Eberhard Ruprecht, "Die ursprüngliche Komposition der Hiskia-Jesaja-Erzählungen und ihre Umstrukturierung durch den Verfasser des deuteronomistischen Geschichtswerkes," *ZTK* 87 (1990): 33–66. Anton Schoors (*Die Königreiche Israel und Juda im 8. und 7. Jahrhundert v. Chr.: Die assyrische Krise* [BibEnc 5; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1998], 214–18) locates Prov 25–29 at the court of Hezekiah.

Judah are accorded a substantial role in the cultivation of the tradition only retrospectively. Nostalgic ideals of a royal house with a Torah orientation (see Deut 17:14–20) have done the brushwork on these royal paintings.

If we continue to be led by this working hypothesis that the writing of traditions and the collection of sacred writings for use by the community in any case did not begin or gain momentum until the Persian period, nothing stands in the way of dating the collection of proverbs in our period as well. The high respect for “wisdom” as a divine gift and quality, the emphatically religious delimitation against lie and deception as the destructive powers hostile to God, and the provision of this body of tradition, which outwardly had been theologically neutral until now, with a Yahweh orientation likewise fit in very well with the portrait of precisely the Persian period. At least on a trial basis, an older, grass-roots, “mundane” mixture of text might be postulated, dealing with types of the “proper” and the “twisted,” the “wise” and the “dumb,” the “lazy” and the “industrious,” the “honest” and the “liar,” and so on, but with no references to God as a central theme (although they are presupposed implicitly, of course). The collections of proverbs preserved contain numerous aphorisms of this kind that are seemingly nonreligious. Conversely, the maxims that are now bundled in the book of Proverbs reflect a clearly theologizing tendency, namely in terms of incorporating “mundane” traditions and the new stylization toward a communal pedagogy, which in part is also expressed in the didactic psalms (see §III.1.3.2 above) of the Psalter.

In a peculiar way, this applies, for instance, to the partial and subordinate collections presented in Prov 10–29 (31). To be sure, the process of the history of redaction that the conglomerate produced is involved. It need not have lasted for an endless period of time, since parallel efforts for this traditional material could certainly have taken place.¹¹⁶ Ultimately, scattered collections were collated; the extant remainders of headings¹¹⁷ in the book of Proverbs itself attest to the complexity of the process. According to the general view, the block of aphorisms (Prov 10–31) is to be set off from the preceding collection of “didactic instructions” (Prov 1–9); it has a typical, albeit subdivided, profile in itself. The theologizing tendencies, however, are unmistakable.

116. See Ludger Schwienhorst-Schönberger, “Das Buch der Sprichwörter,” in Zenger et al., *Einleitung*, 255–63.

117. Apart from the historicizing references mentioned above, there are less certain pointers to authorship and purpose in collections of proverbs: “sayings of the wise” (Prov 22:17; 24:23), “words of Agur” (Prov 30:1), “words of King Lemuel” (Prov 31:1).

As far as length and meaningfulness are concerned, the first collection of Prov 10:1–22:16, bearing the name of Solomon alone, is dominant. Although not a unified whole in itself, but rather grown together in a complex way, this collection, with its 375 verses, probably provided the core for the entire later book of Proverbs, to which other partial collections were added. The mixture of Yahweh-oriented proverbs and those simply expressing experiential concentrates without reference to God is conspicuous. Providing the material with a Yahweh focus is likely, even if the distribution of the Yahweh aphorisms occurs very irregularly. In any case, by means of a persistent “seasoning” with references to God, the final text receives a markedly religious dimension. Let us examine the individual sections. Chapter 10 begins on an entirely interpersonal level and without mentioning God, yet already in verse 3 Yahweh turns up surprisingly.

A wise child makes a glad father, but a foolish child is a mother's grief.
 Treasures gained by wickedness do not profit, but righteousness delivers
 from death.
 The LORD does not let the righteous go hungry, but he thwarts the craving
 of the wicked. (Prov 10:1–3)

The warning against the poorly socializing son and an admonition not to make money outside accepted norms represent a typically domestic (though not unreligious, for that matter) problem; they intend to educate one to observe societal rules and examples of conduct. In the following verse Yahweh suddenly is the great overseer and the one causing a respectable lifestyle, and the world is automatically divided into the “righteous” (*ṣaddiqîm*) and “wicked” (*rēšā'im*). From this point on, this entirely different perspective, founded theologically and communally, runs through the whole chapter (10:6–7, 11, 16, 20, 24–25, 27–28, 30–32). It is not in conflict with other contrasts, such as “slack/diligent” (10:4–5), “wise/foolish” (10:8, 14, 23), “integrity/perverse” (10:9), “hatred/love” (10:12), “having understanding/lacking sense” (10:13), “rich/poor” (10:15), “heeding instruction/rejecting rebuke” (10:17), and “many words/prudent” (10:19). However, the entire text receives its character by means of its monotonously repeated comparison of the “righteous” and “godless, sinners.” Here the terms no longer have the original juridical sense presupposed at least in the case of *ṣaddiq*. They have become theological-technical abbreviations for the disposition and conduct either according to or contrary to Yahweh, as in the case of the postexilic psalms. Especially the end of the chapter is strongly shaped by the concept of Yahweh who blesses and punishes. Three of the four occurrences of the divine name in chapter 10 appear here:

The blessing of the LORD makes rich, and he adds no sorrow with it.
 Doing wrong is like sport to a fool, but wise conduct is pleasure to a person
 of understanding.
 What the wicked dread will come upon them, but the desire of the righteous
 will be granted.
 When the tempest passes, the wicked are no more, but the righteous are
 established forever.
 Like vinegar to the teeth and smoke to the eyes, so are the lazy to their
 employers.
 The fear of the LORD prolongs life, but the years of the wicked will be short.
 (Prov 10:22–27)

The only remaining central theme in the following verses, 28–32, is that of the righteous and the sinner under Yahweh's authority (10:29). Without reference to God, the experience-oriented aphorisms read like objective statements subject to discussion. They have an academic quality and call for well-founded opposite opinions. The objective wisdom saying appears like a verifiable result of a protracted life experience. Where one draws conclusions on the consequences of good or evil, questions remain open, of course. The ideal wish influences the quintessence. Nevertheless the (original!) aphorisms remain entirely in the humanly reasonable sphere. The introduction of the name of Yahweh changes the fundamental philosophy of the one using the saying. He now insists on his God Yahweh intervening in interpersonal events, imposing his power to direct and his authority to punish or reward. For this reason, the Yahweh proverbs have a different quality than the theologically neutral sayings. Since they extend to the entire complex collection of Prov 10:1–22:16, even if very irregularly, since they are of the same quality and can be differentiated so clearly from the terminological and conceptual variety of the remaining text, and since they are linked so closely with the postexilic opposites of "righteous" and "sinful," at least in Prov 10–12, an editorial or traditional layer of its own should be seen here.¹¹⁸ It is not the case that late tradents carefully edited the older parts of the text at their desk, in keeping with our contemporary understanding, with its literary rules, mindful of our needs for concordance. A formation of texts for such collections arranged for practical purposes is inconceivable as a desk-job. Rather, the texts used were modified orally and in writing in keeping with current needs. This is how the irregularity of the references to Yahweh came about. Many

118. Thus, e.g., Roger N. Whybray, "Yahweh-Sayings and Their Contexts in Proverbs 10:1–22:16," in *La Sagesse de l'Ancien Testament* (ed. M. Gilbert and S. Amsler; BETL 51; Gembloux: Duculot, 1979), 153–65. Meinhold (*Die Sprüche*, 38–39) argues for a purposeful placing of the Yahweh sayings in the arrangement of the collection.

of the Yahweh sayings seem to be paraphrases of a theologically “neutral” aphorism (see Prov 10:2–3; 15:9–10, 16–17; 18:10–11). Then they came into the text like a midrash, as it were, as interpretations preceding or following cited proverbs. Others came to more far-reaching consequences based on the formulated experiential truth (see Prov 10:22, 27, 29; 14:2, 26). Still others are linked with particular theological or ethical concepts; the fear of Yahweh is mentioned frequently (see Prov 14:2; 15:16, 33; 16:6; 19:23), especially his encompassing control of human life (15:3, 11; 17:3). The transparency Yahweh desires is a prominent topic as well (11:20; 12:2, 22), especially honesty in trading (11:1; 16:11; 10:10, 23). Yahweh is the supremely present and altogether superior, powerful God (16:1, 4, 9, 33; 19:21; 20:12, 24; 21:1, 31; 22:2). He is especially concerned with order and justice (10:3; 15:25; 17:15; 19:17), not as much with cult,¹¹⁹ purity, hierarchies of priests, national concerns, or the end of history. All of the theological peculiarities mentioned fit surprisingly well into the portrait of the community of Yahweh in the Persian period. All of them also seem to presuppose the social structure of this community, namely, the local (“parochial”) confessional community built upon family units and the clan ethos. Viewed from the sociology of religion, we are looking at the intermediate level of the formation of community, situated between the primary group and the anonymous imperial society. The early Jewish, Judean community of Yahweh was able (and had) to adopt especially the ethical tradition of clan and village serving the socialization of young people and to develop it further in terms of the profession of Yahweh, the only God. This happened in the context of a universal political power, represented by Persian troops, taxes, and civil law. In the case of the Proverbs, we are clearly able to observe the adoption of religiously undefined ethical “norms.”¹²⁰ Their life setting will be addressed later.

At this point it is appropriate to glance at the grammatical numbers of the designations of persons and groups. It should be expected that, in pedagogically and socially formative proverbs, the focus normally is on an individual person who is “good,” “diligent,” “honest” as an exemplar and then, more in terms of the later confessional formation, on “the righteous,” “the diligent,” the “honest,” and the like, as well as on their antitheses. Many of the clearly postexilic proverbs also meet this expectation: “The wage of the

119. The offering, for instance, is mentioned rarely and not very positively (cf. Prov 15:5; 21:3).

120. In acephalic societies, proverbs frequently serve as a replacement of norms; see Jacobson, “Proverbs and Social Control.” Cited, generally accepted experiential sayings still have an interpretive and regulating function today, as in “Truth will prevail!” or “I’ll scratch your back, if you’ll scratch mine!”

righteous leads to life, the gain of the wicked to sin" (Prov 10:16). "The righteous are delivered from trouble, and the wicked get into it instead" (11:8). Frequently, however, both types appear in the plural, as their own groups that respectively exclude others. In this case the individual "righteous" one faces the crowd of "sinners": "The LORD does not let the righteous go hungry, but he thwarts the craving of the wicked" (Prov 10:3). "Blessings are on the head of the righteous, but the mouth of the wicked conceals violence" (10:6). "The memory of the righteous is a blessing, but the name of the wicked will rot" (10:7). An objective reason for the pluralizing is nowhere to be found. The "sinners" do not appear as seducers or persecutors of the "righteous," according to the motto of Prov 1:10, "My child, if sinners entice you..." (cf. Ps 22:17); they are named merely as contrasting parallels. Obviously the singular of the opponents was sufficient for this purpose as well. The plural form, in view of "the righteous" as well, of course, has surely come about for pedagogical reasons. "Good" and "evil" ones flock together, with each side reflecting on the other by means of a negative term. For the postexilic community, perhaps, the plural forms may point to tendencies of division, which later on were clearly expressed in heterodox groups such as the Samaritans and the Qumran community.

If Prov 10 is construed as a distinct unit (the division into chapters did not occur until much later), we gain the impression that in the course of the development of the text a Yahweh-related editing took place, presumably in the course of using older proverbs in the emerging new community of faith. The distinction between the "righteous" (= loyal to Yahweh) and "sinners" (= renegades) goes hand in hand with providing the proverbs with a Yahweh orientation; a comparison of the intimate relationship with God with the anthropological description of types in Prov 10:27–32 may serve as an example. Without the link with Yahweh, the sayings about the "righteous" and "sinners" would hardly be comprehensible. The juxtaposed positions are constituted in people's relationship with Yahweh. The vocabulary and symbolic universe of these wisdom sayings or theological insights focused on Yahweh are reminiscent of many nonwisdom Old Testament texts, as for instance the "fear of God" (10:27; cf. Pss 19:10; 111:10), "(not) remaining in the land" (10:30; cf. Ps 37:3, 27, 29; Gen 26:2; Isa 34:17; 65:9; Jer 23:6), the joyous hope of the righteous (10:28; cf. Hos 2:17; Zech 9:[9], 12; Pss 62:6; 71:5; Jer 31:[12–14], 17). The verses related to Yahweh within the collection of proverbs clearly indicate a different anthropology and theology than the pragmatic aphorisms that merely reflect daily routines. Here the central theme is reflected experience of God, clearly with religious-pedagogically communicative intent.

The remaining chapters of the collections of aphorisms of the book of Proverbs are interspersed with reflections of Yahweh in differing concen-

tration. This hardly reflects editorial planning but rather the coincidence of extant everyday material.¹²¹ For those who used proverbs in some communal events, it was sufficient to have the connection with Yahweh established sporadically. The accompanying text then fitted in on its own with this religious connotation. Even the most neutral saying about everyday life obtained its spiritual solemnity in the new community of faith from the reflective Yahweh sayings. Thus, if we follow the present chapter divisions, Prov 11–14 have only marginally been given a formal Yahweh orientation (Prov 11:1, 20; 12:2, 22; 14:2, 26–27). But for that the comparison of the righteous and the sinner pervades the entire section of the text. This counterpointing is now typical of the community of Yahweh in the Persian period. The plural forms of both antagonistic groups indicate progressive orientation of exclusiveness: “The wicked are overthrown and are no more, but the house of the righteous will stand” (Prov 12:7). “The desire of the righteous ends only in good, the expectation of the wicked in wrath” (11:23). “The light of the righteous rejoices, but the lamp of the wicked goes out” (13:9). “The house of the wicked is destroyed, but the tent of the upright flourishes” (14:11). In this final citation, the designation “righteous” has been replaced by the synonym “upright” (*yāšār*). This happens relatively infrequently. What is surprising is rather the monotony of juxtaposing the “righteous” and “sinners,” “sinners” and the “righteous.” This determines the horizon of faith that is peculiar to the theologized proverbs. It provides evidence for the postexilic community. Apparently other, originally perhaps secular aphorisms are likewise drawn into the process of theological spiritualization. “The teaching of the wise is a fountain of life, so that one may avoid the snares of death” (Prov 13:14). “Whoever is steadfast in righteousness will live, but whoever pursues evil will die” (11:19). “A scoffer seeks wisdom in vain, but knowledge is easy for one who understands” (14:6). The theological world of ideas seems to have increased especially in Prov 14. Following the proverb just cited, there are other conspicuous aphorisms that transcend everyday life:

There is a way that seems right to a person, but its end is the way to death.
(14:12)

Those who despise their neighbors are sinners, but happy are those who are kind to the poor. (14:21)

Those who oppress the poor insult their Maker, but those who are kind to the needy honor him. (14:31)

Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people. (14:34)

121. If only wise authors are seen working here, a purposeful placing of the Yahweh sayings has to be assumed; see Meinhold, *Die Sprüche*, 163, etc.

The language and the world of ideas of such spiritualized empirical sayings are to be read in relationship to God, even if he is barely mentioned explicitly. Chapters 15 and 16 mention Yahweh extremely frequently, twenty times, while in Prov 17:1–22:16 the name is used only nineteen times in three times as much text. All of this seems to support the argument that the collections of pithy sayings originated in their use by the Yahweh-related community. Older sayings material was added to the dominant aphorisms of Yahweh, or, conversely, the Yahweh sayings are built into an older, “secular” collection. Yahweh appears as the boundlessly superior one who aligns himself strictly with the “righteous” and radically rejects the “sinners.” The God of Israel sees and directs everything (Prov 15:3; 16:9). This is the constellation of the Jewish community in the Persian period. Contrary to the use of “secular” collections of proverbs, the Yahweh-oriented edition shows references to cultic performances or obligations such as sacrifice (Prov 15:8) and prayer (15:29). The ethical-religious admonitions resemble those found in some wisdom psalms (cf. Prov 16:3 and Ps 37:5; Prov 15:33 and Pss 19:10; 111:10). How references to “kings” (Prov 16:10–15; 25:1–6, etc.; cf. already 8:15; 14:28, 35) fit into the intellectual picture of the postexilic community can only be assumed. Especially the formations in the plural that appear demonstrate that there is no reflection back to the Judean kings of the past. In a world shaped as a monarchy, it is also possible for subjected people groups who no longer have a ruler of their own to cite the office of the king as the embodiment of statehood, autonomy, and authority. The term “king,” therefore, does not vouch for the collection of proverbs being older. The massive concentration of Yahweh sayings in Prov 15 and 16 does not change anything in the general character of the collection. “Secular” and “religious” units are intertwined; the Yahweh-sayings set the tone.

This does not change in Prov 17:1–22:16 either. The name of Yahweh resounds sporadically, with increasing frequency (17:3, 15; 18:10, 22; 19:3, 14, 17, 21, 23; 20:10, 12, 22–24, 27; 21:1–3, 30–31; 22:2, 4, 12, 14), but the comparison of the righteous and sinners does not have the same significance as, for instance, in Prov 10–13. The basis of the collections of proverbs combined here is formed by solid experiences of life concerning the togetherness of people in clusters of settlements. The underlying code of conduct does not regulate intrafamily or domestic life. Where conflict, poverty, bankruptcy, defamation of character, infringement of the law, alcoholism, and the like become a problem, there are more people involved than merely family members. Most probably the neighborly community in the village, town, or other settlements provides the background. This is the place where proverbs develop their regulating power that promotes public welfare. They are prejudicial norms that are held up to every male and female (espe-

cially to adults and those who will become adults) with gentle emphasis. Citing them presupposes general acceptance. On the second level of their use, namely, in the exilic and postexilic community of Yahweh, these general behavioral norms of the Israelite (partly of the ancient Near Eastern) society, as before, are framed with Yahweh-related aphorisms and thereby placed in the realm of the confessional community. For the latter, of course, the same ethos applies to nonbelievers or those of a different belief of the society of that time.

The remaining collections of the book of Proverbs have their own respective character, based on generally prevailing customs, as if they came from differing regions. This is especially true in the case of Prov 22:17–24:22 (34); this collection shows extraordinarily close connections to the Egyptian teaching of Amenemope.¹²² Should this relate to proverbs from the Jewish Diaspora on the Nile? The clearest parallels to the Egyptian rule of life are found in Prov 22:17–23:14. Here 22:20 even speaks of the “thirty” proverbs that, in fact, are found in Amenemope but are preserved only in a very fragmented form in the Hebrew summary. Perhaps the Hebrew collection can be divided into ten units. Of these, the introduction (22:17–21) as well as the first (22:22–23), second (22:24–25), fifth (22:29), seventh (23:4–5), eighth (23:6–8), and tenth (23:10–11) proverbs follow almost verbatim the Egyptian model, which, of course, is generally more elaborate. That in a literary proximity such as this typical contents of ideas, conceptions, and values of the southwestern cultural realm flow into the Hebrew text should not come as a surprise. Thus in Egyptian proverbs the “hot-tempered” and “uncontrolled” one often is the negative cliché: “Do not take the hot-tempered as your companion, and do not seek him out for counsel.... Do not rush to join up with one like this, so that terror might not take hold of you.”¹²³ Proverbs 22:24–25 (second saying) resembles this, if the Hebrew *ba'al 'ap* (“one who snorts”) is also understood in the sense of “violent-tempered”: “Make no friends with those given to anger, and do not associate with hot-heads, or you may learn their ways and entangle yourself in a snare. The Egyptian milieu of court officials occasionally seems to be projected into the biblical proverbs: “Do you see those who are skillful in their work? They will serve kings.... When you sit down to eat with a ruler, observe carefully what is before you, and put a knife to your throat if you have a big appetite” (22:29–23:2). Amenemope, of course, is completely pervaded by the court-

122. See Römhald, *Wege der Weisheit*; Shupak, *Where Can Wisdom Be Found*.

123. Helmer Ringgren, *Sprüche/Prediger* (3rd ed.; ATD 16.1; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1980), 90.

related sphere: “A scribe who is skilled in his work will be found worthy of being a courtier.”¹²⁴

Of the social norms shared in Egypt and Israel (and presumably in the entire ancient Near East), important sentences also occur in the section discussed:

Do not remove an ancient landmark or encroach on the fields of orphans, for their redeemer is strong; he will plead their cause against you. (Prov 23:10–11; cf. 22:28)

Do not rob the poor because they are poor or crush the afflicted at the gate, for the LORD pleads their cause and despoils of life those who despoil them. (Prov 22:22–23)

In Amenemope the respective instructions are:

Do not remove the landmark on the boundaries of the fields ... and do not move the boundary of a widow.¹²⁵

Beware of robbing a poor person, of driving away one who is weak.¹²⁶

In the collections of proverbs, as well as in many legal texts of the ancient Near East, there are many other examples of the general cultural protection of the weak and the less privileged. The Yahweh orientation of the ancient norms that is also discernible in Prov 22:23 does not alter anything in terms of their content. It is merely a further indicator of the integration of common value systems into the life and instruction of the postexilic community. Against this backdrop, the additions to the section showing an Egyptian orientation most clearly sound authentic as well. Formally Prov 23:15–18 is a father’s lesson of life to his son (see the father’s forms of address: 23:15, 19, 26; those of the mother: 31:1–2), which has a lengthy tradition and was used particularly frequently in Egypt and is contained in many of their texts.¹²⁷ For example, in Prov 25:15–16—“My child, if your heart is wise, my heart

124. Ibid., 91; see Burkard, Shirun-Grumach, and Thissen, “Ägyptische Weisheitstexte,” *TUAT* 3.2:250; cf. Amenemope chs. 30 and 23 on table manners.

125. Ringgren, *Sprüche/Prediger*, 92.

126. Ibid., 90.

127. An overview of the Egyptian and ancient Near Eastern “lessons of life” is offered in Meinhold, *Die Sprüche*, 26–37; see also Römer, “Sumerische Weisheits- und Schultexte,” *TUAT* 3.1:17–67; Burkard, Shirun-Grumach, and Thissen, “Ägyptische Weisheitstexte,” *TUAT* 3.2:191–319.

will be glad. My soul will rejoice when your lips speak what is right”—the familial structure of relationship is evident. The father passes on the high respect of wise, socially accepted conduct to his son. The socialization of the children is the responsibility of the head of the family. The ethos itself, however, presupposes human obligations in the broader society, especially with regard to the local community in terms of living space, life, and work. In the postexilic community, the confessional group becomes the framework of relationships for this long-established custom. Proverbs 23:19–28 moves in the same familial framework; this segment is supplemented by an almost epic satirical poem on the drunkard who misses his goal in life (23:29–35). The topics mentioned—parental example, warning against “the strange woman,” urgent rejection of addiction, and failure to meet obligations—are also constitutive for the religious community. Hence they can be adopted without any outward theologizing. Proverbs 24 follows the Egypt-oriented collection with further admonitions on reason and insight for the purpose of solidarity with the needy, as well as with warnings against social irresponsibility (cf. the poem about the lazy, 24:30–34). Twice, however, a Yahweh aphorism has been inserted (24:18, 21). The two sayings are probably meant to examine particularly sensitive ethical behavioral situations. The first one is concerned with gloating and obsession with retaliation (24:17–20; cf. the “secular” 24:29: “Do not say, ‘I will do to others as they have done to me; I will pay them back for what they have done’”). The second one (quite anachronistically?) summons one to faithfulness to Yahweh and the king (24:21–22). However, the verb in question, *yr’* (“fear”), hides problems. Nowhere else in the Old Testament can “fear of Yahweh and the king” be demanded as straightforwardly as this. Granted, persons in authority in society are always sanctioned religiously and therefore are under divine protection (see Exod 21:15, 17; 1 Sam 24:7), yet the active, theologically reflected reverence over against God and his designated ruler rather seems to have been an Egyptian tradition that filtered into late Israel together with the ideology of the king (see Ps 45:7). Perhaps the glorification of the Persian emperor contributed to speaking openly about a twofold reverence at this point. In this case the term “king” would stand quite generally for “authority and” “government,” not for the one-time Davidic king. In the final part, Prov 24:23–34, the heading “These also are sayings of the wise” should be mentioned. It clearly corresponds to the note resembling a heading in Prov 22:17: “the words of the wise.”

All in all, the picture the collections of proverbs offers is quite varied. Proverbs 25–29, following the corpus discussed thus far, represents a collection resembling Prov 10–21. Their precise historicizing heading, “These are other proverbs of Solomon that the officials of King Hezekiah of Judah copied” (25:1), is rather original. The editor of a later time established the connection

to Prov 1:1 and, given that Prov 1–24 make up predominantly exilic-postexilic collections, cannot have worked as early as he would like to have done with the temporal context of King Hezekiah. The reference to this king, therefore, is most likely a projection. Because he was aware of the secondary attachment of Prov 25–29, which was problematic for him, the collector and editor looked for a good locus in the post-Solomonic period of the kings. Thus it was easy to think of King Hezekiah because in the Deuteronomistic and Chronicist account he had a good reputation as an important reformer loyal to Yahweh (2 Kgs 18–20; 2 Chr 29–31). Furthermore, in the account of Chronicles, he has the qualities of a wise person: “he did what was good and right and faithful before the LORD his God, and every work that he undertook in the service of the house of God, and in accordance with the law and the commandments, to seek his God, he did with all his heart; and he prospered” (2 Chr 31:20–21). He repented of a touch of pride and capriciousness in a timely fashion (2 Chr 23:24–26); this, too, is a trait of those who fear Yahweh.

Otherwise, the partial collection of Prov 25–29 is not fundamentally different from the collection of 10:1–22:16. Gradual differentiations can be observed: the relationship of aphorisms to paraenetic forms of speech (direct address) seems to have shifted in favor of the latter (see 25:6, 8–9, 16–17, 21), and simple comparisons are used more frequently (25:12–14, 18, 20, 25–26, 28). The Yahweh orientation of the proverbs is less developed than in the first Solomonic collection. God is mentioned only six times (25:22; 28:5, 25; 29:13, 25–26); likewise, the polarization of the “righteous” and “sinners” is limited to a few passages only (25:26; 28:1, 12, 28; 29:2, 7, 16, 27). That the king is the central theme again in Prov 25:2–7, the royal court indeed serving as the scene, may be accidental or due to the influence of a royalist environment (cf. already 14:28, 35; 16:10–15; 20:2, 8, 26, 28; 21:1; 22:11). Here again one may assume with certainty that the reference to the king does not guarantee the origin of the text in the period of the Israelite-Judaic monarchy. The period without kings was indeed shaped profoundly by the monarchic structures of the contemporary environment that continued to exist. Thus in Judah and the Diaspora the wisdom texts of the exile and the postexilic period the monarch and high dignitaries could be used quite naturally as symbolic figures. Hence the collection of proverbs supposedly undertaken by officials of Hezekiah fits in quite well with the overall picture of the exilic and postexilic wisdom texts.

What remains are the somewhat peculiar, brief troves of proverbs in Prov 30–31. They bear unusual headings and accommodate less common forms such as numerical sayings, display a rarer intellectuality and theology, and convey a particularly enlightened portrait of the woman. The two titular figures, Agur, son of Jakeh from Massa, and Lemuel, king of Massa, are otherwise unknown in the tradition. Neither their exotic names nor the assumed

location (northwestern Arabia?¹²⁸) can be identified more closely. Perhaps the appeal of things foreign played a part in situating them editorially. Despite all of the dissociating tendencies among minorities within a large pluralist society, the yearning for crossing cultural boundaries often developed as well. On the whole, therefore, Prov 10–31 can easily be understood as a multilayered composition literarily from the postexilic period, when the community of Yahweh adopted different kinds of traditions and from them constructed its own identity within the Persian Empire.

However, whether the collection of Prov 1–9, placed ahead of the “older” corpus of proverbs,¹²⁹ is also to be placed in the Persian period has been debated controversially. The Hellenistic mentality also enjoyed personifications of intellectual powers, just as in the religion of Zoroaster. The vividly personified wise wife in the collection might perhaps accommodate a later intellectual climate; in the ancient Avesta there is no deliberate feminine configuration such as this. But who would want to argue that such a personification would have been impossible prior to Alexander the Great? Already in presumably older psalms peace and righteousness embrace each other (Ps 85:11) and grace and faithfulness are Yahweh’s heralds; that is to say, they are the foundation of his throne (Ps 89:15). On the one hand, the Persian Ameša Spentas are abstractions of benevolent powers; on the other, they also bear personal features. Ahura Mazda, the highest god of the religion of Zoroaster, is himself the personification of the outstanding wisdom that established the world. From these general reflections arises the possibility of reclaiming Prov 1–9 for the fifth or fourth century B.C.E. as well. In this case the entire book of Proverbs (see §III.2.3.3 below) would be a product of the Persian period and a reflection of the conditions of that time in the Judean communities. The first nine chapters contribute new colors and details to the portrait of the time. The entire life, especially for those growing up, is to be under the supervision of “wisdom,” that is to say, of believing reason. Father and mother, or “Mrs. Wisdom” herself, communicate the essential insights in increasingly longer, admonishing, and warning speeches that probably did not have their life setting in the secular school context but rather in the religious instruction of the community of Yahweh. This was also the place where the Torah was taught,

128. See Ernst Axel Knauf, *Ismael: Untersuchungen zur Geschichte Palästinas und Nordarabiens im 1. Jahrtausend v. Chr.* (ADPV; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1985), 71–73.

129. Lang (*Die weisheitliche Lehrrede*, 60) is not able to decide on a time frame. Al Wolters (“*Sôpîyyâ* (Prov 31:27) as Hymnic Participle and Play on Sophia,” *JBL* 104 [1985]: 577–87) situates Prov 1–9 in the Hellenistic period. Baumann (*Die Weisheitsgestalt in Proverbien 1–9*, 268–72) votes for ca. 400 B.C.E. See also Maier, *Die “fremde Frau” in Proverbien 1–9*, 262–69; cf. 25–68. See §III.2.3.3 below.

and the question is whether the instruction of wisdom was leaning on the teaching of the Torah or even was parallel to it, thus blending them into one. In any case, the topics addressed accommodate the contents of the Torah. The overall goal of instruction, according to Prov 1:2–7, is the following:

For learning about wisdom and instruction, for understanding words of insight, for gaining instruction in wise dealing, righteousness, justice, and equity; to teach shrewdness to the simple, knowledge and prudence to the young—let the wise also hear and gain in learning and the discerning acquire skill, to understand a proverb and a figure, the words of the wise and their riddles. The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.

The program is extensive. This issue is integral education of the independent (male) person with regard to his blamelessness, capability to live in a community, and acceptance by Yahweh. It is the educational ideal of the early Jewish community that is expressed here. Proverbs 1–9 dramatizes the individual's struggle for the right orientation in life. Father and mother, that is, wisdom personally (not Yahweh, in spite of 2:6, etc.), appeal to reason with urgent appeals to take or adhere to the right way. Temptations to falsehood, lies, adultery (with a married woman), and disobedience are deadly traps. After many passionate addresses, the collection ends with the presentation of the two ways. Wisdom and folly both invite one to the feast, and each one who is courted has to decide for life or death (Prov 9). Thus already the final appeal of wisdom that precedes the festive scene:

And now, my children, listen to me: happy are those who keep my ways. Hear instruction and be wise, and do not neglect it. Happy is the one who listens to me, watching daily at my gates, waiting beside my doors. For whoever finds me finds life and obtains favor from the LORD; but those who miss me injure themselves; all who hate me love death. (Prov 8:32–36)

As in the case of all biblical and other ancient texts, the fundamentally important question about their practical use must be posed. Every text has a life setting; without it ancient statements remain colorless and noncommittal. Given the situation of things, the private use of wisdom collections as reading material may well be improbable for the Persian period. There is no information about private libraries. A considerable reading culture in privileged strata did not develop until the Hellenistic period.¹³⁰ Consequently, the lit-

130. The educational rigor of the time is foundational; see Martin Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism* (trans. John Bowden; 2 vols.; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974), 1:120–94, 202ff.;

erary collections of the Persian period, at least in the Judean community, were intended for communal purposes, in other words, for public reading. Occasions for public reading of sacred texts arose in sporadic or regular gatherings of the community (see Neh 8). Instruction in wisdom may have been used alongside prophetic admonition and exemplary poetry in the context of Torah instruction. Proverbs 1–9 still shows the vivid, urgent tone of direct address to a respectable audience (didactic address). The collections of Prov 10–31 to a large extent are considerably more sober but certainly may also have been used in the same instructional process. The reading of the Torah was regarded as instruction by Yahweh himself, communicated by the leader of the community of that time (scribes, Levites, priests). Wisdom-related admonition, as found in the book of Proverbs with its complexities, as such had a special affinity to divine instruction. Hence in the Hebrew canon wisdom texts belong close to the Torah texts. They are corollaries to the Torah, and the open question is only whether they were used in the reading of the community's worship service or in special, more pedagogically oriented secondary gatherings.

Given all of the gaps in our knowledge, this much seems certain: the traditions of proverbs and instruction of the ancient Near East would hardly have become part of the canonical writings of the Judean community had they not been used regularly in communal expressions of life. The wisdom tradition, actualized by aphorisms concerning Yahweh, had constitutive significance for the new religious community. The use of proverbial forms in the Psalter (see, e.g., Pss 34; 37) confirms this assumption. From this we may draw the following conclusion: the ethos of the familial and wisdom tradition supported the Judean community; it did not contradict the confession of Yahweh. Distinguishing peculiarities of the community developed in the cultic life, such as the exclusiveness of the commitment to Yahweh, Sabbath, circumcision, and the calendar of festivals. The social-ethical substance was given in the ancient wisdom traditions. It was indispensable on account of its specific action that was not based on a political monopoly on the use of force. As a religious "private community" with a presumably weak, internal jurisdiction, it needed the support of basic, gently regulating, and commonly accepted ethical rules. The monotonous concentration on the central commandment of the worship of Yahweh by the Deuteronomistic tradent possibly becomes reasonable from this perspective as well.

III.1.3.4. Megilloth

Bergant, Dianne. *Lamentations* (AOTC; Nashville: Abingdon, 2003). **Berges**, Ulrich. *Klagelieder* (HTKAT; Freiburg: Herder, 2002). **Berlin**, Adele. *Lamentations* (OTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002). **Barton**, John. *The Unity of Scripture and the Diversity of the Canon* (BZAW 118; New York: de Gruyter, 2003). **Brenner**, Athalya. *A Feminist Companion to the Song of Songs* (FCB 1; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993). **Elbogen**, Ismar. *Der jüdische Gottesdienst in seiner geschichtlichen Entwicklung* (repr., Hildesheim: Olms, 1967). **Garrett**, Duane, and Paul R. House. *Song of Songs and Lamentations* (WBC 23B; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2004). **Horine**, Steven C. *Interpretive Images in the Song of Songs* (Studies in Humanities 55; New York: Lang, 2001). **Ki Tov**, Eliyahu. *The Book of Our Heritage: The Jewish Year and Its Days of Significance* (rev. ed.; 3 vols.; New York: Feldheim, 1978). **Lacocque**, André. *Ruth: A Continental Commentary* (trans. K. C. Hanson; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004). **Lee**, Nancy C. *The Singers of Lamentations* (Biblical Interpretation Series 60; Boston: Brill, 2002). **O'Connor**, Kathleen, M. *Lamentations and the Tears of the World* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2002). **Olyan**, Saul M. *Biblical Mourning: Ritual and Social Dimensions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004). **Pham**, Xuan Huong Thi. *Mourning in the Ancient Near East and the Hebrew Bible* (JSOTSup 302; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999). **Tull**, Patricia K. (Interpretation Bible Studies; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003). **Vries**, Simon Philip de. *Jüdische Riten und Symbole* (rev. ed.; Wiesbaden: Marixverlag, 2005). **Zakovits**, Ya'ir. *Das Hohelied* (trans. Dafna Mach; HTKAT; Freiburg: Herder, 2004).

The compilation of the five minor writings—Song of Solomon, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, and Esther—in the Hebrew tradition is not attested as a collection of “festival scrolls” (Megilloth) until the Talmud, in other words, in the (Christian) Middle Ages. In the preceding history of the canon (e.g., in the LXX), these very diverse writings have no cohesion among themselves; each appears at a different place in the collection of twenty-two sacred writings. Nevertheless, it is necessary here to refer briefly to the beginning of the festival calendar in the Persian period, including the assigned liturgical readings. The roots of many worship-related events of the Jewish tradition go back to the exile and the postexilic period and beyond. As indicated above, the book of Esther may appropriately be placed in the Hellenistic period;¹³¹ probably from the beginning, the book was the etiological legend of the festival of Purim, which is still celebrated today on Adar 14/15 (twelfth month). The festival calendars handed down in the Persian period, especially Lev 23, do not yet provide for the festival of Purim and hence originated before the introduction

131. See Haag, *Das hellenistische Zeitalter*, 118–33.

of the latter. Because its intellectuality is of a Greek mold, the common view is that Ecclesiastes, or Qoheleth, is also a product of the post-Persian epoch.¹³²

The same does not apply to the book of Lamentations. As suggested by Rainer Albertz,¹³³ the collection can be classified in the phase prior to the rededication of the temple. The worship-related use of the texts, however, did not begin until later, according to Albertz, perhaps in parallel with founding celebrations, when the community was accustomed to commemorate the destruction of the sanctuary. After the rededication of the temple in 515 B.C.E., according to Zech 7:3–6, the question arose whether worship services of lament continued to be appropriate. The response seems to be rather positive (7:5–6). This might indicate that an earlier destruction was also commemorated at temple restorations, in keeping with the Sumerian or generally Mesopotamian example. In any case, precisely because of its sublimely poetic form and the liturgical condensation, the book of Lamentations likely had never been “noncultic” literature but instead was surely created for communal, ritual remembrances and for centuries was used on certain commemorative days. Zechariah 7:3–5 mention the fifth and seventh months as festival dates. There is no trace of these in the festival calendars. The defeat in 587 B.C.E. and the destruction of the Jerusalem sanctuary by the Babylonians were serious historical events, and the reference in some national laments (Pss 44; 74; 79; 89), as well as in the book of Lamentations, to the subsequent intellectual situation, is so apparent that it suggests the assumption of crisis rituals. It is possible that, in the period without a temple, commemorative celebrations without sacrifices became established as well and hence were not explicitly mentioned in festival calendars determined by sacrificial service. In the seventh month, with its high liturgical and sacrificial orientation (see Lev 23:23–43), the commemoration of the destruction and rebuilding of the temple would then have become linked with other festival traditions (cf. the heading and content of Ps 30).

For our purposes, the assumption is important that “Lamentations” represents a collection of liturgical songs that were of service in worship gatherings already in the period of the exile and then probably also in the Persian period. Thus this book represents an early “festival scroll” that in the later Jewish tradition, following the destruction of the Second Temple by the Romans, continued to be used. Hanukkah, the dedication of the temple cel-

132. See *ibid.*, 112–18; Otto Kaiser, *Einleitung in das Alte Testament*, (5th ed.; Gütersloh: Mohn, 1984), 398–99; Ludger Schwienhorst-Schönberger, “Nicht im Menschen gründet das Glück” (Koh 2:24): *Kohelet im Spannungsfeld jüdischer Weisheit und hellenistischer Philosophie* (2nd ed.; HBS 2; Freiburg: Herder, 1996).

133. Albertz, *Israel in Exile*, 151–60.

celebrated since the second century B.C.E., also preserved the tradition of the demise of the temple after the Roman victory; it continues to be observed as a festival of light on 25 Kislev, the ninth month. Furthermore, days of fasting existed already in the early Jewish period.¹³⁴ A day of mourning and repentance, established on the 9th of Ab (fifth month), was dedicated especially to the commemoration of the destruction of the temple.¹³⁵ At this point, at least beginning with the Middle Ages, the book of Lamentations was read as a festal legend. Thus the consequence of the lament ritual concerning Jerusalem provides an idea about the origins of this festival. The book of Lamentations belongs to the liturgical products of those lament-related worship settings, traces of which can be observed.

With regard to the book of Ruth (see §III.1.1.4 above), not much that is concrete can be determined concerning its use during the barley festival (Festival of Weeks). The proximity of the narrative's content to the harvest season is obvious. The dramatically artistic development of the literary work certainly renders a public performance very plausible. If we distance ourselves from the idea of modern habits of reading, the question about the type of communication remains obscure. Stylistically, dialogue and narrative alternate in the book of Ruth. A structure such as this favors an oral presentation and does not exclude a scenic performance. The elevated intellectuality and the artistic quality of the book of Ruth should not tempt us to think merely of literary authorship and debates among scholars. The book of Ruth is also intended for communal use and must have had a life setting in the communicative events of the community. Unfortunately, scholarship largely disregards this issue, and since we have no direct references to readings or performances of the story of Ruth, all that remains is conjecture. Given that the reading of Ruth in the context of the Festival of Weeks has a very late attestation, its formation and use in the context of that festival tradition is not impossible. Some scholars consider this writing more generally as a kind of homily on the synagogal pericope of Deut 22–25.¹³⁶

Solomon's Song of Songs, basically a collection of love songs or bridal and wedding songs, sounds festive-secular. The betrothed or newly married alternately sing their reciprocal praises in innocent erotic joy in one another. An

134. See Elbogen, *Der jüdische Gottesdienst*, 225–31; de Vries, *Jüdische Riten und Symbole*, 100–103.

135. See de Vries, *Jüdische Riten und Symbole*, 141–45: "After prayer (the choirmaster) sits on the half-landing in front of the Torah cabinet and gives the five chapters of Lamentations" (143).

136. E.g., Georg Braulik, "The Book of Ruth as Intra-biblical Critique on the Deuteronomic Law," *AcT* 19 (1999): 1–20, esp. 18–19.

integration of the love songs into possible (preexilic) rituals associated with the celebration of the sacred wedding remains hypothetical.¹³⁷ Because of the timelessness of the material, an accurate dating is impossible. However, there is actually nothing that speaks against situating it in the Persian period (despite traces of Greek, for instance in Song 3:9–11), in which the written form of all the traditions important to the community had reached its apex. The only question remaining open is why a collection of erotically charged songs was significant for the Yahwistic community of faith in the process of consolidation, without having to reshape it clearly with confessional characteristics in mind. The puzzle might have a pragmatic solution: in the Judean communities, the Song of Songs possibly served quite naturally as a part of the wedding ritual. This would mean that the adoption of the texts into the tradition of the community simply represents a first step toward rendering an important biographical transition (rite of passage) into the sacred. Birth, puberty, marriage, and death are given a ritual and cultic frame in many societies. While rites of puberty and burial¹³⁸ in ancient Israel gained significant attention at least beginning with the exile, traditionally birth and marriage seem to have taken place in a noncultic or different cultic realm. The adoption of the Song of Songs into the “official” communal literature of the community of Yahweh as such, without providing the text with any Yahweh orientation, may already signal the communal need of ritual structuring of this phase of life. Later theological, largely allegorizing interpretation of the sexual relationship placed this brief, refreshing writing into other cultic contexts. Its reading at the Passover is a late development, as the composition of the five Megilloth attests.

Based on this brief mention of the five Megilloth, one may suggest that the annual festivals of the Judean community were consolidated in the Persian period. Many literary legacies of that time originally go back to different communal communicative situations and more or less assumed cultic shape. The annual cycle of festivals, from or within which a monthly or weekly practice of assembling also emerged, was an essential matrix for the origin of liturgical, theological, and pedagogical texts geared to a specific purpose, administered and cultivated by the appointed leaders of the community. In addition, apparently there were purely secular celebrations (rites of passage) belonging to the cycle of life, which are possible places of origin of communal

137. See Hartmut Schmökel, *Heilige Hochzeit und Hoheslied* (Abhandlungen für die Kunde des Morgenlandes 32.1; Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1956); Samuel Noel Kramer, *The Sacred Marriage Rite* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1969); Otto Keel, “Hoheslied,” *NBL* 2:183–91; Marvin H. Pope, *Song of Solomon* (AB 7C; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1977).

138. See Olyan, *Biblical Mourning*; Pham, *Mourning in the Ancient Near East*.

functional texts. The extended history of the texts read at particular communal festival celebrations apparently has its beginning in the Persian period.

III.2. REVISIONS OF OLDER WRITINGS

Barr, James. *Holy Scripture: Canon, Authority, Criticism* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983). **Davies**, Philip R. *Scribes and Schools: The Canonization of the Hebrew Scriptures* (Library of Ancient Israel; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998). **Kooij**, Arie van der, and Karel van der Toorn, eds. *Canonization and Decanonization* (Boston: Brill, 1998). **Niditch**, Susan. *Oral World and Written Word* (Library of Ancient Israel; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996). **Sanders**, James A. *Canon and Community: A Guide to Canonical Criticism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984).

In terms of collecting and recording the traditions, the Persian period was by far the most productive for the Judeans. Not only were new literary works produced, but extant writings and collections of functional texts continued to be used in the communicative processes of the communities and were adapted to the changed situations. It is helpful to reflect on the radical change once again. The takeover by the Persians brought new impulses for the subjected people groups and provinces. The politics of religion of the new masters had a liberating effect. The exiles in Babylon were allowed to return to their native country or to communicate unhindered with the home country. The temple experienced its rebirth. Here and there the hope for a new establishment of the Davidic dynasty flared up. According to legend, the national law of the Jews was promoted by the government. Jerusalem secured a certain independence in the satrapy of Trans-Euphrates. The consolidation of the communities around the Torah, the introduction of symbols of identity such as circumcision and the Sabbath, annual liturgical festivals, the canonization of written traditions, and so on made significant progress. In every regard, the two centuries of Persian rule, even given the economic and political difficulties, represent a unique golden age of Judean development and foundation for nascent Judaism.

The collection, reshaping, and solidifying of the literary traditions probably only came to full blossom after the reconstitution of the community of the temple. What share in scribal activity is to be attributed already to Babylonian phase in the sixth century is an open question. In his treatment of the material, Rainer Albertz shifted extensive parts of the Old Testament writings to the "exilic period" of barely seventy years;¹³⁹ for him, this means the span of

139. Albertz, *Israel in Exile*, 203–427.

time between 587 and 520 B.C.E.¹⁴⁰ Initially, however, the shock of the defeat and the deportations presumably paralyzed those affected. “Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, ‘My way is hidden from the LORD, and my right is disregarded by my God’?” (Isa 40:27)—thus the exilic preacher summons his community in Babylon. Discouragement pervades. Under the pressure of the conditions, those scattered, as well as the Judeans who remained at home, will have focused their energies mainly on survival. From a social-psychological perspective, major efforts toward new optimism actually can be expected only when the signs of hope increase. For the deportees, the revival perhaps began with the pardoning of Jehoiachin in 562 B.C.E. (2 Kgs 25:27–29), but most certainly with the anticipation of the foreign savior Cyrus, who is virtually hailed as “messiah,” not only by Judean theologians (around 540 B.C.E.; see Isa 44:28; 45:1–7); Babylonian priests also welcomed the conqueror as liberator. An inscription of Cyrus describes the crimes of Nabonidus, the last Babylonian king. He angered Marduk, the deity of the city and the empire, to such an extent that he sent a liberator:

He [Marduk] scrutinized all the countries; he looked around among his friends; a just prince after his own heart he took by his hand: Cyrus, the king of Anšan he appointed, he called his name to be ruler over all.... Marduk, the great Lord who cares for his people, looked at his good works and his righteous heart with joy. He commanded him to move to his city Babylon.... (Marduk assists Cyrus in conquering Babylon. The “liberated” ...) knelt before him, kissed his feet, rejoiced in his rule, his face was aglow.¹⁴¹

The issue here, of course, is pro-Persian propaganda, but among those who believed were also some exiled Judeans: Cyrus brings the great, divinely willed, and controlled drastic change. Now powers were released that led to the new constitution of “ancient” Israel and to the theological discovery of the one world and the only God. Since first attempts at reconstruction were already possible during the exilic period, it seems to me that the major impetus for writing down ancient traditions and for collecting sacred texts only came about with the turn to Persian rule and the associated reordering of

140. Ibid., 1–2, 112. However, the drastic change, as demonstrated by Deutero-Isaiah and the Babylonian opponents of Nabonidus, came already with the appearance of Cyrus in 539 B.C.E.

141. Cyrus Inscription according to Kurt Galling, ed., *Textbuch zur Geschichte Israels* (2nd ed.; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1968), 83; cf. *TUAT* 1:408–10. A Babylonian abusive poem describes the crimes of Nabonidus and the great deeds of Cyrus: *ANET*, 312–15; Kurt Galling, ed., *Textbuch zur Geschichte Israels* (3rd ed.; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1979), 66–70; Schaudig, *Die Inschriften Nabonids*; see §I.1 above.

the community and its cultic life. Often enough we still perceive the excitement in the texts (Deutero-Isaiah!) with which the new was accepted. In this context the already mentioned fact is extremely significant, that in the Judean tradition Babylon is considered an archenemy,¹⁴² whereas Persia appears in a fairly positive light (see Ezra-Nehemiah).

It cannot be surprising, therefore, that more and more scholars today place the writing of the Old Testament especially in the period of 539 B.C.E. to 330 B.C.E.¹⁴³ The major accounts about writing (see Deut 31:9–22; Jer 36) or about the rediscovery of a forgotten Torah (2 Kgs 22) possibly are retrojections and more likely belong in the postexilic period. To put it trenchantly, this would mean that these two centuries, with the political, economic, and religious parameters outlined above, offer the actual fertile soil for the origin and form of belief in Yahweh and of the sacred writings supporting it. The community of Yahweh was formed. In this context, the formation of a priestly-lay leadership elite played an equally major role as the gatherings, celebrations, and festivals that were becoming fixed and ritually shaped. In worship gatherings, texts were presumably recited from the start, planting the roots of the community in the distant past. Poetic elements, songs of Yahweh's helpful intervention, collections of age-old behavioral norms, admonitions to faithfulness over against the God of Israel, and anecdotes from the patriarchal history were diverse and locally distinctive. From this mass of liturgical texts, ordered more or less thematically, evolved literary collections of writings that pointed the way. Leading communities, especially in the Babylonian Diaspora, collected treasures of tradition from a broader sphere; they became binding regionally and ultimately for all Jews. The major endeavor of leading contemporary conditions back to ancient order, revelation, and practices becomes evident everywhere. Noah, Abraham, Moses, Aaron, Jeremiah, and other personalities of the distant past are deemed to be guarantors of the written traditions. Ezra was only able to take the "law of the God of heaven" into his hands and bring it to Jerusalem because it had been proclaimed in the distant past, recorded and preserved throughout the centuries, and at one point found again by accident. In reality, the immense scholarly work of writing and collecting was achieved mainly in the Persian period.

142. The prophetic words of doom against Babylon bear witness to brutal oppression and desperate resistance; see Isa 13–14; 21; 47; Jer 25; 50–51; Zech 5. Hatred and suspicion against the world power Babylon is also reflected in the Psalms (see Ps 137) and in some narratives (Gen 11:1–9); see Ulrike Sals, *Die Biographie der "Hure Babylon": Studien zur Intertextualität der Babylon-Texte in der Bibel* (FAT 2/6; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004).

143. See Davies, *Scribes and Schools*, esp. 106.

It was especially the achievement of circles with a Priestly orientation that brought about a chronological order of the history of Israel from the first beginning to the period of Moses. The continuation of the chain of events up to the Babylonian exile and the release of Jehoiachin was the task of the collectors and editors whom, for lack of concrete details, we identify as the “Deuteronomistic school.” How many other anonymous “hands” collaborated in writing the traditions is impossible to know. The following basic assumption seems important to me: certain literary collections of liturgical texts, intended for use in worship, became fixed in the communities of Judeans that were formed; to a large extent, they were put to use in a historical frame. The principle of antiquity made sure that the oldest traditions about the origin and order of the community of Yahweh were gradually deemed the most important and most foundational parts. From them arose the Torah of Moses, which ultimately took on the form of five scrolls. It seems as if this process had already gained some sort of conclusion in the fifth century, for both the Deuteronomistic tradition and the Ezra tradition already presuppose a recognized “law of Moses.” Speculations about the imperial government of Persia participating in the production of a binding system of laws for Jews are irrelevant and pointless. The information available to us does not offer any reliable data for such direct co-authorship. The toleration of a civil and religious organization among the subjected minorities, however, can be inferred from the treatment of other nations in the empire.¹⁴⁴

III.2.1. HISTORICAL NARRATIVES (DTR)

Campbell, Antony F. *Unfolding the Deuteronomistic History: Origins, Upgrades, Present Text* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000). **Dietrich**, Walter. *Von David zu den Deuteronomisten* (BWANT 156; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2002). **Eynikel**, Erik. *The Reform of King Josiah and the Composition of the Deuteronomistic History* (OtSt 33; Leiden: Brill, 1996). **Harvey**, John E. *Retelling the Torah: The Deuteronomistic Historian's Use of Tetrateuchal Narratives* (JSOTSup 403; New York: T&T Clark, 2004). **Hoffmann**, Hans-Detlef. *Reform und Reformen: Untersuchungen zu einem Grundthema der Deuteronomistischen Geschichtsschreibung* (ATANT 66; Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 1980). **McKenzie**, Steven L., and M. Patrick Graham, eds. *The History of Israel's Tradition: The Heritage of Martin Noth* (JSOTSup 182; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994). **Noth**, Martin. *Überlieferungsgeschichtliche Studien* (Halle: Niemeyer,

144. See §II.2.1 above on “Imperial Structures.” The politics of religion of the Achae-menids is the subject of extensive discussion. Grabbe, *Yehud*, 209–16, rightly warns against an exaggerated evaluation of ancient Persian endeavors of tolerance.

1943). **Peckham**, Brian. *The Composition of the Deuteronomistic History* (HSM 35; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985). **Person**, Raymond F. *The Deuteronomistic School: History, Social Setting, and Literature* (SBL SBL 2; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002). **Raney**, Donald C., II. *History as Narrative in the Deuteronomistic History and Chronicles* (Studies in the Bible and Early Christianity 36; Lewiston, N.Y.: Mellen, 2003). **Römer**, Thomas, ed. *The Future of the Deuteronomistic History* (BETL 147; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2000). **Rösel**, Hartmut N. *Von Josua bis Jojachin: Untersuchungen zu den deuteronomistischen Geschichtsbüchern im Alten Testament* (VTSup 75; Leiden: Brill, 1999). **Rüterswörden**, Udo. *Von der politischen Gemeinschaft zur Gemeinde* (BBB 65; Frankfurt am Main: Athenäum, 1987). **Veijola**, Timo. *Moses Erben: Studien zum Dekalog, zum Deuteronomismus und zum Schriftgelehrtentum* (BWANT 149; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2000). **Vervenne**, H. M., and J. Lust, eds. *Deuteronomy and Deuteronomistic Literature: Festschrift C. H. W. Brekemans* (BETL 133; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1997).

When Moses died in Deut 34, according to the (unanimous?)¹⁴⁵ opinion of early Jewish members of the community, the actual founder of belief in Yahweh died. How did the forefathers fare subsequently? This question occupied the exilic and postexilic communities because the promise of the land was in question. It was unresolved in the Mosaic tradition. The return of the exiles after the Persian seizure of power had not removed the problem either. What was the decision about the property passed on to the families and clans? Other topics that reflect the interests of the Judean community of faith, among others, are the rules and institutions of the community, their offices and functionaries, essential questions of ethics in a pluralistic society, and the exclusiveness of the worship of Yahweh. The aim of the received literature was not so much stylistic or literary. Rather, its specific interest was to allow conclusions to be drawn from its revision and use in postexilic community life. Therefore, the attempt to be made here is not a literary-critical classification but rather a critical classification of interests and ideology. In this process the books from Joshua to 2 Kings are taken up as a coherent complex of tradition compiled or revised in the Persian period.¹⁴⁶ The question about the use of a text ranks higher than its origin.

145. Chronicles focuses its attention on the arrangement of the temple, cult, and festivals on David to the extent that it hardly pays attention to Moses. In the genealogies of 1 Chr 1–9, he is not even mentioned.

146. The debate about the Deuteronomistic History is ongoing on many fronts; see the literature cited above, especially Römer, *The Future of the Deuteronomistic History*; Dietrich (*Von David zu den Deuteronomisten*, 261–62) considers DtrN (a nomistic redaction) to be from the Persian period.

From the perspective of the Persian period, the book of Joshua is replete with references to the actual situations. Central themes are the occupation (Josh 1–12) and distribution (Josh 13–21) of the land. Contrary to all attempts to explain this topic from the eighth century B.C.E., that is, from the Assyrian danger for the Israelite territories, it seems to me that Joshua's occupation and distribution of the land is more comprehensible from the perspective of the experiences, fears, and hopes of the exilic and postexilic period. The exiles' longing aimed at a return and a renewed possession of the land of inheritance (see Jer 24; Ezek 33:23–29; 36:1–5, 24–36). For this purpose, lists of returnees and knowledge of the original areas of settlement were essential. The detailed descriptions of domicile and boundaries in keeping with tribal systems of kinship in the book of Joshua may be bases for claims of family possessions. The argument of the complete expulsion of peoples when Joshua and his army of tribes invaded the land west of the Jordan mirrors the claim of the returning exiles on this promised little spot of soil. The concrete quarreling about the return of the possession of the family began only after the permission to return by the Persian imperial government (beginning in 539 B.C.E.). For the returnees, the traditions of the apportioning of the inheritance had to become the existential foundation.

A wealth of individual motifs links the book of Joshua with the postexilic period. The conception of the finished Torah of Moses supports the entire book. In the introduction, the successor of the founding father receives Yahweh's encouragement and call:

Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to act in accordance with all the law that my servant Moses commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, so that you may be successful wherever you go. This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth; you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to act in accordance with all that is written in it. (Josh 1:7–8)

For practical reasons, the idea of the devout studying the law without ceasing (Ps 1; Deut 17:18–20) is really only feasible in the Persian period, perhaps beginning with the second half of the fifth century, in other words, following the completion of the Mosaic writings.¹⁴⁷ The appearances of Moses' successor, situated at the conclusion, are complementary to the Torah admonition at the beginning of the book of Joshua. Joshua appears as a preacher of repentance and conversion, or as a community leader who addresses his community of Yahweh in keeping with the example of the founder and sharp-

147. See Dietrich, *Von David zu den Deuteronomisten*, 253, 261–62.

ens their conscience for faithfulness to Yahweh: “be very steadfast to observe and do all that is written in the book of the law of Moses..., so that you may not be mixed with these nations ... or swear by the names of their gods ... but hold fast to the LORD your God” (Josh 23:6–8). Following a lengthy parænetic address, Joshua, also following Moses, enforces the covenant of the community (24:25–27). We do not know since when and how this ceremony was celebrated in Israel, but it fits in perfectly with the picture of the community of Yahweh being constituted and clearly betrays features associated with worship; the call for a decision between Yahweh and other gods is followed by the declaration of confession and allegiance by upright adherents of Yahweh—an authentic element of early Jewish piety (Josh 24:14–18; cf. Neh 10). The words and ideas of this covenant without a firmly established community of Yahweh is inconceivable, and the covenantal community was fixed after the exiles had returned and established their religious life.¹⁴⁸ Furthermore, Josh 23–24 discloses even more interesting details from the practice of worship: Joshua did not accept the formal obligation immediately. At first he reluctantly refers to the risk of breaking faith with Yahweh and incurring harsh punishment for it (eradication! 24:20). But the community abides by its confession: “No, we will serve the LORD!” Only then does the sealing of the covenant follow (24:22–26).

The covenant and its theology presumably developed in Israel after the exile; they reached maturity in the Persian period, in other words, under the conditions of free religious practice and a renewed temple cult. The conceptions and rituals associated with that “covenant” express the way the (post) exilic community saw itself, for the religious confessional community most likely did not exist prior to the exile. The peasants of Israel rather adhered to deities with local, familial, and neighborly ties, which they worshiped at open-air sanctuaries and a few regionally designated temples.¹⁴⁹ Israel’s election by Yahweh, the God who demands exclusive worship, is the foundation of the new community in the Persian phase of structural reorganization.

The relationship to neighbors, aliens, and adherents of different religions arises from this self-identification, and the book of Joshua often reflects postexilic situations. Actually, the land Yahweh promised is the exclusive possession of his adherents. This is a puristic ideal of the tradents: Israel dwells separately and serves God on the ground that has been given to the people as their home. Other ethnicities, with other deities, can only dangerously

148. Some considerable time ago Perlitt presented the substantiation for a late date of the covenantal theology in his dissertation; see Lothar Perlitt, *Bundestheologie im Alten Testament* (WMANT 36; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1969).

149. See Gerstenberger, *Theologies in the Old Testament*, 93–110.

disturb the exclusive relationship with God. This is the reason for the well-known politics of expulsion, extermination, and subjection from the book of Deuteronomy (see Deut 20). In his campaigns Joshua sweeps the promised land clean, but the puristic concept suffers exceptions. By means of a ruse the Gibeonites develop a plan of protection. This plan cannot become inoperative when the deception becomes public; the nearby town of Gibeon is preserved, although the inhabitants are subjected to serve Israel as slaves (Josh 9). This agrees in part with postexilic experiences by believers in Yahweh. In order to maintain their unique position as the people of God's possession, they have to disassociate themselves strictly from the Canaanite neighbors (not from the Persians; see Ezra 10; Neh 13:23–28) and perhaps from Babylonian and Egyptian communes. However, the fact that groups of different religions live nearby, as illustrated by the town of Gibeon, is an undeniable fact for the postexilic adherents of Yahweh. Their dream would be to remove these "others" or to degrade them socially. But in the Persian reality they represent subjugated minorities of equal rank, or perhaps they even belong to the governing elite. Throughout the book of Joshua, as well as in Deuteronomy, the "holy-war" ideology is a virtual, theological construct, albeit on the premise of ancient oriental practices,¹⁵⁰ deliberately ignoring the complete powerlessness of Israel in the postexilic period. Thus we see that the Judean situations of the Persian period reflected in the book of Joshua are conformed retrospectively to the ancient situation. This historical distancing, however, also offers the possibility of articulating the Judeans' own longings and religious convictions in an ideal-typical way.

In the same way, this is true of the internal conditions of the Judean community and their reflections in the book of Joshua. A number of institutions or other contemporary peculiarities, which demonstrably were established only after the exile and in a fixed form only after the Persian takeover, are already familiar to the editors of Joshua. In part, they are considered to be constitutive characteristics of the people of Yahweh: circumcision (Josh 5); Torah and covenant (8:30–35; 24:25–27); Passover (5:10–12); a communal structure of offices (1:10; 23:2; 24:1);¹⁵¹ an etiological perspective focused on

150. Cf. the Mesha Inscription in Galling, *Textbuch zur Geschichte Israels* (1968), 51–53; Manfred Weippert, "‘Heiliger Krieg’ in Israel und Assyrien," *ZAW* 84 (1972): 460–93.

151. Among the terms for leadership functions, there is the Deuteronomic *šōtēr*, "official (well-versed in writing?)," surely an expression that only began to be used late in the Hebrew tradition, *contra* K.-D. Schunck, *TDOT* 14:606–8, who assumes a prestate usage. Udo Rüterswörden (*Die Beamten der israelitischen Königszeit* [BWANT 117; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1985], 112–14) scarcely deals with the poststate meanings.

the question of future offspring (4:6, 21; 6:25); hierarchical, heavenly conceptions of angels (5:13–15); a cosmic belief in miracles (10:12–14);¹⁵² the central significance of Jerusalem (22:10–34); and intertextual references to later writings of the Old Testament.¹⁵³

Some interesting individual observations can be made on the respective passages mentioned, as well as on several that have not been mentioned. The “building of an altar by the Jordan” (Josh 22), for instance, apparently has no earlier tradition but instead is an entirely postexilic construct, motivated theologically, culturally, and politically.¹⁵⁴ The changing of an altar’s function to that of “a witness between us and you” (i.e., of belonging to the community of Yahweh, 22:28, 34), raises new questions, of course. What cultic, ritual purpose might a testimonial altar (*ʿēd*) have? Or is the function that of a silent stela, reminding passers-by of certain facts? The notion of a visible witness or sign of remembrance is well-known in Hebrew literature (Gen 31:44, 48; Deut 31:19, 21, 26; Josh 4:4–6; 24:22). It seems to have been practiced especially in the “poststate” period. Occasionally the cosmic dimensions of faith in God in the book of Joshua are striking. The sun, an age-old, important ancient Near Eastern deity whose power is decreased, heeds even the commands of a believer in Yahweh (Josh 10:12–14). An angelic “commander of the army of the LORD” cares for the people of Yahweh. By taking off his shoes, a well-known gesture from Exod 3, Joshua responds to the appearance of the supra-terrestrial manifestation of the holy. Without exception Yahweh is the one who guides history, who has all nations and kings in his hand. Under the guise of local monarchs, appearing in lists as a collective power, the Babylonian and Persian emperors are perhaps also in mind (see Josh 10:3, 23; 11:1–5; 12:7–24). Yahweh, of course, is also Lord of the elements, such as the waters of the Jordan, which he is able to stop any way he wishes (3:9–17). This episode also alludes to an example, the crossing of the Reed Sea in Exod 14–15. Official functions and community structures of the late period can be

152. Noteworthy is the theological, historical reflection on the sun and moon standing still at Gibeon in the Valley of Aijalon, with the assertion of uniqueness: “There has been no day like it before or since, when the LORD heeded a human voice; for the LORD fought for Israel” (Josh 10:14).

153. After Deuteronomy, Joshua belongs to the writings with the most extensive Deuteronomistic imprint. Nevertheless, links with non-Deuteronomistic layers can also be made, e.g., Yahweh and the sun (Ps 72:17; 84:12; Mal 3:20; Num 6:24–26); Keel and Uehlinger, “Jahwe und die Sonnengottheit von Jerusalem,” 269–306.

154. Thus correctly Volkmar Fritz, *Das Buch Josua* (HAT 1/7; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1994), 220–22 (“the justification for admitting all of the inhabitants beyond the Jordan, perceived as the boundary, to the cult of Yahweh in Jerusalem,” 221).

ascertained from hints provided. Alongside the “official” mentioned above, Joshua himself, of course, is the prototype of a community leader. After all, he is sworn to uphold the Torah (Josh 1:8) and functions as a preacher of the Torah (Josh 23–24). Hence, even if in a certain refraction, the book of Joshua, in its accounts from the early period of Israel, indicates conceptions, thought processes, and institutions of the postexilic period (see the excursus on “Community Structures” below).

The imprint of postexilic community life is often recognized in the following series of Deuteronomistic historical books (Judges, Samuel, Kings), only with considerably less clarity. The reason for this is clearly that this complex processes much older material and that the historical facts bring to bear their own weight and coloring of the past more strongly. Even so, many features of the projected history can be understood as a reflection of postexilic conditions and attitudes.

The central theme of the book of Judges is the premonarchic period, often denounced partly as idyllic and partly as chaotic. Judges 1:1–3:6 connects to the theme and theology of the book of Joshua, although the death of the leader (Judg 1:1) marks a break. The doctrine of the conquest of the promised land and the rest of the native inhabitants who nevertheless remained is difficult to reconcile. The numerous Canaanite settlements in Palestine (Judg 1:17–36; negative list of possession) may represent exilic/postexilic conditions. On the other hand, the appearance of a (heavenly?) messenger in Judg 2:1–4 points more clearly to the Persian period. Yahweh’s envoy does indeed appear more civil than the one in Josh 5:13–15 but demonstrates the vividness of the conceptions of angels, which by all means are compatible with the contemporary Iranian spirit world.¹⁵⁵ This also applies to the problem of “mixed marriages” (Judg 3:5; cf. Exod 34:16; Deut 7:3–4; Josh 23:12; Ezra 10; Neh 13:23–29). Only in the multiracial empire of the Persians, under the conditions of free religious practice and largely autonomous civil administration, did it become a test case of the continuing existence of the community of Yahweh.

Usually the book of Judges collects narratives about deliverers or other episodes relevant to Yahweh from the premonarchic period and fits them into the Deuteronomistic schema of Israel’s apostasy from Yahweh and of the subsequent distress caused by enemies and the mercy of God receiving its concrete form in the mission of a liberating hero. This schema presum-

155. On the popular religion in the Achaemenid Empire, see Boyce, *History of Zoroastrianism*, 1:22–177; Widengren, *Die Religionen Irans*, 7–59; Stausberg, *Die Religion Zarathushtras*, 1:115–18.

ably originated already in the preexilic period¹⁵⁶ as the main interpretive key for the preexilic history of the people of Yahweh. The tradents and editors of the Persian period adopted the already-existing schema and added further emphases to it. Thus it is worth considering to what extent the Samson cycle (Judg 13–16), the supplemented stories of Micah, the thief who established a private sanctuary, and of the violation of the Levite's concubine with the ensuing holy campaign in revenge answer questions pertaining to the Persian period. Samson is the prime example of a Nazirite (Num 6) and a well-known hero of the sun by name as well as deeds. The restorative and creative theology of the Persian era apparently loved such semimythical constructions of the past (see Gen 6:1–4; Num 13:28; Deut 5:13; 1 Sam 17:4–10). Micah's making of an image of God and establishing a domestic cult finds its continuation in the regional cult of the Danites (Judg 17–18). By means of Judg 18:30 this trajectory is expanded to the Assyrian deportation, even with the authorization of a Levite priest. Perhaps the expansion of the perspective says something about the exilic/postexilic interest in showing the centralization of the cult in Jerusalem in a positive light. Ultimately the narrative of violation and punishment of Judg 19–21 has to do with a sexual breach of a taboo and the violation of the right of hospitality, which are also denounced in Gen 19. The topic, including the strategy of exterminating the perpetrators, fits well the Second Temple mentality of holiness (see Lev 18; 20). Incidentally, it is striking that the minor and major judges (Judg 3–12) are scarcely measured with the yardstick of Torah piety. Nevertheless, their salvific deeds are occasionally linked with the renewal of the authentic Yahweh cult (see Judg 6:25–32). Why are there no direct references to the Torah? Is the renewal of the cult a sufficient indicator of life in accordance with Yahweh for the late hearers? Or does the fighters' gifting with the Spirit serve as authorization (Judg 7; 11:29)? The lengthy reason for Jephthah's war for Yahweh is noteworthy (11:12–28). Here the deliverer sent by Yahweh functions as exegete and proclaimer of the pentateuchal tradition. In the verbal (!) clash with the Ammonite king, he appeals to the traditions of Israel's experiences, recorded in Num 21–22, east of the Jordan with Sihon of Heshbon and Balak, the Moabite king. Gideon, in turn, has to do with a messenger figure coming directly from Yahweh and needing no historical exegeses at all (Judg 6:11–24). Yet both portrayals point to late usage. According to all of the findings in the book of Judges, therefore, we can be assured that in its final or near-final form this writing was read in light of

156. Examples of presenting this program are found in Judg 2:6–23; 10:1–16; see Albertz, *Israel in Exile*, 290.

their own situation by the postexilic community of Yahweh. The contemporary Persian handling of the traditions, while certainly older, left its mark.

Samuel and Kings constitute a relatively closed context. Some of the main problems are the formation and preservation of the monarchy in Israel—a foundational topic that surely stirred many people's emotions in the community of Yahweh after the Babylonian exile.¹⁵⁷ But how did one read these stories about Samuel, Saul, David, and Solomon and about the Davidic heirs of the extinct southern kingdom in the Persian period, after the rebuilding of the temple and during the constitution of the community in Judah and in the Diaspora? What were the main features? The Chronistic portrayal shows us broad outlines that probably became predominant in the fourth century B.C.E.: the Judaic kings, led by David and Solomon, were busy building the temple, establishing the cultic work, ordering the priestly classes, and establishing and renewing the liturgical calendar of festivals. The different Deuteronomistic tradition is trimmed and supplemented. If we discover Chronistic perspectives in the editorial shaping of the Deuteronomistic books of Samuel and Kings, we may be able to infer traces of the early Persian period. In this context it is worth considering attributing the debate about the question of guilt more emphatically to the exilic Deuteronomistic work and to date the positive portrayal of the kingdom, especially with regard to the cultic life of Jerusalem, to the period of the rebuilt temple. Thus the ambivalent disposition of the Deuteronomists to the monarchy turns into a succession of contextual theological emphases.¹⁵⁸ Under Babylonian patronage and the impression of the defeat and destruction of the temple, the predominant interpretive schema was that of Israel's apostasy and punishment, while following the Persian turn the communal interest shifted to the positive and, in the postexilic period, current institutions of the citizen-temple-community.

In this sense, read from the vantage point of the fifth century B.C.E., the special significance of the temple cult of Jerusalem and its associated ritual acts is imposing in the books of the Kings. The construction and furnishing of the sanctuary are described in detail (1 Kgs 6–7). As in the extraordinarily detailed instructions and reports of implementation concerning the tent of meeting (Exod 25–31; 35–40), this involves texts that are not oriented to the supposedly historical institutions of the period of Moses and Solomon but entirely to the Second Temple of the Persian period. The language, style, world of ideas, and theology—everything points to this later epoch.

157. See Albertz, *Israel in Exile*, 290–302.

158. *Ibid.*, 290: "Now we note with astonishment that the Deuteronomistic historians exempt ... the period of the united monarchy ... from the general trend toward apostasy, treating it as a new period of pure, unadulterated faith in Yahweh."

When these texts were read, the hearers had in mind their own reality that had been created in the past as a sacred prototype. Forerunners of the only legitimate sanctuary, however, were, for instance, the shrines of Shiloh (1 Sam 1–2), Gilgal (1 Sam 13), Nob (1 Sam 21–22), Hebron (2 Sam 15:7–10), and Gibeon (1 Kgs 3). In other words, the exilic/postexilic tradents certainly acknowledged the worship of God at many places in Israel until Solomon. They also knew about the significance of the ark of the covenant, that older symbol of Yahweh that was transferred to the temple of Jerusalem (1 Sam 4–6; 2 Sam 6; 1 Kgs 8). According to Deut 12, however, only Jerusalem is the locus of the Yahweh cult; the latter is a firmly established practice only since the rebuilding of the former royal temple, since 515 B.C.E. the temple serving the confessional community of Yahweh. The reorganization of the temple, incumbent because of the change in the supporting community, also made the restructuring of the cultic operation necessary, for if the central sanctuary of the Judaic monarchy strictly served the preservation of the dynasty and the state (while numerous local and regional cultic places guaranteed that the religious needs of the subjects were met), the newly dedicated sacred structure allows for continual sacrifices, while at the same time being available for the prayers of the community (“house of prayer,” Isa 56:7) from near and far. This important and enormously new function of the house of God now makes the dedicatory prayer attributed to Solomon the absolute focal point. The prayer does not even mention the customary presentation of offerings, which surely ought to be assumed as well-known.¹⁵⁹ The communal prayer service (1 Kgs 8:23–53) is of paramount importance to those handing down the tradition, which is to be dated to the Persian period. It is developed in all directions, beginning with the introduction: “that you may heed the prayer that your servant prays toward this place. Hear the plea of your servant and of your people Israel when they pray toward this place; O hear in heaven your dwelling place; heed and forgive” (8:29b–30).

Then follows a series of seven situations of prayer and petition for individual followers of Yahweh and the entire community,¹⁶⁰ each edited stereotypically: “If someone ... prays to you in his need in this house/toward this house ... then hear in heaven and act on his behalf.” The basic pattern of these petitions seems varied, but the conclusion is quite consistent. The cata-

159. In the background story on the dedicatory prayer, the relationship to the Torah is emphatic; the priests bring the ark of Yahweh, the tent of meeting, and holy vessels into the new temple and sacrifice innumerable sheep and oxen (1 Kgs 8:3–6, 62–64).

160. Allusions to the magic-holy numeral “seven” are clustered in 8:46–51; see Burke O. Long, *1 Kings* (FOTL 9; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 101–4; Jon D. Levenson, “The Paranomasia of Solomon’s Seventh Petition,” *HAR* 6 (1982): 135–38.

log begins with the common incident of personal transgression: "If someone sins against a neighbor and is given an oath to swear, and comes and swears before your altar in this house..." (8:31). Swearing in this context is part of the divine judgment in which guilt or innocence of a suspect is determined when juridical evidence is lacking (cf. Pss 7; 17; 26; Num 5). This procedure is clearly associated with the Second Temple, since the sanctuary was surely reserved for the official cult and the "people" presumably had no access to the holy place. The frequent dating of the text in the exilic century is unfounded because the temple was then in ruins. The prayer reckons with a functioning temple and established liturgical events.

Two cases, introduced by temporal infinitival clauses, simulate Israel's defeat in battle (8:33–34) and the collective distress because of ongoing drought (8:35–36). Both instances of disaster are caused by "transgression" and require returning to Yahweh, ritual invocations, in other words, communal services of petition. Then Yahweh may have mercy and "bring them again to the land" (8:34) that he had given to the ancestors. The prayer can also be made far from the temple but toward it (8:35), that is, in the Diaspora. Unlike in 8:31, 33, the physical distance is assumed in several other contexts (8:38, 42, 44, and esp. 8:47). Yahweh may also grant the community to "teach them the good way" (*tôrēm*, 8:36: "you may teach"); this formulation is reminiscent of the instruction of the Torah. Thus the liturgical prayer, projected back into the Solomonic period, also betrays a postexilic perspective in its historical guise.

Three of the remaining prayer concerns are constructed as conditional clauses with *kî*, "if" (8:37, 44, 46); the fourth one shows the same characteristics, but it is attached to the preceding one without the conditional particle (8:41). In this way these petitions, beyond the stereotypical "hear in heaven" (8:32, 34, 36, 39, 43, 46, 49), constitute a formal unit, albeit with their own respective content. Part 4 (8:37–40) encompasses a very broad spectrum of possible emergencies; they partly overlap with those mentioned in other units. Very characteristic is the distinction of communal (famine, plague, blight, mildew, locusts, caterpillar, and distress by enemies, 8:37a) and individual menacing forms of distress (plague, sickness, 8:37b). That this distinction is intentional is made apparent in the explanatory instruction in 8:38: "whatever prayer, whatever plea there is from any individual or from all your people Israel, all knowing the afflictions of their own hearts so that they stretch out their hands toward this house...." The individual track is continued in 8:39: "render to all whose hearts you know—according to all their ways, for only you know what is in every human heart." A careful classification of the individual and corporate petitions such as this, as well as those stressing the responsible individual, fit the social structure of the postexilic

community, not that of a national society. Verses 41–43 provide foreigners with access to Yahweh in prayer, entirely in keeping with the opening of the temple for foreigners in Trito-Isaiah (Isa 56:6–8), from far and near, as it seems and for the same plights that were described immediately prior. In its universal breadth, the ecumenical explanation, “so that all the peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you, as do your people Israel, and so that they may know that your name has been invoked on this house that I have built” (8:43), by no means takes second place to the most powerful opening declarations of Isaiah (cf. Isa 2:2–4; 19:23–25). All of them are sure signs of a theology that could only have emerged in the religiously tolerant Persian Empire, in spite of contemporaneous policies of discrimination and anxieties resulting from identities that derive from different contexts.

The sixth section of the prayer of dedication (8:44–45), like the second one (8:33–34), sheds light on Israel’s situation at war—a historical snapshot that could apply to the period of the monarchy but not to the exilic and postexilic period. Both circumstances, defeat and impending battle, are merely alluded to in the local context. They are intended only to clarify Solomon’s historical situation. He and his successors had to be able to turn to Yahweh in the event of conflict. The context of the postexilic audience does not intend to communicate more than this. Thus the emphasis is so much the stronger on the seventh section (8:46–51). In it the entire cycle of situations calling for prayer reaches its pinnacle, as the opening section mentioned above demonstrates. For if the first five units of prayer regularly exclaim “then (you) hear,” accentuated by an additional personal pronoun, then in the sixth and seventh sections there enters a more emphatic “then hear their prayer and their plea” (8:45, 49, now no longer in the imperfect but in the perfect consecutive). The change in 8:45 is seemingly intended to prepare for 8:49, for the extent, choice of terms, and theology of this section point to its special importance. Everything that can be gathered from it in view of its roots in the social reality also demonstrates the postexilic background; apparently both the deportation and the return have already taken place (8:46–53). On the surface, the exile of the upper strata to Babylon, sent as punishment by Yahweh, is picked out as a central theme in terms of a prophecy by King Solomon, who is three hundred years older. On the liturgical level, the example of the exile and the cautious allusion (8:53) to liberation serve as a powerful sign of hope for the new community of Yahweh after the restoration of the temple. The great prayer leaders and intercessors of Israel, Moses and Solomon, in this way brought their word to bear before God on behalf of Israel during their time, and the adoption of the exilic paradigm into the worship liturgy (without this important step the text would not have been handed down) impressed it upon the awareness that there was hope for forgiveness

and help for the community as well. At the time of the Second Temple the distress of the exile remained an impressive paradigm for prayer and divine intervention.

According to its language, style, and theology, the prayer unit of 8:31–53 demonstrates an astonishing closeness to the book of Leviticus (cf. Lev 4; 5; 13; 26, etc.). The interest, conveyed case by case, is meant for the transgressions of individuals and of the community (the key word is *ḥt'*, “to do wrong to someone”), as well as for the possible rituals of liberation. The prayer in 1 Kgs 8:31–53 is a variation of the remission of sin. The vocabulary of “having mercy” and “atone” is Priestly. The sublime play with similar-sounding verbs and the numeral “seven,” especially in the section of 8:46–51,¹⁶¹ may also be attributed to the Priestly circle. Universalistic ideas of God with a pronounced heavenly orientation, as well as an anthropology that is generalized and internationalized, which basically appears to have a wisdom orientation, are expected especially in the Persian period. In the seventh section of the prayer, the citation of a repentant confession (or the initial phrase of it) is a peculiarity connecting to the great prayers of repentance of the postexilic period (Ezra 9; Neh 9; Ps 106; Dan 9). Indeed, the citation in 8:47 seems to be a liturgically common phrase for a collective acknowledgement of guilt (cf. Ps 106:6; Dan 9:5). As far as the history of genre is concerned, 1 Kgs 8:31–53 is not a directly used pattern of prayer; rather, it is an account of historical intercession for the exilic/postexilic community. Yet in this account we encounter the following instruction: this is how you are to pray in distant times, that is, in the community of the Second Temple, in the triad of the dominant theory of sin:¹⁶² “We have sinned and have done wrong; we have acted wickedly” (8:47: *ḥāṭā'nu wehēwīnū rāšā'nū*). Solomon's prayer serves as a historical way of thinking; hence it can be heard as a model. One's own prayer is predicated on the lengthy tradition of intercession but follows a different pattern: in a crisis, Yahweh is to be called upon by confessing one's own guilt. However, from the distant position, one recognizes that the Solomonic example is nothing other than a model of a petition of affliction common to the postexilic period. Everywhere one goes and in section after section, 1 Kgs 8:31–53 presupposes the experience of the community with worship-related actions in the Second Temple. If the text is of Deuteronomistic origin, this segment of history originated in the fifth, not in the sixth, century B.C.E.

161. See Levenson, “Paronomasia.”

162. See Rolf P. Knierim, *Die Hauptbegriffe für Sünde im Alten Testament* (Gütersloh: Mohn, 1965).

In the narrative of the dedication of the temple, Solomon acts not only as a priest who presents great quantities of sacrificial animals (1 Kgs 8:5, 62–64) but above all else is the reflection of a community leader responsible for attending to (the ark of the covenant and) the Torah (8:1–9), to call upon Yahweh as the prayer leader, and to bless the community (8:12–27), although many statements bear characteristics of a sermon (cf. 8:15–21). According to Deuteronomistic opinion, the kings, after all, were to be erudite in the Torah rather than politicians (Deut 17:14–20). In the further unfolding of the history of the kings, they were also evaluated by this standard. Most monarchs after Solomon came off badly; they did not rule on the premise of the Torah. Others were halfway tolerable, except that they did not heed the commandment to centralize the sacrificial cult. Only a few attain positive marks in the Deuteronomistic reappraisal of the past, namely, the Judaic kings associated with reform: Asa (1 Kgs 15:19–24), Jehoash (2 Kgs 12:5–17), Hezekiah (2 Kgs 18–20), and Josiah (2 Kgs 22–23).¹⁶³

The reforms of the monarchical period concern the temple and its cultic operation, the Torah, and the annual festivals, themes that were taken up in the later Chronistic work and given special emphasis. However, this also means that precisely these problem areas keep the communities of the Persian period in suspense. They determine the self-understanding of the community of Yahweh. In turn, it becomes clear that, in the treatment of the highly topical subject matter in the books of the Kings, the experience of the community is found in and around the Second Temple. Without the vivid view of the layout of the temple and the rituals carried out there, and without the already firmly established customs associated with the reading and interpretation of the Torah, as well as the adopted periods of festivals, the accounts of reform could scarcely have been written. From this perspective, the postexilic origin of the relevant portrayals can be expected in the Deuteronomistic work of history. It is probably rather by happenstance that King Asa is only given a summary acknowledgement of his effectiveness: “He put away the male temple prostitutes out of the land and removed all the idols” (1 Kgs 15:12) and cut down an abominable image for Asherah that his mother Maacah had made (15:13). Furthermore, his fundamental philosophy is acknowledged: “Nevertheless the heart of Asa was true to the LORD all his days” (15:14). Tribute is paid to the other three reformers with detailed accounts. Jehoash engaged in extensive renovation of the temple, which, in ancient Near Eastern history, always is a state-supported measure worthy of historical note (2 Kgs 12:4–16; cf. the copy of the episode in the story of

163. See Hoffmann, *Reform und Reformen*.

Josiah, 2 Kgs 22:3–7). It is noteworthy that the king must raise the funds for the restoration from the contributions and taxes of the people. That is a pure anachronism since, in the period of the monarchy, the temple was part of the palace layout, a dynastic sanctuary, and a shine of the state only via the figure of the monarch. Thus the text exposes the more private financial conditions of the Second Temple. In addition, it acquaints us with the problems of the late temple economy, namely, the regular income—dues for various official duties and taxes (2 Kgs 12:5; textually and factually this cannot be identified with certainty)—is not used for the maintenance of the building but apparently ends up in the pockets of the priests (12:6–8). Jehoash, that is, his foster father, the priest Jehoiada, has the glorious idea of setting up an additional chest for the renovation of the house (12:9–16). Now with the regularly incoming additional donations from the visitors of the temple, the restoration work can take place. It is strictly a matter of renovating the construction; temple utensils and the support of the priests are not paid from the donations but continue to be paid from the dues collected (12:13, 16). The entire passage exudes the conceptions and the financial and structural problems of the postexilic period. Only the Second Temple is completely and in all matters dependent on donations and contributions of the people. Five of the eight covenantal obligations of Neh 10, the most elaborate and emphatic, concern the support of the temple and the priesthood (10:33–40). The Priestly layers of the Old Testament are replete with debates and precautions dedicated to the house of Yahweh, that is, the Second Temple (cf. the “offering” [*têrûmâ*], Exod 25:2–9; 30:11–16; 35:4–29; plus the “gifts” of the “leaders,” Num 7). The important thing is the responsibility for the entire community. Occasionally the text even refers emphatically to “men and women” who belong to Yahweh (Exod 35:20–29). The appointment, employment, and remuneration of the skilled workers in Exod 36:1–7 is portrayed similarly to the Jehoash pericope. Exodus 38:21–31 contains a similar kind of statement, at least as far as the donated materials are concerned. Various instructions of the book of Leviticus are concerned with the support of the priests and their families (2:3, 10; 6:9–11, 19–23; 7:14, 31–36; 22; Ezek 44:28–31; 48:8–22, etc.). During that time they are no longer royal officials but employees of the community and must be supported by it. In short, the Old Testament portrayals of the temple of Jerusalem during the monarchy and its officiating priests are predominantly of postexilic origin and assume the Second Temple. They are using it as a model, even if the tradents speak of the Mosaic tabernacle or the sanctuary of Solomon. The restoration under Jehoash is a prime example for projecting postexilic conditions into the period of the monarchy.

In the Deuteronomistically reconstructed landscape of reform, the kings

Hezekiah and Josiah play a special part. In retrospect, the former receives the highest accolade among the kings of Judah:¹⁶⁴

He trusted in the LORD the God of Israel, so that there was no one like him among all the kings of Judah after him or among those who were before him. For he held fast to the LORD; he did not depart from following him but kept the commandments that the LORD commanded Moses. The LORD was with him; wherever he went, he prospered. (2 Kgs 18:5–7).

Hezekiah's relationship to the temple is determined by the belligerent manner of the Assyrians. They demand a huge payment of tribute: 300 talents of silver (= 1,026 kg) and 30 talents of gold (= 102.6 kg). Hezekiah paid the amount from the treasury of the temple and the treasury of the king (18:14–15). Entirely along the line of the dedicatory prayer of the temple, the king then presents his and the people's distress before Yahweh in the temple (19:14–19). After his miraculous recovery and extension of life, Hezekiah further promises to render his prayer of thanksgiving in the temple (20:8). For his part, Yahweh promises to protect the city of Jerusalem and preventively repels the attack by the Assyrian king (19:32–37). There are no further references to engagements on behalf of the temple and the priesthood. The picture of the temple that comes through by way of a hint is that of Israel's centrally important house of prayer. The summarizing portrayal of Hezekiah's deeds reinforces this postexilic idea. Like scarcely any other king, Hezekiah is said to have moved against the local shrines, so as to allow the temple of Jerusalem to gain its full validity: "He removed the high places, broke down the pillars, and cut down the sacred pole. He broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made" (2 Kgs 18:4). Otherwise his portrayal is depicted in keeping with the pattern of the exilic/postexilic believers. He is neither politician nor military commander; during the Assyrian crisis and in serious illness, he places his entire hope in Yahweh as helper and savior (2 Kgs 18–20), "trusting" his God (18:5; cf. 18:19–24; Ps 115:8–11). Yahweh's authorized representative ("angel") strikes down the Assyrian army (2 Kgs 19:35–37), and the prophet Isaiah brings the news of healing and prolongation of life (20:2–11), again supported, as in the account of Joshua, by a spectacular miraculous sign associated with the course of the sun (20:8–11; cf. Josh 10:12–14).

In the case of Josiah, we find a similar basic pattern, although the emphases are altered (2 Kgs 22–23). Initially the king devotes himself to

164. Cf. the similarly elevated rating of Josiah in 2 Kgs 23:25; there were too many negative accounts circulating about David and Solomon for the postexilic theologians to be able to place such absolute stress on them.

the constantly arising measures of structural maintenance, just like his predecessor Jehoash (22:3–7). The passage seems to be an excerpt from the more detailed account of Jehoash and at this point actually serves the tradent only for the purpose of introducing his main topic of discovering the (lost?) Torah during the renovation (22:8–10). Tackling the purification of the temple from alien religious symbols and the sweeping demolition of all other cultic shrines, including their personnel (23:4–20), is a second topos, albeit one that seems to be subordinate to the theme of the Torah. A third motif is the linking of the prophecy against the altar of Bethel (1 Kgs 13:30–32) with Josiah's execution of the prophetic word (2 Kgs 23:16–18). There is no doubt, however, that the main emphasis is on the pericope of the Torah (2 Kgs 22:8–23:3; 23:21–24). For a long time, the historical authenticity of this account has been subject to scholarly debate, yet already Ernst Würthwein irrefutably pointed out the historical anachronism:¹⁶⁵ Is it precisely the last significant king of Judah who is supposed to have found the Torah of Moses again shortly before the end of the monarchy and to have placed it in its legitimate position by means of a covenant? Further, did he do so although he and all his predecessors were continually evaluated by precisely this “book of the law” in the Deuteronomistic pattern of interpretation? From the historical perspective, the account of the rediscovery of the Torah is a legend. It has a theological background and purpose. The question is merely when and in what circles a fable like this might have emerged. The trenchant explanation, which is regarded as self-evident and requiring no speech explaining the content of “the book of the Torah,” “the book,” the “book of the covenant,” clearly describes a known entity, a recognized, holy writing. In all likelihood, however, a “canonical” form of a “book” of this kind—whatever its scope and content might have been—only came about after the constitution of the community of the temple, that is, in the Persian period. At the earliest from the fifth century B.C.E., the “book” that is the concern of our Josiah tradition does indeed become the central point of the community's life, as well as of the personal existence of all adherents of Yahweh. Thus the account of the discovery of this holy writing and its establishment as a covenantal document is narrated in view of the postexilic community and indeed by the scribes and liturgists of precisely that Torah-oriented community of faith. What was the intent of the scribes and tradents? Was the embedding of their sacred words of God from Moses' mouth in the distant founding period not sufficient (see

165. See Ernst Würthwein, “Die Josianische Reform und das Deuteronomium” (1976), in idem, *Studien zum deuteronomistischen Geschichtswerk* (BZAW 227; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1994), 188–216.

Exod 24:3–8; Deut 31:9–13, 19–22; Josh 24:25–28)? Obviously not; the entire history of the people of Yahweh was to proceed in keeping with the rules of the elect community in the Persian Empire. The period of the kings, too, was to be accepted only subject to the model of a confessional community based on the Torah. Hence the temple plays such an emphatic, anachronistic role for the people. Hence the kings are partly scribes and prayer leaders. Hence at least one in the Judaic dynasty had to celebrate the covenant and the Passover ritual in accordance with the rules of the Torah. The postexilic theologians designated Josiah for this role, the king who radiated Yahweh's mercies. He sets a sign against his time, which is already shaped by decline: a community professing Yahweh will not perish, as long as it adheres to the sacred Word of their God.

The question is appropriate whether there are further discernible reflections of interests of the postexilic period in the Deuteronomistic History. As already indicated, a side glance at the Chronistic work with its much stronger communal character is able to assist in recognizing such late constellations. If the kings of Judah are imagined as functionaries of the newly constituted community of Yahweh, initially in the Deuteronomistic History and then fully by the Chronicler, it is also possible that other late offices surface anachronistically in the historical accounts. How does the Deuteronomistic History deal with priests, Levites, scribes, prophets, liturgists, and community leaders? Who is hidden behind the royal officials and the royal servants? Furthermore, the portrayed relationships of Israel with their neighbors and major powers are to be examined: Are they recorded in the direction of postexilic situations? Especially the theological perspectives of the Deuteronomistic complex of tradition could be important for our formulation of the question. To what extent might the ideas about God and the world, presented in the early history and the history of the monarchy, reflect the contours of a later time? Finally, as a control question the negative reconnaissance should not be missed: What characteristic constellations of the Persian period are absent in the Deuteronomistic portrayal of history? That is an extensive research program.

Some observations on the matter have to suffice at this point. Unless we are completely wrong, there are some other later community related offices reflected in the Deuteronomistic History, apart from the preaching, praying, and community leading of the king. In the case of the priest and the Levites, whose ancestral lines reach deep into the past, the well-known, strained relationship between various priestly traditions in Chronicles could serve as a criterion for a late gloss or something imagined, for it is only since the period of the Second Temple that the legitimation of those serving at the altar among the clans with a legitimate claim may have been controversial and may have

led to intense disputes (cf. Lev 10; Num 16). In the period of the monarchy, such problems were resolved by the official word of the government; this authority was lacking in the revived Jerusalem of the Persian period. At best, the central government determined the political leadership of the province. We indeed read little in the Deuteronomistic History about feuding priestly families. In the Persian period, the stories of corrupt priests at local shrines such as Shiloh (1 Sam 2:12–17) or of politically suspect priesthoods such as the one at the shrine of Nob (1 Sam 21:2–10; 22:6–19) were possibly read as pointers to unorthodox behavior by the priests. Indeed, the justification of the Zadokite, originally probably Jebusite-Jerusalemite, priestly clans extends throughout the Deuteronomistic History. Ultimately it was planted among the ancestral line of the Levitical Aaronides. Already at the condemnation of the sons of Eli of Shiloh, the (Deuteronomistic!) prophecy is given: “I will raise up for myself a faithful priest” (1 Sam 2:35). Apparently this prediction points to the installation of Zadok as senior priest and minister for religious affairs in the governments of David and Solomon (2 Sam 8:17; 15:24–25; 1 Kgs 1:8; 2:35; 1 Chr 5:34, 38).¹⁶⁶ The political and economic implications of the Zadokite preeminence are evident everywhere. In various contexts the Deuteronomistic History provides the basis of the tradition that benefits the later position of this priestly family. However, even this preparatory legitimation may belong to the period of the Second Temple. The problem of the Levitical origin of the priesthood of Jerusalem is linked with this and equally virulent (cf. Josh 3:3; 8:33). Finally, in the context of establishing the “cities of refuge” and the “cities allotted to the Levites,” Josh 20–21 already speak of the future “high priest” who will rule one day (20:6) and thereby clearly reveal the postexilic origin of such a *vaticinium ex eventu*.

Are other offices from the early Jewish community already known or transparent in the Deuteronomistic History? Levites and scribes who play such an important role in the Chronistic work fade in importance. In the Deuteronomistic History, scribes are predominantly royal officials. At best, it should be asked whether Shaphan, who serves under Josiah (cf. 2 Kgs 22:3–20), does not also have the profile of a Torah expert of the community, albeit subliminally. Descendants of this official surface several times as sympathizers or even as functionaries of the community of Yahweh (cf. Jer 26:24; 36:10–12; 39:14; Ezek 8:11). Levites are mentioned only parenthetically. They are itinerant priests (Judg 17–18) or an isolated sacred tribe (Josh 21), carri-

166. Cf. J. G. McConville, “Priesthood in Joshua to Kings,” *VT* 49 (1999): 73–87; Deborah W. Rooke, *Zadok’s Heirs, The Role and Development of the High Priesthood in Ancient Israel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

ers of the ark (1 Sam 6:15; 2 Sam 15:24) and assistants to the priests (1 Kgs 8:4). The Chronistic relationship of competition is not (yet) apparent. For the (Levitical!) Zadokites, however, the pressure of legitimation is unmistakable. As already indicated, “judges” (*šōpēṭîm*) and “officers” (*šōṭṭērîm*) are characteristic designations of leadership functions for the Deuteronomistic History, except that we do not know precisely how they were structured and what authorities they included. In the postexilic period, both may well have had something to do with the interpretation and fostering of the Torah. In keeping with the later understanding, the “minor” judges (Judg 10:1–5; 12:8–15) may have practiced leadership functions in the community of Yahweh. Mind you, the issue is not the historical roles of these leaders¹⁶⁷ but the interpretation of their functions from the perspective of the community of the Second Temple. From the later perspective, the kings were regarded as liturgists, prayer leaders, preachers, and community leaders of ancient Israel. “Judges,” and surely the ominous “officers” as well, who are often ranked prior to the priests (cf. Josh 3:2–3; 23:2: “their elders and heads, their judges and officers,” without mention of the clergy; likewise in 1:10; 24:1), were civilian designations for community leaders. Perhaps the term “officers” also alludes to the scribal function.

Experts have always emphasized that the prophets have a special role in the Deuteronomistic History. It is not for naught that the “historical books” from Joshua to 2 Kings are called the Former Prophets in the Hebrew tradition. The history of Yahweh’s people is always driven by God’s communication, mediated by the mouths of the prophets. In the book of Joshua, the word of Moses continues to have a direct effect; in the book of Judges, the Spirit of Yahweh directly influences the leaders, while from Samuel to Kings now and again messengers of the God of Israel appear who are mentioned by name and given special tasks. How do the communities in the Persian Empire retrospectively assess this entire course of history, directed by Yahweh by means of his intermediaries? What significance did “classical” prophecy have at all for the postexilic community, and to what extent did it evaluate those ancient messengers of God in keeping with the contemporary models of the vividly staged word of God? The ideas of prophetism in the early Jewish community can perhaps be derived from the writings of the period. There were serious reservations with regard to spontaneous, critical objections on the part of God (cf. Neh 6:14; Zech 13:3–6). Yahweh’s message came about through chosen people on the basis of the Torah; Deut 18:15 and 34:10 estab-

167. Nor is it about the hypothesis of Noth, according to which the minor judges had been amphyctionic arbitrators of the Torah. See note 151 above.

lish the criteria: “The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me” and “Never since has there arisen a prophet in Israel like Moses.”

The second, still anonymous prophet (*nābi*) appearing in the Deuteronomistic History clearly speaks as one who proclaims the Torah. He proclaims the exodus and the promise of the land (Judg 6:7–10); the portrayal and message are Deuteronomistic and nothing more than citations of Scripture. They are based on an already extant authoritative source, and this criterion can only have been present beginning with the Persian era. The first appearance of a female messenger of God is less clear. Deborah “was judging Israel,” is described as “prophetess” (*nēbīʾā*), and in her message to Barak almost acts like one (Judg 4:4–7). From this first appearance of a *nēbīʾā*, the trajectory extends to the final prophetess in the Deuteronomistic History, the famous Huldah (2 Kgs 22:14–20). All other prophetic figures are included in this fashion. Huldah, too, is focused on the Torah, since she has to render her appraisal on the just-discovered scroll of the Torah. Amazingly, the Deuteronomistic History engages a female prophetic figure in an extraordinarily important case such as this. She communicates to the royal messengers a classical prediction of disaster, albeit based on the curses referenced in the “book” (2 Kgs 22:15–16). The language, style, and theological content belong to the Deuteronomistic realm, as already established above. At important turning points of history, the tradents unfold a vivid prophetic portrayal that includes both Deborah and Huldah. In turn, it shows reminiscences of the postexilic milieu. Samuel, Elijah, Elisha, and other court prophets mentioned by name are the main characters of the major historical accounts. The story of young Samuel, dedicated to the temple (1 Sam 3), is a lesson on the early Jewish understanding of the prophet. The boy learns his occupation of recognizing Yahweh’s voice and communicating it precisely to the priests—a spiritual symbiosis pointing to the communal organization and theology of the Second Temple. Only in the community of Yahweh of the late period of the Old Testament did the priestly and prophetic practice merge in this way, as other genres of text also indicate (see Ezek 1–3; Zech 3–4; Ps 95). The “word of Yahweh was scarce,” and there were “no longer any visions”—these were observations of the postexilic period (see Isa 58:2; 59:9–15; Ps 74:9). The “word of Yahweh” has already become a set concept; it refers to what had been announced, expresses general, long-term judgments, and aims for the broader literary context of the priestly families of Eli and Zadok (1 Sam 3:11–14; cf. 2:27–36). The “man of God” in 1 Sam 2:27 and Samuel bring their “prophetic” message as admonition in keeping with the Torah or as the proclamation of well-known statutes to a listening audience. They argue like interpreters of Scripture, although the Torah is not mentioned. The understanding of the prophet of the later community expects from God’s

messenger that he is anchored in Yahweh's "word" (see 1 Sam 3:1) and by means of his messages merely causes this "word" to become effective. The prophet is an executive agent of the well-known and obligating word of God. In the case of Samuel's message to Eli, the additional concern is the personal responsibility of the addressee for the conduct in his office and personal life, as well as for the behavior of his clan. Both the faith and the ethos of the individual members of the community are at risk. Since the early Jewish period, they are the alpha and omega of everything pertaining to the life of faith. In addition, there is the behavior of collective "Israel." Samuel also addresses the entire community as a Deuteronomistic preacher: "If you are returning to the LORD with all your heart, then put away the foreign gods and the Astartes from among you. Direct your heart to the LORD and serve him only, and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines" (1 Sam 7:3). The lengthy farewell address of the first prophet, portrayed extensively in the Deuteronomistic History, once again depicts the qualities of the community liturgist established in the Torah (1 Sam 12:6–24). Samuel follows Moses in preaching how much Yahweh was favorably disposed toward the people and how dreadful Israel's manifold apostasy from Yahweh was (12:6–11). Then, in the crisis with the Ammonites in 1 Sam 11, there came the additional blasphemous desire for a royal constitution (11:12), tantamount to a denial of the theocratic leadership of Yahweh. Within certain bounds, the problem may be Near Eastern; here, however, it is clearly postmonarchic. The real alternative between royal and divine leadership is posed only by hindsight. After a demonstration of the superhuman power and justice of Yahweh (11:16–19), it is immediately abandoned again in the text under discussion. The political circumstances have indeed changed; they are no longer shaped by monarchic values, hence the ancient question about obedience to God applies in a new situation. It is about faithfulness to Yahweh exclusively (12:20–25).

Samuel is not distinguished by the title "prophet," but he conducts himself according to the role model of a prophet in the fifth century B.C.E. The messenger of Yahweh must castigate the potential apostasy to other cults as the primary danger; he must stress the great deeds of Yahweh for his chosen people and urge them to revere this one God exclusively. The primary functions of the messenger of Yahweh, after all, are to intercede for the community and to provide those of like faith with good and correct instruction (1 Sam 12:23). However, this means that the prophet of this epoch is already fully integrated into the literary tradition of the community. He teaches the history of salvation and election from the early Jewish perspective, just as the exemplary Moses had done and in accord with the worship-oriented liturgical tradition (cf. Pss 78; 106; 136; Ezra 9; Neh 9).

After his farewell, the prophet Samuel still continues in his ministry for another few chapters. Above all else he criticizes the new king, Saul, and continues to function as a kingmaker (see 1 Sam 13:7b–14; 15:24–31). The crisis concerning Saul culminates in 1 Sam 15, when he apparently ignores the ban criteria of the holy war and high-handedly spares the conquered king of the Amalekites and selected spoils from the ban. Samuel, the strict interpreter of the laws of *ḥērem* (“ban”) of Deut 20, was not pleased with Saul’s high-handed interpretations nor with his insinuation of wanting to bring the preserved loot properly and in a worthy setting as a sacrifice. The radical “prophet” (i.e., teacher of the Torah) demands unconditional and immediate implementation of the commandments concerning holy war. His argument sounds thoroughly postexilic: “To obey is better than sacrifice” (1 Sam 15:22). Parallel passages such as Pss 50:7–15; 40:7–11; Isa 1:11–17; and Jer 17:21–23 come to mind immediately; they originated in the late period, when the meaning of the ministry at the altar had to be examined and the superior value of a personal relationship with Yahweh became recognized and established. For this reason, “hearing” (15:23: *šmʿ*, “obeying” is easily misunderstood!) and “paying heed” to Yahweh’s instruction is vastly more important than a successful sacrificial ritual, which is only able to work mechanically and transsubjectively. “Disobedience” (*mēri*) and “conflict” (*ḥap̄sar*) are less common antonyms describing independent turning away from and rebellion against Yahweh. The entire problem, the individual position over against God, is typical for the postexilic community of faith. Thus the figure of Samuel described above moves in the realm of the late community. There may be older features of the portrait of Samuel to be discovered, those of a shaman, that is, a local priest or ombudsman, but the Deuteronomistic writings classify him among the prophetic figures with postexilic coloring; that is to say, they rank him ahead of all others.

In the lineage of the true proclaimers of the Torah following the rise and succession of David, the famous figures Elijah and Elisha in part appear scattered within the complex of 1 Kgs 17–2 Kgs 13. Both characters are interdependent; behind them are related circles of tradents. Both seem to be multilayered: on the one hand, the tradition portrays them as zealots for Yahweh and as uncompromising pioneers of his exclusive covenant with Israel; on the other, it emphasizes the popular, miraculous features of nonmedical practitioners and men of God. Perhaps the two strands of the tradition are not that far apart, since there are also plenty of miraculous features to be recognized in the books of Joshua and Judges. These are placed in the foreground of the portrait of Elijah and Elisha, who possess zeal for Yahweh. Most interpreters of the Deuteronomistic History regard the pro-

phetic figures as historical but recognize later revisions of the accounts.¹⁶⁸ In my mind, Elijah and Elisha seem to be altogether fictitious characters who have been written into the sequence of events of the history of the monarchy from the postexilic community's perspective. In the context of the ninth century, they appear anachronistic. King Ahab and his Sidonian wife Jezebel, who is charged with the primary blame for Israel's idolatry, cannot bear the historical justification of the Yahweh-only movement. Their hostility to Yahweh and the prophets is just as much the work of the Deuteronomistic writer or editor as Elijah's and Elisha's zeal for Yahweh. The traditions of the two men of God are indeed multilayered and complex, but the striking features of their portrait do not belong to the ancient period of the kings but rather to the period of the Second Temple. This calls for a brief depiction.

Elijah is the great warrior against the prophets of Baal (1 Kgs 18). He alone escaped the fury of Queen Jezebel; nevertheless, he fearlessly opposes the favorite enemy on Israel's throne and challenges him to muster the army of 850 priests of Baal and Asherah against him in a life-and-death competition. It comes to a head on Mount Carmel. Elijah first delivers a message of repentance similar to Moses and Aaron: "How long will you go limping with two different opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him" (18:21). Then he determines the criteria for the divine judgment to be implemented. The rivals slaughter and prepare a sacrificial animal; the true God will send his fire on Elijah's woodpile (1 Kgs 18:23–24). The result is well known and has had a major impact in the history of tradition. By means of ecstatic dances and bloody self-castigation, the servants of Baal make a genuine effort to move their god to a public intervention—in vain. On the other hand, Elijah intensifies the conditions for his proof of the existence of God. Three times he pours water on the pile of wood beneath the burnt offering, then prays to Yahweh; the longed-for fire falls from heaven. Outwardly the prophet's supplication aims at the community and is intended to make the latter confessionally sensitive. Implicitly, however, the evident answer to his petition is also intended as a demonstration against Baal and to intimidate his followers (cf. 18:36–37). The brusque, irreconcilable juxtaposition of Yahweh and the "other" gods is characteristic of a developed theology of exclusiveness. The God of the forefathers, as audibly and visibly in the Pentateuch, is the one, exclusive God of the new community. His word and his revelation is available as the plum line. What

168. In place of a detailed bibliography, see at least Georg Hentschel, *Die Elija-erzählungen* (ETS 33; Leipzig: St.-Bruno, 1977); Hermann-Josef Stipp, *Elischa-Propheten-Gottesmänner* (ATS 24; Erzabtei St. Otilien: EOS, 1987).

is demanded is the undivided turning to Yahweh on the part of the community *and* of each individual member. The seductive prophets of Baal are killed (18:40). It is not the Persian (or Babylonian) religion that endangers Israel's faith but rather the cult of neighboring Phoenicia. This is likely in accord with postexilic reality. They lived alongside and among a pluralistic, open society, shaped by the general culture and religion of the imperial power.

That the young community existed in a multiracial empire and was in close contact especially with the neighboring regions and their ethnic groups—the province of Trans-Euphrates was an important administrative entity, after all—is shown precisely by some of the Elisha narratives. Concerning that miracle-worker, often eccentric, one of the stories told is that he had healed a Syrian general of his skin disease, sent by God (2 Kgs 5). Furthermore (perhaps in conjunction with an unknown “man of God”), he played a part in the battles against Arameans by Israelite kings and even had to carry out a divine mission in Damascus (2 Kgs 6–7; 8:7–15). He is in touch with a woman in northern Shunem (2 Kgs 4:8). If the historical couching is removed from these associations, they become meaningful for the postexilic community.

The story of Naaman the general has novelistic qualities. An Israelite household slave moves the leper to seek healing from Elisha. Initially the patient turns to the king in Samaria but gains only bare dismay from the monarch: “Am I God, to give death or life, that this man sends word to me to cure a man of his leprosy?” (2 Kgs 5:1–7). Elisha hears about “his” king's defensive reaction, offers help but, without diagnosis and by means of an intermediary, orders the leper to dip seven times in the river Jordan (5:8–10). Naaman is angry; he had at least expected a personal meeting and proper religious ceremony (5:11–12). Once again he allows himself to be persuaded by the servants to follow the prophet's instruction, and, contrary to expectation, his health is restored (5:13–14)! The general turns around in order to express his gratitude to Elisha. He endeavors to compensate him royally but ends with a request for two mule-loads of soil from Israel. This is meant to enable him to worship Yahweh henceforth in his native country.

With narrative skill the story amounts to theological statements as they are understood in the context of the postexilic community. For one, the cured leper is converted to Yahweh; he becomes a Syrian proselyte from the highest stratum of society. His confession has the monotheistic ring of that time: “Now I know that there is no God in all the earth except in Israel” (2 Kgs 5:15). Here God is construed as geographically universal. There is no deity except for the one resident in Israel! Naaman acknowledged the community's exclusive claim to the true religion. For this reason, still preju-

diced by particularistic concepts, he asks for soil from the land of Yahweh, which will make the worship of the only true God possible for him (5:17): “for your servant will no longer offer burnt offering or sacrifice to any god except the LORD” (5:17b). Yet he also unexpectedly receives an exceptional approval, allowing him to enter another temple at home in the context of rendering a service; he is permitted to accompany his king into the shrine of Rimmon (5:18). The negative expression “there is no God, except...” is dominant in Second Isaiah (Isa 44:6–8; 45:5, 14, 18, 21; 46:9, etc.). Naaman’s confession states emphatically that Yahweh is associated with the land and the people of Israel; parallels to it can also be found in late texts (see, e.g., the peoples’ pilgrimage to Zion, Isa 2:2–4). The theological perspective of the Naaman pericope is universalistic, as it is possible to be only after the Babylonian exile. The pledge no longer to sacrifice to “other gods” “but to Yahweh alone” fits best into the postexilic period (e.g., Deut 5:6–10; Josh 24:14–15; Jer 44:15–19). The story is a lesson about conversion to true faith in Yahweh, the only God. It comprises turning away from the impotent other gods (renunciation) and turning to the God of Israel. The model of converting to faith in Yahweh underlies many Old Testament texts with a variety of aims (see Gen 35:1–4; Exod 12:43–50; Deut 23:8–9; Josh 24:14–15; Isa 56:6–8). However, proselytism with a confession of faith is possible only after the constitution of the early Judean community (previously the criterion for the possibility of joining was social integration). The conditions for joining, as intimated only vaguely in the case of Naaman, were disputed in the course of time and in changing situations (cf. only Deut 23:2–9; Isa 56:1–6; Exod 12:43–49). Various solutions were practiced. In the case of the story of Naaman, the generous interpretation of the prohibition of foreign gods is conspicuous.

Many other features and characteristics of the Elijah-Elisha cycle are striking; they also seem to belong to the late period and not to the ninth century B.C.E. The Mosaic model of revelation at Sinai is reproduced (1 Kgs 19), and there is a belief in miracles, which stands out already in the book of Joshua, and the celebration of raisings of the dead, which are mentioned for the first time (1 Kgs 17:17–24; in this context a confessional formulation similar to that of Naaman occurs: “Now I know that you are a man of God and that the word of the LORD in your mouth is truth,” 17:24; 2 Kgs 4:18–37). Even the corpse of Elisha effects the resuscitation of one who had been buried (2 Kgs 13:20–21). The focus on an established, well-known “word of Yahweh” permeates all of the texts. A story about the prophet of Micaiah, son of Imlah (1 Kgs 22), which has been included in the portrayal, reinforces the impression that during the time of Elijah and Elisha the issue was a sharp conflict with the belief in Baal among the neighboring peoples—a projec-

tion of the late period reflecting the tensions among the Semitic religions of the Near East. In short, the entire literary context from 1 Kgs 17 to 2 Kgs 13 is highly suspect of being a later arrangement of the ancient history of the kings, in keeping with the pattern of fifth-century ideas. Older traditions have been incorporated, such as the accounts about court prophets or priests: Abiathar serves David as one who obtains oracles (1 Sam 23:6, 9; 30:7), while Nathan and Gad are prophetic mediators between Yahweh and the royal court (2 Sam 7:2ff.; 12:1ff.; 1 Sam 22:5; 2 Sam 24:11ff.). As far as language and posture are concerned, the latter two act like the Deuteronomistic messenger of Yahweh; they support the dynasty and keep it on the right, divinely ordered path.

EXCURSUS: PROPHETS, TORAH, AND COMMUNITY

Overall, from the various contours of offices and the allusions to the temple, assemblies of the community, prayer habits, and the like in the Deuteronomistic History, we are able to construct a picture of the early Judean Yahwistic community of faith and compare it with the findings in Ezra, Nehemiah, the books of the Chronicles, and contemporary psalms. Despite Deut 29–31, the reading of the Torah does not yet have the central significance as in Neh 8. But worship-related functions such as the dedication of the temple, sacrifices, prayer, proclamation, and instruction are strongly attested. Community leaders in the guise of kings carry out all of the phases of this communal worship service. The crowned heads, that is, the immediate successors of Moses, call the community together and arrange all the ceremonies. What does this signify for the reality of the early Judean confessional community? It was not the priests or only the priests, not Aaron and his descendants, who were in charge of the community. The laity carried significant weight. Moses' successors in office, Joshua being the prototype, were seemingly given the highest authority. These findings also agree with the circumstances in Priestly strands of tradition such as the book of Leviticus.¹⁶⁹ The reason for this may have been that the Holy Scriptures contained the treasure of the revelation of God, and these writings were not entrusted to the priests but to the scribes and experts in the law. The kings of the preexilic period apparently were closer to the scribal authorities of the fifth century

169. See Erhard S. Gerstenberger, *Leviticus: A Commentary* (OTL; trans. Douglas W. Stott; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996); Lester L. Grabbe, "The Priests in Leviticus—Is the Medium the Message?" in *The Book of Leviticus: Composition and Reception* (ed. Rolf Rendtorff and Robert A. Kugler; VTSup 93; Boston: Brill, 2003), 207–24.

than the priests who from time immemorial were primarily identified with the ministry at the altar. Attempts at entrusting them with the care and interpretation of the Torah (Ezra, the “priest”) seem artificial and secondary. But where were the prophets according to the witness of the Deuteronomistic tradents? They largely retained the aura of shamans, those ancient mediators of God. Even Isaiah receives features of an archaic healer (2 Kgs 20:7). All of the messengers of God of the Deuteronomistic History have more than human powers, which they activate mostly by means of the word of Yahweh entrusted to them. An anonymous man of God announces judgment to the northern king Jeroboam I in Bethel, on account of his unauthorized assumption of authority, a judgment that was fulfilled in part, while the rest was not carried out until the end of the period of the monarchy (a literary means of linking events, 1 Kgs 13:1–5). Hence the unnamed messenger of God is a figure gifted extraordinarily with power. He uses the word of God with competence and certainty, and that word will attain its final goal in 2 Kgs 23:16–20. The curious continuation of the story, however, also demonstrates that even impressive proclaimers of the will of God can go astray and suffer shipwreck (1 Kgs 13:11–32). Behind this reflective and mischievous story there probably are formulations of the question and current problems of the postexilic period (cf. Jonah). An old prophet from Bethel leads the fellow-prophet returning from his mission astray, against the imposed rule, to accept his hospitality (that of a citizen of the unclean north). God immediately sends a lion that kills the “disobedient” messenger but does not devour him (a sign of God! 13:24–26). Here the separation of the Samaritan territory, carried out by the Assyrians in 722 B.C.E. and sealed theologically in 2 Kgs 17 and under Ezra and Nehemiah, is assumed. Hence the functions and ways of life of the men of God and prophets are given a colorful and multifaceted presentation in the Deuteronomistic History. What are the implications for the early Judean community? What concrete tasks did messengers of God have in the Persian period? Did they even exist still in a community that began to live by Holy Scripture, or are the prophets merely proclaimers of the Torah projected into the past?

There are no simple answers to these questions. On the whole, the convergence of the portrait of the prophet with the model of Moses in the Deuteronomistic History, in other words, with the model of the mediator of the Torah, can be seen in the Deuteronomistic History. This is true of the central figures Elijah and Elisha as well as of the anonymous and court prophets, including Isaiah. (The absence of Jeremiah, i.e., his replacement by the prophetess Huldah in 2 Kgs 22 remains an unresolvable problem.) Also worth noting is that the Deuteronomistic tradents assign the prophets either to small, itinerant groups of “disciples” (see 2 Kgs 4:38–41; 6:1–7) or turn

them into recluses and persecuted outsiders (1 Kgs 17:2–6; 19:4–10; 22:8; 2 Kgs 2:23–25). As a rule, they confront the kings of the northern and southern kingdoms and assist them by means of a word from Yahweh or severely criticize them on account of their conduct in office and life. Thus the prophets seem to be largely conceived as antagonists of the monarchs; contacts with private individuals probably belong to older layers. (It is conspicuous that both Elijah and Elisha were in the habit of maintaining close contact with women; see 1 Kgs 17; 2 Kgs 4.) Appearances before the entire nation or the community are scarce (cf. 1 Kgs 18:21–40; 2 Kgs 2:19; 6:32). Typical are the dialogues between prophet and king: Elijah eye-to-eye with Ahab (1 Kgs 18:16–20; 21:17–24); an anonymous prophet and Micaiah son of Imlah before Ahab (1 Kgs 20:13–22; 22:15–17, 18–28); Elisha in a pastoral conversation with Joash (2 Kgs 13:14–19) and even with the Syrian usurper Hazael (2 Kgs 8:7–13). Some of these encounters have the characteristic of a pure oracular conveyance (1 Kgs 20:13–14, 20, 28). Most of them are embedded in the Deuteronomistic theological history. Has prophetism thereby become an anachronism for the postexilic period? If not, what contemporary functions might divinely commissioned speakers have had in the fifth century?

The emergence of some prophetic books and the editing of others in the communities of the Persian period clearly speak in favor of prophetic phenomena (still) having been familiar, albeit in an adopted contemporary form. There also is the occasional reference to (oppositional!) prophetic figures, such as Noadiah in the book of Ezra-Nehemiah (Neh 6:14). Thus the documentation in the Deuteronomistic History can be interpreted as follows: perhaps in the postexilic period there still were experiences with spontaneous mediators of the words of Yahweh. However, the prophetic appearances were systematized in keeping with the Mosaic prototype. Basically the mediators of messages were nothing more than proclaimers of the Torah, except that Torah apparently was not yet fully identical with the written Word, as we see it in Ezra at the end of the fourth century B.C.E. At any rate, there was still enough preserved of the original concept of free, spontaneous communication of the will of God that prophets cannot be stylized as community leaders even in the narratives of the Deuteronomistic History. Their functions remain reserved rather for the royal prototypes. According to the understanding of the Yahweh communities, prophets have Word-experiences, as well as Word-visions (see, e.g., 1 Kgs 22:19–23) and a development in the Word-event (1 Sam 3). All of this is closely linked with the Yahweh-word tradition initiated and faithfully passed on by Moses. The falsification of this traditional will of Yahweh, however, is a constant danger. In a vision in the royal throne room, Micaiah son of Imlah experiences how a lying spirit offers to lead prophets astray (1 Kgs 22:19–23)!

Concerning the life of the community as such and apart from the stereotyped offices mentioned, we indeed learn far less in the Deuteronomistic History (with the exception of the book of Joshua) than in the Chronistic work. Perhaps the suffering individuals are modeled after the examples of the period (see 1 Kgs 17; 2 Kgs 4; 8:1–6). There is hardly any mention of community activities. Kings, priests, and prophets are the protagonists. Extensive summaries replace more detailed information about the well-being of the people (cf. Judg 2:6–23; 2 Kgs 17). Political information precedes “ecclesiastical” information. Cultic inspections, shaped by the leading lights of the society, are focused transparently on the communal, liturgical events (see Judg 6:25–32; 1 Kgs 8; 2 Kgs 21:1–9). Of interest are the many etiological references to ongoing conditions or facts since antiquity (e.g., “to this day”; see Josh 4:9; 5:9; 6:25; 7:26; 8:28–29; 9:27; 10:27; 13:13; 14:14; 15:63; 22:3, 17; 23:8–9; Judg 1:21, 26; 6:24; 10:4). Thus the tradents cover a wide range from the distant past to their own circumstances of life. The things that formerly were articulated, established, and decided are still valid in the present situation of the reporters. Conversely, contemporary realities create many events and facts of the past.

In conclusion, it should be said that the Deuteronomistic History has adopted much ancient material, certainly including historical information about the royal courts. However, it did originate in the course of the formation of the Judean community. Therefore, many strands and episodes bear the imprint of postexilic expectations, practices, and institutions or are virtually their reflection projected into the past. The “communal laws” of Deut 16–18 provide an impression of the macrostructure of the Judean society;¹⁷⁰ the civil law of Deut 22–25 (also in contrast to Exod 21–23) reveals the network of connections of the local community.

III.2.2. PROPHETIC BOOKS

Becker, Uwe. *Jesaja—von der Botschaft zum Buch* (FRLANT 178; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1997). **Ben Zvi**, Ehud. *Micah* (FOTL 21B; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000). **Blenkinsopp**, Joseph. *A History of Prophecy in Israel* (rev. ed.; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996). **Carroll**, Robert P. *Jeremiah: A Commentary* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986). **Floyd**, Michael H. *Minor Prophets, Part 2* (FOTL 22; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000). **Fritz**, Volkmar, Karl-Friedrich Pohlmann, and Hans-Christoph Schmitt, eds. *Prophet und Prophetenbuch: Fest-*

170. Cf. Rüterswörden, *Gemeinschaft*.

schrift für Otto Kaiser zum 65. Geburtstag (BZAW 189; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1989). **Kessler**, Rainer. "Zwischen Tempel und Tora: Das Michabuch im Diskurs der Perserzeit," *BN* 44 (2000): 21–36. **Kessler**. *Micha* (HTKAT; Freiburg: Herder, 1999). **Lang**, Bernhard. *Ezechiel: Der Prophet und das Buch* (EdF 153; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1981). **Nicholson**, Ernest W. *Preaching to the Exiles* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1970). **Nissinen**, Martti, et al. *Prophets and Prophecy in the Ancient Near East* (SBLWAW 12; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003). **Nissinen**. "Spoken, Written, Quoted, and Invented: Orality and Writtenness in Ancient Near Eastern Prophecy," in *Writings and Speech in Israelite and Ancient Near Eastern Prophecy* (ed. Ehud Ben Zvi and Michael H. Floyd; SBLSymS 10; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000). **Nogalski**, James D. *Literary Precursors to the Book of the Twelve* (BZAW 217; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1973). **Parpola**, Simo. *Assyrian Prophecies* (SAA 9; Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1997). **Reddit**, Paul, and Aaron Scharf, eds. *Thematic Threads in the Book of the Twelve* (BZAW 325; New York: de Gruyter, 2003). **Scharf**, Aaron. *Die Entstehung des Zwölfprophetenbuches* (BZAW 260; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1998). **Watts**, James W., and Paul R. House, eds. *Forming Prophetic Literature* (JSOTSup 235; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996). **Zenger**, Erich, ed. "Wort JHWHs, das geschah..." (*Hos 1,1*): *Studien zum Zwölfprophetenbuch* (HBS 35; Freiburg: Herder, 2002).

That the Old Testament prophetic writings were used by the emerging Judean community in the postexilic period is perfectly obvious. Had this not been the case, these books (or their early stages) would not have been received into the canon. Equally clearly, many peculiarities of the texts, especially their sociotheological connotations, point to postexilic editing, except that postexilic characteristics are not easily distinguished from exilic ones. The dividing line between the two phases of Israel's history is controversial in any case. Thus in volume 3 of this series, Rainer Albertz claimed the bulk of the prophetic writings for the sixth century B.C.E. The main argument for this dating is the consideration that immediately following the catastrophe of 587 B.C.E. the people had to begin coping theologically with the historical trauma. The collection and formation of prophetic predictions of doom, projected back into the period of the monarchy, coupled with the Deuteronomistic construction of history could provide help in understanding the collapse of Israel and Judah. In this way the books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, but also the subject matter of the Book of the Twelve, are said to have been thoroughly dealt with and in part edited several times already in the decades following the fall of Jerusalem. A detailed analysis of such hypotheses would go too far, especially since the views would indeed diverge due to the confused status of the sources. Nevertheless, the following needs to be considered on principle: the span of time between the conquest of Jerusalem by the Babylonians and the Persian takeover (539 B.C.E.) was relatively brief. The process of coming to terms

with the past takes some time, once the initial shock has been overcome; we realize this clearly from the German example after 1945, especially as it has been burdened with problems of guilt. For this reason, Albertz has to shift substantial literary efforts associated with the clarification of the historical problems to the beginning of the Persian rule, especially the new constitution of the temple-community (the "late exilic period"). This perspective seems to me to be essentially correct. The new beginning or, more precisely, the founding of the community of Yahweh since 539 B.C.E., is the premise for the intellectual and theological process of coming to terms with the past. The rebuilding of the temple occupies an important place in this process. But the formation and consolidation of the confessional community cannot have been completed by 515 B.C.E., the time of the rededication of the temple; they extend into the fifth century B.C.E., where they do, in fact, have their focal point.

This yields criteria for the literary shape of the prophetic writings as well. The existence and structure of the community of Yahweh determine the interest in the prophetic tradition and have to be found again in the writings edited during that time. The maturing of "monotheism" can only have developed in the religiously liberal, multiracial empire of the Persian provenance. Clashes with neighboring religions and politically competing provincial governments are typical of the postexilic period. The Judean minority seems to have been quite open-minded as regards the central government and in part was even cooperatively disposed. Perhaps the Achaemenid universal faith in Ahura Mazda, the first, last and only global leader, also promoted the development of the theology of Yahweh. In short, the particular conditions of the Persian hegemony did not go unnoticed by the Judean community. From the living conditions of the latter, the interests in and expectations of Yahweh can be reconstructed. These, in turn, have left traces in the prophetic text collections and editorial work of the contemporary scribes and community leaders. Thus where signs of the established community of Yahweh and its theology, partly functioning exclusively and partly inclusively, can be found in the prophetic corpus of the Old Testament, we are able to see the theologians of the early Judean community at work.

A concern is also in order at this point: in Old Testament scholarship the abstract prophetic word, entrusted to the individual messenger, has almost exclusive validity. The detachment of the "word of Yahweh" from its concrete social fabric, however, merely appears to make its appropriation easier today. In reality, we urgently need their "life settings" in order to evaluate correctly and fully understand the prophetic communication. Where, when, and how was the prophetic word issued and used? At the end of the process of writing, there certainly was no audience eager to read it by any means, as is normal in

our own time. In all likelihood, the prophetic writings were intended for the ear, not the eye, of the listening community. This classification of Old Testament text collections as ancient “talking books” assumes groups in which passages were read aloud (see Neh 8; Jer 36). Communal gatherings probably had declarative and didactic features. It is possible, therefore, that prophetic statements (like texts associated with Torah and Gospels) emerged from the instructional process of the community and secondarily were reduced to the handier form of the scroll. At that time one probably used regionally divergent and presumably quite scarce messages by historical prophetic figures to whom these statements and messages were attributed. If necessary, one also invented prophetic representatives (Elijah, Malachi, etc.). The prophets charge Israel or individuals with departure from faith in Yahweh, as well as with social and cultic misconduct, perceived as “sin” during the Persian period, and they bring the liberating message of the renewed care of Yahweh, after years of humiliation and foreign rule. Behind their charges, the definite rules of the Torah can be recognized in the Persian period. The prophets no longer declare spontaneous messages. They proclaim a well-known order; in other words, they basically are guardians and interpreters, possibly also functioning as continuing “scribes” of the Torah (see “Excursus: Prophets, Torah, and Community” above). This typically contemporary prophetic function, which was unthinkable in the Babylonian exile because the Holy Scriptures were not yet available, helps one understand the reading of the texts of disaster and salvation in the gatherings of the community. For the community, prophetic words were just as much Torah, words sent by Yahweh, as were the speeches of Moses.

Presumably only a chronological ordering of all the texts used in worship and in other gatherings (preeminence of Moses) led to the shaping of the Pentateuch and the prophetic and liturgical corpora of Scripture. In this context there may also have been various centers for collecting prophetic utility texts, for instance, Jerusalem and the settlements of the Babylonian *golah*. In the end, the extant collections were structured according to the proportional principle of 3 to 12 (perhaps in memory of the three sets of patriarchal parents and the twelve sons of Israel?) as pericopes for public reading with continued use. According to this view of things, we would have to break completely with the concept of prophetic authorship that continues to dominate.¹⁷¹ Neither original prophets nor circles of prophetic disciples and tradents would then

171. See Bernhard Duhm, *Israel's Propheten* (2nd ed.; Tübingen: Mohr, 1922); F. F. Deist, “The Prophets: Are We Heading for a Paradigm Switch?” in Fritz, *Prophet und Prophetenbuch*, 1–18; Erhard S. Gerstenberger, “Gemeindebildung in Prophetenbüchern,” in Fritz, *Prophet und Prophetenbuch*, 82–97; idem, “Ausblick,” in Joseph Blenkinsopp,

be the writers of these books. In this case, the Deuteronomistically shaped headings to some works would have no historical informational value. They could only be considered data for a late division and placement of the tradition in the concept of history of the postexilic community. In consideration of the discussion of the prophetic writings in the preceding volumes of this series, I am content with portraying the late perspective of the community of Yahweh by means of some observations.

III.2.2.1. The Book of the Twelve

The group of writings (Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi) concluding the Book of the Twelve Prophets, as well as the legend of Jonah, have already been claimed above for the Persian period. Did the final composition of this motley array of a “book of prophets” also emerge during this period of time? Almost all experts reckon with some sort of editing in the early history of the Second Temple; no one still shifts the rise of the now-extant small collection of books into the preexilic period. The only contentious question is the extent of the redactional activity of the contemporary scribes and theologians, that is, how deeply they intruded on, reshaped, and augmented the substance of prophetic traditions that had been handed down. According to a minority of experts, the tradents and editors of the Minor Prophets worked with marginal traditional content. For this reason their share in the creation of the text is larger than traditional scholarship is willing to allow. I do not wish to present new literary analyses; there are enough of them already. Instead, we shall examine important elements associated with genre and the motifs of the Book of the Twelve in regard to their possible rootedness or editing in the Persian period. Therefore, it is necessary to read this prophetic composition selectively from this late perspective, but with the focus on the final product.

The various titles in the corpus of the Twelve partly belong to the Deuteronomistic circles and therefore in all likelihood to the early period of the Second Temple or the late exilic period. Older redactional introductory forms exist and can be clearly delimited from the Deuteronomistic stereotypes, such as Hos 1:2a; Obad 1a; Hab 3:1. The Deuteronomistic headings stand out because, along with the name and often also the prophet’s father’s name, they generally strive to indicate the time frame of the prophet’s work. The same interest guided the editors of the collections of Isaiah and Jeremiah (Isa 1:1; Jer 1:1–3). In the case of the two major prophetic books, a chain of names

of Judean kings serves the historical location of the prophet mentioned in the heading: four monarchs for Isaiah (Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah) and three for Jeremiah (Josiah, Jehoiakim, Zedekiah). In the view of the editors, prophets had a certain period of office; in other words, they were permanently engaged messengers of Yahweh, not merely ad hoc, from time to time. They confronted kings who are mentioned by name and belonged to the historical context of the respective period. According to this school of thought, those titular prophets served the “word of Yahweh” continuously. Such conceptions of the prophetic office or prophetic rank are in a certain conflict with the spontaneous, partly ecstatic phenomenon of prophecy known from the ancient Near East and the Old Testament. Already by their historical retrojections, the Deuteronomistic headings betray contemporary concepts of an institutionalized practice of the word of Yahweh.

The Book of the Twelve clearly shows traces of the Deuteronomistic construction of history. It extends from Hosea (1:1), via Amos (1:1) and Micah (1:1), to Zephaniah (1:1). The temporal fixed points—the reigns of Judean and Israelite kings—agree with those given in the headings of the books of Isaiah and Jeremiah. Hosea, like Isaiah, is supposed to have preached during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. Additionally, the northern king of Israel, Jeroboam, appears in Hos 1:1—a reference to the words of Hosea that in part were pointedly addressed to Ephraim. For Amos, only the reigns of Uzziah and Jeroboam are noted. His words against Samaria likely provoked the mention of the king of northern Israel. On the other hand, Micah is again assigned to Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, with the express remark that in his messages he came out against Samaria and Jerusalem. Finally, Zephaniah is supposed to have appeared under Josiah, who, from the Deuteronomistic perspective, was the final important descendant of David. This yields a time frame that excludes the prophetic work of Elijah and Elisha, because it is already anchored in the historical portrayal of the ninth century. Then, in the mid-eighth century the writing prophets begin, according to the Deuteronomistic reconstruction, and extend to the end of the Judean state and, by means of the heading to Ezekiel, on to the early decades of the sixth century. Via the four headings mentioned, the Book of the Twelve is first of all associated with the classical main period (Uzziah to Josiah) in chronological order (Hosea, Amos, Micah, and Zephaniah). Then follow the books dated explicitly to the Persian period: Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. Hence the overall Deuteronomistic idea is quite clear: since the Mosaic period there has been an uninterrupted sequence of prophetic messengers of Yahweh. They proclaimed the will of God directly to the people or to the king. Principally their message is “Torah,” instruction, for the community. The confessional community formed in the exilic and postexilic period is assumed all along the line. The Deuteronomistic

prophets appear and speak up for this community everywhere, with announcements of disaster as well. From this perspective, prophecy denotes nothing more than building up and maintaining the community in terms of the Torah.

The argument can be solidified in view of other elements of the headings. Next to the interest in the historical location, the headings are generally interested in the type of divine communication. Two designations dominate the headings. For one, the concept of the “word of Yahweh” is important. This word “happened” or “came” to the prophet (Hebrew *hyh*), or it was “seen” (*hzh*). Now the term “vision” also occurs independently of the term “word” (Obad 1; cf. Isa 1:1). Apparently the vision is a more elemental communication from God with which the Deuteronomistic redactors have to deal. Evidently for them the concept of the “word of Yahweh” is of paramount importance (Hos 1:1; Joel 1:1; Jonah 1:1; Mic 1:1; Zeph 1:1; Mal 1:1). Perhaps this connotes the Torah, the word of Yahweh as such, even if this is rarely expressed directly. Other expressions of a prophetic collection, especially those with the ominous term *maššā*, “burden” (?), “saying” (?),¹⁷² and lacking book-headings (Hag 1:1; Zech 1:1) may not be the responsibility of the Deuteronomists. Different editors have been at work in this case, who perhaps were also responsible for the arrangement of the twelve “books.” The Deuteronomist corpus of the “minor” prophetic writings was possibly comprised of only four divisions; however, they had a different scope than those that are now introduced with Deuteronomistic wording, namely, the “books” of Hosea, Amos, Micah, and Zephaniah.¹⁷³

Apart from the formulaic headings of the books, the bulk of liturgical texts contained in the collection of the Twelve is striking. To be sure, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel contain poetic and possibly liturgical texts as well. In any case, we cannot avoid considering the communal use of Old Testament tradition as the first and most probable purpose. Where else but in the gatherings of postexilic adherents of Yahweh were the Scripture traditions supposed to have been read aloud? The liturgical parts in the prophetic writings are particularly striking because they indicate the “communal” participation (i.e., the party addressed). If this occurs by means of a first-person plural, there is no any doubt about the communal formation of the text.¹⁷⁴ Here I cite but a few examples: “Come let us return to the LORD, for it is he

172. Thus Nah 1:1; Hab 1:1; and Mal 1:1 in headings; cf. Isa 13:1; 15:1; 17:1; Zech 9:1; 12:1, etc.

173. See the discussion in Albertz, *Israel in Exile*, 203–45.

174. See Erhard S. Gerstenberger, “Psalms in the Book of the Twelve: How Misplaced Are They?” in *Thematic Threads in the Book of the Twelve* (ed. Paul L. Redditt and Aaron Schart; BZAW 325; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2003), 72–89.

who has torn, and he will heal us" (Hos 6:1). Thus the song of repentance of a community in worship (6:1–3) begins with the call to venture returning to Yahweh and thereby overcome alienation from him. The immediate context for this communal psalm also comprises liturgical speech: Hos 5:8–14 is an announcement of disaster in the first-person singular of God, represented by a speaker, and 6:4–7:7 contains further lamenting, reflective and threatening words of God. Hosea 14:2–9 repeats this pattern: an appeal to return (14:2–3) is followed by a communal petition for forgiveness (14:3b–4) and, in this instance, words of encouragement: "I will heal their disloyalty; I will love them freely, for my anger has turned from them" (14:4). Yahweh promises flourishing life (14:5–8). A Torah-saying concludes the liturgy (14:9).

Texts such as this read like excerpts of worship services. Such readings increase substantially in the Book of the Twelve. Joel 1–2 is a single liturgy. Amos contains scattered fragments of psalms that can scarcely be explained from literary usage (Amos 4:13; 5:8–9; 9:5–6). Because of its heading and postscript, Hab 3 is widely recognized as a theophanic psalm. Obadiah belongs to the genre of oracles against the nations and can readily be understood in a liturgical context.¹⁷⁵ The books of Micah, Nahum, and Zephaniah contain extensive hymnal material. Brief texts with a liturgical agenda occur so broadly that the question needs to be asked in every instance how they are even able to penetrate collections of prophetic messenger formulas. If one further adds the strongly paraenetic, proclamational tenor of many prophetic sayings and faces the issue of the life setting afresh, it is not possible to maintain the dominant view that prophets are essentially lone proclaimers of the word of God; in this case, all of the features fit the picture of the liturgical and didactic communal gathering quite well. Such gatherings, however, are inconceivable prior to the exile because, from a sociological perspective, a confessional community of Yahweh did not yet exist. Presumably festivals and rituals of the preexilic population did not have the confessional trait of the later community of Yahweh. The conditions for communities of this kind arise only as a result of the exile. Further, it was only due to the politics of reintegration promoted by Persia and the setting up of an ethnic Yahweh-denomination that the possibility was created for parochial communal worship with its sacral center in Jerusalem.

The topics broached in the Book of the Twelve and the emerging contours of offices and community also point to a postexilic context. A central point in the proclamation of most of the Minor Prophets is Yahweh's demand

175. See Hans Walter Wolff, *Obadiah and Jonah: A Commentary* (trans. Margaret Kohl; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1986).

of exclusive worship by his adherents. In the accounts of Elijah and Elisha, this identical demand is consistently articulated in Deuteronomistic language and in keeping with Deuteronomistic conceptions. The picture of the Book of the Twelve is more varied. The respective sayings and speeches occasionally have a clear affinity with the Deuteronomistic expressions (see Hos 4:12–19). Frequently, however, they are also independent and reflect a whole range of claims of veneration. They do not consistently bear the imprint of a universal, radically excluding faith negating all other deities. For the postexilic period, however, this must be assumed. Prophetic rebuke on account of lukewarm worship of God is also known from times of polytheistic interpretations of the world. For instance, Assyrian messengers or spokespersons of a god venerated in Mari occasionally admonished the king to more intensive, more determined, or also preferred service for a certain deity. The Neo-Assyrian collections of prophetic sayings to Esarhaddon and Assurpanipal contain largely promises of salvation to both rulers. In one of the texts, Ishtar of Arbela unequivocally causes the former to be told that her welfare has limits: “Have I not given to you like (otherwise) no one else? ... (And you), what have you given to me?”¹⁷⁶ A Mari letter a millennium earlier sounds similar. Addu (=Adad), the ruler of Kalassu, lets Zimrilim know that he had raised him and brought him to the throne. But if the king did not obey his god, “What I have given (him) I can also take away again!”¹⁷⁷ Beyond such predictions of doom specifically addressed to the king, prophetic sayings following a postexilic model should explicitly show the universality and uniqueness of Yahweh, his domain over all the nations, Israel’s thought of unreserved election, commitment to the will of God, uniquely portrayed in the Torah, and similar specifics of the epoch. This does not render impossible that a more sedate prophetic rebuke on account of unfaithfulness toward the particular God or neglecting his worship during the period of the exile could also be understood in terms of a pronounced monotheism. However, we are looking for passages clearly revealing the theology of the Persian period.

The Book of the Twelve begins with a major debate about Israel’s break with Yahweh, illustrated dramatically by means of the marriages of Hosea (Hos 1–3). Here Yahweh’s relationship with his people, as in Jer 3:6–11; Isa 62:1–5; and Ezek 16; 23, is construed as a bond of matrimony that is able to provide the human partner with the highest fulfillment, fellowship with God and prosperity (see Hos 2:1–3, 20–25). Israel’s failure, however,

176. Table K 2401, III, 18.17.24, in K. Hecker, “Assyrische Propheten,” *TUAT* 2.1:61; Parpola, *Assyrian Prophecies*, 26 (“cultic demands”).

177. Table A 1121 combined with A 2731, line 22–23, in M. Dietrich, “Propheten-briefe aus Mari an König Zimri-Lim,” *TUAT* 2.1:86; cf. Nissinen, *Prophets and Prophecy*.

leads to Yahweh's repudiation and misery (2:11–15). During what period of time did the marriage imagery¹⁷⁸ in the Old Testament and here specifically in the book of Hosea come to light? Is the meaning of the picture relative or absolute? In other words, are the tradents thinking in universal or regional categories? Although unmistakably diverse layers of the composition are evident—Hos 1:4, for instance, begins with Jehu's bloody deed in the valley of Jezreel (2 Kgs 10:1–14)—the entire textual orbit nevertheless aims at a temporally and spatially comprehensive understanding of Israel's existence. For the people of Yahweh there is only one possibility of survival, namely, on Yahweh's side. Just as women effectively have no other choice but to live together with their husbands, so Israel and Judah (the division into two has been adopted from the history of the kings!) find their context of life only in Yahweh. The universal aspect of Yahweh as creator and ruler of the world is not contained in the metaphor. Yet the picture carries the one-sided, exclusive relationship and therefore represents a poetic realization of Yahweh's unconditional claim to his people. As in other Deuteronomistic texts, breaking away is theologically branded as “whoring” (e.g., Hos 2:4–7; Jer 2:23–25; 3:6–10; Ezek 16; 23). Actually, this metaphor is only possible after the consolidation of a permanent covenantal community. The preexilic monarchic structures were based on dynastic agreements with the national God, Yahweh; they were not suitable for such conceptions of a civil bond of matrimony.

Theological conceptions of Yahweh and his universal rule over all (neighboring) nations are indeed represented extensively in the Book of the Twelve as well. They supply the statements referring to Israel with regard to the global perspective. They culminate in the imminent “day of Yahweh” found in several books of the Minor Prophets. Here a truly globalizing, monotheizing theology is at work, which is best conceivable in the Persian phase of Israel's history of faith.

Concerning the first aspect, the rule of Yahweh over the nations of the world, prophetic words in the Book of the Twelve are directed against the immediate neighbors of Judah and Israel and against the world powers of Assyria and Babylonia. The book of Amos begins with a curious cycle. The divine voice is directed in the form of numeric wisdom sayings against the neighbors in Western Samaria and then aims at the small states situated in the south and finally in the east (Amos 1:3–2:3). “For three transgressions ...

178. See Gerlinde Baumann, *Liebe und Gewalt: Die Ehe als Metapher für das Verhältnis JHWH-Israel in den Prophetenbüchern* (SBS 185; Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2000).

and for four, I will not revoke the punishment” is the stereotypical introductory formula. Yahweh proves to be the protector of his chosen people (see Amos 3:2); he calls the neighbors to account for their encroachment on Israel and thereby demonstrates his international authority, quite the opposite of a particularistic disposition such as is observed in Mic 4:5, for instance. Under the political conditions of the second half of the eighth century B.C.E., Yahweh’s claim of criminal jurisdiction beyond the boundaries of Israel would probably have to be construed as illusionary and arrogant. In the multiracial state under Persian provenance, however, such claims of influence by a community with a religious orientation only, rather than with a political one, is certainly comprehensible. Nothing changes the ambitious religious expectations of the cycle of Amos, not even the fact that in Amos 2:4–12 the tradents surprisingly direct Yahweh’s penal justice to their own southern and northern Israelite society in various phases. The international horizon of many passages in Amos (see Amos 3:9; 6:2–3; 9:5–9) is further support for a theology that is to be understood as increasingly universal. A listing of neighboring nations against which Yahweh will take punitive action also appears in Zeph 2:4–11; in the following verses it moves toward the more distant Cushites and Assyrians (2:12–15).

The motif of “Yahweh and Israel among the other nations” belongs to the firmly established findings with regard to the twelve minor and three major prophets of the Old Testament. The collecting and editing redactors of the late period also wanted to determine their own communal identity by means of the sayings concerning foreign nations through their imaginary prophetic figures. The “book” of Obadiah, which is only artificially constructed (extensive contact with Jer 49:7–22; Isa 34:5–15; Ezek 25:12–14), is addressed against the Edomites to the south, probably along the lines of Amos 1:11–12. The central theme of the books of Jonah, Nahum, and Zephaniah, in part or as a whole, is the Assyrian threat or foreign rule. Historical experiences are perhaps continuing to have an effect here. The Assyrian campaigns of conquest to the west, to the Mediterranean, and on to the capture of Egypt had a traumatizing effect because of their brutality and remained lodged in the collective memory. But when the sparsely available traditions from the eighth and seventh centuries B.C.E. were revised and expanded in the Persian period, the term “Assyrian” changed into a cipher for every kind of political, imperial or regional oppression:

and he shall be the one of peace. If the Assyrians come into our land and tread upon our soil, we will raise against them seven shepherds and eight installed as rulers. They shall rule the land of Assyria with the sword, and the land of Nimrod with the drawn sword; they shall rescue us from the Assyrians if they come into our land or tread within our border. (Mic 5:5–6)

In this text, originating in the Persian period at the earliest,¹⁷⁹ the designation “Assyrian” stands for any invader or tyrant. The chosen community of the period, revealing itself in the “we,” is self-conscious enough to include Yahweh, the ruler of the world, definitely in the self-defense of the country, also against powers that legendarily could have a devastating effect. Nahum and Zephaniah deal with Nineveh, an Assyrian capital, the former in an editorial heading (Nah 1) and by citing the name in the text (2:8; 3:7, 18 = Assyria) and the latter more concealed (Zeph 2:13). Both prophetic writings possibly react against the protective treatment that Nineveh experiences in the book of Jonah. Nahum 3:1–7 describes the battle against, the victory over, and the violation of the enemies: “Horsemen charging, flashing sword and glittering spear, piles of dead, heaps of corpses, dead bodies without end—they stumble over the bodies! Because of the countless debaucheries of the prostitute, gracefully alluring, mistress of sorcery” (Nah 3:3–4a). The news of the destruction or of the surrender of major Assyrian cities (and of their reconstruction!) has been preserved equally for centuries in the ancient Near Eastern tradition as did that of the destruction of Babylon (cf. Gen 11:1–9). This legend is apparently also used in the writings of Nahum and Zephaniah; long after the demise of the Assyrian Empire, it is intended to make the uncertain community of Yahweh aware of the unlimited power of their God. Just as the legendarily domineering Assyrians, bristling with power, have been humiliated by Yahweh, the universal God—the desecration of the capital stands *pars pro toto* for the victory over the entire empire—so in every new danger the God of Israel will also assert himself on behalf of his chosen people, even against the largest human powers. The specific references to Babylon are scarce in the Book of the Twelve; both Mic 4:10 and Zech 6:10 reflect back on the distant time of the exile. Zechariah 5:11 reckons with a heterodox Jewish temple in the “land of Shinar”; Hab 1:6 (probably anachronistically) sees the Chaldeans as Yahweh’s threatening, universal, punitive armada.

The orientation of the book of Zephaniah is predominantly eschatological.¹⁸⁰ After the heading it begins with an end-time scenario of apocalyptic proportions:

I will utterly sweep away everything from the face of the earth, says the LORD. I will sweep away humans and animals; I will sweep away the birds of

179. Kessler, *Micha*, 234.

180. See Walter Dietrich and Milton Schwantes, *Der Tag wird kommen* (SBS 170; Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1996).

the air and the fish of the sea. I will make the wicked stumble. I will cut off humanity from the face of the earth, says the LORD. (Zeph 1:2–3)

A comprehensive nightmare comparable to that of Isa 24: life on earth becomes extinct! Hard on its heels the message is put in concrete terms for Judah and Jerusalem (Zeph 1:4–13). Then follows the key phrase “Day of Yahweh” as substantiation, as it were, for the eschatological catastrophe. The classic visualization of the judgment has penetrated deeply into the consciousness of the Christian tradents as well, as a motif of the *dies irae*:

The great day of the LORD is near, near and hastening fast; the sound of the day of the LORD is bitter, the warrior cries aloud there. That day will be a day of wrath, a day of distress and anguish, a day of ruin and devastation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness, a day of trumpet blast and battle cry. (Zeph 1:14–16a)

The enemies of Israel also will have to give an account at the dreadful reckoning on the Day of Yahweh (Zeph 2:4–15), yet the community of Yahweh’s followers is the primary addressee (1:4–13; 3:1–7); for a comparison, the listing of four leadership functions in Zeph 3:3–4 may be considered. But the eradication of evil in the world has a shining counterpart, namely, the reordering of the nations of the world, the salvation of the “remnant of Israel” and life under God’s rule: “At that time I will change the speech of the peoples to a pure speech, that all of them may call on the name of the LORD and serve him with one accord” (Zeph 3:9). The “final judgment” (3:8) also purifies the “remnant of Israel”: “they shall do no wrong and utter no lies” (3:13). Paradisiacal salvation awaits those who escape the judgment, and this salvation is imagined as universal, including Judah and the nations. The texts of Zephaniah appear like an excerpt of a communal worship liturgy. Broad accusation and announcement of judgment are followed by prophecies of salvation; they are then taken up and concluded by a hymnal response of the community, that is, the call for jubilation and praise (Zeph 3:14–18), once again underscored by divine promises (3:19–20).

The tense topics of judgment and salvation, final judgment, and the new creation of the world are also represented elsewhere in the Book of the Twelve. In its first two chapters the “book” of Joel reflects the structure of a worship-related action against a threatening locust plague, which then unexpectedly transitions into the scenario of the Day of Yahweh and the final judgment (see 2:1–11: “The day of the LORD is coming, it is near,” 2:1; “the day of the LORD is great,” 2:11). The second part of Micah (chs. 4–7) in part examines eschatological themes and questions about how the community of Yahweh will fare in turbulent times; it ends in a miraculous renewal of the people of Yahweh:

Shepherd your people with your staff, the flock that belongs to you, which lives alone in a forest in the midst of a garden land; let them feed in Bashan and Gilead as in the days of old. As in the days when you came out of the land of Egypt, show us marvelous things. The nations shall see and be ashamed of all their might; they shall lay their hands on their mouths; their ears shall be deaf; they shall lick dust like a snake, like the crawling things of the earth; they shall come trembling out of their fortresses; they shall turn in dread to the LORD our God, and they shall stand in fear of you. (Mic 7:14–17)

Toward the end the “books” of Hosea and Amos salvific sounds for the future are sounded; Habakkuk’s psalm celebrates the theophany of Yahweh for the salvation of his community (Hab 3). “You came forth to save your people” (3:13); “I will exult in the God of my salvation” (3:18). The allusions to a relevant messianic expectation out of the event of the rededication of the temple (Hag 2:23) agree in principle with the more general announcements of a divinely sent new king (cf. Mic 5:1–3; Zech 9:9–12; the last part of the book, chs. 12–14, are frequently referred to as an “apocalypse,” in any case). In short, for the new Judean community the Persian period also brought entry into eschatological hopes. The eschatological expectation must have seriously concerned the people of that time. The intellectual climate of the Persian period presumably provided the impetus for this: the Zoroastrian faith had a rigorous ethical orientation, and its essential goal was the final judgment, dealing with the decision about life or death.

Is the Book of the Twelve also lucid for the community structures of the late period? In any case, the liturgical texts of worship allow activities of the community to shine through. The texts in which the “I” of the prophetic speaker (see Mic 2:11; 3:8; Hab 2:1) or the “we” of the gathered community (Hos 6:1–3; Mic 7:17–20; Hab 1:12) appear would need to be examined in conjunction with the “we” psalms.¹⁸¹ How do the prophetic figures within the corpus relate to this? Are they cultic officers? In contrast to the book of Jeremiah, for instance, biographical elaboration is scarce. Apart from the infrequent references in the headings of the books and the brief, stylized episodes of Amos 7:10–17 and Hos 1 and 3, there is hardly a mention of the fate of the messengers of God or their communal function. The prophetic manner of speaking alternates between rock-hard announcements of disaster, didactic reproaches, and pastoral, wisdom-oriented reflections. In our understanding, harsh, uncompromising denunciations of wrong conduct are most likely to be associated with the type of spontaneous messengers of God. If this way

181. See Erhard S. Gerstenberger, *Psalmen und Ritualpraxis* (HBS 36; Freiburg: Herder, 2003), 80–83.

of speaking is still associated with visionary experiences, such as in Amos 7:1–9; 8:1–3; 9:1–4, for instance, the emotion of the messenger, brought about by the Spirit, which characterizes prophetic existence in many ancient Near Eastern sources, becomes evident immediately. Such stylizing of the messenger of God, however, is questionable for the late period (cf. Zech 13:2–6). Other styles of speaking, especially admonition, the call for repentance, consolation, reassurance, and establishing external limits, are much more fitting for the portrait of the postexilic community. Occasionally prophetic sayings mention communal leadership functions such as prophets and priests. The late, systematizing designation *nābî*, “prophet,” is used predominantly (33 times). Older terms such as “seer” (twice: Amos 7:12; Mic 3:7), “man of God,” “dreamer” (once: Joel 3:1), “diviners” (twice: Mic 3:7; Zech 10:2; cf. Mic 5:11) occur very rarely. The “new” terms related to offices in the community of confession and Scripture—“scribes” (cf. only Hab 2:2), wise men, officers, and arbitrators—are also almost entirely lacking. Only references to the Torah and to justice occur here and there, which should not be pushed back into the period of the monarchy; for Mal 2–3 and Hag 2:11 the late setting is clear. Yet Hos 4:6, 8:1, 12, and Amos 2:4 are to be placed back to the period of the monarchy; for Mal 2–3 and Hag 2:11, however, the late setting is clear. Yet Hos 4:6, 8:1, 12, Amos 2:4, Mic 4:2, Hab 1:4, and Zeph 3:4 (references to the Torah) have to be considered as well, such as the occurrence of *mišpāṭ*, “justice,” “verdict” (e.g., Hos 2:21; 5:1; 6:5; 12:7; Amos 5:24; 6:12; Mic 3:1–8; 6:8; 7:9; Hab 1:4), which express a strong affinity to the Torah. Thus the older corpus of the Twelve contains more references to postexilic dispensation of justice and ordinances than normally assumed. The reference to the “just” as a designation of those faithful to the Torah is conspicuous in a few instances (see, e.g., Hos 14:10; Amos 5:12; Mic 7:2; Hab 1:4, 13; 2:4). Strictly sapiential testimonies (e.g., Hos 14:10; Mic 6:8) also gain significance in this context. Thus many indicators point to a frequent use of the texts or to their revision by the community of Yahweh in the Persian period.

III.2.2.2. Isaiah

Becker, Uwe. *Jesaja—von der Botschaft zum Buch* (FRLANT 178; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1997). **Berges**, Ulrich. *Das Buch Jesaja: Komposition und Endgestalt* (HBS 16; Freiburg: Herder, 1998). **Bosshard-Nepustil**, Erich. *Rezeptionen von Jesaja 1–39 im Zwölfprophetenbuch* (OBO 154; Fribourg: Universitätsverlag; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1997). **Broyles**, Craig C., and Craig A. Evans, eds. *Writing and Reading the Scroll of Isaiah* (VTSup 70.1; Leiden: Brill, 1997). **Childs**, Brevard S. *The Struggle to Understand Isaiah as Christian Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004). **Dim**, Emmanuel Uchenna. *The Eschatological Implications of Isa 65 and 66*

as the *Conclusion of the Book of Isaiah* (Bible in History 3; New York: Lang, 2005). **Höffken**, Peter. *Jesaja: Der Stand der theologischen Diskussion* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2004). **Gouldner**, Michael D. *Isaiah as Liturgy* (SOTSMS; Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2004). **Kaiser**, Otto. *Isaiah 1–12: A Commentary* (2nd ed.; trans. John Bowden; OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983). **Kiesow**, Klaus. *Exodustexte im Jesajabuch* (OBO 24; Fribourg: Universitätsverlag; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1979). **Kratz**, Reinhard G. *Kyros im Deuterojesaja-Buch* (FAT 1; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1991). **Park**, Kyung-Chul. *Die Gerechtigkeit Israel's und das Heil der Völker: Kultus, Tempel, Eschatologie und Gerechtigkeit in der Endgestalt des Jesajabuches* (BEAT 52; Frankfurt: Lang, 2003). **Vincent**, J. M. *Studien zur literarischen Eigenart und zur geistigen Heimat von Jesaja Kap 40–55* (BEATAJ 5; Frankfurt: Lang, 1977). **Williamson**, Hugh G. M. *The Book Called Isaiah* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994).

Apart from the Psalter, the book of the prophet Isaiah is the most extensive in the Old Testament canon. Because of the great variety of texts it contains, it must have undergone a complex genesis. Thousands of lines of text, from various periods and situations, have been accumulated under the name providing the title of a certain “Isaiah, son of Amoz.” The rough division of the material into prophecies of disaster, sayings concerning foreign nations, and proclamation of salvation has only limited usefulness as a description of growth. The literary structuring into three distinct, chronologically sequential books (Isa 1–39; 40–55; 56–66) is of little value as well, because especially the first part also contains many passages from later periods. For our purposes it will again be best to consider the texts attributed to Isaiah as a lot of quite “accidentally” collected readings, which probably had been gathered since the beginning of the exile and more or less received their present form in the Persian period.

The third part of the Isaiah scroll, the so-called Trito-Isaiah (Isa 56–66), is generally attributed to the phase following the rededication of the temple, as has been discussed above (§III.1.2.2). The passages associated with Deutero-Isaiah (apart from Isa 40–55, several other pericopae are attributed to it, e.g., Isa 35), however, draw upon the spirit of optimism of the deported Judeans in Babylon; they sense that a fundamentally new beginning is available or has already been given. The established date for that turn was the year 539 B.C.E., when Cyrus entered Babylon unopposed and was in fact welcomed as a liberator by the native priests of Marduk. In this case the record of the “songs and sayings about God by the repatriates” (W. Caspari, 1934) may have begun during or, more likely, after the repatriation, so that this major section of the book of Isaiah belongs in the Persian period as well.¹⁸²

182. Albertz deals in detail with the book of Deutero-Isaiah, which, in his view, is

Regardless of how many editions the collection of the sayings and songs of Deutero-Isaiah actually involved, the question is how the communities of the Second Temple received the message. The relevant texts are among the most important in the Old Testament canon as a whole. They express dramatically and with lasting effect the spiritual and theological turn in the Babylonian colonies of deported Judeans. The renewal of the community of Yahweh in the multiracial world of Persian molding is reality. In place of the oppressive Babylonian politics of economy and religion enters a new power that, to a large extent, leaves the religious and ethnic minorities with their peculiarities. Cyrus also appears to the Judean theologians as a liberator, indeed, as the “anointed” of God (see above §§I.1 and III.2; Isa 45:1–4). This is incredible, considering everything that we know otherwise about Judean particularism and belief in election. The rebuilding of Jerusalem, including its temple of Yahweh, is the outward sign of the fundamental, radical change under Cyrus:

I am the LORD, who made all things, who alone stretched out the heavens, ... who confirms the word of his servant and fulfills the prediction of his messengers; who says to Jerusalem, “It shall be inhabited,” and of the cities of Judah, “They shall be rebuilt, and I will raise up their ruins,” who says to the deep, “Be dry—I will dry up your rivers”; who says of Cyrus, “He is my shepherd, and he shall carry out all my purpose”; and who says of Jerusalem, “It shall be rebuilt,” and of the temple, “Your foundation shall be laid.” (Isa 44:24b, 26–28)

The Babylonian empire is finished. It had enslaved the subjugated peoples. In the Judean community of exiles, liberation takes on the hues of the legendary exodus out of Egypt under Moses. The literature reflects an interplay between the motives of the drama of the exodus in days gone by and the return home at the beginning of the Persian Empire.¹⁸³ Contempt, gloating, and hatred on the part of the exiled and now liberated Judeans are directed against the former oppressors (Isa 47:1–4). In this radical change of global political proportions, faith in the only God and ruler of the world, the creator and liberator of Israel, becomes stronger in the small community of exiled Judeans. The texts of Deutero-Isaiah are glowing testimonies of this universal-particular belief, which we describe as monotheistic. They resemble

comprised of two editions; he places already the first edition in parallel with the rebuilding of the temple (520–515 B.C.E.); *Israel in Exile*, 376–433.

183. See Kiesow, *Exodustexte*; Jorge V. Pixley, *On Exodus: A Liberation Perspective* (trans. Robert R. Barr; Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1987).

the genre of “sermon,”¹⁸⁴ for they presuppose a listening community, partly reacting with (thoughts of) objections (see Isa 44:21–22; 43:10–13; 44:6–9; 48:12–13). In these passages of Deutero-Isaiah, everything revolves around the uniquely effective God, Yahweh. He is the creator and sustainer of the world; he assigned his people Israel a key role in the history of the world. The hope and real experience of liberation from the Babylonian rule motivates the speakers of these powerful proclamations. Yahweh alone—temple, Torah, praise: the enthusiasm knows no end. In the powerful words of salvation, a profile of the community becomes apparent. Those speaking are callers, preachers; “prophets” are out of the question. Only the literary tracks of the divinely authorized speakers can be discovered, such as the introductory formulas of divine sayings, the direct address to the audience, the first, divine person of Yahweh’s messages to the people. It also appears in the stereotypical names of the patriarch Jacob and/or Israel, as well as in all kinds of honorific and affectionate expressions, such as “servants” (often also in the singular: the “servant of Yahweh”), “tiny worm of Israel,” “elect,” “deaf and blind,” “Zion,” “sons of Abraham and Sarah,” and “Yahweh’s wife” (Jerusalem; cf. Isa 54, also 62!)—a plethora of affective terms. They reflect the self-understanding of the saved, chosen community. It is the focal point of the universal community of humanity. Its constitution by Yahweh, through the proclaimed word about the new beginning and its eschatological destiny are more than obvious. The proclamation of Deutero-Isaiah is a vivid reflection of the conditions surrounding and following the rebuilding of the temple. It builds the consolidating community.

Only Proto-Isaiah still needs to be addressed. Are there indications for the use and editing of this part of the book in the postexilic epoch? The collection of the statements of Isaiah is motley. The compositional segments, generally comprised of Isa 1–12; 13–23; 24–27; 28–35 (the last chapter showing characteristics of Deutero-Isaiah); and 36–39, consist of various types of genre and show diverse historical and liturgical contexts.

The concluding chapters, Isa 36–39, are legendary historical narratives and deal with the siege of Jerusalem by the Assyrians under Sennacherib in 701 B.C.E. To a large degree, the text agrees verbatim with the rendition of the same episode in 2 Kgs 18–19; in other words, it originates in the same tradition.¹⁸⁵ King Hezekiah, one of the shining figures of the historiography of Deutero-Isaiah, firmly trusts in Yahweh’s help, and the powerful Assyrian army is wiped

184. See Hans Eberhard von Waldow, “Anlass und Hintergrund der Verkündigung Deuterjesajas,” Ph.D. diss., Bonn, 1953.

185. A substantial difference is the insertion of the complete prayer of Hezekiah in Isa 38:9–20; is this a clear indication of a liturgical use of the entire narrative context?

out in its camp outside Jerusalem through divine intervention (“the angel of the LORD set out and struck down one hundred eighty-five thousand in the camp of the Assyrians,” Isa 37:36). It has already been pointed out above that the verbal, theological clash between Hezekiah and the Assyrian commander, or Sennacherib himself, takes place in the Deuteronomistic vocabulary and imagination and therefore can hardly be contemporary. Rather, both versions in 2 Kings and Isaiah fairly certainly belong into the exilic and postexilic period. They reflect the interests and theological imagination of the emerging Jewish community. The addresses against foreign nations (Isa 13–23), for one, concern smaller neighboring countries, as we have already observed in Amos and, for another, the more distant empires of Egypt, Babylon, and, only peripherally, Assyria (Isa 20), as well as Arabia and Cush (= Ethiopia). The collected material is very heterogeneous; interestingly, apart from the customary condemnation of the “enemies,” it also contains prospects for a major reconciliation between nations:

The LORD will strike Egypt, striking and healing; they will return to the LORD, and he will listen to their supplications and heal them. On that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrian will come into Egypt, and the Egyptian into Assyria, and the Egyptians will worship with the Assyrians. On that day Israel will be the third with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth, whom the LORD of hosts has blessed, saying, “Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel my heritage.” (Isa 19:22–25)

Individual passages of the composition on foreign nations may portray older phases of combating enemies or of cultic entreaty of enemies. Viewed as a composite block, the universal theological backdrop and the globalizing status of the discussion (Persia can indeed only be intended implicitly here and there!) attest to a late writing of the corpus that is now extant. Especially the announcements of disaster aimed at Babylon, demonstratively introducing the corpus on foreign nations (Isa 13–14; 21:1–9), are anachronistic in relation to the imaginary figure of the Isaiah in the eighth century B.C.E. The Medes are already active as opponents of the Babylonian Empire (Isa 13:17; 21:2). The famous song of triumph about the fall of the Babylonian Empire (14:4–21) is probably a product of the Persian period thematically, stylistically, and theologically, when the preceding empire had already been swept aside. In magnificent historical style it develops the peaceful (*pax Persica!*) condition of the world following the departure of the Babylonian emperor. For his part, stripped of all his god-like dignities, he enters into the egalitarian underworld (14:9–11):

But you are brought down to Sheol, to the depths of the Pit. Those who see you will stare at you, and ponder over you: "Is this the man who made the earth tremble, who shook kingdoms, who made the world like a desert and overthrew its cities, who would not let his prisoners go home?" (14:15–17)

This is probably an allusion to the Persian release of the exiles that has already taken place. The Assyrians are hardly of interest any longer (Isa 14:24–27). Apocalyptic sounds intrude (see Isa 13:9–12; 17:12–14; 19:16–25). The composition of oracles about foreign nations is followed immediately by a genuinely apocalyptic section, Isa 24–27. Poststate features of Israelite communal theology appear with such prominence that no scholarly exegete is willing to date these chapters in the period of the monarchy:

Now the LORD is about to lay waste the earth and make it desolate, and he will twist its surface and scatter its inhabitants. And it shall be, as with the people, so with the priest; as with the slave, so with his master; as with the maid, so with her mistress; as with the buyer, so with the seller; as with the lender, so with the borrower; as with the creditor, so with the debtor. The earth shall be utterly laid waste and utterly despoiled; for the LORD has spoken this word. The earth dries up and withers, the world languishes and withers; the heavens languish together with the earth. The earth lies polluted under its inhabitants; for they have transgressed laws, violated the statutes, broken the everlasting covenant. (Isa 24:1–5)

Ruin comes upon the whole earth, and all humans are affected by this. All are reproached for disregarding God's order. The portrait of society is postmonarchic. There is no state-related administrative elite; instead, the community, described in six contrasting couplets, is purely civilian (24:2). This is followed by the emerging picture of universal destruction affecting all nations; even the heavenly bodies are included (e.g., 24:23; 25:6–8). Also significant are the liturgical forms in which the corpus of the text appears. The "we" passages offer the most compelling pointer in view of a postexilic cultic community (Isa 24:16; 25:9; 26:1, 8, 12–13, 16–18). As in other prophetic writings and in the Psalter, such texts in the first-person plural are an indication that the section in question has been formed in the environment of worship. The strong community contours militate against situating Isa 24–27 even later in the Hellenistic period; the apocalyptic orientation does not have to be against it, not even the slight allusions to a belief in the resurrection (see Isa 25:8; 26:19; Ezek 37:1–14) must do so. Just as also in other segments of the prophetic canon (e.g., Zechariah, Ezekiel), extensive eschatological scenarios certainly belong to the sphere of the cultures and religions influenced by Persia.

Not only nationally restricted predictions of disaster but also broadened and eschatological views into a paradisiacal future run through still other compositional units of the book of Isaiah. In Isa 1–12, the initial major section, such individual future-oriented texts are so frequent that the final arrangement can in no way be dated in the period of the monarchy. Thus Otto Kaiser is right, for instance, when he moves the writing of the so-called “testimony of Isaiah” (Isa 6–12) into the exilic/postexilic period for reasons of a critical ideology and history of theology.¹⁸⁶ In this way the mission of hardening given to the prophet can only be understood as a retrojected legitimation of the exile. The messianic portrayals of paradise in Isa 9:1–6 and 11:1–9 open the window to the apocalyptic period of salvation. The song of thanksgiving of the redeemed (12:1–6) belongs to the liturgy of the late period, even if 12:1–3 are given in the first-person singular of the liturgist. The hearers are addressed directly (12:4–6):

I will give thanks to you, O LORD, for though you were angry with me, your anger turned away, and you comforted me. Surely God is my salvation; I will trust, and will not be afraid, for the LORD GOD is my strength and my might; he has become my salvation. With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation. And you will say in that day, “Give thanks to the LORD, call on his name; make known his deeds among the nations; proclaim that his name is exalted. Sing praises to the LORD; for he has done gloriously; let this be known in all the earth. Shout aloud and sing for joy, O royal Zion, for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.” (Isa 12:1–6)

Only the inclusion of the nations of the world (cf. also Isa 2:1–4) verifies the late writing of the hymn. But also the situation addressed in 12:1–3—the change in Yahweh’s wrath—and the presupposed types of piety, anticipation of salvation, and faith in Zion agree very well with what we know of the early Jewish community.

Thus it appears that the “book of First Isaiah” also was arranged or broadened only in the postexilic period. Older prophetic utterances may be found scattered in Isa 28–34 at best, but even in this part of the writing there are sayings with a messianic and eschatological orientation or late predictions of disaster upon foreign nations that stand out. Indeed, there are even faint references to an existing written tradition, namely a “book of Yahweh” (34:16), which is to serve as plum line (see 8:1). This conception, too, can have originated only in the late period. The expectation of the final salvation in a realm of peace determined by Yahweh transcends the visions of the fray of the final

186. Kaiser, *Isaiah 1–12*, 73.

battle. However and in whatever chronological sequence the individual layers and compositional units of the book of Isaiah are supposed to have been brought together, a great supply of prophetic sayings of many kinds were not received already previously formulated from the period of the monarchy but rather were a contemporary formation of the liturgical or communal kind of precisely that period when the temple in Jerusalem was able to exercise its functions again and the community began to long for the better righteousness of their God.

III.2.2.3. Jeremiah

Becking, Bob. *Between Fear and Freedom* (OTS 51; New York: Brill, 2004). **Carroll**, Robert P. *Jeremiah: A Commentary* (OTL; London: SCM, 1986). **Herrmann**, Siegfried. *Jeremia* (EdF 271; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1991). **Kessler**, Martin. *The Battle of the Gods: The God of Israel versus Marduk of Babylon* (SSN 42; Assen: Van Gorcum, 2003). **Kiss**, Jenö. *Die Klage Gottes und des Propheten* (WMANT 99; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2003). **Nicholson**, Ernest W. *Preaching to the Exiles* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1970). **Pohlmann**, Karl-Friedrich. *Die Ferne Gottes: Studien zum Jeremiabuch: Beiträge zu den "Konfessionen" im Jeremiabuch und ein Versuch zur Frage nach den Anfängen der Jeremiatradition* (BZAW 179; Berlin: deGruyter, 1989). **Römer**, Thomas. *Jérémie: Du prophète au livre* (Poliez-le-Grande: Editions du Moulin, 2003). **Seybold**, Klaus. *Der Prophet Jeremiah: Leben und Werk* (Kohlhammer Urban-Taschenbücher 416; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1993). **Sharp**, Carolyn J. *Prophecy and Ideology in Jeremiah* (London: T&T Clark, 2003). **Smith**, Mark S. *The Laments of Jeremiah and Their Contexts* (SBLMS 42; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990). **Thiel**, Winfried. *Die deuteronomistische Redaktion von Jeremia 1–25* (WMANT 41; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1973). **Thiel**. *Die deuteronomistische Redaktion von Jeremia 26–45* (WMANT 52; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1981). **Vieweger**, Dieter. *Die literarischen Beziehungen zwischen den Büchern Jeremia und Ezechiel* (BEATAJ 26; Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1993).

Roughly 70 percent of the text of the book of Jeremiah originated from the Deuteronomistic or even later circles of tradents. The Septuagint has preserved a text of Jeremiah that is about one-eighth (12.5 percent) shorter than the Masoretic one. Already such broad observations fuel the suspicion that the book associated with the prophet of the Old Testament, who as a person allegedly is the most closely examined, goes back predominantly to later retrojections and community formations than to authentic sayings or narratives of the prophet. Purely in terms of form, the lengthy addresses of the protagonist Jeremiah, saturated with the Deuteronomistic spirit, are in fact dominant. The themes touched on by the effective messenger of God, who is treated broadly with hostility, however, and is pressed into the role of suffer-

ing, can largely be understood best against the backdrop of postexilic reality and theology.

Jeremiah has much to say concerning foreign nations, nations at enmity and empires. In his worldview and theology, he seems to move frequently in international circles. This is even to be understood literally: the legendary prophet wanders to the Euphrates (Jer 13:3–7), (as a displaced person) he preaches in Egypt (Jer 44), and he sends a book of curses to Babylon (Jer 51:59–64). As the only one among the Old Testament messengers of God, he is referred to as prophet “for the nations” in the legitimation of his calling, whose quasi-apocalyptic task it is to bring calamity upon the world, followed by salvation. “See, today I appoint you over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant” (1:10). Thus the Masoretic Text of Jeremiah (different from the LXX version) ends with a battery of prophecies concerning foreign nations (Jer 46–51), with the add-on of a piece of the Deuteronomistic account about the capture of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar (Jer 52; note the break by means of the redactional remark in 51:64). The catena of scolding of nations often coincides with the familiar one in Isaiah. Jeremiah positions Egypt at the beginning (Jer 40), and the spell on the land of the Nile is followed by messages against Israel’s neighbors: the Philistines, Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Syrians, Arabs, and Elamites (Jer 47–49). The weighty final chapters are dedicated to Babylon (Jer 50–51). In the case of a Jeremiah who is projected into the period of Josiah and of the early exile, this is not as anachronistic as with Isaiah of the eighth century. Nevertheless, the serious suspicion imposes itself that the prophecies of ruin against this empire were only made in reflection on the collapse of the Babylonian Empire that had already occurred, namely, after the Persians had taken the entire empire, including the heartland Mesopotamia and the regions of Trans-Euphrates. “Declare among the nations and proclaim, set up a banner and proclaim, do not conceal it, say: ‘Babylon is taken, Bel is put to shame, Merodach is dismayed. Her images are put to shame, her idols are dismayed’” (Jer 50:2, see also 50:15; 51:8, 31, 41–44).

Hence many statements presuppose Babylon’s fall. Or are they all the same a genuine announcement of ruin that is yet to occur? As an argument in favor of such authenticity of the sayings about Babylon, the altogether violent and warlike portrayal of the end is often brought to bear. Historical reality, however, is the unopposed entry of the Persian troops. Are the prophecies about Babylon in Jer 50–51 not supposed to be aware of the real course of events? In my view, such ideas ignore the nature of the condemnation of foreign nations. After all, it most probably deals with a collection of liturgical texts that were recited as genuine curses against enemies in emotionally charged gatherings. They offer no tranquil assessment of the situation. The

hatred against the oppressive imperial power had become bottled up for decades and also gave way in written form after the liberation. Stereotypical conceptions of the humiliation of one-time all-powerful enemies, of the destruction of the capital, and of the revenge of their own deity are the bulk of the threatening speeches. The communal “we” appears occasionally (Jer 51:10, 51), and a hymn of worship has also remained (51:15–19), so as to attest to the place of origin of these texts. In alternating juxtaposition of Babylon and Israel, both chapters in the book of Jeremiah express the strong faith that Yahweh already punished the former oppressors of his people and has already granted a new chance of life to those loyal to him.

Between the introduction of Jeremiah as “a prophet to the nations” and the concluding, vehement threats against Babylon, there are forty-eight chapters of the book in which the horizon of the nations occasionally becomes visible. As already indicated, the prophet himself travels through the remotest countries, voluntarily or forced, or establishes contact with them through messengers or in writing. At the Euphrates, he carries out the parabolic action by means of the loincloth (the beloved but unfaithful people of Yahweh) that decomposes there (Jer 13:3–7). The scroll of disasters given to the Babylonian delegation is meant to bring ruin to the hostile city (52:59–64). Then Jeremiah writes a letter to the deportees in Babylon with an entirely different tone: accept life abroad in the long term! “But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare” (29:7). This positive attitude of the prophet is maintained in many narrative texts and sayings (see Jer 21; 27–28; 32). It led to the idea that Jeremiah had been arrested and taken into custody on account of treason (37:11–16; 38:1–6), as well as to the motives of his secret consulting work for Zedekiah, his rescue from the dungeon, the alleged preferential treatment by Nebuchadnezzar after the fall of Jerusalem (38:14–28; 39:11–14), and the abduction of the prophet by some officers associated with Johanan, son of Kareah (43:1–7). The tradents of the Jeremiah texts were not troubled that in this way two fundamentally different portraits of Babylon were adopted in the book. They did not become slaves of the authorial delusion that motivates many modern exegetes. Rather, the contrary valuations suited the communal liturgies quite well. Under Nebuchadnezzar, Babylon at one time had been the power established by Yahweh to execute the sentence and as such was legitimized. However, when Babylon had fulfilled its service, Yahweh had to intervene because of the atrocities committed. For this reason, the messages to foreign nations provide ample space for the thought of revenge.

The mission of the abducted Jeremiah extends to Egypt (Jer 43:8–44:30). He preaches long sermons in the style and spirit of Deuteronomistic theology

to the Judeans who had fled or rendered service there. Otherwise the realm of the pharaohs appears as a hapless opponent of Nebuchadnezzar, the authorized representative of Yahweh. Because of this estimation of the balance of power, which also agreed with the historical reality, it had to be considered most unwise, if not suicidal, for the king of Judah to rely on the Egyptians for political survival (see Jer 2:18, 36; 37:7).

In sum, the following may be said concerning the horizon of the world of the book of Jeremiah: the emotionally critical Babylonian parts, with some degree of probability, belong in the time following the liberation by the Persians. Hatred, inclination to retaliation, and relief come together retrospectively in the messages to foreign nations mentioned. The pro-Babylon passages are closely linked with the prophet's story of suffering. Because by his behavior Jeremiah helps feed the suspicion of being a "bought" follower of Nebuchadnezzar, he experiences persecution and mistreatment by his own countrymen. Many see a reliable historical recollection in these biographical details. However, more plausible, in view of the general conditions of origin of the prophetic writings in the late period, is the assumption that the entire scene of suffering is a literary fiction, carved out on the basis of liturgical patterns of the suffering righteous one, the suffering follower of Yahweh (cf. Ps 69:8-13; Isa 52:13-53:12). The discussion about the authenticity of the so-called "confessions" of Jeremiah, which obviously show strong affinity with the individual lament psalms, is a piece of evidence that the formulation of the question is legitimate. If the "passion" (von Rad) of Jeremiah is indeed retrospective theologizing fiction, its writing belongs rather to the more tranquil postexilic times, when the community was busy imagining its own past impressively. It is difficult to establish the associations with Egypt in contemporary history. In any case, Jer 44 presupposes a substantial Jewish colony of emigrants in the country of the Nile. Most likely it was established as a consequence of the Babylonian westward advance, in other words, in the sixth century B.C.E. The Jewish military colony of Elephantine is not identical with the settlements assumed in Jeremiah, though they are support for such phenomena having existed (see §II.4.2).

As the outside world of the book of Jeremiah, so its inner world also demonstrates the exilic, but especially the postexilic, period. According to tradition, Jeremiah is supposed to have been the first and only prophet who was continually busy drafting writings. He is given a professional scribe named Baruch as a companion (Jer 25:13; 30:2; 36; 51:60). This means that the tradents are aware that prophets, like normal people in general, are not knowledgeable in writing and reading. But from their postexilic communal practice they know the importance of the written Word of God. Hence they make Jeremiah an author. As such, for this late tradition he stands in a long

line of messengers of God that, according to contemporary understanding, begins with Moses and his conveyance of the Torah (see Jer 7:25; 25:4; 26:5; 35:15; Deut 18:15). The chain of those sent by Yahweh vouches for the truth and righteousness of the will of God, which had been made known in the preexilic period but had been scorned time and again. This agrees with the Deuteronomistic messages of Jeremiah. They monotonously declare Yahweh's claim to exclusive worship, the criminal turning away of the community, and the ever-renewed offer of God to return, to repent, and to make sure of Yahweh's gracious care:

You shall say to them: Thus says the LORD: "If you will not listen to me, to walk in my law that I have set before you, and to heed the words of my servants the prophets whom I send to you urgently—though you have not heeded—then I will make this house like Shiloh, and I will make this city a curse for all the nations of the earth." (Jer 26:4–6)

The gift of the Torah is indissolubly linked with the covenant (see Deut 29–31; Josh 24), and the covenant community of believers in Yahweh is a result of the radical change of the exile, which was concretely realized in the "restoration" (reorganization!): "Cursed be anyone who does not heed the words of this covenant" (Jer 11:3). The community lives under the threat that the covenant is revocable. The idea of the covenant continues to develop in the period of the Second Temple; it also assumed more spiritual features: "I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts" (Jer 31:33b); thus the knowledge of God and truth become direct in the new covenant (31:34), and the medium of writing is skipped. The established self-understanding of the community of Yahweh is expressed clearly in these passages. Covenant and Torah are established realities, concerning which the community is addressed in the form of a sermon. Furthermore, as already in Deutero-Isaiah, election and the constitution of Israel are tied up with Yahweh's creative acts; in other words, Israel's existence in a multiracial empire is a cornerstone of the world order (see Jer 31:35–36). Yahweh's universal claim extends precisely from Jerusalem to the whole earth (25:15–29). None of the nations is excluded; all of them are cited by name. For this reason the direct order to the prophet of the world is to hand the divine cup of wrath to all of them. "See, I am beginning to bring disaster on the city that is called by my name and how can you possibly avoid punishment?" (Jer 25:29). Yahweh rules the earth.

Various aspects can be expected here and there concerning the constitution of the community of Yahweh. The Deuteronomistic style of proclamation has already been mentioned: the admonitions and instructions are addressed to the gathered community, which is addressed expressly in the proxim-

ity of the temple or in the court of the temple (Jer 7:2; 26:2; 36:5–6). This shows the new function of the sanctuary as the center of the community of the people; the times of the royal temple of the state are long past. The prophets are preachers of the Torah. The Torah, handed down in written form, is assumed and impressed upon by God's messengers, hence the formal language about keeping the Torah and about returning to Yahweh and his Torah (his covenant). "For twenty-three years ... the word of the LORD has come to me, and I have spoken persistently to you, but you have not listened" (Jer 25:3). The prophet is seen as commissioned for life in line with the proclaimers of Yahweh since Moses. He is to pass on the word of Yahweh. His "message" completes the Torah because it is completely related to the will of God in written form. These are unmistakable characteristics of the postexilic, established theology of the community. Particular topics of the time, such as circumcision, Sabbath, holiness of the temple, Levitical ministries, and separation from foreigners, surface sporadically in the book of Jeremiah but are established in the extant Torah, of course. The demand for a personal decision for Yahweh and individual obligation of faithfulness to the God of Israel is just as much a characteristic of the community of the Second Temple as is, for instance, the rising and fading expectation of a messiah, the kingdom of God, the new covenant. Obviously, the banishment to Babylon and the return from exile are occasionally addressed as events that have already occurred. Last but not least, some stylistic features of communal language, such as the communal "we," permeate many parts of the text.

In particular, the themes addressed can be illustrated briefly as follows: The Sabbath is treated similarly as in Neh 13:15–22: "For the sake of your lives, take care that you do not bear a burden on the Sabbath day or bring it in by the gates of Jerusalem. And do not carry a burden out of your houses on the Sabbath or do any work" (Jer 17:21–22). In the same way, circumcision already serves as a distinguishing mark of religion but also as a binding mark of identity; furthermore, the external sign also is a spiritual metaphor. Yahweh will punish circumcised nations, for "I will attend to all those who are circumcised only in the foreskin" (Jer 9:25b). Occasionally the temple and temple personnel are in focus, as well as Jerusalem, Zion, sacrifice, and festival. The two first-mentioned key terms deserve more detailed attention. The temple is the place of the gathered community, but it must not be abused as a guarantor of the presence of Yahweh (Jer 7:4–11). Whoever treats the Torah with contempt cannot appeal to Yahweh's presence in the temple (7:4: "deceptive words": "This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD.") Hence some in the community were lulled into false security. That it is not the temple destroyed in 587 B.C.E. that provides the backdrop here is abundantly clear from the language, style, and theologi-

cal content of the passage. The Levitical class of priests is addressed in Jer 33:18–22. The close link between the promise of David and the promise of grace for the priests of Jerusalem appears to be conspicuous of and typical for the postexilic period. The Chronistic vision of David, the organizer of the temple, is tangible. The hope for the continuity of the Davidic lineage was set high especially at the beginning of the Persian period (cf. Hab 2:23): “I will increase the offspring of my servant David and the Levites who minister to me” (Jer 33:22b). Addressing David as a “servant” of Yahweh certainly has cultic and religious connotations in the Deuteronomistic and Chronistic works (cf. 1 Kgs 8:24, 26; 1 Chr 17:4, 7, 17–18, 23–27), and in the Priestly layers, too, the technical term for the Levitical service is found: the *piel* of *šrt*, “rendering priestly service.”

In the book of Jeremiah, the separation from the foreign nations is not carried out in keeping with the pattern of Ezra-Nehemiah or of many Priestly and Deuteronomistic texts. Rather, it moves exclusively via the prohibition of alien cults, in other words, Baal worship. Here the tradents certainly follow the tradition of Hosea, which is also used in Trito-Isaiah. Yahweh’s relationship with Israel is construed under the metaphor of a marriage covenant from which the people break away time and again:

Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying: Go and proclaim in the hearing of Jerusalem, Thus says the LORD: “I remember the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride, how you followed me in the wilderness, in a land not sown. Israel was holy to the LORD, the firstfruits of his harvest. All who ate of it were held guilty; disaster came upon them, says the LORD.” (Jer 2:1–3; see §III.2.2.1 on Hos 1–3 above)

Then follows a lengthy, argumentative discourse with a multitude of units of poetry, all of which bring the primary accusation to the heart of it: since that idealized time of their youth, Israel time and again abandoned Yahweh. In this context, the marriage metaphor is not applied consistently. When Israel entered the promised land, “you defiled my land, and made my heritage an abomination” (Jer 2:7b). “Those who handle the law did not know me; the rulers transgressed against me” (2:8). The bride, Israel, denies the guilt and is charged: “How can you [i.e., Jerusalem] say, ‘I am not defiled, I have not gone after the Baals’? Look at your way in the valley; know what you have done—a restive young camel interlacing her tracks, a wild ass at home in the wilderness, in her heat sniffing the wind! Who can restrain her lust?” (2:23–24a). “On every high hill and under every green tree,” the unfaithful one practiced “whoring” (3:6). “Because she took her whoredom so lightly, she polluted the land, committing adultery with stone and tree” (3:9). Jeremiah 2–3 depict a liturgical, compositional context, addressing

current problems in terms of the postexilic theology and concept of history, via accusation, demonstration of guilt, and a call to repentance with a promise of salvation (3:14–18: Zion, Jerusalem being “Yahweh’s throne”!) and a renewed prayer of repentance with an admonition (3:22b–4:4). What is central is the well-known proclamation of the exclusive belief in and cultic service of Yahweh, in other words, the confessional rejection of every other religion.

This addresses the decisive dimension of faith in God at the time of the Second Temple. Like hardly another document of the Old Testament, the book of Jeremiah is a testimony to the structure of faith that gained acceptance at that time. The issue is no longer the faith of the family of the oldest time, revolving around the small group.¹⁸⁷ The agricultural settlement does not provide the background for the new, individual-parochial relationship with God either, and definitely not the older traditions of tribe or state. Rather, in the religious community that originated since the collapse of the Judean state, the decision of personal faith is dominant in the foreground in the context of a communal and religious, national horizon. It is no wonder that wisdom sayings and advice flow into the religious and liturgical literature under this sign, for the wisdom teaching of the ancient Near East had always been tailored to action for which the individual (even if integrated into the group) is accountable. In this context it does not matter whether it concerns wise reflections of the popular or of the courtly type. Vivid language and argumentation, focused on everyday coping with life, as well as the characteristic style, appealing to reason and understanding, are the hallmarks of the wisdom tradition. “Cursed are those who trust in mere mortals.... Blessed are those who trust in the LORD” (Jer 17:5, 7; cf. Ps 1). Benedictions and maledictions get to the heart of the principles of one’s relationship with God. Theological reflection, of course, is also critical over against the wisdom tradition; nevertheless, this must not mislead about the fundamental use of wisdom patterns of thought (see Jer 9:22–23: against any self-praise!). There are many other attestations to be found of the principle of personal responsibility in the book of Jeremiah. Thus the (wisdom-related!) slogan that renders generations liable, broadly refuted in Ezek 18, is found in Jeremiah and yet, here also it is intensely disputed: “The parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge” (Jer 31:29). This may no longer be said, however, but rather “all shall die for their own sins” (31:30). This is a realization of the individualizing, postexilic period in the Judean community.

187. See Erhard S. Gerstenberger, *Yahweh—the Patriarch: Ancient Images of God and Feminist Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 13–23.

The epitome of personal responsibility and thereby also of self-doubt and feelings of loneliness is attained in the figure of the complaining, rebelling prophet who challenges God. The literary figure certainly portrays the extraordinary, almost superhuman intermediary between Yahweh and his community. But in some ways it is also an exemplary model for every believing Judean. The intimate prayer of Jeremiah, often called his "confessions," following the example of Augustine in the history of the church, therefore also sheds light on the culture of prayer and individual faith of that time. This can be demonstrated from literary history and genre criticism: purely personal records of the prophet are virtually inconceivable at that time, given everything we know about personal writing practices and the use of writing in the pre-Hellenistic period. Hence the "confessions" (Jer 10:23–25; 11:18–23; 12:1–4; 15:10–18; 17:14–18; 18:19–23; 20:7–18; cf. 32:16–25) represent liturgical compositions adapted from the psalms of lament and put in the mouth of the prophet.¹⁸⁸ They have a similar life setting and an intent analogous to the servant songs in Deutero-Isaiah. The texts in Jeremiah (incidentally, they are accompanied by songs of lament of Zion and of God) display great spiritual power and have an extensive history of effect until the present. They are not to be read biographically, however; instead, they reflect individual attitudes of Judean followers of Yahweh (cf. Jer 12:1–4 with Ps 139!). The specific situation of a messenger of God is rarely in the foreground in the prayers of lament; most likely it is in Jer 17:14–18: "See how they say to me, 'Where is the word of the LORD?'" (17:15). Similarly in Jer 15:10–18 ("Your words were found, and I ate them," 15:16), 18:18 ("the word [shall not perish] from the prophet"), and 20:7–9 ("For the word of the LORD has become for me a reproach and derision," 20:8). By way of a hint, these passages speak of the proclamation of the word in terms of how the tradents imagined Jeremiah's practice. These comments may refer to the prophetic office, except that such allusions betray an already-established theory about prophets. The imagined messenger of God is engaged as one who proclaims the will of God (= preacher of the Torah) for life, rather than called spontaneously and unforeseeably ad hoc. In this manner, all the references to the word of Yahweh and its conveyance to the community prove to be modifications of normal prayers of lament (see also Ps 69:8–10). Otherwise the statements about hostilities for God's sake, personal doubt concerning the support of the deity, and the certainty of security appearing here and there, also communicated by means of special Yahweh oracles (see Jer 11:22–23; 12:5–6;

188. See Erhard S. Gerstenberger, "Jeremiah's Complaints," *JBL* 82 (1963): 393–408; Kathleen M. O'Connor, *The Confessions of Jeremiah* (SBLDS 94; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988); Kiss, *Die Klage Gottes und des Propheten*; Smith, *The Laments of Jeremiah*.

15:19–21), are adopted entirely from the ritual of lament and petition for those in need. The desperate curses of self at the end of the lengthy catena of “confessions” is a document of challenging Yahweh, as found in radical wisdom, not prophetic (!) theology (cf. Job 3:1–16):

Cursed be the day on which I was born! The day when my mother bore me, let it not be blessed! Cursed be the man who brought the news to my father, saying, “A child is born to you, a son,” making him very glad. Let that man be like the cities that the LORD overthrew without pity; let him hear a cry in the morning and an alarm at noon, because he did not kill me in the womb; so my mother would have been my grave, and her womb forever great. Why did I come forth from the womb to see toil and sorrow, and spend my days in shame? (Jer 20:14–18)

The very personal prayers of Jeremiah, conceived literarily and theologically, therefore are shaped from the liturgical, psalm-like tradition. In the course of a late perspective of prophecy, including the one attesting to the faith, they intend to exemplify Yahweh’s message in the fate of the one conveying it. The parts of speech that allow the messenger to “preach” in the first-person singular support a personified theology such as this. Yet this occurs primarily in the narrative passages describing the suffering of Jeremiah (see especially Jer 13:1–11; 19:14–20:6; 26:1–19; 37:11–16; 38:1–28; 43:1–7). This “passion history” of the prophet (von Rad) presumably is a later, theological, didactic construct serving the community of the Second Temple.

Thus overall the book of Jeremiah is made up of various layers or blocks of tradition that have been compiled in written form in the exilic and postexilic period. Authentic words of a possible historical Jeremiah are handed down sporadically at best, for example, among the announcements of disaster in Jer 4:5–6:26 or the critiques of the king of Jer 22. The bulk of the book is arranged retrospectively, occasionally perhaps based on echoes of Jeremiah’s proclamation. Decisive is the fact, it seems to me, that the later canonized text shows powerfully the postexilic community’s interests related to worship, liturgy, and pedagogy. From the stylistic perspective, the formalized “we” of the community (see Jer 3:22b–25; 6:24; 8:14–15; 9:18, 20; 14:7–9, 19–22; etc.), occurring especially in the book of the Twelve and in the Psalms, is symptomatic. The community, not only preachers, editors, composers, and scribes, asserts the leading interest in establishing and shaping traditions. The conceptions of God, humanity, and the world, which we find portrayed in the canon of the prophets, have their origin in the community of believers in Yahweh. Yahweh is the great, unique, universal God; the polemic against the dumb idols is roughly analogous to the one

we are familiar with from Deuteronomistic History and Deutero-Isaiah (cf. Jer 10:1–16; 18:13–16; 19:1–5). By means of the covenant and the Torah, Yahweh, the God of the world and of the nations, has destined his community for a special role in the theater of the world. His plan is effective from the earliest of times and extends to the time of the end. In the messages to the foreign nations and the eschatological, apocalyptic perspectives (on the latter, see Jer 4:23–28), the future horizon is dominant. Israel, the elect community, must fit in the divine plan of the world; for this reason addresses and narratives are largely focused on returning and adhering to Yahweh's order and on a harsh critique of both religious and political deviation. The chain of commissioned proclaimers of the Torah holds history and tradition together (see Jer 7:25; 25:4; 26:5; 35:15). The community is constituted by Yahweh's fixed line, the community of the temple, and Diaspora gatherings but needs ongoing critical accompaniment by watchful leaders and proclaimers, so as to avoid the misuse of the institutions and apostatizing to other deities. This built-in critical potential seems conspicuous but is indeed a characteristic of the early Jewish formation of the community. It probably results from adopting differing traditions in the one ecclesial parochial organization, namely, of the interpretation of the Torah, occupied by the priestly guild and by lay people and embodied by scribes and scholars. Prophecy belongs to the latter layer, and the tension between the two permeates the canonical books in varying intensity; local, parochial differences are to be assumed. However, most of the time we do not know where the various blocks of tradition originated. If we are asking about the life setting of the book of Jeremiah, we should probably think of the community of Jerusalem, despite the prophet's excursions.

III.2.2.4. Ezekiel

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The book of the prophet Ezekiel is a very independent collection of visions, reports, parables, and hymns and has little in common with the books of Isaiah and Jeremiah in terms of style, genre, and theology. Geographically, the assumed events have their locus in Babylon, among the Judean exiles (Ezek 1:1; 33:21). Chronologically, the editors of the book assert, in a series of fourteen precise date references fitting in well with one another, that the texts convey events between the “thirtieth year” corresponding with the “fifth year” following the abduction of King Jehoiachin (Ezek 1:1–2)¹⁸⁹ and the “twenty-fifth year of our exile” (Ezek 40:1), hence between 593 and 568 B.C.E. The dates are extraordinarily precise, also mentioning the month and day along with the year, and in this way they establish a solid structure for the entire book. The prophet is said to have experienced the decisive historical happenings in the Diaspora for twenty years and, by means of the typical address, “son of man,” to have accompanied them in a visionary and exemplary way through the respective messages from God sent to him.

The unified, well-ordered sequence of texts of Ezekiel, however, has to be a matter of concern. From the start, it is unlikely that prophetic speech was written down immediately following its pronouncement, including the date, by loyal disciples (following the pattern of the recording of Luther’s Table Talks?). Likewise the hypothesis, already familiar from Jeremiah, that the prophet himself made records of his appearances and these notes were later reappraised and collected is shaky. While private archives of commercial and legal documents from Mesopotamian cities have indeed been recovered, there are no memoirs of men or women of God or other personal accounts among them at all. Rather, the overly precise chronological structure suggests the suspicion that the final redaction did not begin until after the conclusion of the entire sequence of events, in other words, that it was constructed after the completed segment of history (Ezek 40–48). Further, this conclusion of

189. On matters of dating, see Walther Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel, Chapters 1–24* (trans. Ronald E. Clements; Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 112–16; Pohlmann, *Ezechielstudien*.

the book of Ezekiel, the large-scale vision of the new temple, now has all the characteristics of a composition rooted in the Persian period. Many experts agree with this analysis. Whoever describes the architecture of the temple, its furnishings, and the priests associated with it in an intensive manner such as this, and beyond this imagines the entry of the divine glory so dramatically (Ezek 43:4–5; cf. 1:4–28; 10:1–22), has in mind concrete structures and occurrences and does not speak from a context of the past without a temple into a future enriched by the temple. We should assume that for the authors and editors of Ezek 40–48 the fully functioning sanctuary of Jerusalem was reality. Thus at least the stupendous final portrait of the book belongs entirely to the Persian period. From this apex, however, the postexilic spirit very much wafts through the preceding thirty-nine chapters as well. Thus it is not surprising that many scholars understand the book of Ezekiel as a whole not as a work of the sixth century B.C.E. but later, from the fifth to the third century.¹⁹⁰ In any case, the dating of the book requires caution, and the possibility of the late dating should be examined carefully.

The temple, the temple community, and the glory of Yahweh in the temple, as already intimated, are a dominant topic of the book of Ezekiel. The community obtains its possibilities of life from the sanctuary, from the presence of Yahweh. Ideally, blessing issues from it. “I will bless them and multiply them, and I will set my sanctuary among them forevermore” (Ezek 37:26b). Unfortunately, the adherents of Yahweh did not follow the covenant. They deserted to other deities and betrayed Yahweh, their own God, especially in the area of temple worship. They are cited as saying: “The LORD does not see us; the LORD has forsaken the land” (Ezek 8:12); in other words, they act out of frustration. In a shocking vision, transported by the Spirit, the prophet shares the experience of the desecration of the temple:

So I went in and looked; there, portrayed on the wall all around, were all kinds of creeping things, and loathsome animals, and all the idols of the house of Israel. Before them stood seventy of the elders of the house of Israel, with Jaazaniah son of Shaphan standing among them. ... Then he brought me to the entrance of the north gate of the house of the LORD; women were sitting there weeping for Tammuz. Then he said to me, “Have you seen this, O mortal? You will see still greater abominations than these.”

190. See, e.g., J. Becker, “Ez 8–11 als einheitliche Komposition in einem pseudepigraphischen Ezechielbuch,” in Lust, *Ezekiel and His Book*, 136–50; Garscha, *Studien zum Ezechielbuch*, esp. 287; Pohlmann, *Ezechielstudien*. See also Albertz, *Israel in Exile*, summary of research, 347–52; he himself places the book in the period of 535–515 B.C.E. (352–53).

And he brought me into the inner court of the house of the LORD; there, at the entrance of the temple of the LORD, between the porch and the altar, were about twenty-five men, with their backs to the temple of the LORD, and their faces toward the east, prostrating themselves to the sun toward the east. (Ezek 8:10–11a, 14–16)

The false worship in the temple dedicated to Yahweh refers, among others, to Dumuzi/Tammuz, the very popular Mesopotamian figure of heroes and salvation, as well as to the sun deity Utu/Shamash. The worship of idols is coupled with the images of unclean small animals—obviously a terrible piece of circumstantial evidence for deviancy. In religious polemics, the other side is always accused of the aberrations and monstrosities one considers to be most hideous, which often have much to do with one's own sensations of disgust but nothing at all with the reality of the others. The idolatry takes place individually in personal compartments of the temple—a sure sign of postexilic practice, because only governmental interests could be at work in the state's sanctuary in the period of the monarchy (see also Exod 32:1). But this way leads to a worsening of the situation instead of a change. Idolatry is followed hard on the heels by “abomination and violence” (8:17)—and that precisely because of the veneration of the sun, the unerring judicial deity. The divine wrath and the punishment are overdue. A writing angel marks the innocent on the forehead; all the guilty are killed without mercy (Ezek 9:3–11). Even the prophet's petition is rejected:

He said to me, “The guilt of the house of Israel and Judah is exceedingly great; the land is full of bloodshed and the city full of perversity; for they say, ‘The LORD does not see.’ As for me, my eye will not spare, nor will I have pity, but I will bring down their deeds upon their heads.” Then the man clothed in linen, with the writing case at his side, brought back word, saying, “I have done as you commanded me.” (Ezek 9:9–11)

What audience does this dressing down have in mind? A preexilic location is virtually out of the question in spite of the reference to the date in Ezek 8:1 (= 592 B.C.E.). After all, in the opinion of the redactors, the deportation began already with the first contingent: Jehoiachin and the nobility of Jerusalem (see 2 Kgs 24:14–16). Ezek 8–9 can scarcely be understood as a warning to those who remained behind between the first and second deportations. But the remaining community of Israel prior to the liberation by the Persians is likely not the actual addressee either. The operation of the temple is understood to be in full swing; the home community turns to Mesopotamian deities and is polluted by unholy creatures. It seems very likely that only the third option applies: from the perspective of the Babylonian Diaspora, the worship in the

already functioning Second Temple in Jerusalem appears to be idolatrous and unclean. The reproach of the local believers: "Yahweh has forsaken the land; Yaweh does not see" and the resulting conversion to a cult of a different kind (Ezek 9:9; cf. Jer 44:16–18) agree with a mentality that is also discussed among the Deuteronomists. Ineffective deities are replaced. The prophet's reprimand aims at a division of the community into those who are obedient devotees and those who are damned godless similar to the one already observed in Isa 56–66. In Ezekiel, the "writing angel" marks the elect, those faithful to Yahweh who reject the apostate cult, with a sign on the forehead (Ezek 9:4–11). The divisions in the confessional groups that become visible in this manner are surely more likely hallmarks of the community of the Second Temple than of the early sixth century B.C.E.

Against this backdrop the eschatological texts in the book of Ezekiel appear only as a consistent further development of the scenario of threat for a community of faith searching for the only right concept of God and for the exclusively valid global responsibility. It is not the case that the basic decisions for Yahweh under the Babylonian rule had not yet been involved. But the existential debate between "traditionalists" and "reformers," theologians of the Diaspora and community leaders of Jerusalem, had only been able to develop fully in the Persian period. Part of this debate was the flourishing eschatological worldview that, under the influence of Zoroastrian concepts of the end time as well, as may be assumed, developed vehemently in apocalyptic dimensions. The impending end because of the general corruption of the world became the backdrop for the urgent admonitions to the community of Yahweh. "Soon now I will pour out my wrath upon you; I will spend my anger against you. I will judge you according to your ways and punish you for all your abominations" (Ezek 7:8). Judah is still in view above all else, but the tradition of the broader Day of Yahweh is in the air. The end of the period of grace is signaled (see 7:14–19). Based on vocabulary and imagination, the portrait of horror stems from the context of the siege of a city. However, it is also broadened to the more general "Day of Yahweh," and its contours are generalized and the temporal element removed. From there the range extends to the explicitly apocalyptically traced pictures of the valley of dry bones and the invasion of nations (Ezek 37–38). Semimythical powers will conquer the whole earth, until they encounter Israel (see 38:1–9). The identification of the eschatological armies is subject to debate, and the same is true of the temporal placing of the pericope. Whether Lydians, Babylonians, Persians, or even Alexander the Great or one of his successors are behind the mysterious key-name "Gog," from the empire of "Magog," is relatively irrelevant. Important are the truly cataclysmic phenomena of the invasion of Gog (see Ezek 38:18–39:8). The fixed point envisaged for the event is the end of time (38:8,

16), when Israel “will dwell securely” (38:14). Then the brutal world ruler will founder on Israel: “You shall fall on the mountains of Israel, you and all your troops and the peoples that are with you; I will give you to birds of prey of every kind and to the wild animals to be eaten” (39:4). But Israel experiences a rebirth. In view of a valley full of dry bones the prophet receives the encouraging task of proclaiming:

Then he said to me, “Prophecy to these bones, and say to them: ‘O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. I will lay sinews on you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the Lord.’” (Ezek 37:4–6)

The following interpretation of the vision (37:11–14) argues against the discouragement of the “dried bones” and reiterates the promise of the new beginning by means of another metaphor: “Therefore prophecy and say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD: I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you back to the land of Israel’” (v. 12). Following the creation account (Gen 2:7; cf. Ps 104:30), the gift of the breath of life is strongly emphasized. Hence the predictions of disaster amount to a wonderful, new future under the sovereignty of Yahweh, partly also with a revived Davidic dynasty (see Ezek 34:23–24; 37:24). It is already laid out in the constitution of the covenant and the plans for the new city of the temple, Jerusalem. The strengthening and protection of the community of Yahweh therefore is the ultimate goal of the prophetic proclamation.

The entire constitution of the community on the ground of the Torah serves the same purpose. The qualifications of the understanding of the Torah appear curious and in a certain sense comparable to the passages in Jeremiah dealing with the new covenant. On the one hand, Yahweh’s will is laid down in Scripture, and it is the holy scroll that the prophet eats at his commissioning: “Then I ate it, and in my mouth it was as sweet as honey” (Ezek 3:3). On the other hand, according to later theologians, Yahweh’s revelation of his will to the fathers of Israel did not achieve its goals. The Torah went unheeded; indeed, it was even counterproductive: “I gave them my statutes. ... Moreover, I gave them my Sabbaths. ... But the house of Israel rebelled against me” (Ezek 20:11–13). Yahweh prolongs the sojourn in the wilderness but graciously refrains from a more drastic punishment (20:14–17) and then imposes the ban as the final sentence (20:18–26). The advanced argumentation, presupposing a constitution of the Torah, notices the failure of the divine instructions on three levels: in Egypt, the ancestors failed to render

the obedience they owed (20:4–9, esp. 20:8); the generation of the exodus was equally awkward (20:10–17, esp. 20:13); and the potential immigrating generation followed the evil example (20:18–24, esp. 20:21). The establishment of guilt occurs in almost identical sentences: “they rebelled against me..., they did not observe my statutes” (20:8, 13, 21). But this is followed by an afterthought about the destructive and not life-promoting divine ordinances (20:25–26) that falls outside the tripartite schema. It is unique in the Hebrew tradition and has caused headaches for many exegetes. Does this really refer to the debate about the offering up of the oldest son in an allusion to a real offering of the firstborn (see Exod 22:28)? At any rate, we are staring into an abyss of theological thought that seems archaic and modern at the same time. In his basic rules, Yahweh lays tracks of death—he wants to kill (cf. Gen 32:25–31; Exod 4:24). This vantage point results in a certain tension to the laws that are recorded. It is taken up in the confessions to the vividly working Spirit of Yahweh:

I will take you from the nations, and gather you from all the countries, and bring you into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. I will put my spirit within you and make you observe my ordinances. Then you shall live in the land that I gave to your ancestors, and you shall be my people, and I will be your God. I will save you from all your uncleannesses, and I will summon the grain and make it abundant and lay no famine upon you. (Ezek 36:24–29)

Following the protection from hunger by means of plentiful harvests of grain and fruit (36:29–30), the list of salvific promises also includes the rebuilding of cities and the restoration of devastated places (36:33–35). Everything happens in order that the other nations recognize the glory of Yahweh (36:36: “shall know that I, the LORD, have rebuilt the ruined places, and replanted that which was desolate”; cf. 36:23). At the center, however, is the thought that, after futile attempts by means of the traditional means of communication (preaching and reading the Word), only direct contact with God in the heart of hearts is able to overcome the difficulties of understanding and application. The instilling of the Spirit and the liberation from stubborn wants brings about the believers in Yahweh loathing themselves (36:31–32) and separating themselves from their own past. Now they will make the statutes of Yahweh their own with all their heart (cf. Jer 31). How is this miraculous change of heart to be understood? Without a doubt, the background, as in Ezek 20, is a theological debate about the appropriateness of the Torah avail-

able in written form and proclaimed by called messengers of God. Similar to the book of Jeremiah, those handing down the tradition of Ezekiel reckon with a recorded form of the message from God, continually accompanied, impressed upon, and expanded by the prophetic message. Typical Torah themes of the time, such as the keeping of the Sabbath, for instance, or the absolute holiness, inaccessibility, and flaming wrath of Yahweh, play a significant part in the corpus of the book. To this extent, for the leaders of the community, the written record actually is only indirectly the theological problem. They are concerned with the futility of proclaiming the Word as a whole, which shows itself in Yahweh's twofold failure in leading his people. If in the conceptions of those responsible the God of Israel reaches for an entirely different means by implanting his will directly, without any agency, in the body and consciousness of the believers, then the phase of the mediated proclamation of the Word has ceased. As in Jer 31:33–34, this change in consciousness, away from stubbornness and toward natural consent with Yahweh, appears as the final means of accomplishing the divine plan. That a procedure like this is extremely dubious in the light of other biblical witnesses as well (cf. Gen 3; 6–9; 11), extinguishing the ambivalence of humanness and equal to brainwashing, is an issue that Jeremiah and Ezekiel do not address. Most important for our purposes is the realization that such a deep, radical discussion about the possibilities of divine guidance and the value of mediated revelation of the will in the nature of things is only possible on the basis of more extensive experience with the appropriate ideas of Torah, hence perhaps since the end of the fifth century B.C.E.

Several further observations about the book of Ezekiel can confirm the pinpointing of the final editing or also the origin of major parts of the composition in the Persian period. The horizon of nations, as portrayed in the oracles of judgment against the neighboring states (Ezek 29–32), involves insignificant neighbors and Egypt exclusively. Babylon and Persia are missing as a target group in the collection. Nebuchadnezzar is merely the executing organ of Yahweh's will to punish (see Ezek 26:7–14). Instead, in part supplemented by sarcastic lamentations about the bitter fate of those punished, the threats concentrate on the coastal cities of Tyre and Sidon (Ezek 26–28) and the empire of the pharaohs (Ezek 29–32). Naturally it must be difficult to compare these general geographical findings with the political history of the Near East and Egypt. Nevertheless, it is worth making an attempt to determine the historical context of Ezekiel's invectives more closely.

Ezekiel 26–28 represent a critique of an economic world power that is unique in the Old Testament. The issue is not military, political, or religious dominance and exploitation of second-rate powers but strictly an economic hegemony that does indeed lead to lunatic arrogance: "Because your heart is

proud and you have said, 'I am a god; I sit in the seat of the gods, in the heart of the seas,' yet you are mortal, and no god, though you compare your mind with the mind of a god" (Ezek 28:2b). This extremely excessive self-assessment is taken up by other divine oracles, alluding to ancient myths about the mountain of the gods and its fire:

With an anointed cherub as guardian I placed you; you were on the holy mountain of God; you walked among the stones of fire. You were blameless in your ways from the day that you were created, until iniquity was found in you. In the abundance of your trade you were filled with violence, and you sinned. (Ezek 28:14–16a)

The lamenting and accusing text describes in vivid detail the economic activities of the Tyrians, who concern themselves exclusively with cheating and exploiting trade partners throughout the world, especially neighbors on the Mediterranean (Ezek 27:8–10). The entire list of trade relations (see esp. 27:11–25) is insightful. It encompasses many well-known cities, regions, and states from the west to the east and from the north to the south. Tarshish, Asia Minor, Near Eastern, and African names can be recognized in this text, which often is not easily deciphered. That "Greece" (*yāwān*, 27:13, 19) appears does not have to point to the Hellenistic period. The term may also denote Greece in Asia Minor, which was significant in world politics especially during the Persian period, or it can be aimed at the Greek islands, which in part may also be mentioned directly, for instance Rhodes (27:15, LXX). The city of Tyre itself has a long history, attested by outside sources, reaching back far into the second millennium. As a trade metropolis, it had a legendary reputation, supported by various economic periods of ascendancy. In the sixth century B.C.E., however, it was defeated by the Babylonian Nebuchadnezzar after a siege of twelve years (573 B.C.E.), so that precisely at the time in question of a "historical" Ezekiel it cannot have had the brilliant nimbus of the seat of God. Only in the Persian period did the city regain its importance. Therefore, the texts of Ezekiel refer either to the fame of the past, which would be difficult to understand, especially during a period dominated by weakness, or they assume the revitalized trade metropolis since the beginning of the Persian rule. To me this seems to be the more plausible explanation of Ezek 26–28.

Beyond these, many formal and theological observations agree in content with the Persian background. The stylistic and form-critical analysis may point to the prophetic pattern of address in the book of Ezekiel taking up certain "classical" forms of divine communication, though certainly developing its own characteristics. Thus the "messenger formula" ("thus says the LORD") in Ezekiel, as in most other prophetic writings, is common-

place. Likewise, Ezekiel shares the “word-event formula” with other literary compositions, especially with the book of Jeremiah. Yet, God addressing the messenger (“you, O mortal,” occurring ninety-three times) is out of the ordinary; it is unique in the Old Testament and not easily explained. Why is the prophet not addressed by name? Why does it emphasize the generic being of the human? Since Amos, the close connection between vision and receiving a message occurs repeatedly. The curious combination of divine visions portrayed in detail and the awkwardly substantiated designations nevertheless are of a different quality than the traditional brief visions. Something similar applies to the sign-actions of Ezekiel. We are familiar with comparable things in Isaiah and Jeremiah. The variants in Ezekiel are more numerous, put together more intensively and extensively throughout, much more strongly intertwined with the instructing voice of God, and overall situated on a different level of imagery and allegory. Above all else, however, it is about Yahweh’s conspicuous instructions to speak, which often take on considerable scope following the address of “you, O mortal” and even completely replace the reporting part, namely, the description of ordered addresses and actions.

In the introductory section of Ezek 1–3, for instance, the vision of the four rolling and moving cherubim and the throne of God established above them fills chapter 1. The first-person singular style of the reporting prophet is already maintained consistently; time and again it breaks through the objective “is” portrayal. The commissioning ceremony for the prophet begins in Ezek 2:1. Up to the conclusion of this section (3:27 and 37), the plot ensues predominantly in the form of divine address (twenty-five verses), whereas only pithy sentences (twelve verses) remain for the account once again given in the first-person of the narrating prophet. In the flow of the events, the prophet, as the one receiving oracles, remains largely passive. Very rarely is he the partner in dialogue with Yahweh who perhaps also influenced the course of things (see 4:14; 11:13; 21:5). As a rule, however, only the commissioning God speaks. Thus after the introductory scenes, this is the flow of the language, including the eating of the scroll, from top to bottom:

He said to me: “Mortal, go to the house of Israel and speak my very words to them. For you are not sent to a people of obscure speech and difficult language, but to the house of Israel—not to many peoples of obscure speech and difficult language, whose words you cannot understand. Surely, if I sent you to them, they would listen to you. But the house of Israel will not listen to you, for they are not willing to listen to me; because all the house of Israel have a hard forehead and a stubborn heart. See, I have made your face hard against their faces, and your forehead hard against their foreheads. Like the hardest stone, harder than flint, I have made your forehead; do not fear

them or be dismayed at their looks, for they are a rebellious house. He said to me: Mortal, all my words that I shall speak to you receive in your heart and hear with your ears; then go to the exiles, to your people, and speak to them. Say to them, "Thus says the Lord God"; whether they hear or refuse to hear." (Ezek 3:4–11)

By the power of the Spirit, Ezekiel is moved to Babylon (3:12), where he learns the more detailed conditions of his mission. The hearers of his prophetic message are personally responsible, though the prophet is responsible for carrying out his mission (3:16–21). Thus he receives a twofold order. First, he is to address the community of believers in Yahweh and bring them on the right path. From the outset the tradents realize the hopelessness of this undertaking, for in principle the community will reject the message because their resistance against Yahweh is embedded (see the discussion on the fruitlessness of the proclamation above). Hence, this is settled, just as in Isa 6 the ancient theory of obstinacy makes the prophet's mission entirely impossible. Second, however, the individual believer is intended, who may be or become a sinner/ungodly or may live as a righteous/saved individual. All of these contents are poured into the form of God's oracles. In this manner the latter becomes the decisive formal element in the book of Ezekiel. This communication of Yahweh announces and moves both history and society. Formally it is addressed to the prophet. He listens and is to pass it on. The implementation, however, is omitted in the text. The oracles of God, addressed to the prophet and entrusted to him to be imparted, move the events in and of themselves. Nothing further needs to be said. Such messages make up a considerable part of the book of Ezekiel. Compare the following: Ezek 4:1–13, 16–17; 5:1–17; 6:1–14; 7:1–27; 11:2–12, 14–21; 12:1–6, 8–28; 13:1–23; 14:2–11, 12–23; 15:1–8; 16:1–63; 17:1–24; 18:1–32; 20:2–44; 21:1–37; 22:1–31; 23:1–49; and 24:1–17. This lengthy catena of texts has to be cited at least for the first major part of the book, so as to recognize the scope of this unique revelatory communication. As in Deuteronomy or in the book of Jeremiah, they remain in the form mediated to the prophet because in the same way they are consistently cited, read out, or used as enacted Torah in the presence of the community! In the oracles concerning foreign nations in Ezek 25–32, this unique style continues and, with very few exceptions, extends to the varied texts of Ezek 33–39. Given the plurality of contents, of the formal elements used, and obviously also of the differing age and origin of the oracular components, such uniformity of the oracular structure is spectacular. Wherever a normal narrative style is present (see Ezek 8:5, 7, 14; 24:18–19; 33:21; 37:1–2), it is at the disposal of the major oracular complexes.

EXCURSUS: ORACLES TO THE COMMUNITY IN EZEKIEL

The content of the discourses is varied indeed; it seems that especially themes dealing with the problems of the communities of the postexilic period are addressed. Each chapter in Ezek 4–7 contains a thematically self-contained oracle. In Ezek 4 Yahweh orders a sign-act that is meant to symbolize the siege of Jerusalem. Ezekiel 5 contains the instruction concerning the parable of the hair; for Ezekiel, parts of the shorn hair are to signal the fate of Jerusalem and its inhabitants. A third is to be burned, a third is to be cut up with the sword, and a third is to be scattered in the wind (Ezek 5:11–12).

Ezekiel 6 and 7 likewise contain pronouncements of doom of a general kind, without accompanying sign-acts. It may be asked why, from a superficial perspective, an atmosphere of disaster, as it must have existed prior to the fall of Jerusalem in 587 B.C.E., is taken up. In the case of a central theme such as this, surely part of the issue is one of still coping with the past. However, as, for instance, the references to idolatry in the temple (see Ezek 5:11; 8–10) indicate, the tradents have loaded the idea of preexilic “abominations” with illustrative material from the Second Temple period. Solomon’s temple belonged to the state; only the Second Temple received genuine community functions and for this reason could be available for the popular foreign cults (worship of the sun, veneration of Tammuz). Ezekiel 11 contains further charges against Jerusalem, and tensions between exiles and the community of Jerusalem become evident (11:15–17: against the claims of ownership of the land of the deportees by the Jerusalemites!). Because of its sign-act (banishment), Ezek 12 reverts back to the time of the fall of Jerusalem; the problem of false prophecy, mediated by men and women, concerns Ezek 13. In Ezek 14 (as also in Ezek 8; 20) the elders of Israel (or Judah) seeking counsel are the cause for a revelatory oracle. The issue is idolatry. A brief poem about the distinction between wood and the vine, aimed at Jerusalem, half of which is burned down, follows in Ezek 15. The dreadfully impressive parables about the infidelity of Judah, or Samaria and Judah, portrayed by their female symbolic figures, take up chapters 16 and 23. Both texts have a dimension of historical depth and reflect a condition following the catastrophe of Jerusalem. Ezekiel 17, poetically worked out to the last detail, begins with a riddle about eagles, a cedar, and a vine. The interpretation (17:11–24) applies the happenings of the fable to the first and second invasion of the Babylonian troops in Judah. The lengthy chapter 18 provides the answer to the question of individual responsibility. The responsibility of the clan is no longer applicable; everyone is accountable for his or her own action and must not suffer for the guilt of the preceding generation. This is a typically communal, postexilic perspective on things. The strict accountability of the family has ceased,

because the local community has taken up all of the religious functions of the familial group and because it now places every single believer directly in relationship to Yahweh. Ezekiel 22 is a socioethical counterpart, processing catalogs of sins in its discourse. The accusations partly reflect Priestly views (cf. 22:8–11, 26–31; Lev 18:7–16; 26:2). These in turn are reflected most clearly in postexilic works in the Hebrew writings of the canon. They are linked with the Second Temple. Presumably an older, poetically formed lamentation interrupts the series of oracles (Ezek 19). In Ezek 20, however, we are back again in the dominant textual pattern: the central theme of the strongly historical oracle, as already pointed out, is the written, prophetic, and spiritual Torah—a clear *topos* of the postexilic community. The renewed announcement of disaster in Ezek 21, containing a further sign-act, conjures up the doom of the southern country by fire and the sword. Finally, the revelatory oracle of Ezek 24 concludes the drama of the unfaithful and stubborn city; contemporaneous with this address, “the king of Babylon” is said to have “laid siege to Jerusalem this very day” (24:2). According to priestly standards, the blood-stained city (24:6, 9) has done serious wrong: “For the blood she shed is inside it; she placed it on a bare rock; she did not pour it out on the ground, to cover it with earth” (24:7). The surprising transition to a seemingly autobiographical scene (24:18) has been mentioned already. After the oracles against foreign nations, the standardized parts of speech continue, but they take on an increasingly positive perspective. Once again Ezekiel is appointed as a “watchman,” and the individual responsibility of every believer is highlighted once more (Ezek 33). Then the focus turns to the leadership of the nation of Israel. Two possibilities seem to be discussed: Yahweh himself or a descendant of David assumes the task of leadership (Ezek 34:15, 23). It may also be that the two coincide, as the editor of the chapter probably wants it to be understood. A denunciation of Edom (Ezek 35) is followed by a glorious final chapter (Ezek 36). As announced in the surveyed valley of corpses that have been revived, Israel may venture a new beginning (Ezek 37). The final apocalyptic sections (Ezek 38–39) are only a literary *ponto finale*, for in Ezek 40–48 follows the grandiose sketch of the current and future city of the temple of God with its furnishings and functionaries—clearly a vista based on late, postexilic facts.

In terms of genre, the oracles of Ezekiel are situated somewhere between the Deuteronomistic discourses, especially those of Moses (see Deut 1:11; 29–31) but also of other protagonists (Jeremiah!), and the revelatory oracles, as developed especially in the apocalyptic and gnostic literature.¹⁹¹ Already

191. Bruce J. Malina, *On the Genre and Messages of Revelation* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1995).

the conspicuous address of the “son of man” should be given more careful consideration. After all, it is not a concrete human who is addressed by name and place of birth but the generic human. As such, he becomes the mediator of divine wisdom. The authority bestowing upon him his mission is the supreme God, the owner of all knowledge and means. He channels his sovereignty and his plan through the anonymous messenger, or the Ur-human (!), and thus mediates a view of the divine reality and the divine purpose of existence. The instructions to the mediator or revealer, Ezekiel, refer to many realms of life. They have a singular goal, to promote the knowledge of the supreme guide of the world or to effect the turning away from egocentric concepts of life and the world.¹⁹² The knowledge of the highest deity is clearly the decisive concern.¹⁹³ Thus the revelatory oracles in the book of Ezekiel are to be read largely from a general human but also particularly Judean perspective. Based on all indications, their life setting may well be the Diaspora community in Babylon. There one pondered for decades, if not centuries, why the catastrophe of 587 B.C.E. had to affect the holy city Jerusalem with its centrally important temple. One puzzled over the destruction of the temple and held idolatry, rendered in contemporary experiences, accountable for it. Its presence was construed as an opportunity for a new beginning, and the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem was greeted with enthusiasm. Nevertheless, the past was to remain vivid as an everlasting warning against renewed apostasy from Yahweh. This is at least part of the motivation for presenting the warnings and orientations in the historical wrapping of the Babylonian era to the address of the postexilic community.

The ancient Persian sacred writings are conversant with a constellation that is analogous to the Old Testament. God, his spokesperson, and the community interact. The human mediator, also presented by name as Zoroaster in the Gathas, addresses Ahura Mazda: “This I ask Thee, tell me plainly...” (Yasna 44, following H. Humbach, *Gathas*) is the stereotypical beginning of the strophes of the ninth hymn. Encounters of the messenger with his god are also addressed elsewhere. A key topos of the Gathas is the knowledge of God and of the basic harmony (*aša*):

192. See the final statements of the units of speech: “I, the LORD, have spoken” (Ezek 5:17; 17:24; 21:37; 37:14), “I am your God, says the Lord God” (34:31), “Then they shall know that I am the LORD” (6:14; 7:27; 12:16, 20; 13:23; 14:23; 16:62; 20:44; 23:49; 24:27; 25:17; 28:26; 29:21; 30:26; 33:33; 35:15; 36:38; 37:28; 38:23), “and I will be their God, says the Lord God” (14:11), “For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, says the Lord God. Turn, then, and live” (18:32).

193. See Walter Zimmerli, “Knowledge of God according to the Book of Ezekiel,” in idem, *I Am Yahweh* (trans. Douglas W. Stott; Atlanta: Knox, 1982).

11. I realize that Thou art prosperous, O wise Ahura, when one attends me with good thought. Since through statements (voiced) by You, I learn (about) the primal (stage of existence) confidence in mortals appears distressing to me. Let me do what You tell me (to be) the best. 12. And when Thou tellest me: "With foresight thou reaches truth," then thou givest me orders (which will) not (be) disobeyed. Let me arise before (recompense for) obedience Will have come to me, followed by wealth-granting reward, who at the benefaction will distribute the rewards according to (the respective) balances. (Yasna 43:11, following Humbach, *Gathas*)

Ahura Mazda, the "Lord Wisdom," is the outstanding divine figure; he acts together with divine beings that could also be understood as his manifestations, such as Vohu Manah, "Good Thought." Through his close contact with the divine world, Zoroaster becomes the one who knows and mediates. The issue is knowledge and passing on of *aša*, the basic principle of truth and harmony. *Sraoša*, the implementing divine power, indicates the final account about life's work of the proclamation of God. Hence, as in the Old Testament, and especially in Ezekiel, there is a responsible mediator of the word at the center of the events. From God he receives the instructions, the knowledge that he is to pass on to the people. The latter have to decide between the lying spirits and the only truth-bringing life, that of Ahura Mazda:

1. Reiterating these requirements we proclaim these words to you, incredible to those who, heeding the instructions of the lying spirit, corrupt the living things of Aša, but the best words to those who believe Mazdā.
2. Therefore, if the way representing the better choice cannot be seen, I am coming to all of you as the one who knows Ahura Mazdā as judge between the two parties, in order that we might live in accordance with Aša. ...
5. Tell me to determine what you have given me through Aša of that which is better than knowing through Vohu Manah and than remembering—as I was inspired—that, O Ahura Mazdā, which will or will not be.
6. The best will be what I am told by the one who tells me the right formula because he knows, namely, that of Haurvatāt, Aša, and Amartāt: "To Mazdā belongs the realm that he causes to grow through Vohu Manah." (Yasna 31, following Widengren, *Geisteswelt*)

A confession addressed to the only creator, Ahura Mazda (strophes 7 and 8, Yasna 31), concludes this fourth Gatha. It clarifies the commission and significance of the mediator, regardless of whether or not the historical figure of Zoroaster is perceived behind it. In strophe 6 it seems to be the human

messenger who speaks in the first-person singular. He is sworn to the three essential powers, the feminine Haurvatāt and Amartāt, two immortal benefactresses, and Aša, the world order. The addressees of the proclamation are people in general, humanity, without regard for nationality and ethnic origin. Those addressed are “all who are alive” (Yasna 31:3), “you, O people” (Yasna 30:11). On account of personal decision, they very quickly fall into the two groups of adherents to the truth and friends of lies (“adherents of the devil,” Yasna 30:11); fundamentally, however, the saving wisdom is for all people, and occasionally they are addressed in this general way. The good and the bad are also confronted separately and directly by the message. An example of this is the denunciation of the *daēvas*, the evil demons:

3. But all of you Daēvas issued from the Evil Manah, and so did the one who venerates you much, and the lie and pride, as well as your deeds for which you have long been well known in the seventh segment of the earth.
4. Since you have decreed that people who practice what is most wicked are to be called darlings of the Daēvas, who retreat from Vohu Manah, who turn away from the counsel of Mazdā Ahura and from Aša.
5. Since then you thereby rob people of good life and immortality, a practice that you, Daēvas, together with the Evil Manah, were taught by the Evil Spirit, promising power to the liar through the evil word. (Yasna 32:3–5, following Widengren, *Geisteswelt*)

However the dualistic features, which can be embedded in a comprehension such as this, might be assessed, the Gathas portray a conflicting world into which the prophet is sent with his message of truth, order, and life.

From a form-critical vantage point, the Old Avestian texts were handed down as liturgical songs, occasionally showing a community-related situation, also via the first-person plural referring to the worshiping congregation. The language of prayer, praise, direct address to good and evil, instruction, admonition, and threat—all of these are also well-known elements from the prophetic discourse in the Old Testament. Longer, connected divine oracles are found in the more recent Avestian groups of text, such as the Yašt, for instance.

55. Thus said Ōhrmazd to Spitāmān Zartušt: “Memorize the interpretation and the explanation of the interpretation, and reveal the explanation; speak to the ‘priests of fire’ and the ‘disciples.’ In the world address those who do not understand after (ten-) hundred winters, telling them that because of the hope of the future body and of deliverance of (their) own soul, they may place little value on the wrath and disaster and resistance of those people who are without religion and (yet) celebrate the Yasna associated with religion.”

56. "And this I declare to you, Oh Spitāmān Zartušt, that whoever seeks the body in this age, is not able to redeem his soul, for a well-nourished body means misery of the soul and suffering in hell; but whoever seeks the soul has the misery of the body and suffering in the world and is heavy laden and poor but in paradise his soul is well-fed (= well-being)." (Bahman, *Yašt* I).

In such revelatory discourses of the mediator with the only God and the dominant oracle of commission to certain addressees, the Avestian examples also agree formally with the findings of the Old Testament. The phenomenon of such profound analogy cannot be explained by means of literary dependence but perhaps on the basis of common intellectual, cultural, and also religious assumptions and surroundings. Clearly there were thought structures (or an intellectual climate) in the Persian sphere of influence that could be utilized by different religious communities. The superior creator-God and ruler of the world no longer was the natural shepherd of his ancestral admirers, tied to society and dynasty, but communicated with believers and unbelievers as a special, nonmythically, genealogically legitimated deity. Through the mediator this deity called for a decision in its favor. The religion of Zoroaster, like that of Moses or Ezekiel, was a confessional faith that called for individual adoption and accountability with an ethical and cultic basis. It was built upon a sacred, written tradition and in principle was open for all people, hence its universality. The official mediator and herald of the salvific truth constituted the central communicative hinge, in contrast to all "natural" religious structures bound up with society. The essential means for communication and formation of the community was the mediated oracle of God, in the face of which each individual had to make a decision. The cultic work was of secondary importance; it did indeed radiate into the community's everyday life: purity regulations were applicable in conjunction with high-ranking ethical rules.

Thus in its peculiarly structured literary form, with its emphasis on the son of man as mediator and his sermons of warning and repentance, with the homiletical-liturgical character and the emerging apocalypticism, with its ideal drafts for a citizen-temple-community to be constructed, and with all of the signs discussed concerning individualism, solidarity, and universalism, the book of Ezekiel is a clear witness of the new period that dawned following the assumption of power by the Persians. In terms of genre and content, the three "major" prophets demonstrate considerable differences; each book has its own theological profile. Nevertheless, there seem to be strong commonalities with regard to life setting and the use of the texts.

III.2.3. THE THIRD PART OF THE CANON

Auvers, Jean-Marie, and H. J. de Jonge, eds. *The Biblical Canons* (BETL 163; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2003). **Barr**, James. *Holy Scripture: Canon, Authority, Criticism* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983). **Barton**, John. *The Unity of Scripture and the Diversity of the Canon* (BZAW 329; New York: de Gruyter, 2003). **Chapman**, Stephen B. *The Law and the Prophets: A Study of Old Testament Canon Formation* (FAT 27; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000). **Clines**, David, Hermann Lichtenberger, and Hans-Peter Müller, eds. *Weisheit in Israel* (Altes Testament und Moderne 12; Münster: Lit, 2003). **Crüsemann**, Frank. *Kanon und Sozialgeschichte* (Gütersloh: Kaiser, Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2003). **Davies**, Philip R. *Scribes and Schools: The Canonization of the Hebrew Scriptures* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998). **Dohmen**, Christoph, and Manfred Oeming. *Biblischer Kanon: Warum und wozu? Eine Kanontheologie* (QD 137; Freiburg: Herder, 1992). **Fischer**, Irmtraud, Ursula Rapp, and Johannes Schiller, eds. *Auf den Spuren der schriftgelehrten Weisen* (BZAW 331; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2003). **Kooij**, Arie van der, and Karel van der Toorn, eds. *Canonization and Decanonization* (SHR 82; Leiden: Brill, 1998). **MacDonald**, Lee M., and James A. Sanders, eds. *The Canon Debate* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2002). **Sanders**, James A. *Canon and Community. A Guide to Canonical Criticism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983).

Large parts of the Pentateuch and of the prophetic canon originated in the Persian period—this much is fairly certain. But what is the situation concerning the Writings (Ketubim), that multifaceted third part of the Hebrew Bible that obviously gathers various practical, theological texts? The arrangement and sequence of the individual collections is quite diverse in the extant manuscript traditions. The variety becomes even larger through relatively independent septuagintal variants, not to mention the “apocryphal” texts that were not allowed into the Hebrew canon or that were removed again in times of a restrictive interpretation of canonicity. Some texts were at the fringe of the Hebrew canon, which was not conclusively fixed until the Christian era; they were disputed, and their place in the Holy Scriptures continued to be questioned in subsequent history. This means that the various *canones* of binding biblical books have always been in flux, subject to society and situation. Basically there was and is no unique, exclusively valid, sacred text. Every community, for example, Aramaic-speaking Jews, Hellenized Jewish communities, separatist communities such as the Samaritans and the people of Qumran, and emerging Christian communities (we disregard the exaggerated concepts of authorship of literary scholarship), created their own manual of “revelatory words” of their God. The respective foundational, binding writings served certain religious groupings in finding their identity. For the Jewish faith, the time frame in which the literary shibboleth was shaped and consolidated is situated between 587 B.C.E. and the second century C.E.

The canon's division into three parts is probably a relatively late phenomenon, and so are many divisions of the book; several functional texts possibly fluctuated back and forth between the "book covers" before they found their final place. Roughly speaking, in the arrangement of the collections of Torah, Nebi'im, and Ketubim, chronological, content-related, and practical perspectives were probably central. That which corresponded with the giving of the law at Sinai in terms of age and nature and what preceded this decisive event of the distant past was allocated to the first part, the Mosaic revelation. These fundamental texts probably also served as reading texts in important gatherings of the community. Everything of a later period and everything that had to do with the ongoing proclamation of the Torah subsequent to Moses was gathered into the canon of the prophets, which was also used liturgically. What remained were the "songs of praise to God and rules of life for people" (Josephus, *Contra Apionem* 1.8), the third part of Scripture, for which a ritualistic use for various ceremonies must be assumed. The sequencing and text-form of the "books" is even looser than we have become used to in the first two parts of the canon. At this juncture we have to deal with those collections that had already been extant in the Persian period and have been edited in the community's further use.

Consequently, we are able to put aside completely those writings that only originated in the subsequent Hellenistic period: Qoheleth, Esther (see §III.1.2.4 above), Daniel, and, naturally, all of the deuterocanonical collections, even if they should contain scattered older material here and there.¹⁹⁴ As original works from the Persian period, the Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah, Ruth, and, with some restrictions, Lamentations and the Song of Solomon have already been acknowledged above. There remain the Psalter, Job, and Proverbs; during the Achaemenid period, their main substance likely already existed but, as demonstrated especially in the textual history of the collections of the Psalms and which can be recognized in Qumran, had not yet fully determined.

III.2.3.1. Psalter

Erbele-Küster, Dorothea. *Lesen als Akt des Betens: Eine Rezeptionsästhetik der Psalmen* (WMANT 87; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2001). **Flint**, Peter W., and Patrick D. Miller, eds. *The Book of Psalms: Composition and Reception* (VTSup 9; Boston: Brill, 2005). **Gerstenberger**, Erhard S. "Der Psalter als Buch und als Sammlung," in *Neue Wege der Psalmenforschung* (ed. Klaus Seybold and Erich Zenger;

194. Ernst Haag, *Das hellenistische Zeitalter* (BibEnc 9; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2003).

HBS 1; Freiburg: Herder, 1994), 3–13. **Gerstenberger**, Konrad Jutzler, and Hans Jochen Boecker, eds. *Zu Hilfe, mein Gott* (4th ed.; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1989). **McCann**, J. Clinton, ed. *The Shape and Shaping of the Psalter* (JSOTSup 159; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993). **Millard**, Matthias. *Die Komposition des Psalters: Ein formgeschichtlicher Ansatz* (FAT 9; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1994). **Rösel**, Christoph. *Die messianische Redaktion des Psalters* (Calwer theologische Monographien, A/19; Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1999). **Süssenbach**, Claudia. *Der elohistische Psalter* (FAT 2/7; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003). **Westermann**, Claus. *The Psalms: Structure, Content and Message* (trans. Ralph D. Gehrke; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1980). **Wilson**, Gerald H. *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter* (SBLDS 76; Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1985). **Zenger**, E. “Was wird anders bei kanonischer Psalmenauslegung?” in *Ein Gott, eine Offenbarung* (ed. Friedrich V. Reiterer; Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 1991), 397–413.

As described above, the collections of Psalms came from an unknown past; the songs of lament, thanksgivings, and praise served the responsible experts as important, set pieces to be recited in various religious rituals.¹⁹⁵ They were adapted for use by the community of Jerusalem, and some new types and collections were added in keeping with the needs of the new type of religious community (see §III.1.3.1–2 above). But what about the overall arrangement of the extant texts of the psalms in the Psalter, used liturgically at varying communal events?

Precisely with regard to this process of the final redaction of the Psalter, an extensive scholarly body of literature has developed in recent years. The developed theories about the merging of various materials and strands of tradition diverge quite considerably in their particulars. On the whole, however, all of them are positioned on the premise of literary-historical and theological analysis. The complete Psalter is intended as a book for reading and devotion, consciously composed by scribal collectors and editors and then brought into its canonical form.¹⁹⁶ This view of things is shaped by holistic and integral exegesis of Scripture, as developed by B. S. Childs and Rolf Rendtorff. From the many individual psalmodic texts that have their own respective main points, they form an overall theological, messianic, and salvific witness. While contemporary interpreters cannot be denied the right to read the Psalms synchronically, intertextually, and ordered in outline form, the question very much remains as to what extent redactors of the Psalter as a whole intended this kind of reading material. Granted, every endeavor involving the ancient texts applies certain eisegetical methods, since we are indeed able to grasp

195. See my form-critical and sociohistorical interpretation of the psalms in Gerstenberger, *Psalms*.

196. See Zenger, “Was wird anders bei kanonischer Psalmenauslegung”; Millard, *Die Komposition des Psalters*; Wilson, *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter*.

conditions that are historically and culturally so distant only by means of our own framework of thought. Conversely, however, the horrible historical gap needs to be respected; otherwise exegesis levels off the other conditions of the past before we become aware of them as strange. It is also granted that the necessarily literary work of the composition and passing on of the texts of the psalms did not take place neutrally but exposes the tracks of the editors, their intentions and aversions. All the same, or precisely for this reason, the burning question is when and for what purpose the overall collection and the final edition of the Psalter was made.

Most experts agree that the book of Psalms contains several clear indicators of the final redaction(s). The two psalms at the beginning (Pss 1 and 2), which remained without a heading, may well have been placed at the beginning close to the end of the (almost) complete collection. At least Ps 1 is a kind of introduction for the entire book; it places the emphasis on reading the Torah and total surrender to Yahweh, and it cautions against the “godless” or “wicked” (*rēšāʾīm*):

Happy are those who do not follow the advice of the wicked,
or take the path that sinners tread, or sit in the seat of scoffers;
but their delight is in the law of the LORD,
and on his law they meditate day and night. (Ps 1:1–2)

The (male!) members of the community are to order their life according to the pattern of Torah students; Deut 17:18–19, Jer 17:8, and Ps 92:13–15 are contemporary parallel expressions, and Pss 19:8–11 and 119 expound the joy in and the love for the orienting Word of God. In Ps 1 the community of followers of Yahweh, as in the adjoining texts, is assumed, and a “countercommunity” of deviants comes into view. The first psalm not only instructs them in the reading of the psalms but teaches them the Torah. He advises all those who deal with the texts of the psalms, whether as those praying or listening, to seek an intimate relationship with Yahweh via his Torah and to attune the ear that is willing to learn by hearing the centrally important Word of God.

In the book of Psalms that was later canonized, Ps 150 is a single call for praise for Yahweh and provides a musical final chord. This count of 150 text units has a certain symbolic value. With the round number, the entire Psalter portrays a complete construction, although in divergent traditions some additional psalms are appended.¹⁹⁷ The rounded-off impression is

197. The additional texts in Syriac have been known for a long time; see Harry F. van Rooy, “The Psalms in Early Syriac Tradition,” in Flint and Miller, *The Book of Psalms*, 537–50.

reinforced by the Psalter's division into five subdivisions, each separated by liturgical formulas (after Pss 41; 72; 89; 106), which probably are reminiscent of the five books of the Torah. But whether the concluding psalm (Ps 150) and the division of the books already came about during the Persian period or substantially later is difficult to determine. Some of the manuscripts of the Psalms found at Qumran favor an unfinished collection at the time of the Qumran community.¹⁹⁸ Be that as it may, experts also discuss the possibility that there were various shorter collections than the Psalter today and that it was gradually created. Further, since there is textual uncertainty about the sequence and number of psalms belonging precisely at the end of the corpus, a linear development is often assumed. Accordingly, further blocks of text were gradually attached to smaller collections, such as Pss 3–41 and 42–72. In this way it would be possible—presumably in the Persian period—to reckon with a Psalter that extended from Ps 3 to Ps 72. There is indeed a scribal note (colophon) that appears at this point: “The prayers of David son of Jesse are ended” (Ps 72:20). This notation seems to be in accordance with a provisional end in the development of the Psalter. In this case it would have been less than half as extensive as the current canonical collection.

Psalm 72 displays the ancient Near Eastern royal ideology of the righteous ruler who exercises care for his people or for the earth vicariously for the God of the country or of the world. The historic kingdoms of Israel and Judah surely shared the common belief in a just order mediated through the kings. Yet we scarcely have original attestation of an ideology such as this: all of the biblical texts have been (re?)formed through extensive processes of tradition and are now extant in late versions. This also applies to Ps 72. It conspicuously focuses on the deplorable situation of the people:

Give the king your justice, O God, and your righteousness to a king's son.
 May he judge your people with righteousness, and your poor with justice.
 May the mountains yield prosperity for the people, and the hills, in righteousness.
 May he defend the cause of the poor of the people, give deliverance to the
 needy, and crush the oppressor. (Ps 72:1–4; see also 72:12–14)

The vocabulary used belongs to the late rhetoric of lowliness, helplessness, and devastation of the people of Israel. “The poor” and “the needy” are self-designations of the exilic/postexilic community. The collective laments and

198. See James A. Sanders, *The Psalms Scroll of Qumran Cave 11* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1965).

petitions reflect celebrations and rituals of lament of the epoch following the defeat of 587 B.C.E. Conversely, the psalm radiates a utopian, universal expectation of salvation associated with the king and his dynasty:

May he live while the sun endures, and as long as the moon, throughout all generations.

May he be like rain that falls on the mown grass, like showers that water the earth.

In his days may righteousness flourish and peace abound, until the moon is no more.

May he have dominion from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth. (Ps 72:5–8)

The yearning for global significance, which probably also lies dormant in minor potentates, expressed in the forms found in Ps 72 can hardly be assumed in the period of the Israelite-Judaic monarchy. Old Testament texts with such extreme expectations should confidently be taken as that which they are: either retrospections of imperial dreams in the past or future hopes for a glorious future in which the universal king Yahweh, with or without Davidic (or from another tribe?) agent carrying it out, is taking up his reign. The expectation of the future that moves from eschatology to apocalyptic is a consequence of the real collapse of the Judaic sovereignty, of recapturing an ethnic and religious identity since the beginning of the Persian rule, of the development of a universal and exclusive belief in God, and of the awakening of a corresponding understanding of the world. In the end, Yahweh will establish his kingdom on earth and possibly revive the Davidic (not explicitly mentioned here) dynasty again. The postexilic horizon of the poem is demonstrated to the extent that Ps 72 focuses on the situation of the community's poverty and the future implementation of divine righteousness with the help of a king (theoretically, this could also intend the Persian emperor as an example), the postexilic horizon of the poem.

Thus if a Psalter comprising Pss 2–72 ever existed, it perhaps might have had a messianic orientation: the announcement of the unrestricted rule of God, encompassing all nations, by the appointed king and son of God (Pss 2; 7) established on Mount Zion against all rebellious world powers, would then have opened the collection of Psalms, and the firm expectation of the completed realm of righteousness (Ps 72) would have ended it. Even if the assumption is relevant, it remains open as to whether an introductory and concluding text of a collection, apart from numerous references to David in the headings of the psalms and some scattered poems referring to the king (Pss 20; 21; 45), would have been able to create a messianic work out of a collection of functional texts (lament, petition, and trust on the part of indi-

viduals praying) that are so heavily weighted in a different direction. Such polarization via first and last texts is scarcely verifiable by means of hymnals and prayerbooks commonly used today.

Other scholars think they perceive a similar ending of the book in Ps 89. It is no accident that there is a similar break between books at the conclusion of this psalm (after 89:52). However, Ps 89 deals with the catastrophe of the kingdom in 587 B.C.E. Although it begins with a reflection on the great period of David (Ps 89:1–38; cf. 89:4–5) and thus coincides closely with the dynastic promise of 2 Sam 7, it subsequently adopts an entirely different tone. Initially even creation themes are included (89:6–13); the hymn about Yahweh's incomparable power introduces the election of the legendary founder of the Israelite state, citing an oracle of Yahweh:

I have set the crown on one who is mighty, I have exalted one chosen from the people.

I have found my servant David; with my holy oil I have anointed him. ...

I will set his hand on the sea and his right hand on the rivers.

He shall cry to me: "You are my Father, my God, and the Rock of my salvation!"

I will make him the firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth. (Ps 89:19b–20, 25–27).

How much of this oracle can be attributed to authentic formulations of the monarchic period cannot be determined. At least the statement about the rule of sea and rivers smacks of a later coloration. The historical kingdom did not have any great ambitions of influence overseas, if one disregards 1 Kgs 10:22, which probably is a reflective exaggeration as well. Further, the dominion over "rivers" (plural!) per se sounds very mythological. The reference to divine sonship also belongs rather to the attributes heaped on the past kingdom retrospectively in the course of time. Consequently, viewed in this way, already the initial large part of the psalm is a postexilic formation. This becomes even clearer in the lamenting and petitioning second part (89:39–52), which presupposes the fall of the kingdom of Judah and a prolonged period of suffering. The reciters first badger Yahweh with serious reproaches (89:38–47: second-person address: "you have spurned ... rejected ... renounced") and then transition to petitioning (89:48–51), supported by the twofold use of the appeal to remember: "Remember how short my time is. ... Remember, O Lord, how your servant is taunted" (89:47, 50). The wisdom related, penetrating reflection on transitoriness, the question about the validity of ancient promises that is substantiated thereby, and the ongoing burden of the defeat and of disparagement in the multiracial state—all of these are signs of a more protracted, burdening situation of oppression and depen-

dence. This burden continues to be borne in the lament ritual in the time of the new beginning (cf. Neh 9:36–37).

If concluding texts can have such meaning, Ps 89 as a possible concluding text of an older edition of psalms could indeed signal the failure of the kingdom of Israel and Judah rather than its ongoing significance. A final note of this kind is difficult to imagine after the glorious beginning with Ps 2. Further, the immediate context of Ps 89 does not radiate great future hopes. Psalm 88 is the most hopeless individual lament in the entire Psalter. In light of the eternality of God, Ps 90 allows the extremely thin life expectancy of each person to shrink to nothing. Would a Psalter ending in these surroundings really have wanted to place emphasis on the notion of a frustrated kingdom despite its very different, multiform content of the composition of Ps 3 to Ps 87? Or do the concluding petitions of Ps 89 matter so much that a new perspective of the future was opened for believers? However these questions may be answered, it seems to me to be fairly plausible that the concluding psalm of a collection, or its framing by well-directed introductory and concluding texts, cannot and does not intend to determine the character of the entire book just like that. Collections of clearly defined individual texts, which can be attributed to specific genres and life settings, retain their character as collections of functional texts despite redactional intrusions.¹⁹⁹

The third striking psalm that has been interpreted as a possible early conclusion of an edition of the Psalms²⁰⁰ is the longest text of the Old Testament book of hymns and prayers: Ps 119. It is an alphabetical acrostic with eight successive lines beginning with the same letter, thus resulting in a total length of eight times twenty-two lines, for a total of 176 lines. Despite its length, the poem knows only one theme: Yahweh's Torah and the Torah-piety that God desires. In terms of this goal, the extensive psalm completely agrees with the brief beginning poem of Ps 1. It can easily be imagined that both formed a bracket around the remaining 117 prayers, hymns, and meditations and that both pointed to a common task: to conduct one's life in close contact with the divinely revealed will, established in writing. In particular, the argumentation in Ps 119 proceeds as follows. The first segment contains a twofold beatitude (congratulation), prayer, gratitude to Yahweh, vow, and petition:

Happy are those, whose way is blameless, who walk in the *law* of the LORD.
Happy are those who keep his *decrees*, who seek him with their whole heart,
Who also *do no wrong*, but walk in his ways.

199. See Gerstenberger, "Der Psalter als Buch," esp. 9–13.

200. So Westermann; see also Roger Norman Whybray, *Reading the Psalms as a Book* (JSOTSup 222; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 18.

You have commanded your *precepts* to be kept diligently.
 O that my ways may be steadfast in keeping your *statutes*!
 Then I shall not be put to shame, having my eyes fixed on all your *commandments*.
 I will praise you with an upright heart, when I learn your righteous *ordinances*.
 I will observe your *statutes*; do not utterly forsake me. (Ps 119:1–8).

The italicized words are (1) the term “Torah”/“law” itself (119:1) and (2) seven synonyms (119:2–8) for Torah, in which one of the two occurrences of *ḥuqqîm* has been replaced with *‘imrâ* (“word”) (119:5, cf. 119:8).²⁰¹ The life of the follower of Yahweh was centered on the Torah. Nearness to the Torah meant nearness to God. From such nearness came vitality. God’s presence in Holy Scripture had to be professed; it had to be sought and practiced actively. Almost all of the following twenty-one segments of the psalm deal with this. Style and form change in a certain variation. Well represented is addressing God in prayer, so that the entire psalm can also be read as a direct address to God. Such a monotonously intensive address of a multistructured object shows that this theme was on the community’s mind a great deal. It represents a traditional item, not a short-lived fad. For Ps 119, Torah was an established entity that every individual in the group of those of like mind had to adopt. The redundant poem uses many topoi of the individual lament and of the individual hymn of thanksgiving but processes them for the new situation of the community Torah-piety. In this way the lament concerning the wicked (119:61 and frequently) and the “instruction of the ignorant” (119:64 and frequently) found their way into the litany resembling a catechism. However, the use of older forms also indicates the change in the social structure that began in the postexilic period.²⁰²

For our taste, Ps 119 would indeed make the most beautiful conclusion to a Psalter, serving a community oriented to the Torah as a book of prayer. It would harmonize perfectly with the introductory text of Ps 1 and the second part of Ps 19. Furthermore, since the late addition to the literature of the Psalms reflects the other genres of an individual’s practice of prayer so much, it would also satisfy the content of the encompassed texts (Pss 3–118) to a large extent. In addition, it probably would take up the tension between the “godless” and the “righteous” pervading the Psalter²⁰³ in an independent fashion (only six occurrences of *rešā’îm* over against six times *zēdîm*, “impu-

201. The NRSV does not make this distinction.

202. See Gerstenberger, *Psalms II*, 310–17.

203. See Christoph Levin, “Das Gebetsbuch der Gerechten,” *ZTK* 90 (1993): 335–81.

dent”; *ṣaddiq*, “righteous,” used only once with reference to God (119:137). In this instance, too, however, the question marks that we placed with regard to the significance of the compositional technique are in order. If we recognize that the individual texts of the Psalter also continued to be used in various liturgical functions after their collection into a “book”—after all, it was precisely in the final redactions that they received individual headings with all kinds of references to particular handling and effect—it should be clear that the redactors’ theological, systematizing intent in shaping them should not be overrated. In the Persian period, the Psalter had not yet become a reader of the devout; this is not attested until the *regula Benedicti* in the fifth century C.E. Prior to this, in the Hellenistic and Roman periods, there had been developments toward a private culture of reading (see Acts 8), which did not necessarily include the Psalter, however. In keeping with the nature of the collected texts, especially the Psalter is not a “book by authors” or a “reader,” as we have it in mind, but rather a collection of functional texts, as we also continue to know them in our orders of worship and hymnals.

The topics and liturgical areas of use of the texts of the Psalms are quite broad, as we may be able to assume from the spectrum of the community’s life in the exilic and postexilic period. Some of the hymns may have been associated with the general assembly of all Israelites (on the parochial level as well!), as Neh 8 (but also Deut 29–30; Josh 24) indicates. Worship in the synagogue evolved from the local assemblies. The annual festivals offered events for songs of praise and petition, instruction, and commemoration of history. As presented above (§III.1.3.2), many types of psalms only began to be used in the life of the community of the Second Temple: teaching, homily, and proclamation of the Torah. Others lived on, having been adopted from early cultic contexts. This is especially true of the large group of individual hymns of lament, petition, and thanksgiving. Occasionally they reveal traces of editing that occurred in the transition from the domestic sphere to their use in the community. The basic pattern remained: in life-threatening situations people call on their tutelary deity, to fend against enemies and asking for speedy help. Under the sign of the community, this liturgy is raised to a corporate level. Thus in Ps 12:2–9 the lament of the individual broadens to the sphere of the poor and oppressed (12:6).²⁰⁴ In other individual prayers a communal request is suddenly voiced (see 102:13–23). Such mixtures of purely personal and communal concerns allow for the conclusion that forms

204. Gerstenberger, “Ps 12,” in Gerstenberger, Jutzler, and Boecker, *Zu Hilfe*, 27–28; on this matter, see also Erhard S. Gerstenberger, “Psalm 12: Gott hilft den Unterdrückten,” in *Anwalt des Menschen* (ed. B. Jendorff and G. Schmalenberg; Giessen: Selbstverlag des Fachbereichs, 1983), 83–104.

of familial petition rituals continued to be used in the local community. This is not surprising; every group of people needs arrangements for treating the sick, for instance. In the postexilic community, the respective rituals were controlled by the religion of Yahweh; they were not left to foreign domestic or protective deities and their functionaries.

Whatever may have been its shape in the Persian period, the Psalter reflects the colorful life of the early Jewish communities. It contains prayers and hymns, sermons and instruction for the purpose of the adherents of Yahweh. As already indicated, their direct participation in the recitation of texts is also suggested by many “we” formulations.²⁰⁵ In this context it is not appropriate to limit the liturgical and ritual practice of the confessional community to the sphere of the temple in Jerusalem. It would be incorrect, therefore, to speak of a “hymnal of the temple community,” if any ritual activity at other locations (including the Diaspora) should be thereby excluded. No, the widely scattered parochial communities, grouping primarily around the Torah and its proclamation and not around the place of sacrifice, needed suitable texts for their festivals and celebrations, dedicatory ceremonies and treatment of the sick. They obtained from tradition and by means of new literature, collected what proved its worth and was popular, and gradually arranged a collection valid for the worldwide Jewish community of faith. Interestingly, later scribes provided the collection with the heading *tēhillim*, “songs of praise.” This means that for the tradents the broadly represented hymnal element was particularly important. Songs of praise of various kinds are concentrated in the final third of our Psalter, forming a resonant final chord (Ps 145–150; yet see also Ps 103–104; 111–118). Many exegetes see a dramatic trajectory from the lament to praise in the structure of the Psalter. Indeed, the goal of every individual hymn of lament (except for Ps 88?) is the breakthrough to thanksgiving and praise. For this reason the designation “songs of praise” is certainly justified, although not completely so. The Psalter of the Persian period, which perhaps still went through several changes in the Hellenistic period, without doubt became the most complex and profoundest book of the Old Testament.

III.2.3.2. Job

Beuken, Wim A. M. *The Book of Job* (BETL 114; Leuven: University of Leuven Press, 1994). **Cheney**, Michael. *Dust, Wind and Agony: Character, Speech and Genre in Job* (ConBOT 36; Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1994). **Dell**, Katharine J. *The Book of Job*

205. See, e.g., Pss 48; 80; 95; 100; 136; 147; Erhard S. Gerstenberger, “Psalmen und Ritualpraxis,” in *Ritual und Poesie* (ed. Erich Zenger; Freiburg: Herder, 2003), 81–83.

as *Sceptical Literature* (BZAW 197; New York: de Gruyter, 1991). **Ebach**, Jürgen. *Streiten mit Gott: Hiob* (2 vols.; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1996). **Englählinger**, Klaudia. *Theologie im Streitgespräch* (SBS 198; Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2003). **Fuchs**, Gisela. *Mythos und Hiobdichtung: Aufnahme und Umdeutung altorientalischer Vorstellungen* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1993). **Grادل**, Felix. *Das Buch Ijob* (NSKAT 17; Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2001). **Keel**, Othmar. *Jahwes Entgegnungen an Ijob* (FRLANT 121; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1978). **Lambert**, Wilfred C. *Babylonian Wisdom Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1960). **Mende**, Theresia. *Durch Leiden zur Vollendung* (TThSt 49; Trier: Paulinus, 1990). **Müller**, Hans-Peter. *Das Hiobproblem* (2nd ed.; EdF 84; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1988). **Newsom**, Carol A. *The Book of Job: A Contest of Moral Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003). **Perdue**, Leo G., and W. Clark Gilpin, eds. *The Voice from the Whirlwind* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1992). **Pyeon**, Yohan. "You Have Not Spoken What Is Right about Me": *Intertextuality and the Book of Job* (Studies in Biblical Literature 45; New York: Lang, 2003). **Remus**, Martin. *Menschenbildvorstellungen im Ijob-Buch* (Frankfurt: Lang, 1993). **Schökel**, Luis Alonso, and José Luis Sicre Diaz. *Job: Comentario teológico y literario* (Madrid: Ediciones Cristiandad, 2002). **Syring**, Wolf-Dieter. *Hiob und sein Anwalt* (BZAW 336; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2004).

In Mesopotamia, the two-sided theme of Job—Why does the righteous person have to suffer? and Are the gods just in their dealings with humans?—is ancient. It goes back to the second millennium at least. Generally this compound theological question belongs to the realm of ceremonies of lament and petition, by means of which the needy seek to ensure the help of their deities. One of the Neo-Sumerian laments has been given the title "The Sumerian Job" because faint reproaches against personal tutelary gods can be heard in it:

My companion says not a true word to me,
 My friend gives the lie to my righteous word.
 The man of deceit has *conspired* against me,
 (And) you, my God, do not thwart him,
 You carry off my understanding. (ANET, 590)

Further emotional lamentation and reproachful questions addressed to the deity are followed by a confession of sins by the petitioner (lines 111–13) and an (anticipated?) account of pardon, rehabilitation of the petitioner, and expelling of the demons causing illness, as well as granting tutelary spirits (lines 118–29). The basic elements of the book of Job are also present, even though the dramatic debate with friends who think differently is not part of the plot. The lament ritual with a happy ending turns into praise: "The human faithfully expresses the eminence of his (personal) god!"²⁰⁶

206. See line 130; W. H. Ph. Römer, "Der Mensch und sein Gott," *TUAT* 3.1:109.

The most widely known ancient Near Eastern “Job” epic, written in Akkadian around 1000 B.C.E., is named in keeping with its initial line, *Ludlul bēl nēmeqi*, “I will sing to the Lord of Wisdom.” A “righteous sufferer” brings his affliction before Marduk, the god of Babylon. This major work (approx. 480 lines on four tablets) begins with an extensive hymn (tablet I, lines 1–40) and concludes with the rehabilitation of the sufferer (tablet IV). In between, however, the petitioner wrestles with the deities, in the manner of Job. He knows he has been treated unjustly.²⁰⁷

I called to my god, but he did not show his face,
 I prayed to my goddess, but she did not raise her head,
 The diviner with his inspection has not got to the root of the matter,
 Nor has the dream priest with his libation elucidated my case.
 I sought the favor of the *zaqītu*-spirit, but he did not enlighten me;
 And the incantation priest with his ritual did not appease the divine wrath
 against me.
 Like one who has not made libations to his god,
 Nor invoked his goddess at table,
 Does not engage in prostration, nor takes cognizance of bowing down;
 From whose mouth supplication and prayer is lacking,
 Who has done nothing on holy days, and despised sabbaths,
 Who in his negligence has despised the gods’ rites,
 Has not taught his people reverence and worship,
 But has eaten his food without invoking his god,
 And abandoned his goddess by not bringing a flour offering,
 Like one who has grown *torpid* and forgotten his lord,
 Has frivolously sworn a solemn oath by his god,
 (like such a one) do I appear.
 For myself, I gave attention to supplication and prayer:
 To me prayer was discretion, sacrifice my rule.
 The day of reverencing the god was a joy to my heart;
 The day of the goddess’s procession was profit and gain to me.
 The king’s prayer—that was my joy,
 And the accompanying music became a delight for me.
 I instructed my land to keep the god’s rites,
 And provoked my people to value the goddess’s name.
 I made praise for the king like a god’s,
 And taught the populace reverence for the palace.
 I wish I knew that these things were pleasing to one’s god!
 What is proper to oneself is an offence to one’s god,

207. Tablet II, lines 4–9, 12–38; see W. G. Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1960), 38–41.

What in one's own heart seems despicable is proper to one's god.
 Who knows the will of the gods in heaven?
 Who understands the plans of the underworld gods?
 Where have mortals learnt the way of a god?

To the very end of Tablet II the sufferer indulges in bitter laments, always in the style of objective reporting, never in a prayer addressed to a deity. He has suffered dreadful agony under the attack of demons and illnesses. Beginning with Tablet III a turn for the better opens up. Creatures of light bringing deliverance appear to him in dreams. On Tablet IV the one tormented narrates his restoration in detail and in the end calls on all people to praise Marduk, who alone is able to bring those entrusted to death back to life (Tablet IV, lines 99–112).²⁰⁸

The agreements with the mentality, theological conceptions, and basic values of the Old Testament poetry of Job are substantial. That which becomes especially apparent in both works is personal piety, essentially inculcating a functioning association of conduct and health: whoever lives life in accordance with divine instructions also has a claim on well-being. But in the Near East this fundamental expectation is considerably shaken beginning with the first millennium B.C.E. Older doubts and reproaches addressed to the personal deity, that it supposedly had neglected its obligation of care in the concrete case, now broaden to fundamental questions to the divine rule of the world. Presumably political, economic, and social developments that brought serious traumatic experiences were responsible for the changes in the intellectual and religious climate.

The third text that needs to be introduced briefly has been given the title “Babylonian Theodicy” by modern editors.²⁰⁹ Someone who has been struck by fate tells his troubles to his friend. The dialogue, partly critical of the gods, surges back and forth in twenty-seven strophes, with each strophe (signs of a Manneristic mode of literature) within its respective eleven lines beginning with the same cuneiform letter (acrostic). Read vertically, these headers produce the name of the author: “I, Saggil-kīnam-ubbib, the incantation priest,

208. “Who but Marduk restores his dead to life? / Apart from Sarpānītum which goddess grants life? / Marduk can restore to life from the grave, / Sarpānītum knows how to save from destruction” (Tablet IV, lines 103–106; Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature*, 58–59).

209. The transliteration of the text and an English translation are provided in Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature*, 70–91); a German translation is provided by Wolfgang von Soden, “Die baylonische Theodizee: Ein Streitgespräch über die Gerechtigkeit der Gottheit,” in *TUAT* 3.1:143–57).

am adorant of the god and the king.”²¹⁰ The sufferer complains about his cruel personal fate but also cites the injustices throughout the world in general as an argument against the justice of the gods. The friend, reasoning in terms of traditional theology, puts forward the unfathomable nature of divine rule but ultimately relinquishes his defense of the just order and concedes the pristine intermixture of the world with evil. This permits the sufferer a conciliatory, humbly subordinating conclusion:

XXIII: *Sufferer*

I have looked around society, but the evidence is contrary.
 The god does not impede the way of a devil.
 A father drags a boat along the canal,
 While his first-born lies in bed.
 The first-born son pursues his way like a lion,
 The second son is happy to be a mule driver.
 The heir stalks along the road like a bully,
 The younger son will give food to the destitute.
 How have I profited that I have bowed down to my god?
 I have to bow beneath the base fellow that meets me;
 The dregs of humanity, like the rich and opulent, treat me with contempt.

XXIV: *Friend*

O wise one, O savant, who masters knowledge,
 In your anguish you blaspheme the god.
 The divine mind, like the centre of the heavens, is remote;
 Knowledge of it is difficult; the masses do not know it.
 Among all the creatures whom Aruru formed,
 The prime offspring is altogether...
 In the case of a cow, the first calf is lowly,
 The later offspring is twice as big.
 A first child is born a weakling,
 But the second is called an heroic warrior.
 Though a man may observe what the will of the god is, the masses do not
 know it.

XXVII: *Sufferer*

You are kind, my friend; behold my grief.
 Help me; look on my distress; know it.
 I, though humble, wise, and a suppliant,
 Have not seen help and succor for one moment.

210. Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature*, 63; von Soden, “Die baylonische Theodizee,” 143, assumes that the work originated between 800 and 750 B.C.E.

I have trodden the square of my city unobtrusively,
 My voice was not raised, my speech was kept low.
 I did not raise my head, but looked at the ground,
 I did not worship even as a slave in the company of my associates.
 May the god who has thrown me off give help,
 May the goddess who has (abandoned me) show mercy,
 For the shepherd Šamaš guides the peoples like a god.

While there are many differences between Babylonian theodicy and the Old Testament book of Job, there are nevertheless fundamental commonalities that stand out. The structure of the dialogue is common to both works, suggesting a specific life setting, namely, the school of wisdom. The skeptical-critical tone permeates both texts; the issue is the generally unjust order of the world for which deities are ultimately responsible. Also, the relative victory of the destructive worldview is a characteristic of the analogous texts, just as the ultimate accommodation of the protester is as well. In the end, he nevertheless submits to the overwhelming power of the gods and asks for mercy. Curiously, however, this very last insight into the inevitable does not nullify the prior accusations against the deities. They have arranged the world ambivalently, so that evil can no longer be removed from it.

The Old Testament epic of Job as patient, recalcitrant, and humbling himself is embedded in the stream of tradition of the ancient Near East. It depicts a variation of the themes of “the just person” and “just God,” a specifically Judaic variant and yet one that moves entirely in the paradigms of the Sumerian-Akkadian literature. The intertwining with the older literature cited above can be recognized already in Job’s name and location. Both are from outside the Israelite realm. The personal name can perhaps be traced back to the Eastern Semitic *ayyābu*, “where is my father?” and in this case would be a literary programmatic name. At that time the land of Uz was located in the northern part of east Jordan or farther to the east.²¹¹ The cosmopolitanism of the authors of that time thus becomes clear. The Judaic community definitely feels it is in contact with the neighboring regions and practices such wisdom traditions that transcend countries, such as are available in the book of Job. The work itself is arranged on at least two levels. The disputation of Job with his “friends” is itself made up of several phases and framed by the prose narrative in which Job is exposed to suffering, has to endure much, but does not yield to the tempter. Popular, and yet elaborately and magnificently narrated, the audience experiences the “prelude in heaven”; in his council meeting, God

211. See Georg Fohrer, *Das Buch Hiob* (KAT 16; Gütersloh: Mohn, 1963), 71–73; Lang, *NBL* 2:214–15.

also receives the chief prosecutor and hands the exemplarily devout Job over to him. Satan, who travels everywhere and is alert, is permitted to subject Job to the most severe tests that an individual has to endure in his lifetime: loss of property and children, as well as serious illness. Job, for his part, is “blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil” (Job 1:1) and is not swayed. He remains faithful to his God: “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return there; the LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD. . . . Shall we receive the good at the hand of God and not receive the bad?” (Job 1:21; 2:10b).

After Job had survived all of the tests, the narrative does not enter a third appearance of Satan in heaven, in which his defeat could have been celebrated. A scene such as this is probably avoided intentionally because the kinds of problems Job faced have not vanished from the world experientially. Instead, the narrative concludes with the lapidary description of the rehabilitation of the afflicted one (Job 42:10–17). This portrayal of an example of a believer in Yahweh who is able to cope with so much and who unwaveringly holds on to his faith in God, even over against the critical disposition of his own wife (2:9) and in view of the dissolution of all the solidarity of the family (19:13–22; 42:11), agrees precisely with the ideal of the one who is devoted to the Torah, as seen in Ps 37, for instance, (cf. 37:5–6, 25a, 37). From the Torah the exemplary devotee draws his vitality and holds to it under all hostilities and temptations; this indeed is also the theme of Ps 119 (cf., e.g., 119:41–42, 50, 71, 92, 120, 141, 143, 153).

The dialogical part of the book, on the other hand, brings out different emphases. Job 4–27 let Job’s three theologically erudite friends—Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite—get three chances respectively to speak against Job’s desperate reproaches (Job 3); the third cycle, however, is not preserved in full (Job 22–27). After each statement, the righteous sufferer comes out more pointedly against the admonitions to humility and confession. This is followed by a nondialogical, mixed connecting piece (Job 28–31). This is introduced by a song of praise of the profoundest wisdom, the highest mystery of the world, which is known by God alone (Job 28). Wisdom “is hidden from the eyes of all living and concealed from the birds of the air. Abaddon and Death say, ‘We have heard a rumor of it with our ears.’ God understands the way to it, and he knows its place” (Job 28:21–23).

The connecting piece seems to be preparatory for God’s addresses in Job 38–41. As always, the song of praise is followed by a most interesting block of statements, which is more fitting in the situation of judgment than in the academic debate (Job 29). Job describes his earlier life: he was a respected individual, fully integrated in society, one who kept his social obligations

especially toward the less fortunate (29:12–17; cf. Lev 19:9–18; Deut 24:10–22; 26:12–13), and exercised leadership functions (Job 29:21–25). Hence he is the ideal citizen and is sure of God's blessing and of the confidence of his community. This is juxtaposed by description of the affliction that has come and goes beyond all social relationships (Job 30). At times the loudly proclaimed lament even changes into the language of prayer: "They abhor me, they keep aloof from me" (30:10); "I cry to you and you do not answer me. ... You have turned cruel to me" (30:20–21). Both chapters portray the sufferer in a defensive position. He describes earlier happiness that God destroyed. The extensive confession of innocence in the following chapter (Job 31) goes with this description of the situation. Job swears that he had not committed certain misdeeds, probably commonplace ones that might have been the cause for his misfortune. It seems that there is an allusion to ten offenses, in keeping with the number of commandments, though not coinciding with the Ten Commandments of Exod 20 or Deut 5. Three or four of these protests of innocence have the form of a classical oath: "if I have raised my hand against the orphan, ... then let my shoulder blade fall from my shoulder" (Job 31:21–22). Cleansing oaths such as this one could also be significant as evidence in court cases. Twice inappropriate behavior is classified as punishable: "If my heart has been enticed by a woman..., then let my wife grind for another. ... For that would be a ... crime; that would be a criminal offense" (31:9–11). Job's extensive protest of innocence has certain parallels in chapter 125 of the Egyptian Book of the Dead and in Tablet II of the *šurpu* incantation series. The Egyptian Book of the Dead has the deceased make a lengthy series of brief, negative confessions before the court of the netherworld as follows: "I have not blasphemed any god; I have not badgered anyone poor; I have not caused anyone to cry; I have not killed anyone," and so on. The *šurpu* (immolation?) ritual was meant to remove known and unknown misdemeanors; for this reason it listed common offenses (false evidence, quarrelsomeness, adultery, bodily harm, etc.) and concludes with the petition for resolution and forgiveness.²¹²

Whatever the formulations might be, they seem to presuppose a sacral court proceeding. In this case Job 31 would be a defendant's attempt at exoneration. A kind of colophon concludes the text in the present tense: "The words of Job are ended" (Job 31:40b).

On the other hand, Job 32:1 takes up chapter 27, considers the debate with the three friends closed, and allows a fourth dialogue partner to enter:

212. See Erica Reiner, *Šurpu: A Collection of Sumerian and Akkadian Incantations* (Graz: Weidner, 1958), 13–18.

Elihu, son of Barachel the Buzite (Job 32:2–10: an involved, twofold reason for the new sequence). Is this (Job 32–37) a fragment of another version of Job? Why are only four speeches of Elihu and no replies on the part of Job handed down? In Yahweh's final verdict, which belongs to the narrative frame, only the first three of Job's dialogue partners are mentioned (42:7–9; cf. 2:11); Elihu does not surface after Job 36–37. In the final chapters (Job 38–41), however, the creator God himself takes the floor. In magnificent speeches the creator God unfolds the mysteries of his knowledge and ability and poses the ironic question, how human capacities fare over against this (38:2–39:30). Job is only able to answer very shamefacedly: "See, I am of small account; what shall I answer you?" (40:4). After Yahweh's further intervention "out of the whirlwind" (40:6–41:26), Job once again admits his lowliness and helplessness (42:1–6). He himself is guilty; God himself emerges justified from the affair (42:2–3, 5–6).

The compositions of the dialogue, as well as the court intermezzo, place the emphasis on the rebellious human who partly in drastic accusations reproaches his God of ruling arbitrarily and unjustly: "know, then, that God has put me in the wrong. ... I call aloud, but there is no justice" (Job 19:6–7). Only God's speeches bring the rebellious to see reason and mediate between the boisterous picture of the one who braces himself against God and the gentle figure of the sufferer in the frame. That both figures are also able to stand curtly alongside one another can be seen in some of the psalms. In expressions of trust, those praying accept everything coming from God's hand (see Pss 11; 16; 23; 31; 42–43; 62; 120). Some confessions of innocence and reproaches addressed to God insist on their own right (Pss 7; 17; 26; 44; 73; 88). Among the psalms just mentioned, particularly Ps 73 has been labeled a "Job psalm." The problem of incomprehensible suffering is present; God is identified as the originator (see Pss 44:10–15; 88:7–10, 16–19). Those who are praying rebel against God. For us the big question is about the time in which the religious resistance is to be located. More specifically with reference to Job, how and when does the combination of the surrendered sufferer with the recalcitrant come about? Generally it can be said that in the ancient Near East the time for such thoughts emerged in the first millennium B.C.E. After major historical upheavals and immense experiences of suffering such as those associated with the Kassite wars, confidence in a stable world order was severely shaken for the inhabitants of Mesopotamia. Resignation and doubt spread. However, the general assessment of the intellectual situation does not yet express anything about Israel. How did the changes in their attitude to life alluded to come about there? Especially, how is the conglomerate to be explained from the various conceptions, and why does such an enigmatic profile of one who suffers on account of God merge in the book of Job?

For one, the work's language with its Aramaisms,²¹³ the motifs (e.g., the figure of Satan, the heavenly scenes),²¹⁴ the wisdom-shaped speeches of God,²¹⁵ and the theological trend toward skepticism²¹⁶ all point to the pessimistic Babylonian wisdom and, for another, perhaps to the Persian period as an initial piece of data. In any case, the universal human backdrop points toward the Judaic authors' and tradents' horizon of thought having been global. Specifically Israelite traditions do not set the tone; even the name of Yahweh occurs only in a few instances (e.g., Job 1:6–9; 2:1–6; 38:12; 40:1–6; 42:7–12). Furthermore, the comparison with the other Near Eastern Job traditions suggests that the biblical literature is at the end of a development. To be sure, for the conclusion of the book of Job there still remains a considerable range of possible dates. If we want to move closer to the answer, an investigation into the life setting and the social constellations is inevitable.

According to the level of language and theological reflection, the dialogues of Job were not popular or worship-related literature. In this case we must assume an "academic" origin. This immediately raises the questions of when there were "institutions of higher education" for the theological elite in Judah or in the Judean Diaspora. Scholars are attached to various theories. Some are of the opinion that the organization of state and temple promoted schools of scribes and officials out of internal necessity already during the period of the monarchy (since Solomon?),²¹⁷ which also authored important literature. Others emphasize a later beginning of the organized guild of writers in conjunction with the constitution of the exilic/postexilic religious community, of the collection and further education of ancient traditions of faith, and of the training of a distinctive elite of laity of theological scribes and experts in the law. Torah schools are probably fully developed beginning with the Hellenistic period.²¹⁸ The Qumran writings and the Mishnah collection testify to a school tradition in which the cultivation and interpretation of the traditions were practiced, possibly in contact with the cultic life of the community. Perhaps the book of Job (and maybe Qoheleth as well)

213. See Norman H. Snaith, *The Book of Job* (SBT 2/11; London: SCM, 1968), 104–12.

214. See Müller, *Das Hiobproblem*, 41–48; ancient Eastern parallels, 49–64.

215. See Keel, *Jahwes Entgegnungen an Ijob*.

216. See Dell, *The Book of Job as Sceptical Literature*.

217. See Lemaire, *Les écoles et la formation de la Bible*.

218. Davies, *Scribes and Schools*: "The fact is, however, that scribal and non-scribal schools clearly existed in Judah in the Hellenistic period, and scribal schools probably grew up in the Persian period" (77); "it remains the inescapable truth that while scribal activity on a 'canonizing' scale *must* (on any account) have taken place within Persian or Hellenistic Judah, we cannot say whether or not it began earlier" (87).

belongs to this intellectual context. The scholarly culture of debate was highly developed. Job and his friends personify theological positions. The issue revolves around the traditional ideas of a just world order that makes possible a balanced, fulfilled life for the one who is morally beyond reproach and in addition announces appropriate punishment to the “godless” and “wrongdoers” in their lifetime. The Near Eastern religions already reached the limit in this formulation of the question, for they discovered unresolvable contradictions in their immanent horizon. This also happened in the case of the Old Testament book of Job. Egyptian religion takes a different view, where in all questions of meaning what really mattered was the world to come. Persian theology differed as well: already according to the earliest layers of the Avesta, life on earth was rather only the probationary period prior to eternity. The final account comes with the death of the individual or with the expiration of historical time and the final judgment of all humans. Is the book of Job subliminally perhaps also a debate with the future hope, albeit structured differently, of the ruling Persian religion and of the Babylonian one that had a continuing effect?

The concrete social embedding of the drama of Job has become the topic of scholarship in recent decades.²¹⁹ The figure of Job is supposed to go back to experiences in economically turbulent and disastrous times. An incredibly wealthy individual who considers himself to be both morally and religiously superior is ruined by social distress and experiences directly what it means to suffer sickness and discrimination. After persistent resistance against any assumption of guilt, he is only able to be rehabilitated by humbly acknowledging his infinite insignificance and to continue to enjoy his earlier riches increasingly. As much as the association of Job's problem needs to be developed with times of economic crises of contemporary history, it is not very advisable to link concrete individual events or historical persons directly with a literary work of such historical and intercultural dimensions and intellectual concentration as reflected in the book of Job. The economic crises and figures that really are behind the various figures of Job have been stylized for centuries to that which is commonly human. Conversely, that Job could be an allegorical figure for the suffering nation of Israel is probably only attainable by means of forced reinterpretation.

219. See F. Crüsemann, “Hiob und Kohelet,” in *Werden und Wirken des Alten Testaments* (ed. Rainer Albertz et al.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1980), 373–93; Rainer Albertz, “Der sozialgeschichtliche Hintergrund des Hiobbuches,” in *Die Botschaft und die Boten* (ed. Joachim Jeremias et al.; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1981), 349–72; Rainer Kessler, “Ich weiss, dass mein Erlöser lebt,” *ZTK* 89 (1992): 139–58.

In its individual parts the conglomerate, Hebrew “book of Job” surely originated in the exilic/postexilic period or even in the preexilic period. Because of the advanced status of the composition (integrating various traditions), it probably did not receive its final canonical form before the end of the Persian period or in the subsequent Hellenistic period. In other words, the work was completed sometime in the fourth or third century B.C.E.

III.2.3.3. Proverbs

Baumann, Gerlinde. *Die Weisheitsgestalt in Proverbien 1–9* (FAT 16; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1996). **Crenshaw**, James L. *Wisdom: An Introduction* (Atlanta: Knox, 1981). **Fuhs**, Hans F. *Das Buch der Sprichwörter* (FB 95; Würzburg: Echter, 2001). **Fuhs**. *Sprichwörter* (NEB 35; Würzburg: Echter, 2001). **Hermisson**, Hans-Jürgen. *Studien zur israelitischen Spruchweisheit* (WMANT 28; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1968). **Lang**, Bernhard. *Die weisheitliche Lehrrede* (SBS 54; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk Verlag, 1972). **Lang**. *Wisdom and the Book of Proverbs* (New York: Pilgrim, 1986). **Meinhold**, Arndt. *Die Sprüche* (ZBKAT 16; Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 1991). **Murphy**, Roland E. *Proverbs* (WBC 22; Nashville: Nelson, 1998). **Perdue**, Leo G. *Proverbs* (IBC; Louisville: Knox, 2000). **Römheld**, K. F. Diethard. *Die Weisheitslehre im Alten Orient* (BN 4; Munich: Görg, 1989). **Shupak**, Nili. *Where Can Wisdom Be Found?* (OBO 130; Fribourg: Universitätsverlag; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993). **Whybray**, Roger N. *The Composition of the Book of Proverbs* (JSOTSup 168; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994). **Yoder**, Christine E. *Wisdom as Woman of Substance* (BZAW 304; New York: de Gruyter, 2000). See also the bibliography under §III.1.3.3.

We already discussed individual collections of the book of Proverbs as products of the postexilic period (§III.1.3.3.). General reasons and some pieces of circumstantial evidence favor this placement. When exactly the complete, canonical composition of the book of Proverbs as a whole was completed can hardly be demonstrated conclusively. It may be argued that the three parts of the canon were shaped in succession. The book of five scrolls, the Torah, was followed by the canon of the prophets and referred directly to the Moses tradition. The writings of liturgical and didactic content, which are put together loosely, would then have been added later still. This theory on the origin of the canon probably is too simple. Presumably many processes of collection and composition got underway since the beginning of the exile. Most of them, probably all of them, were associated with the activities of the newly emerging confessional community around Yahweh and his Torah. Whether for the cultic gatherings or for their use in schools, the emerging collections of texts and “books” served the community and were not used and preserved privately. All of the Old Testament references to writing, scrolls, and “books”

refer, as it were, to public acts and to public or communal property (see, e.g., Exod 24:7–8, 12; Deut 29:19–20, 26; 31:9–13, 19–22; 2 Kgs 22; Neh 8:1–5; Jer 36). The written Word belongs to everyone; priests, Levites, and prophets (experts in writing) continually read out aloud to the community. The believers hear and learn the Word; they do not have it on the bookshelf at home. Where does the book of Proverbs as a whole belong? What specific purpose did it serve?

The overall introduction to the book of Proverbs (Prov 1:1–7) provides broad information on this. It identifies the purpose for everyone in five infinitives: “to learn about wisdom and instruction,” “to understand words of insight,” “to gain instruction in wise dealing,” “to teach shrewdness to the simple,” and “to understand a proverb and a figure.” Knowledge of what the community expects and God orders is necessary for everyone, without distinction between age and gender. Particular groups within the community, however, require special attention by those who teach, namely, the “simple” and the “young” (1:4); not always but frequently the two are identical. The person who is already wise needs to polish up his knowledge and awareness constantly (1:5); the issue is constant growth in insight—in this regard a rolling stone gathers no moss. The high point of the introduction resembling a title is 1:7. Perhaps it is strikingly added to the older introduction of 1:1–6: “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction” (1:7).

We have already observed a certain formulation of part of a collection that is edited to refer to Yahweh (10:1–22:16). With its fear of Yahweh, the introduction to the book of Proverbs takes the same line. Purposeful references to this important key term of the postexilic confessional community or of the name of Yahweh are also found in Prov 1–9 (1:29; 2:5–6; 3:11–12, 19; 5:21; 6:16; 8:13, 22, 35; 9:10). It seems as though this strict focus on Yahweh portrays the common bond for all of the subgroups of the book of Proverbs. If so, this would be a sure sign of the concluding redactional processes regarding the complete work.

The attribution of the book to Solomon is also instructive. If the sectional heading of Prov 25:1 had already claimed Solomonic authorship for the individual proverbs and introduced an intermediate authority (“the officials of King Hezekiah”) in the cultivation of the tradition, then the entire book is now considered the legacy of the wise former king of Israel. Hence the editors of the book hold on to the extraordinary talent given by Yahweh, along the lines of 1 Kgs 3; 5:9–13; and 10 (wisdom and riches). Yet the quantity and quality of the literature attributed to Solomon does not agree: “He composed three thousand proverbs, and his songs numbered a thousand and five. He would speak of trees, from the cedar that is in the Lebanon to the hyssop that

grows in the wall; he would speak of animals, and birds, and reptiles, and fish" (1 Kgs 4:32–33). The book of Proverbs is more modest in scope, and the only two psalms attributed to Solomon (Pss 72:1; 127:1) do not make up for the number of songs. About the mythical literature that he is supposed to have produced, we have no knowledge at all. At any rate, the late redaction intends to reserve the authorship of Proverbs, Qoheleth, Song of Songs, and the extracanonical collections of wisdom and psalms for the wise king. From a literary-historical point of view, therefore, the tendency also to attribute very recent texts to the legendary ancient writer continues. This provides no hint concerning the date of the final redaction of the book of Proverbs.

We assume that the partial collections contained in Prov 10–31 came about in the course of the Persian period and possibly also were joined together or fitted into one another. What are we able to say about Prov 1–9? It is commonly assumed that it represents a more recent collection; formally and content-wise it clearly differs from the other proverbs, this much is certain. The textual units are larger didactic speeches, thematically organized and mostly stylized in direct address.²²⁰ "Hear, my child, your father's instruction, and do not reject your mother's teaching" (Prov 1:8) is a typical opening address. As an educational authority, father and mother are behind the admonitions to a socially responsible life. The rejection of well-known bad habits, falsehood, laziness, and enmity (see Prov 3:27–32; 6:1–9) is included. The other authority reporting profusely is personified wisdom itself: "at the entrance of the city gates she speaks: 'How long, O simple ones, will you love being simple?'" (Prov 1:21b–22a). Parents and wisdom personally, therefore, are the immediate teaching authorities, while Yahweh, as already mentioned, comes into play (editorially?) now and again. That father and mother are responsible for their children's socialization is ancient tradition in the Near Eastern and Egyptian realm. That wisdom appears didactically, partly against its rival, the foolish woman (Prov 9:13–18), belongs to the peculiarities of the collection of Prov 1–9. The didactic contents of both authorities are similar. First of all, the youth and those still lacking understanding should be strengthened in their will to be attentive to the voice of reason, in other words, to what is socially wholesome and to what is divinely ordered, and not to give in to any enticement to yield to a wretched conduct. Thus the concern is not, as in many narrative and prophetic texts, to forsake Yahweh or cultic warnings. The motivation in wisdom speech is strictly of the social-ethical kind. The right journey through life in the reasonable social sphere of life of the kinship group and local community is its most pressing topic. It is guar-

220. Lang, *Die weisheitliche Lehrrede*.

anted by means of learning, pondering, and adhering to the tried and tested teaching. Wisdom is the highest good, for “long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor. Her ways are ways of pleasantness. ... She is a tree of life to those who lay hold of her” (3:16–18a).

One of the biggest dangers of getting on the wrong paths is men yielding to sexual temptation. In a society with a patriarchal structure, men presumably were not very restricted sexually. They had access to single women and prostitutes. For this reason the frequency and intensity of the warnings about the married woman is astonishing. Thus the middle one of three admonitions calls for level-headedness:

You will be saved from the loose woman, from the adulteress with her smooth words, who forsakes the partner of her youth and forgets her sacred covenant; for her way leads down to death, and her paths to the shades; those who go to her never come back, nor do they regain the path of life. (Prov 2:16–19)

From the prevailing male perspective, the seductive woman bears all of the blame. This perspective is impressed insistently in Prov 5–7. By chance the inexperienced young man comes near a lascivious woman in the evening, and immediately he is seduced.

Then a woman comes toward him, decked out like a prostitute, wily of heart.

She is loud and wayward; her feet do not stay at home; now in the street, now in the squares, at every corner she lies in wait. She seizes him and kisses him, and with impudent face she says to him: “I had to offer sacrifices, and today I have paid my vows; so now I have come out to meet you, to seek you eagerly, and I have found you!

I have decked my couch with coverings, colored spreads of Egyptian linen; I have perfumed my bed with myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon. Come, let us take our fill of love until morning; let us delight ourselves with love.

For my husband is not at home; he has gone on a long journey. He took a bag of money with him; he will not come home until full moon.” With much seductive speech she persuades him; with her smooth talk she compels him.

Right away he follows her and goes like an ox to the slaughter or bound like a stag toward the trap until an arrow pierces its entrails. He is like a bird rushing into a snare, not knowing that it will cost him his life. (Prov 7:10–23)

Does this masochistic genre picture contribute something beyond the clear male fantasies to understanding the social conditions and thus to the temporal classification of the text? The assembled statements of Prov 1–9 seem to demonstrate that monogamy based on mutual agreement is gaining ground. Proverbs 2:17 speaks to the wife about the “partner of her youth,” whom she is not allowed to forsake (cf. Jer 3:4). The formulation is reminiscent of Mal 2:14–16; this text speaks of the “wife of your youth,” “your wife by covenant,” the “companion,” and the “faithfulness” of the husband. On the other hand, Prov 5:15–19 advises the husband to seek sexual enjoyment only with his partner, the “wife of his youth.” The still patriarchal idea of partnership fits both the Persian and the Hellenistic periods. It would make comprehensible a certain sexual emancipation of the women against the exclusively male claim of ownership.

The other *leitmotif* able to serve the dating of the collection is the personification, indeed the hypostatizing, of the female figure of wisdom.²²¹ It reaches its apex in Prov 8. At the beginning of the chapter Lady Wisdom appears in public again and preaches to the men to live wisely and carefully (cf. Prov 8:1–9). Lady Wisdom presents her qualities and deeds (8:10–21), then adds a special hymn, a divine self-praise, which was not unknown in the ancient Near East.²²² This song of praise clarifies the relationship between Yahweh and Wisdom, thus assigning the hypostatized power to the monotheistic belief in Yahweh. “The LORD created me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of long ago. Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth. When there were no depths I was brought forth, when there were no springs abounding with water” (8:22–24). This text is unique in the Old Testament. Later it finds reception and parallels especially in gnostic speculations. But where does the notion of a preexistent “Wisdom” come from, which can hardly be described other than as a hypostasis, a role model with the highest God? There is no lack of theories in the history of religions intended to serve as a clarification.²²³ It certainly is necessary to begin, together with Gerlinde Baumann, with a multilayered meaning of the figure of Wisdom; in other words, from the perspective of the history of traditions, various ideas from the surroundings of Israel and from intra-Israelite tradi-

221. On this, comprehensively, Baumann, *Die Weisheitsgestalt in Proverbien 1–9*; see also Silvia Schroer, “Die göttliche Weisheit und der nachexilische Monotheismus,” in *Der eine Gott und die Göttin* (ed. Marie-Theres Wacker and Georg Braulik; QD 135; Freiburg: Herder, 1991), 151–82.

222. See Adam Falkenstein and Wolfgang von Soden, *Sumerische und akkadische Hymnen und Gebete* (Zurich: Artemis, 1953), 67–68 (Inanna).

223. See Baumann, *Die Weisheitsgestalt in Proverbien 1–9*, 4–57.

tions flow together in it. It should not be overlooked, however, that along with ancient Near Eastern and Egyptian (Maat) goddesses, Persian theological configurations may also have played a significant part. This is not to say that the Old Testament figure of Wisdom was a copy of a Zoroastrian model. But it does show surprising affinities with the Ameša Spentas, which essentially depict abstractions of powers of order, law, and reason and overall personify supreme truth and goodness. According to Michael Stausberg,²²⁴ the compilation of the “benevolent immortal” reads as follows: good thoughts, // the best truth / order / harmony, // desirable power / rule, // benevolent respect / obedience / legal mindset (?), // intactness / wholeness / health, and // immortality. In other lists Ahura Mazda belongs to this group of supreme powers but generally is the superior “Lord of Wisdom” and is only identical with the Ameša Spentas in terms of the issue itself. The powers mentioned can be found again in the figure of Wisdom in Prov 8. The relationship to Yahweh is similar to that of the Ameša Spentas to Ahura Mazda. Hebrew Wisdom is the power created first, prior to every other creature. But it functions as a partner and playmate in all of Yahweh’s works of creation. This demonstrates that Wisdom is the fundamental essence of the world and participates in the creator’s nature and behavior. If Persian analogies are present, the first part of the book of Proverbs goes back to the postexilic period. To be sure, the Hellenistic period is also possible for the origin and shaping of the Wisdom figure, since Persian cosmological and theological impulses continued to have a powerful effect.

Among other things, the discovery of the papyri of Elephantine brought to light an Aramaic collection of proverbs associated with a fragment of a novel. This text, named after Ahiqar, the famous sage, is surely to be dated to the fifth century B.C.E. in its discovered form²²⁵ and thus provides us with the welcome possibility of drawing a comparison with the book of Proverbs. In its composition and conceptions, does the Old Testament book show similarities with the book of Ahiqar? Beginning with a significant difference: Ahiqar is written in Aramaic and makes no reference to Yahweh; rather, it mentions Shamash and El as deities, the former in keeping with the fictitious Assyrian context, and the latter given its assumed country of origin, southern Syria. Perhaps wisdom is assigned to the important gods as a feminine greatness. Consequently, the book does not belong into the context of the community

224. Michael Stausberg, *Die Religion Zarathushtras*, 1:119; on this topic as a whole, see 1:118–23; Mary Boyce, *History of Zoroastrianism*, 1:192–228.

225. According to Ingo Kottsieper (*Die Sprache der Ahiqarsprüche* [BZAW 194; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1990]), the narrative frame is more recent, whereas the proverbs are older, on account of its Old Aramaic language (eighth/seventh century B.C.E.).

of Yahweh but generally to that of the West Semitic mercenaries who served the Persians in Elephantine. Yet a certain internationality and interreligiosity of wisdom opens up from the existence of the text of Ahiqar on the island in the Nile and from the numerous well-known, more recent versions (Syriac, Ethiopic, Greek, Arabic, Armenian, and Slavic) and thereby allows us to appreciate the great popularity and broad dissemination of the material.

The narrative introduction or the framing account about the fate of the hero is roughly comparable to the action frame in the book of Job or to the novel of Joseph. At the royal court of Assyria (at the time of Sennacherib and Assarhaddon), the sage is rescued from mortal danger because the enforcement officer remembers the good deed of the one condemned to death and spares him as a token of gratitude. In the book of Proverbs, there is no narrative introduction of the author, or it has dwindled to the brief references to the Solomonic authorship. A connection with a fictitious or historical author of the proverbial wisdom, however, certainly belongs to the provision of such collections in Egypt and in the Near East.

To the extent that the text is preserved and intelligible, the attached collection of proverbs consists predominantly of shorter units and contains few didactic speeches. The form and content of the terse proverbs are quite diverse. Aphorisms alternate with admonitions and cautions, questions with experiential statements in the first-person singular, comparisons and fables of animals with direct ethical instructions. Thematic concentrations of short sentences do occur; nevertheless, the sequence of the units is largely hypothetical because of the poor condition of the papyrus.²²⁶ The direct address to the young recipient of the instruction occurs frequently and also determines many proverbs not using formal address: "Yes, my son, gather everything available for harvest and carry out every task, then you will eat your full and give to your children" (col. V,2, following Ingo Kottsieper; *TUAT* 3.2:328). Admonition and warning are the dominant linguistic and emotional forms of expression. Occasionally the writer of the proverbs resorts to the first person; in so doing he passes his own experience of life on to the young generation for its benefit (col. XV,11; 3.2:337).

The aphorism and comparison, which leave it to the hearer to come to the right conclusions, belong to the standard inventory as well: "A person whose conduct is pleasing and whose heart is good is like a fortified city in which an army is situated" (VII,1; 3.2:331).

The animal or plant fable also belongs to these nondirective forms of speech:

226. See Porten and Yardeni, *Textbook of Aramaic Documents*, 3:23.

The leopard met the goat, and the latter was naked. Then the leopard began and said to the goat: "Come here and I shall cover you with my fur." The goat (answered) and said to the leopard: "What is your covering to me? Do not take my skin from me!" For, (the leopard) does not greet the gazelle except to suck its blood. (XII,8–10; 3.2:339)

At the end of the ninth and the beginning of the tenth column (in Kottsieper's count), there seems to be a reference to deified wisdom, which has prompted a comparison with Prov 8:

(From) heaven mankind was (bless)ed, the gods (p)roclaimed (its wisdom).
It is also honored among the gods; dominion belongs (to her Lord)
(together) wit(h it).
It is established in he(aven); indeed, the Lord of the saints has exalted (it).
(IX,16–X,1; 3.2:335–36)

If the reconstruction of the text and the translation are correct, this does indeed represent a certain parallel with deified wisdom, shades of which are also known from Egypt and Persia. In this case the book of Ahiqar in its forms, contents, and starting points would certainly be comparable to the entire collection of Proverbs, even if it is by no means possible to bring all of the details and characteristics of both works to coincide completely. This analogy of two collections of proverbs, however, can hardly lead back straight to the Persian period. It is difficult to limit the proverbial literature to a specific time of origin. This is also supported by many Egyptian teachings about life that have been copied for centuries and often are very ancient but are extant in relatively recent copies.²²⁷

Regarding the final point of discussion we may, on balance, emphasize the following: especially in the collection of proverbs, Ahiqar corresponds formally and content-wise largely with the findings we encounter in Prov 10–31. The form of didactic speech in Prov 1–9 is also represented in the Aramaic proverbs. Furthermore, attempts at deifying the figure of wisdom can be seen in Ahiqar. Only the considerable hypostatizing of Wisdom and its self-importance are conspicuous in the Old Testament. For the book of Proverbs as a whole, the result can be formulated as follows: the complex collection is quite feasible as an agenda for instructing young people in the postexilic community of the fifth and fourth century B.C.E. A later drafting in the third century B.C.E., that is to say, in the Hellenistic environment, cannot be ruled

227. See *TUAT* 3.2:191–319 (M. Sternberg-el-Hotabi; G. Burkard; I. Shirun-Grumach; H. J. Thissen).

out, even though clear clues (e.g., Greek philosophical starting points) are lacking.

III.2.4. TORAH (PENTATEUCH)

Achenbach, Reinhard. *Die Vollendung der Tora* (Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für Altorientalische und Biblische Rechtsgeschichte 3; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2003). **Assmann**, Aleida, and Jan Assmann, eds. *Kanon und Zensur* (Munich: Fink, 1987). **Blenkinsopp**, John. *The Pentateuch* (ABRL; New York: Doubleday, 1992). **Blum**, Erhard. *Die Komposition der Vätergeschichte* (WMANT 57; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1984). **Blum**. *Studien zur Komposition des Pentateuch* (BZAW 189; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1990). **Crüsemann**, Frank. *The Torah: Theology and Social History of Old Testament Law* (trans. Allan W. Mahnke; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996). **Frei**, Peter, and Klaus Koch. *Reichsidee und Reichsorganisation im Perserreich* (OBO 55; Fribourg: Universitätsverlag; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1984). **Frevel**, Christian. *Mit Blick auf das Land die Schöpfung erinnern: Zum Ende der Priestergrundschrift* (HBS 23; Freiburg: Herder, 2000). **Gertz**, Jan C. *Tradition und Reaktion in der Exoduserzählung* (FRLANT 186; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000). **Kessler**, Rainer. *The Social History of Ancient Israel: An Introduction* (trans. Linda M. Maloney; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008). **Levin**, Cristoph. *Der Jahwist* (FRLANT 157; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993). **Millard**, Matthias. *Die Genesis als Eröffnung der Tora* (WMANT 90; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2001). **Nicholson**, Ernest W. *The Pentateuch in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998). **Noth**, Martin. *A History of Pentateuchal Traditions* (trans. Bernhard W. Anderson; Englewood, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1972). **Otto**, Eckart. *Das Deuteronomium zwischen Pentateuch und Deuteronomistischem Geschichtswerk* (FRLANT 206; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004). **Rendtorff**, Rolf. *The Problem of the Process of Transmission in the Pentateuch* (trans. John J. Scullion; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990). **Rofé**, Alexander. *Introduction to the Composition of the Pentateuch* (BiSe 58; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999). **Sanders**, James A. *From Sacred Story to Sacred Text* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987). **Van Seters**, John. *The Pentateuch: A Social-Science Commentary* (Trajectories 1; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999). **Watts**, James A. *Reading Law: The Rhetorical Shaping of the Pentateuch* (Biblical Seminar 59; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999). **Watts**, ed. *Persia and Torah: The Theory of Imperial Authorization of the Pentateuch* (SBLSymS 17; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2001). **Weinfeld**, Moshe. *The Place of the Law in the Religion of Ancient Israel* (VTSup 100; Leiden: Brill, 2004). **Wellhausen**, Julius. *Die Composition des Hexateuchs* (3rd ed.; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1899).

III.2.4.1. Conditions of Origin

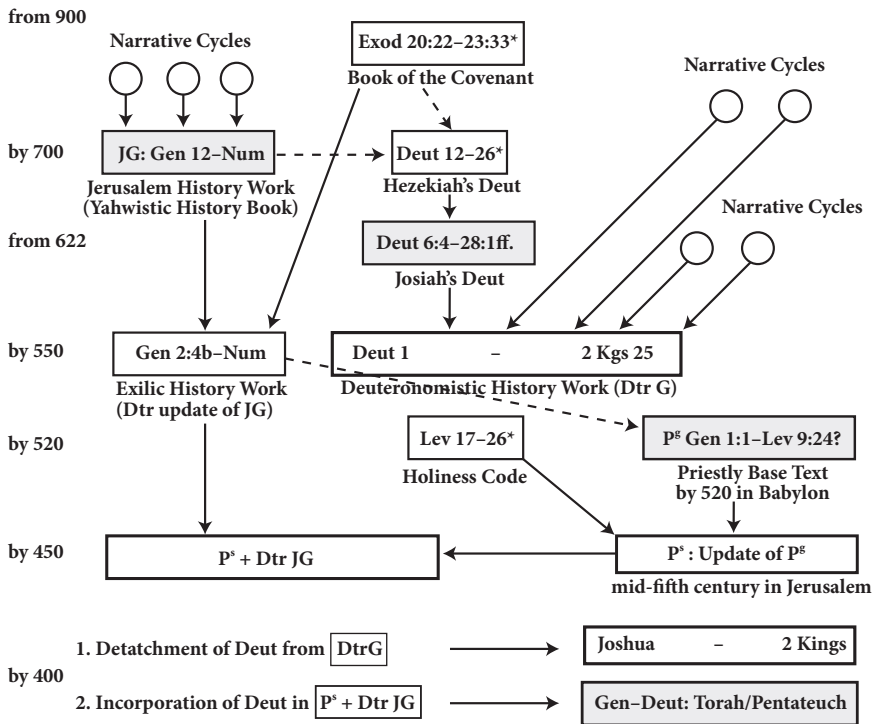
The five scrolls of the Old Testament associated with Moses are by far the most important part of the Hebrew canon. It alone expresses the full revelatory character in the tradition as conceived in Judaism. Already God's communications mediated through Moses make the claim, albeit still diffused, of being Yahweh's complete, professed intention for his people, from which nothing was to be taken away and nothing to be added (Deut 4:2; 13:1). This means that at the time of the Deuteronomists—not at the close of the seventh century B.C.E. but much more likely at the beginning of the fifth century B.C.E.—there existed a canonical, recorded edition of supposedly Mosaic authoritative texts, however defined, in the communities of the Jewish faith. Ezra deals with the Torah of Moses as if it were the most natural thing in the world. What precisely the content of this Holy Scripture was (the reference to a scroll of the Torah is in the singular), we do not know. It remains to be assumed that in that fifth century, when Nehemiah and Ezra literally constituted the community of Yahweh in Jerusalem, almost all of the texts still assembled in the Pentateuch today were brought together and codified. The most sacred piece of the Hebrew Bible is a work of that Persian period in which the community of Yahweh was formed. They originated together. The Samaritans adopted the Torah but rejected any further growth of the canon. This also points to the singular significance of the Torah.

For more than two centuries, the genesis of the complex Moses tradition has been construed in keeping with the author-reader model. Writers working independently and/or editorial circles working collectively produced texts and brought together textual traditions over lengthy periods of time for a readership that cannot be designated more specifically. A modified history of traditions schematic to explain this emerged in recent decades.²²⁸ It emphasizes the formation of thematic blocks of tradition ("narrative cycles") which were extrapolated and ultimately meshed. In each case involved literary models of growth resulted; they allegedly came about in age-long work at the desk. Zenger's conception of a hybrid form may serve as an example (see opposite page); in his view the origin of the Pentateuch took up half a millennium. The many authors involved are supposed to have worked consistently on the mixture of texts now available and at the Torah.

Zenger explains the diagram as follows: for the earlier phases of the tradition he assumes the pattern of narrative cycles and works "with a redac-

228. In Germany, e.g., Martin Noth, Rolf Rendtorff, and Erhard Blum.

Combination of Narrative Cycles Model and Reduced Sources Model



A modified model of the growth of the Pentateuch (solid line = extrapolation, redaction; dashed line = conceptual stimulus). After Erich Zenger et al., eds., *Einleitung in das Alte Testament* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1995), 74.

tion-history model of two sources or of three sources beginning with 700 B.C.E.”

The Pentateuch originated from three streams of tradition (sources), namely, non-Priestly texts (= J), Priestly texts (= P), and Deuteronomic texts (= D), each of them passing through its own respective history before they met in such a way that the Pentateuch came about. The first overall portrayal of history came about after 700 in Jerusalem, under the influence of the prophets Amos, Hosea, and Isaiah (Jerusalem History Work, JG). ... The second overall portrayal of history emerged around 520 in the exile in Babylon. Because of its Priestly language and theology, it is called the Priestly Base Text (P^g). ... The stream of tradition that can be delimited in the form of the book of Deuteronomy in the Pentateuch may be construed as the third source

(Zenger, *Einleitung in das Alte Testament*, 73, 75). The model is considerably modified in subsequent editions.

The parameters used obviously were extracted from our literary world and applied to antiquity—a process that hardly takes into account the conditions of literary production of that time or the ancient communicative structures.²²⁹ Especially lacking is the constant reference to the assumed community in which the texts were used. In other words, the creative power emanating even more from people of that time than in our world, who use such literature in their rituals and other communicative processes, cannot be sufficiently appreciated in all of the literary models of explanation focused on “producers.” Examinations of the “reader-response” approach, however, show that even in today’s literate society literature is produced in interaction between “author” and community. Further, as already mentioned several times, the community of Yahweh, which takes responsibility for the origin of the Torah, emerged only slowly after 587 B.C.E. It did not yet exist in the preexilic period.

We now have to attempt to retrace the origin of the Pentateuch in the Persian period in the best possible way in keeping with the status of the current discussion. In the earlier discussions about the Deuteronomistic History and the Priestly layers, as well as about the question of the canon, the starting point on the whole has become clear. In contrast to many literary-critical efforts concerning sources and redactional layers, priority will be given primarily to a history of traditions theoretical model, with the primary focus on the practical process of textual usage, writing, and passing on of the functional texts. In this context the collaboration of the community of faith needs to be given attention. The Hebrew writings, after all, did not originate as private records of scholars in studies and academic circles and for private reading material but instead in conjunction with gatherings and multilayered, worship-related and civil acts of the community of Yahweh. The primary motivation for writing was the public reading of the text (see Deut 29–31; Jer 36; Neh 8), not the personal call to writing. The common literary separation of continuous sources of the Pentateuch of earlier times (Julius Wellhausen) was based entirely on the principle of individual authorship and can be considered out-dated today. More useful hypotheses of the history of traditions type (Rolf Rendtorff, Erhard Blum), as already indicated, get closer to the

229. Only rarely does Old Testament scholarship deal with possible differences in the use of texts at all; see Eduard Nielsen, *Oral Tradition* (SBT 11; London: SCM, 1954); Watts, *Reading Law*; Achenbach, *Die Vollendung der Tora*; Sanders, *From Sacred Story to Sacred Text*.

facts but have not yet fully detached themselves from the constraints of being author-centered.

With a few exceptions, however, given everything we know and are able to reconstruct (see §III.1 above), the Hebrew writings of the Old Testament are purely functional literature, and the productive share of the community in compositions of texts is to be respected highly. This does not at all exclude the exception, of course, of individuals formulating and writing texts. Nevertheless, individual “authors” act according to the expectations and needs of the community and precisely not on their own responsibility. Consequently, we see the Pentateuch as a collection of materials for early Jewish community gatherings, partly in the native country and partly in the Babylonian Diaspora (perhaps also in other locations). Presumably the entire ensemble of texts was in a state of flux before it received its final shape in the five books well known to us, and the bulk of texts produced in the exilic/postexilic community was much larger than the current content of the Torah. Presumably it included large parts of the canon of the prophets and the “writings,” as well as material that has been lost, so that the fixing of the Pentateuch runs parallel with a selection of the most authoritative (Mosaic and pre-Mosaic?) texts. The beginning of a collection with canonical claims is to be placed in the period of the exile at the earliest, because only then (and not at the time of Josiah) were the sociological and ecclesial prerequisites given for establishing a sacred writing necessary for the identification of the community. In other words, the confessional community of believers in Yahweh was constituted at the earliest after the fall of Jerusalem in 587 B.C.E. In the preexilic period there was at best a Yahweh cult of the state under royal direction and variable, not yet exclusive, worship of Yahweh, mixed with all kinds of other cults on local levels. A “Holy Scripture” was unnecessary. The individual, exclusive decision for the God of Israel developed only after the loss of the monarchy, when the Judeans had to form themselves anew and radically differently as a minority in a multiracial empire. Under the given political conditions of the exilic period, limited beginnings of this fundamental reorientation may have been tested. But it is in the nature of things that the constitution of the Yahweh communities fully began around their religious backbone, the Torah, only after the liberation by the Persians in 539 B.C.E., concurrent with the origin of the Holy Scriptures. This was brought to a good conclusion in the fifth century B.C.E.

The origin of sacred writings, perhaps stimulated in the Babylonian exile (higher writing culture in Mesopotamia!) and later possibly by the already existing Zoroastrian communities and their sacred tradition (Gatha), certainly presupposes a professional writing rank. Archival activities associated with the royal courts in Jerusalem and Samaria are well known, but they

hardly extended to the popular places of worship, domestic religion, and shrines on hills in the land of Israel. The archaeological yield of inscriptions (in tombs, cultic rooms, on seals, potsherds, etc.) for the period of the monarchy is minimal and does not attest to a widespread culture of writing and reading. Consequently, apart from the royal courts, there were presumably very few experts in writing in ancient Israel. The end of the monarchy and the reorganization of the community of Yahweh, the collection of ancient traditions, and the necessity of fixing the traditions in writing gave rise to a major new need for skilled writers. The priests of the formerly royal temple in part may have been experts in writing, but they are not mentioned as writers anywhere prior to Ezra. The need for tradition by the communities of Yahweh, transcending the priestly concern by far, called for a broader training of those who had to deal with the written Word of God. Thus by means of collecting and developing traditions the profession of the scribe (of Torah) may have emerged slowly; in Ezra it leads to the fully developed title "scribe of the law of the God of heaven" (Ezra 7:12; cf. 7:6) and further to the office of the "scribe."²³⁰

EXCURSUS: WHY HOLY SCRIPTURES?

Because we are firmly anchored in the Judeo-Christian tradition, we generally accept as God-given that our sole foundation of faith is the Holy Scripture, perhaps supplemented and interpreted by rabbinic clarifications, Protestant confessional writings, orthodox patristic decisions, or Roman encyclicals. From a history of religions, as well as a theological, perspective, the permissible if not indeed necessary question is not exactly posed frequently:²³¹ Why did the writing of holy traditions come about at all? What is the nature of "book-oriented" religions in contrast to communities of faith that are built upon the Spirit of God and oral tradition either in part or entirely? There are numerous examples, especially in tribal religions, verifying that there often are serious misgivings against fixing sacred texts in writing. The written form may provide noninitiates or those otherwise unauthorized with access to religious secrets and may endanger a community of faith from within. The written form signifies a bond with times gone by, with historical figures, and antiquated rules and conceptions and there-

230. See Davies, *Scribes and Schools*.

231. This question is posed, for instance, by Walter J. Hollenweger, *Christen ohne Schriften* (Erlangen: Verlag der Ev.-Luth. Mission, 1977).

fore may displace the living presence of God. Many biblical passages relate to such elements of danger or possibilities of abuse and do not seem to trust the written tradition (see Jer 31:31–34; Ezek 20:23–26). How did the nascent confessional community of Yahweh come to compile a canon of writings after the deportation by the Babylonians? Would it not make the community more vulnerable thereby, if it published its faith in this manner? An external reason that has already been mentioned was surely the high writing culture dominant in Babylon, which was further intensified by the Persians. Only if one lives in an ambience like this is the desire of casting one's own traditions in the form of writing able to come about. Religious documents in writing probably signified a higher level of standing and acceptance. In its situation among minorities, the creation of identity-markers was extremely important for the community. The Sabbath and circumcision certainly were very suitable as confessional symbols. The Torah and the seasonal festivals were added. Members of a confessional community have to be able to point to distinctive features because the "natural" social corset (family, state, etc.) is missing. For the community, the Torah became a significant element in the system of valid symbols.

Above all else, however, putting in writing the relevant professed intentions of Yahweh is what seems to have been in accordance with the formative faith of his adherents. Trust in the God of Israel had to be able to be articulated personally by every member. The other way around this meant that every person belonging to the association of faith had to be informed and have access to the sources of the covenant with Yahweh. For this reason the commandments of God were not communicated to the leaders of the community, although it could appear that way, according to many Old Testament passages, but expressly to the entire people of Israel, even if Moses and the prophets held special positions as mediators. Yet there was no arcane discipline for office-bearers in the nascent Jewish community. Rather, oral tradition was in danger of being monopolized by functionaries and misused for personal purposes. Potentially, at least, traditions fixed in writing do in fact offer the possibility of control by lay people. For a time the members of the community probably were still illiterate and therefore dependent upon the public reading of the Torah (and the Prophets). But apparently from the beginning the communities considered themselves the actual owners of the written traditions of Israel. They commissioned Ezra to read the Torah aloud (Neh 8:1). The Word of God, established in writing and read aloud regularly, was memorized by everyone and thus could be regarded as the binding norm for all. Furthermore, it gradually offered more and more people the possibility of self-determined reading matter. On the one hand, the writing of Scripture in classical Hebrew facilitated the access for those willing to

learn (alphabetical instead of syllabary script); on the other hand, however, its appropriation by lay people was made more difficult because the official and colloquial language in Syria-Palestine was (Imperial) Aramaic during the Persian period. Already in Neh 8 the practice of having the texts of the Torah translated ad hoc into Aramaic during the worship service offered lay people a new opportunity to understand Scripture directly. At this time the women apparently were admitted to the study of the Torah as well. How else could it be explained that (according to the portrayal of postexilic scribes) in a decisively important situation, the rediscovery of the Torah in the days of Josiah, Huldah drew up the requested report and confirmed the judgment in the name of Yahweh. The narrator would not have attributed this central significance to her apart from meticulous knowledge of Scripture. Consequently, the community structures were basically responsible for the believers in Yahweh having acquired a written support and orientation. Initially, we may well assume that throughout the Persian period the written Word of God was still accompanied by equal prophetic (scribal) proclamation. The boundary between the written and orally communicated Word of God had not yet been drawn rigorously and sharply (see §III.1.2 above).

III. 2.4.2. Priestly and Deuteronomistic Basis

As already shown above, all the rules and norms for communal use were compiled in the Persian period and “canonized” in multilayered processes serving the reorganization of Yahweh’s community of faith. We recognize the so-called Priestly strands of the Pentateuch and, to be distinguished from these, the Deuteronomic-Deuteronomistic compositions. Both share the common endeavor of anchoring the basic orders of the new confessional community in the Mosaic period. A contrasting example may be seen in the books of Chronicles, which look for their formative period in the era of David and Solomon. The two collections of reading texts setting the tone, P and the Deuteronomistic History, are in a certain tension to one another, but they also mutually complement one another and occasionally blend their contents. The editors with a Priestly orientation let Moses receive the extensive covenantal texts at Mount Sinai, as recorded from Exod 19 to Num 10. The main point of interest is the construction and furnishing of the tabernacle, regulating the sacrificial cult and the priestly functions, but also the shaping of the community’s life with regard to Holy God and his presence in the only central temple of Jerusalem. By means of public reading, probably at the community’s festival-related gatherings, the stock of sacred texts developed. One gets the impression that this happens in the awareness that the temple does in fact exist and function. These reading texts are to be remembered and genuinely

learned. By comparison, however, the “draft constitution” of Ezekiel seems to be of a utopian character.

In Deuteronomy, the Mount of God is called Horeb instead of Sinai, and the fictitious scenery of a “reiteration of the Torah” is arranged east of the Jordan, in Moab. Although Deuteronomy has some interest in the furnishing of the temple cult as well (centralization, Levitical service, and festival calendar), the main attention is given to the exclusive worship of Yahweh and the defense against alien cults and the civil institutions and structures. The Decalogue of Deut 5 (with its context of Deut 4 and 6) is a summary of the Deuteronomic concerns. On the other hand, Lev 19 (with the accompanying chapters of Lev 16 and 18) may possibly be viewed as central statements of the Priestly tradition. To be sure, the different theological emphases in the streams of tradition can be put down to different communal situations in specific social, historical, and cultural contexts, but whether or not the differences between the communities of the Babylonian Diaspora and the Judeans who had remained in their home country are able to explain the differences in the traditions is an open question. Indeed, there have been plenty of conflicting opinions, self-assessments, and claims of ownership between the *golah* and those who had remained behind (see Jer 24; Ezek 33:21–29). Theologically based factions were the order of the day precisely in the phase of restoration and formation of the religious community (see also Isa 56–59; 66). It is indeed more than improbable that sharply antagonistic groups would have been able to bring their sacred writings together into a common canon. The Deuteronomistic and Priestly layers of the Pentateuch do not show any irreconcilable differences either; they rather complement one another. Consequently, they presumably originated from developments that were parallel or gradual within the same community.

A glance at the intentions of the two main layers of the Pentateuch and the purposes of the texts collected in them can clarify the growth of the Torah as a whole. We begin pragmatically with the dominant need of the community during the Persian period: there was a need for rules and guidelines for the shaping of the cultic and communal life. The regulations conveyed to Moses at Sinai and Horeb were deemed to be the root positions, given once for all and partly also calling for further development and the organization of and conduct in the postexilic community of Yahweh. Sometimes the texts transposed fictitiously into the Mosaic period are themselves already endowed with a focus on the distant early Jewish community (see Deut 29:13–14; 30:1–5, etc.). We take the practical need for action-related instructions to be the most important starting point for the collection and production of Torah-instructions. The traditions themselves tell of exemplary instances of a legal crisis: an Israelite misuses the “name” of Yahweh during the wandering in the wil-

derness. What action should be taken? “They put him in custody, until the decision of the LORD should be made clear to them” (Lev 24:10–12; cf. Num 15:32–36, violating the Sabbath). Behind the pericopes is the postexilic community’s need for clarification; while they were conversant with the basic rules (“you shall not misuse the name of Yahweh,” “you shall keep the Sabbath holy”), they did not yet know any regulations of implementation. What should be done with a person violating the fundamental norms? The narrative of Exod 18 is based on a similar concrete question. In jurisdiction, general legal stipulations do not suffice; in concrete instances, judicial decisions are needed. Nevertheless, the community expects instructions from the Torah that are as detailed as possible for all situations of life, including clarifying cases of precedence. According to Jewish understanding, there always remains sufficient need for discussing exceptions, despite the perfection of the divine directive. The continuing debate is reflected especially in the Mishnah and the Talmud.

Thus if the community’s questions—What shall we do? How are we able to live?—are the main motivating force behind the Priestly and Deuteronomistic Torah collections, this also explains the increase of other, partly later literary blocks and layers. Instead of the traditional way of following the origin of the Pentateuch from the oldest to the most recent texts, the question here should be posed in the reverse order: How did the formative layers become enriched with topical fields that transcend the immediate organizational interests of the early Jewish community of Yahweh? Indissolubly tied up with the expectation that Yahweh will provide a formative sphere is the certainty that in the course of history the God of Israel called his community to himself and entered into a covenant with them that cannot be lost. The concept itself was not fully developed until the exilic and postexilic period; the “covenant” as a foundational theological category of the Pentateuch came to be used late in the Old Testament literature, in spite of all kinds of possible Assyrian models (vassal treaties!), via P and Dtr.²³² Nevertheless, the special relationship of the tribes of Israel and of the nation to Yahweh was anticipated in numerous contexts in the tradition. The later theologians used the available conceptions to illustrate their vision of the age-old, tried and tested, as well as endangered, Mosaic covenant. Thereby they responded to the question of the community about the whence of the newly established

232. See Lothar Perlitt, *Bundestheologie im Alten Testament* (WMANT 36; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1969); H.-C. Schmitt, “Das sogenannte jahwistische Privilegrecht in Ex 34:10–28 als Komposition der spätdeuteronomistischen Endredaktion des Pentateuch,” in *Abschied vom Jahwisten* (ed. Jan C. Gertz et al.; BZAW 315; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2003), 157–71. On the back-tracking explanation of the genesis of the Pentateuch, see also Zenger et al., *Einleitung*, 34–123.

community of Yahweh; anchoring it in the distant past (not only among the kings! Josiah is merely a reformer!) provided it with the necessary security. Thus the first major manifestation of Yahweh at Mount Sinai is almost able to manage without the covenantal vocabulary, yet is nevertheless bound up with the expectations of the late period (Exod 19). The chapter shows various traces of editing. At the core is the ancient conception of the theophany of a God of the mountain and the weather with all of the tectonic concomitants (19:16, 18). At the most one appointed individual together with a few who are chosen are able to approach this deity at the risk of their life (19:9, 20, 24). Bringing the people out of the camp (19:17) indicates the participation of the entire community in a ceremony of obligation; only the elemental force of the manifestation of God prevents this encounter (19:21; cf. Deut 5:23–27; Josh 24; Deut 29–31). In its place the interpretation of the event precedes in Priestly terms:

Then Moses went up to God; the LORD called to him from the mountain, saying, "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob and tell the Israelites: You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now, therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the Israelites. (Exod 19:3–6)

Moses communicated this message to the elders (representatives of the community!), and all the people agreed with the arrangement (Exod 19:7–8). Only then did the dreadful manifestation of God take place, leading to the people fleeing and to the commissioning of Moses to the service as mediator (Exod 19:18–19). Hence mediation and active communal decision are skillfully crafted into the ancient conceptions of the appearance of an archaic god of the mountain. By means of other emphases the editors solve the same problem twice, in fact, in Exod 24:3–11. One version reports on entering into a covenant by means of a sacred meal. Moses, the priests, and the elders, seventy in all, participate: they "saw the God of Israel," and "they ate and drank." The conception of the meal with the deity seems archaic; perhaps it originated in the familial religion (see Gen 18:1–8; Judg 13:15–20). Moses, the priests, and the elders are brought into line with a regular representation of the community of the postexilic period. By means of communion on the mountain they enter into covenant with Yahweh. The description of the heavenly realm may be colored by Babylonian conceptions (blue tiles!). The use of ancient concepts of God for the new situation of the community is clear. The other production of the covenant treaty, on the other hand, uses contemporary categories

of the Persian period without reservation, in order to describe the ceremony Moses carried out (Exod 24:3–8): the community's own obligation to Yahweh's words, their inscription in the "book of the covenant," the sacrifice by the tribes of Israel with the blood ritual, the reading of Scripture, and the community's own obligation. Without sacrifice, a fundamental procedure such as the election of Israel to be Yahweh's possession would have been inconceivable for the community of the Second Temple. The blood ritual includes even the sprinkling of the community (24:8; cf. Exod 4:25). Conversely, the written version of a covenantal agreement and its public reading (see Neh 8; 10) is indispensable. The covenant is based on words established in writing; the book of the covenant is an acknowledged holy document, even if its content remains undefined for us. The next account of the covenant treaty (Exod 34) revolves only around the two tablets of the commandments that Moses takes with him to Mount Sinai. He calls upon Yahweh and has a direct encounter with God in which the liturgical formula of homage is made known: "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness" (34:6–7). Following Moses' request for God to accompany them and for protection (34:9), Yahweh offers the covenant with the promise of the land and the expulsion of the competing peoples (34:10–16). Then follows the so-called cultic Decalogue as a covenantal document (34:11–26), which, after forty days of fasting on the part of Moses on the Mount of God, is then recorded in writing on two tablets (34:27–28).

The covenant is completely embedded in worship-related forms and formulas as they apparently were common in the postexilic community: Yahweh's self-identification with the grace formula (Exod 34:6–7; cf. Pss 86:15; 103:8; 111:4; 145:8; Neh 9:31), the prostration of the liturgist (34:8), the community's confession of guilt (34:9b: first-person plural!), and the promising and instructing voice of God (34:10–28). A theophany is neither necessary nor practicable, given the mediating, written Word. The covenant is completely integrated into the worship (of the synagogue).

The passages concerning the topic of the covenant indicate that the postexilic community not only received the necessary instructions for their cultic and civic life from Sinai (more precisely, it projected its action model to Sinai), but it drafted its entire existence into Moses' encounter with God. Israel was assembled there, on and at the mountain of revelation. The "whole nation" became eye- and ear-witnesses of the inaugural ceremony. They entered into a covenant with Yahweh, whether through the delegated priests and elders or as hearers of the publicly read written Scripture. History connects the present and the past at one point. Still today Jews are able to say "when we crossed the Red Sea..." "when we stood at Sinai..." In the Persian period, the community had the same formative power that was also shap-

ing history. In the frequently mirrored and reflected covenant of the Mosaic period, the community portrayed itself as called out of the vast world of nations, destined to be the partner of Yahweh, the sole creator of the world and guide of history. Thus Israel's present experience in the Persian Empire adopted what had been handed down of the ancient family and tribal traditions and then the local and regional sanctuaries, changing them into valid patterns of the community of Yahweh. The formative idea for the composition of the pentateuchal traditions originated in the early Jewish community; it did not come from the distant past of a Mosaic period that was hardly still tangible historically.

Narrative motifs that sought to answer all kinds of questions of the late community were linked with the covenant and the central figure of Moses. There is hardly anything that is still historically authentic in tradition of Moses and the exodus. Already Martin Noth, one of the founders of the history of traditions approach, and preceding him Hugo Gressmann, recognized the legends about Moses as theological fictions.²³³ We only need to add that the creative impulses for the shaping of historical leadership figures always start out from the active community who collect the materials of the past and arrange them for its own basis of identification. In this case the theologians looking back created the covenantal situations and the mediator of the covenant in keeping with the parameters appropriate in their period. Conceptions handed down were incorporated, revised, and reshaped.

To a large extent this interpretation refers to the entire history of Moses and the exodus, as presented in the cycle of tradition in Exod 1–15, as well as in the subsequent wilderness tradition of Exod 16–18; Num 10–36 is arranged eclectically. From the perspective of the communities in the Persian period, the origin of Israel had something to do with Egypt. Whether the Egyptian name of Moses suggested this connection or whether more substantial information about a group of Hebrews enslaved in Egypt is behind this hypothesis can no longer be determined. Perhaps there are also other historical reminiscences of Egyptian advances to Canaan and of groups of refugees that were granted asylum in Egypt that were reflected in the exodus narratives (see Hos 11:1; Ps 80:9, etc.). Important is that the theological witness concerning the oppression in and the liberation from Egypt must also be seen in conjunction with the slave labor under Solomon and the experiences of the Babylonian exile.²³⁴ Thus it processes motifs that are much more contemporary and out

233. Hugo Gressmann, *Mose und seine Zeit* (FRLANT NS 1/18; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1913); Noth, *A History of Pentateuchal Traditions*, 172–91.

234. See Pixley, *On Exodus*.

of them constructs parts of the exodus narrative. What were the contemporaries able to learn from the narratives that they themselves shaped? Moses, the mediator of the covenant, was miraculously rescued by Yahweh already as a child and brought to Pharaoh's court (Exod 1:8–2:10; the abandonment is a migration motif that was already used concerning Sargon of Akkad). His escape to Midian creates the connection with Mount Sinai, the focal point of the Torah, and initiates the rescue from Egypt (Exod 2:11–3:22). The clashes with the Egyptian power of the state (Exod 5–12) are prototypical for the tensions in which minorities find themselves in an imperial system. Just as Yahweh rescues, accompanies, and protects the people in the narratives of Moses and the exodus, so the descendants in the Persian period want to be protected by Yahweh. They knew that the protection of Yahweh was with them (Ezra-Nehemiah).

The postexilic community certainly is not naïve with regard to a beneficial relationship with God. The problem of their own guilt and their straying from the good paths of the Torah was always present. Narrators project this same theological enigma in the wilderness wanderings before and after the Sinai event. Israel grumbled on the arduous path, refusing to comply with Yahweh's will also and especially following the gift of the Torah (see Exod 16–17; Num 11–14; 16–17). Even the leaders of the community, Moses and Aaron, can be overcome with doubt; Yahweh punishes them for their unbelief (Num 20:2–13). In this way the ancient story of the people becomes the mirror image of the experiences of the community in the fifth and fourth century B.C.E. Of course, there are also reports of victories and blessings; in spite of his people's fickleness and unfaithfulness, Yahweh holds to their election (see Num 21:22–24). Yet Israel's difficult fate, mostly caused by their own inappropriate behavior over against God, is very significant for the postexilic community, which is still shaking from the shock of the Babylonian conquest. They cope with their own guilt complexes by designing, hearing, and considering the sobering accounts of the period of Moses. The reflection of their own conditions in the primeval time to the extent that the dangers of idolatry, all the way to Baal of Peor (Num 25:3–5; Deut 4:3), in conjunction with foreign women who were married to Israelites (Num 25:1f., 6–9), are prefigured there. Apparently the problem of marrying foreigners was discussed vigorously within the Judean communities in the Persian period (see Ezra 10; Neh 13:23–28; Ruth). The story of Phinehas, who was zealous for God (Num 25:6–13), is an example for the hardliners of the Judean politics of marriage in the fifth century B.C.E. Everything in this literary episode is oriented to the explanation and justification of postexilic situations. Phinehas, of the family of Eleazar/Aaron, secures the clan privileges in the Second Temple (see Lev 10:6–12; Num 20:2–28; 31:6; 1 Chr 5:30; 24:1–6; Ezra 7:5). Divorce, practiced

in Ezra-Nehemiah, is justified in anticipatory fashion. The animosities that apparently built up in the area of southern Judah (against Midianites and Edomites) since the sixth century B.C.E. are being substantiated²³⁵ against the other tradition, according to which Moses is related to Jethro. Thus in the framework of the exodus and the wilderness wanderings, the legal and cultic regulations as a rule belong to the Priestly tradition or revision. Therefore, they are tailor-made for the postexilic circumstances from the start.

III.2.4.3. Supplementing with Ancient Narratives

Blum, Erhard. *Die Komposition der Vätergeschichte* (WMANT 57; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1984). **Fischer**, Irmtraud. *Die Erzeltern Israels* (BZAW 222; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1994). **Görg**, Manfred, ed. *Die Väter Israels* (Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1989). **Heard**, R. Christopher. *Dynamics of Diselection: Ambiguity in Genesis 12–36 and Ethnic Boundaries in Post-exilic Judah* (SemeiaSt 39; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2001). **Köckert**, Matthias. *Vätergott und Väterverheissungen* (FRLANT 142; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1988). **Matthes**, Karl-Horst. *Abraham, Isaak und Jakob greifen in die Geschichte der Väter* (Theologie 3; Münster: Lit, 1997). **Schmid**, Herbert. *Die Gestalt des Isaak* (EdF 274; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1991). **Schmid**, Konrad. *Erzväter und Exodus: Untersuchungen zur doppelten Begründung der Ursprünge Israels innerhalb der Geschichtsbücher des Alten Testaments* (WMANT 81; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1999). **Schneider**, Tammi J. *Sarah: Mother of Nations* (New York: Continuum, 2004). **Thompson**, Thomas L. *The Historicity of the Patriarchal Narratives* (BZAW 133; New York: de Gruyter, 1974). **Van Seters**, John. *Abraham in History and Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975).

Modeling the story of the exodus in keeping with the needs of the Judaic community of the Persian period was but a first step beyond the arena of the Sinai pericope. Out of genealogical and historical interest, the early Jewish theologians went back far beyond the period of Moses for the origin of the people (of the community) in Egypt to have a prehistory. How did Hebrews end up in the Nile Delta? What are the lines of descent of the forefathers? In the far-reaching narrative cycle on the patriarchal parents (Gen 12–50),²³⁶ the geographical frame is marked out from lower Mesopotamia via Syria-

235. Differently, Ernst A. Knauf, *Midian* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1988). See also Knauf, *NBL* 2:802–3: “In the Pentateuch the Midianites are a literary *pass-partout*, by means of which all options of Israel’s encounter with other peoples are rehearsed.”

236. A discussion on the literary theories about the patriarchal history is available in Albertz, *Israel in Exile*, 246–71. Whether the brief span between 587 and 539 B.C.E. is sufficient for the publication of two versions of this narrative cycle is an open question.

Palestine to Pithom and Rameses—truly a wide-ranging realm of action for a handful of migrant families! The geographical horizon, however, roughly agrees with the Babylonian and Persian Empire, in other words, with the experiential realm in which the Judaic group of people existed after 587 B.C.E. Ur of the Chaldeans (Gen 11:27–32) is said to be the original home of Abraham's clan, and from there he, together with his brother Nahor, moved to Haran in upper Mesopotamia. According to the story of Jacob, this is where the relatives of the patriarch settled. What is the purpose of the (later) inclusion of the south? A possible answer may be because the area where the exiles of 587 B.C.E. settled was much farther south than Haran, and the tradents did not want to leave this area untouched by the patriarchs' migrations. The names of the patriarchal parents, Abram and Sarai (plus the names of their immediate relatives), are Western Semitic rather than Akkadian.²³⁷ The Mesopotamian background of the Hebrews (see also Gen 24; 27ff.) cannot be demonstrated either historically and or archaeologically, ethnically or from the history of linguistics. Overall, it probably may only be explained from the interests in those regions kindled as a result of the exile.

In the large framework of the patriarchal narratives, purely Priestly passages are conspicuous because of their language and content. There is far-reaching agreement on this in Old Testament scholarship. Especially Gen 17 and parts of Gen 21, 23, 25, 28, 35, and 36, for instance, are considered to be the work of Priestly circles. The topics addressed correspond to the interests and theological orientation of postexilic theology. The covenant between Israel and Yahweh is at the center of Gen 17, and it is portrayed symbolically by means of a typically postexilic sign of the covenant: "Every male among you shall be circumcised" (17:10b; cf. 17:11). Whoever is not circumcised (on the eighth day of life! 17:12) "shall be cut off from his people" (17:14). As can be gathered from other postexilic texts, for the Judean community circumcision had the character of a confessional status (see Exod 12:48–50; Lev 12:3; Ezek 32:17–32). The Priestly tradents provide the sign of the covenant, to be applied to every single (male) adherent of Yahweh, with an older legitimation going back beyond the period of Moses and protect the practice by threatening death in the case of noncompliance.

The major problem of the promise and possession of the land probably only became a central topic as a result of the loss of independence. It concerns the narratives of the exodus and the conquest of the land but in the tradition is very consistently and coherently attributed to the patriarchal period as an

237. Thompson, *The Historicity of the Patriarchal Narratives*, 22–36.

essential motif.²³⁸ The Priestly tradents not only adopt older promise-related texts (see Gen 12:7; 26:3; 28:13; Exod 3:8, if they are not formed by Priestly writers themselves), but they also make the beginning of the “conquest of the land” a central theme in a particular narrative, namely, that of Sarah’s burial in the cave of Machpelah. Abraham successfully purchases this tiny plot of land from the Hittites who ruled the country. He entreats the owner: “I am a stranger and alien residing among you; give me property among you for a burying place, so that I may bury my dead out of my sight” (Gen 23:4). Following the conclusion of a purchase contract, the text then says laconically, albeit legally correctly by providing the exact location:

So the field of Ephron in Machpelah, which was to the east of Mamre, the field with the cave that was in it and all the trees that were in the field, throughout its whole area, passed to Abraham as a possession in the presence of the Hittites, in the presence of all who went in at the gate of his city. After this, Abraham buried Sarah his wife in the cave of the field of Machpelah facing Mamre (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan. The field and the cave that is in it passed from the Hittites into Abraham’s possession as a burying place. (Gen 23:17–20; see also Jacob’s purchase of land in 33:19)

According to tradition, Sarah’s tomb was also used for further patriarchs and their wives (Gen 25:9–10; 49:29–32; 50:12–13) and to this day plays an important role in the Jewish tradition as a sign of God’s promise of the land to Israel. The Priestly writers also appear to be very interested in genealogies, especially in the particular ethnic collateral line that supposedly goes back to Abraham’s first son Ishmael. In the narrative the tradition begins with the stories about Hagar (Gen 16; 21), still has Ishmael in focus in the covenant of Gen 17 (see 17:23, 25–26), and then transitions to the genealogy unfolding Yahweh’s promise to this semilegitimate son of Abraham (25:12–18). The Priestly tradents deal with the two sons of Isaac in a similar way: the narrative portrayal of how Jacob, the younger one of the two, worms himself into the blessing of the birthright is probably adopted from the tradition (Gen 27), but then the Priestly writers are also interested in the fate of Esau, who, though the firstborn, is not Yahweh’s choice; Esau violates the (postexilic) prohibition of marrying foreign women by taking an Ishmaelite woman as a concubine (Gen 28:6–9). The narrative portrayal of the problem of the

238. See Köckert, *Vätergott und Väterverheissungen*; Moshe Weinfeld, *The Promise of the Land* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Thomas Römer, *Israels Väter: Untersuchungen zur Väterthematik im Deuteronomium und in der deuteronomistischen Tradition* (OBO 99; Fribourg: Universitätsverlag, 1990).

descendants again issues in a detailed genealogy of the nations and princes who descended from Esau (Gen 36). The Priestly writers were also very engaged when the issue was placing the world of nations known to postexilic Judah under the protection of the one God Yahweh, an endeavor that continues, as mentioned earlier, with the genealogies of the early history. Judah and its neighbors originated altogether under the protection and blessing of Yahweh, the God of the nations. On the one hand, there is a fully legitimate line of ancestry from Adam to Abraham and Jacob bearing the undiminished blessing and the entire responsibility before Yahweh; on the other, the collateral lines, namely, all the known nations (Noah's descendants, Gen 6–9), have a significant part in the promises of Yahweh, the God who creates, guides, and preserves.

In the perspective of the postexilic community, of course, the pre-Priestly tradition adopts a specific meaning applied to their own respective time. Read with the eyes of the members of the community, the figures and circumstances of the patriarchal history become references and models for the situation of faith in the Persian context. Abraham is not only an earlier ancestor, a “father” of the community and the covenant; he also is the prototype of the worshiper of Yahweh who in a difficult personal decision submits his whole life to the leadership of the only God. The theology of decision and obedience, as reflected in the figure of Abraham, points to intensive arrangement and reception in the postexilic period. In the preexilic communities of faith, there were beginnings of this personal and communal dimension of faith, for instance, in the relationship of individuals and their close groups to the family's deity. Yet here also the issue was personal loyalty and personal trust bound up with the small group. The figure of Abraham, however, is already integrated into the religious community of “Israel” and is applied to Yahweh, the God of all the world. Consequently, it reflects the horizon of the community in the Persian period.

Abraham's call out of his southern Mesopotamian home has the goal of becoming a nation, of land ownership, and of the mediation of blessing to all humans (Gen 12:1–3)—a truly wide-ranging, universal framework. Further, the one who is called submits to the divine command without any objection, reflecting the ideal behavior imagined in Ps 119 and elsewhere. In the conceptions of the adherents of the Torah, Abraham remains the absolutely loyal follower of Yahweh throughout the narrative strand of Gen 12–25. As a stranger he sojourns through the land that is promised to his descendants, builds an altar to Yahweh here and there (Gen 12:8; 13:17), resolves family problems in the spirit of the received promises, gets into difficult situations because of his beautiful wife Sarah or because of the familial solidarity with his nephew Lot, is able to reckon with Yahweh's support in all circumstances,

and repeatedly celebrates Yahweh's steadfast confirmation of the covenant (apart from Gen 17, see the seemingly older version of Gen 15). The prototypical portrayal with the meaningful ritual of the sacrificial animals cut in half, which apparently are supposed to allude to the fate of one who breaks covenant (15:10), is followed by a vision. The future is opened up to the patriarch as far as the postexilic period—a clear sign of a retrojected interpretation or figure. His descendants will be enslaved for four hundred years and then experience the exodus (15:12–14) and possess the land from the Egyptian border to the Euphrates (15:18–21). This geography is reminiscent of the Davidic rule but could also have the Jews in focus who are dispersed in Trans-Euphrates (see Ezra 7:25). The prophetic interpretation of covenantal history is built into an older narrative about a ceremonial sacrifice of duty.²³⁹ A dialogue between Abraham and Yahweh introducing the chapter has the character of wisdom; the conclusion once again points directly to the spirituality of the postexilic period: “And he believed the LORD; and the LORD reckoned it to him as righteousness” (Gen 15:6). The personal faith marks the *šaddîq*. Childlessness on the part of the subjects of the promise (15:1–5) often is a delaying element in Old Testament narratives. Here the ancient motif is picked up and serves as an impressive background to the complete devotion to the divine promise. The key term, “believing in Yahweh,” “trusting in Yahweh” (*ʾmn*, *hiphil*), is characteristic of Torah piety in the late period.²⁴⁰ The reckoning “as righteousness” alludes to the widespread expression of the time for the believers engaged on behalf of Yahweh and his Torah. He is the one who is “righteous” (*šaddîq*) over against the godless (*rāšāʾ*, “villain”).²⁴¹ In the Psalms or in the book of Proverbs, for instance, both terms are able to adopt the function of a motto for late redaction.

For modern readers, the exemplary character of Abraham²⁴² is carried to extremes in the horrific account of the sacrifice of Isaac (Gen 22). If we consider the circumstances of the time with their spiritual value systems in which

239. On the very complex literary structure of Gen 15, see Claus Westermann, *Genesis 12–36* (Continental Commentaries; Minneapolis: Fortress), 247–75; P. Weimar, “Genesis 15: Ein redaktionskritischer Versuch,” in *Die Väter Israels* (ed. Manfred Görg; Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1989), 361–411.

240. See Exod 14:31; Jonah 3:5; Pss 27:13; 106:12; 116:10; 119:66; 2 Chr 20:20.

241. See Josef Scharbert, “Gerechtigkeit I. Altes Testament,” and Asher Finkel, “Gerechtigkeit II: Judentum,” *TRE* 12:404–11, 411–14; Helmer Ringgren, “רָשָׁע,” *TDOT* 14:1–9.

242. See Udo Worschech, *Abraham: Eine sozialgeschichtliche Studie* (EHS.T 225; Frankfurt: Lang, 1983); Manfred Oeming, “Der Glaube Abrahams,” *ZAW* 110 (1998): 16–33; John Ha, *Genesis 15: A Theological Compendium of the Pentateuchal History* (BZAW 181; New York: de Gruyter, 1989).

the text originated and was used publicly in proclamation and instruction, its message becomes clearer. At issue is absolute trust in Yahweh, the God of promises and fulfillments. Even if this God demands the most absurd sacrifice, everything will be right. Abraham was to sacrifice his only son (22:1–3). This hero of faith prepared to carry out the terrible deed without grumbling or question. Based on the understanding of Yahweh's faithful in the postexilic community, the relationship with the one caring God was the absolutely highest requirement for every member of the community. All other obligations, desires, and concerns paled into insignificance in comparison. Hence it was essential to carry out God's instruction unconditionally and without hesitation, even against one's own sensations of pain. In the value system of Yahweh's faithful of that time (modern examples of most diverse quality are extant), this was not loathsome, blind obedience but rather the apex of trust in the God who is good, who in his wisdom might also demand the absurd from the human. Expressions of trust such as "I trust you, God" (e.g., Pss 13:6; 25:2; 31:7, 15; 52:10; 55:24; 56:4–5, 12) come to mind. This ancient trust in God is to be maintained in hard times as well (e.g., Pss 23:4; 42:6, 12; 43:5; 62:2–9). Doubt, which breaks out especially in the sufferings of the righteous, then leads logically to Job's situation (cf. Ps 73; Job), in other words, to the sense of questioning the suffering. The idea that the extreme burden caused or permitted by God could be a "test" of the ability to cope with suffering and steadfastness in faith (Gen 22:1) may turn the discussion in yet another direction but cannot halt it. Job's concerns remain virulent in the Old Testament, and, for those who get to speak in the book of Job, it is possible that Abraham's exemplary disposition in Gen 22 also served as a negative foil in the intracommunal dispute about God's righteousness.

It is not the personal piety of the postexilic period alone that is reflected in the patriarchal narratives. The early Jewish community takes shape as well, both positively and negatively. Abraham's encounter with the legendary Melchizedek of Jerusalem, following the patriarch's successful campaign against Chedorlaomer (Gen 14:1–16), must establish the link with the later temple. The ancient priest-king expresses blessing to the returning patriarch; Abraham reciprocates by giving him one-tenth "of everything" (14:18–20). Here sounds a Jerusalem tradition that rarely shines through in the Old Testament but has stronger extracanonical attestation. Melchizedek is the secular and spiritual ruler of (Jeru)Salem; this is also assumed in Ps 110:4 (the oracle for the messianic king says, "You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek"). The figure seems to be fitted archaically and is intended to symbolize the ancient and future divine government of the city of Yahweh. The striking divine description *ʾel ʾelyôn*, "God Most High," well known in the environment of Israel and used occasionally for Yahweh, has the same archaic

sound. The priest-king brings out bread and wine as welcoming gifts and thereby includes the patriarch almost sacramentally in the different religious community and makes him a companion. Then he administers the blessing of this God Most High (*ʿel ʿelyôn*, as in some Ugaritic texts), who bears the powerful title of a creator of the world. In this way Abraham is completely incorporated into the community of Jerusalem. The idea of a pre-Yahwistic religious tradition resonates in the text as well. Through Abraham, however, it is given a Judaic and thereby also a Yahwistic focal point. By means of giving his tithe, the patriarch also substantiates the later temple tax accepted in Jerusalem (14:20). Thus the priestly office, temple, and tax are a foreshadowing of the situation existing in the era of the Second Temple, transposed into the period of Abraham. The seemingly erratic embedding of the Melchizedek scene in semimythical, Babylonian wartime events (14:1–17, 21–24) supports this chapter's dating in the exilic and postexilic period. Already Claus Westermann (who nevertheless first wants to interpret the individual parts of Gen 14 independently) dates the text as a whole to the late postexilic period.²⁴³ The compiler provided Abraham with "a significance reaching into the history of the world." For the Jewish people, he thereby sought "to arouse a glorious past that opened up broader horizons for the humiliating present."²⁴⁴ In the Abraham narratives the counterparts of the holy community of the Jerusalem temple are the loathsome Sodom and Gomorrah (18:16–19, 29), in which injustice and immorality are rampant. The preludes to the destruction of both cities are interesting; the original accounts of this are to be construed etiologically; they have to do with the origin of the incredibly deep rift of the Jordan and of the Dead Sea. In the shaping of the motif of the demise of the wicked cities by fire and sulfur, Abraham is given a decisive role. He accompanies the divine guest at the outset, and in the narrative the latter reflects on whether he ought to hide his plan of destroying Sodom from the chosen one (18:17–19). The intimacy of the divine relationship between Abraham and Yahweh is a direct result of the close relationship practiced by the postexilic community. According to 18:18–19, the reason extends even farther:

The LORD said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, seeing that Abraham shall become a great and mighty nation and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? No, for I have chosen him, that he may charge his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD

243. Claus Westermann, *Genesis 12–36* (Continental Commentary; trans. John J. Scullion; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 188.

244. *Ibid.*, 207. Thus the issue in these more or less prophetic narratives is not only the past but certainly also the horizons of Israel's future.

by doing righteousness and justice, so that the LORD may bring about for Abraham what he has promised him. (Gen 18:17–19)

A saying of Amos imposes itself as a parallel: “Surely the Lord God does nothing without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets” (Amos 3:7). It grew on the same seedbed of trust as Gen 18:17–19; prophets and community are partners in the foreknowledge of Yahweh, and this knowledge is bound up with the Torah. While the key term as such is not used directly, the issue itself suggests the gift of the Torah. Abraham is responsible for the coming generations (note the perspective of the future); on his instruction they are to “keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice” (18:19a; cf. 26:5), but these are precisely the contents of the Torah-obligation (Ps 119:33, 44, 60, 112, 121, 166). These contents are entrusted vicariously to Abraham’s descendants for all the nations (Gen 18:18). In the coordinate system of empires, therefore, in which Israel is living as a minority, they share responsibility for justice and righteousness. This shared responsibility demands that they be informed about God’s plans. Thus Yahweh tells what is supposed to happen with regard to Sodom: investigating the accusations of inappropriate behavior and possible punishment of the corrupt cities (Gen 18:21). Abraham then stops and assumes the role of the intercessor for the lost city (cf. Jonah). Is this meant to be an act of loving one’s neighbor over against ignorant pagans who are left to their own devices? Or is it an entreaty showing solidarity for the minority of the community of Yahweh that surely must have existed in this city of Sodom as well? The latter alternative seems more plausible, for Abraham does not wrest the promise from God not to destroy the city, even if there were only ten “righteous” among their inhabitants, in the common use of language meaning “followers of Yahweh.” The imploring plea of the patriarch to God is a masterpiece of postexilic theological rhetoric:

Abraham remained standing before the LORD. Then Abraham came near and said, “Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked? Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city; will you then sweep away the place and not forgive it for the fifty righteous who are in it? Far be it from you to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from you! Shall not the judge of all the earth do what is just?” (Gen 18:22b–25)

The question about collective guilt and individual responsibility is being tested. Must the uninvolved individual suffer with everyone and possibly be punished for his or her fellow-citizens’ common behavior? By virtue of his position as covenantal partner of Yahweh and with an intercessory attitude,

Abraham intervenes in the mechanism of collective responsibility with its strategy of extermination and lowers the minimum requirement from fifty to ten righteous (18:22–32). Yahweh agrees with this deal. The debate about Sodom's guilt or innocence is conducted entirely under the aspect of whether there is a certain number of "righteous" (*ṣaddīqīm*) over against the "godless wicked" (*rēšā'im*). This is the familiar standard classification of the postexilic period, which does not necessarily agree with our conceptions of morality. At least in the Priestly strand of tradition, the issue is rather the categories of holiness and impurity, as shown by the demonstration of Sodom's reprehensibility in Gen 19:4–11. The messengers of Yahweh stop at Lot's, one of the "righteous" in Sodom; the city's street mob wants to abuse the guests sexually. For the ancient East, this is one of the worst conceivable disgraceful deeds, a barbaric breach of hospitality (cf. Judg 19:22–30). For the Old Testament audience, the homosexual dimension of the act also brings back associations to Lev 18:22 and 20:13, the prohibition of male homosexual contacts on account of the incompatibility with the sphere of holiness and sexuality. Sodom, increasingly so in the later tradition, appears as a paragon of sexual deviancy, in other words, as a counter foil of the holy, unblemished ideal community alluded to in Gen 14:18–20. The positive model and the counter cliché correspond with the ideology of the Second Temple community in Jerusalem.

The actual major theme of the patriarchal narratives is the promises that Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and their wives receive from Yahweh. Accordingly, the divine oracles are focused on the distant future; the issue is the possession of the land of Canaan and the increase of the meager, small clans in the coming generations. In any case, in a future perspective such as this, based on the nature of the promise, the only question to be asked is what epoch, following the imaginary period of the patriarchs in the early or mid-second millennium B.C.E., might have had a specific interest in the topics of promise. This period would then share in the responsibility for the development of the respective announcements. Theoretically, only two periods in the history of Israel can be considered.²⁴⁵ For one, there is the segment in which Israel established itself as a political entity in the land of promise, hence the phase of "immigration," together with the following so-called period of the judges and the early monarchy. For another, this would be the period after the collapse of the monarchy, when Israel saw its national laws abolished by the troops of the

245. A third segment of history, the beginning of the united monarchy under David and Solomon, is ruled out because the promises of the book of Genesis can hardly be interpreted from a monarchic, political perspective.

world powers, the rights of land ownership drastically becoming relativized, and chances of survival and power made possible only by means of world-wide increase of their population.

The first interpretive option would be plausible as such, if we had some reliable documents or memoirs of the final two centuries of the second millennium B.C.E. If anything, there is the attestation of some poetic pieces and fragments of sayings about Israel taking the land and perhaps many names of locations and name changes and certain traces of settlements in the hill country of Ephraim and in southern Judah that can be determined archaeologically. No coherent, historically convincing portrait of Israel's early period can be gained from these fragments of information. Especially the promises made to the patriarchs cannot be demonstrated to be authentic texts of those ancient days when the ancestors of the Hebrew people or their immediate descendants became resident in the promised land.²⁴⁶ Both segments of history, that of the wandering shepherd families and that of the tribes filtering in from Egypt, dependent on arable land, have been largely constructed by the tradition working centuries later. The three patriarchal couples, supplemented by Joseph, the Egyptian link, and the people having grown up in Egypt, correlate much better with the interests of the exiles and returnees since the sixth century B.C.E. This needs to be portrayed briefly by means of an overview of the so-called promises to the "fathers."

The promises of Yahweh to the patriarchs encompass the announcement of the possession of the land, numerous descendants, and being a blessing to and ruling over other nations. They are scattered over the narrative blocks and thus represent the central theme of the entire account of the patriarchs. The Deuteronomistic History probably had always had a comparable topic of promise, which was initially attached to the throng of Moses after the escape from Egypt. Secondarily, however, it also linked the promises with the names of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in some instances.²⁴⁷ Both perspectives relate to the exilic and postexilic situation, when the land was lost but then the rulers permitted the return and the reorganization in Canaan and the Diaspora.

246. See Niels P. Lemche, *Prelude to Israel's Past* (trans. E. F. Maniscalco; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1998); Volkmar Fritz, *The Emergence of Israel in the Twelfth and Eleventh Centuries B.C.E.* (trans. James W. Barker; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, forthcoming), as well as investigations by Thomas L. Thompson, *Early History of the Israelite People* (SHANE 4; New York: Brill, 1992).

247. Thus the attractive thesis of Thomas Römer, *Israels Väter: Untersuchungen zur Väterthematik im deuteronomium und in der Deuteronomistischen Tradition* (OBO 99; Fribourg: Universitätsverlag; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1990); the references are Deut 1:8; 6:10; 9:5, 27; 29:12; 30:20; 34:4.

These dealt with the question of the significance of their own minority in a vast empire, which caused a stir. For this reason, all of the facets of the promises to the patriarchs were of a very explosive nature. The promises of Yahweh concern the three patriarchal couples as well as Joseph in his Egyptian domicile. Yahweh speaks programmatically to Abraham first: "I will make of you a great nation. . . . I will bless those who bless you" (Gen 12:2–3; see also 12:7). The words of Yahweh signal the closest solidarity with Abraham, a covenantal relationship, as it were, in which Yahweh is absolutely on the side of the patriarch and his family. The horizon is universal, encompassing the whole earth, as it may be expected, given Israel's imperial experiences of the sixth century. The Judean community as mediator of vitality for all nations can only be a self-awareness developed within the Persian Empire, after religious tolerance on the part of the rulers also fed the hope for spiritual and possibly eschatological political possibilities of influence. A longing for land ownership was also prevalent; the community sought to realize its autarchy on its own soil (see Neh 9:36–37).

The Abraham narratives (Gen 12–25) are also interspersed with similar divine promises or references to it (see 13:14–17: with a command to inspect the promised land; 15:5, 7–8, 16, 18–19: in the context of the covenant; 17:2, 4–8, 15–16, 20: together with the covenant of circumcision; 22:15–18: promise of blessing and dominion). The promises continue into the narrative of Isaac and Jacob (Gen 26:2–5; cf. 26:24); the reference to the Abrahamic promise is clear in the choice of words and content. Once again the important thing is the universal framework of the announcement of the future. This is followed by the reference to Abraham's faithful compliance with the Torah, and this continues with Jacob (Gen 28:13–14); his "offspring shall be like the dust of the earth." The reckoning used is that of the dimensions of an empire. The same promise is reminiscent of the blessing on the journey that the father, Isaac, grants his son Jacob earlier, when he departs to Mesopotamia (Gen 28:3–4), and still earlier at the handing over of the honor of being the head of the clan in the blessing of the firstborn (27:27–29, 39–40: dominion over a sister nation). Jacob's prayer before the struggle at the Jabbok contains a reference to the promise of increase (32:13), and, in conjunction with building an altar and the new commitment to Yahweh at Bethel, the patriarch has another vision; his name is changed to "Israel," and the promise of increase and land strengthen the dominant tone of the narrative complex (35:9–12). This promise finds a later echo in the Joseph cycle, when Jacob, on the verge of death, reminds his son in Egypt of the Bethel vision (48:3–4). By the way, with the story of Joseph the promises of Yahweh already enter the phase of fulfillment. On the one hand, the settlement in the land of the Nile commences the enormous growth of Israel (see 46:3; 48:16, 19; Exod 1:6–7); on the other,

the transporting of Jacob's body to his home, the "land of the fathers," after the purchase of the field near Shechem (Gen 33:18–19), is an obvious further signal of the taking of possession long before the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt (Gen 47:30; 48:21–22; 50:7–14). The right of disposal of the land in the native country of Canaan was a major problem for the exiles and the returnees. The deportations in the early sixth century B.C.E. were accompanied by expropriations. The questions of ownership remained open until the return of the exiles, and in the Judean population it remained contentious (see Jer 24; Ezek 33:23–29). This was compounded by major burdens on the family property by the occupying powers, Babylonian as well as Persian. Many peasants were ruined (Neh 5). There certainly was no reliable safeguard for family property in terms of land in the province of Judah. For this reason the patriarchal stories in Genesis entwine themselves so strongly around the problem of the land. The promises of increase ultimately originate in the same critical situation. The Judaic community was painfully aware of its minority status. Only a considerable increase in its own population and a career in the dominant society could bring influence to bear. This topic is taken up in many narratives of the Old Testament. Thanks to Yahweh's hidden guidance, Joseph ascends to the second highest office in the government of Egypt. In this way Jacob's "lost son" is able to assist his clan decisively. On account of God's non-verbal guidance, Esther is able to lead the Persian emperor in such a way that mortal danger is averted for the Jews and the threatening demise is turned into an overwhelming victory. Nehemiah and Ezra work effectively for the best of the people at the Persian imperial court. All of these examples demonstrate that the goal of the population's growth and spread lies in the presence of Jews everywhere in the world. Especially in the centers of power, skilled and loyal servants of the respective rulers are essential agents of God (see also Daniel and Judith), who also cause the ancient promises to become reality. The patriarchs' descendants probably are meant to be bearers of blessing in such a way that through their life with and before Yahweh, with and through the Torah, they gain the character of examples for all other nations and religions. In such promises the Jewish community opens itself for all of humanity and causes them to share in the self-revelation of the only God (see Isa 2:2–4; 19:23–25; 49:1–6; 56:1–8; Ps 87; Jonah). Ultimately the desires for power, which are not very concrete, arise from the promise of increase: "I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you" (Gen 17:6; cf. 22:17; 27:29; 35:11).²⁴⁸

248. On Gen 17:6, see Westermann, *Genesis 12–36*, 261. References placing the "nations" and "kings" in parallel (as also in Isa 41:2; 45:1; 60:3; Jer 25:14) are "oracles of

Thus, overall, in the patriarchal accounts of Israel's ancestors there is a remarkably broad geographical, coupled with an open intellectual or religious, horizon. The migratory movements of the ancestors and founders of the Judaic community most likely have nothing to do with the historical wanderings and migrations of peoples; they arise from the common experience that domiciles are endangered in conjunction with geopolitical developments and can shift. The intention of statements by the postexilic writers or hearers of the patriarchal narratives rather point in a different direction. According to Yahweh's plan for his people, Israel, and the entire inhabited world, the patriarchal parents left their marks in all the countries between Mesopotamia and Egypt. The Deuteronomistic Historian sums up the second, more important part of the narrative as follows: "A wandering Aramean was my ancestor; he went down into Egypt and lived there as an alien, few in number, and there he became a great nation, mighty and populous" (Deut 26:5). The restlessness of the seminomads suggests the notion of the welfare of the God who is good, who provides his chosen with the appropriate orientation. "Hear my prayer, O LORD, ... for I am your passing guest, an alien, like all my forebears" (Ps 39:12). The picture of a migrating believer in Yahweh has stuck and conversely has also contributed to portraying the history of the patriarchal parents as ongoing wanderings, from Mesopotamia to Canaan and from Canaan to Mesopotamia, back and forth through Canaan, from Canaan to Egypt and back again, and to Egypt once more, not including undercurrents. What emerged was the icon of faith of the devout longing for being settled, yet always remaining in uprooting motion (Heb 13:14: "For here we have no lasting city"; cf. the profiles of faith in Heb 13:4–31: Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, and Rahab).

III.2.4.4. Primeval History

Albertz, Rainer. *Weltschöpfung und Menschenschöpfung* (Calwer Theologische Monographien 3; Stuttgart: Calwer, 1974). **Bauks**, Michaela. *Die Welt am Anfang* (WMANT 74; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1997). **Baumgart**, Norbert C. *Die Umkehr des Schöpfergottes* (HBS 22; Freiburg: Herder, 1999). **Crüsemann**, Frank. "Die Eigenständigkeit der Urgeschichte," in *Die Botschaft und die Boten* (ed. Jörg Jeremias and Lothar Perlt; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1981), 11–29. **Dohmen**, Christoph. *Schöpfung und Tod* (2nd ed.; SBB 17; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1997). **Gardner**, Bruce K. *The Genesis Calendar: The Synchroponistic Tradition in Genesis 1:11* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 2001). **Hieke**, Thomas.

salvation to the exilic and postexilic period." With regard to 22:17, the desire to "possess the gate of the enemies" probably originated in the ancient incantation literature.

Die Genealogien der Genesis (HBS 39; Freiburg: Herder, 2003). **Keel**, Othmar, and Silvia Schroer. *Schöpfung: Biblische Theologie im Kontext altorientalischer Religionen* (Fribourg: Universitätsverlag; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2002). **Louth**, Andrew, ed. *Genesis 1–11* (ACCSOT 1; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2001). **Neumann-Gorsolke**, Ute. *Herrschen in den Grenzen der Schöpfung* (WMANT 101; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2004). **Oberforcher**, Robert. *Die Flutprologe als Kompositionsschlüssel der biblischen Urgeschichte* (Innsbrucker theologische Studien 8; Innsbruck: Tyrolia, 1981). **Schorch**, Stefan. *Die Vokale des Gesetzes: Die samaritanische Lesetradition als Textzeugnis der Tora 1: Das Buch Genesis* (BZAW 339; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2004). **Towner**, W. Sibley. *Genesis* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001). **Trimpe**, Birgit. *Von der Schöpfung bis zur Zerstreuung: Intertextuelle Interpretationen der biblischen Urgeschichte (Gen 1–11)* (Osnabrücker Studien zur jüdischen und christlichen Bibel 1; Osnabrück: Rasch, 2000). **Witte**, Markus. *Die biblische Urgeschichte* (BZAW 265; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1998). **Zenger**, Erich. *Gottes Bogen in den Wolken* (2nd ed.; SBS 112; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1983).

Starting with Abraham and his wife was not yet sufficient for the postexilic communities; it was necessary to answer further questions. The (ancient Eastern and Israelite) thirst for knowledge focused on the first beginnings. What sort of Mesopotamian country of origin was it from which the Hebrews once emigrated, and what were the associations with northern Babylon? Out of what environment had Yahweh called the ancestors; how did their distant, different world come about? Especially those whose settlement in Babylon was compulsory presumably thought about this realm. They probably also listened to the traditions of their “host” country and formulated answers in the framework of the traditions that they discovered there. The creation, flood, and genealogies of nations in the book of Genesis refer to extant Mesopotamian conditions and partly also processed the available materials. The great Babylonian epics, Atram-hasis, Enuma Elish, and Gilgamesh, in whatever literary and/or oral form, probably did not remain foreign to the Israelites living in Babylon. In their own way they shape the history of the beginning of humanity with elements of Babylonian tradition²⁴⁹ in order to answer their questions about the time before Abraham. It remains doubtful whether the primeval history ever existed independently and secondarily was placed in front of a complete or developing Israelite book of salvation history. Nor may it be clarified unambiguously where the actual boundary between the history of humanity and of the nation has to be drawn, whether after Gen 9 or Gen 11. Perhaps the somewhat stronger arguments favor those who assume

249. See Bauks, *Die Welt am Anfang*. The author also acknowledges Egyptian elements and the common ancient Eastern treasure of imagination; see, e.g., 268.

a relatively swift composition under the responsibility of Priestly tradents in the postexilic period. The chronological framework, especially of the book of Genesis, favors a hypothesis like this. Further, what did the early Jewish communities and their scribes learn and give new thought to in Babylon?²⁵⁰

It may be assumed that, in rural circles of ancient Israel, it was not customary to assign the creation of the world a triumphal first place in the tradition. For the people in the cultural centers on the Euphrates, Tigris, and Nile in general and especially for the theologians among them, however, it had been a matter of course for more than a thousand years to reflect on the origin of the world, to hear and talk about it. In the annual New Year festival in Babylon, the *Enuma Elish*, the epic of the city and the empire, was performed or, in any case, recited as “up there.”²⁵¹ The other epics apparently enjoyed a less cultic-official life setting but surely were also performed publicly. The result of the Judean endeavors regarding the topic of the beginning of the world is the composition on Yahweh’s creation of the world and humans in two layers (Gen 1–2). The first work of creation ends with the Sabbath, a projection of their own weekly structure that originated after the exile into the very first primeval history. The course of time in their own experiential world, crowned by the Sabbath, was of supreme importance for the editors of the primeval history, so much so that they also imprinted it upon the creation event. This expresses human consciousness: from the very beginning our world was ordered in the way in which we now experience it. Other traces of their own theological interpretation of the world and God is found in Yahweh’s verbal acts of creation, the diminishing of the astral powers (all of which had divine qualities in Babylon), and the appointment of the human in general (not the monarch) as deputy-ruler of the earth.²⁵² Everything reveals

250. The question coincides with those dealing with adopted materials and the intentions of ancient Israelite editors of primeval history. D. J. A. Clines is correct in arguing that they adapted motifs that they were able to interpret directly in the light of their own exilic and postexilic experiences, e.g., the corruption of humans (Gen 6) or the craving for power of the (imperial) united nations (Gen 11); see Clines, “Theme in Gen 1–11,” in *I Studied Inscriptions from Before the Flood* (ed. Richard S. Hess and David T. Tsumura; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 285–309, esp. 308: primeval history was “heard in exile as a story of God and Israel.”

251. On this important festival of the turn of the year, in the course of which the tablets of fate were written for the year to come and the vitality of the country was renewed in the sacred wedding, see Walther Sallaberger and Beate Pongratz-Leisten, “Neujahr(sfest),” *RIA* 9:291–98.

252. See Ute Rütterswörden, *Dominium terrae* (BZAW 215; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1993). In Gen 1:26–30, however, two layers are to be distinguished: the commission to rule in 1:26–28 is in tension with the togetherness of the human and the animal with equal rights

the retroactive construction of the creation event from the experiential horizon of the postexilic community. In the second account (Gen 2:4b–25) the coloration of the late period is not very clear. The human is the main topic, including his position before God, the societal structure, and his position over against the animals. Some sort of world map of the paradisiacal primeval conditions is inserted (2:8–14). This latter passage has a Mesopotamian mold. Eden is situated in the East, in the mountains, from where the Euphrates and the Tigris obtain their water.²⁵³ The sexually different humans have a patriarchal relationship to one another; the woman is a (valuable) complement of the man, created for his benefit. This is the relationship that has existed for thousands of years in the ancient Near East and has not changed substantially until now. God is the creator and partner of both humans; he puts them to work and establishes rules for them.

The problems of the human are situated in the garden of Eden. He is given tasks by God, and limits are laid down, which lead to the creature rebelling against the creator (Gen 2:15–17; cf. 3; 6; 11). This strand of primeval history, which accounts for a particular theological anthropology, seems to agree precisely with the conceptions of the postexilic period, in other words, with the communal theology of the time. The fundamental idea is that Yahweh demands the believers' full surrender, and the sovereignty of orientation belongs to him. Over against more relaxed perspectives, according to which the one who fears God simply guards against intruding into the divine sphere, offending him, or attracting his negative attention, the spiritual attitude of Gen 2:15–17 signifies a more reflective level of the religious lifestyle that also comes to light in the community's Torah piety (cf. Ps 119). Yahweh's order with regard to daily nourishment and the pursuit of knowledge point to the encompassing regulation of human life by means of the holy commandment and prohibition. At the end of the prohibition, the decisive point is not to eat of the tree of knowledge. The writers and tradents of the text must have been aware that they touched on a delicate point. Distinguishing good and evil is a fundamental quality of being human. Thus at the beginning of the history of humanity, it is precisely the step to genuine incarnation that is prohibited. The substantiation on Yahweh's part follows

in 1:29–30 (as also in Ps 104); Erhard S. Gerstenberger, "Macht Euch die Erde untertan" (Gen 1:28): Vom Sinn und Missbrauch der 'Herrschaftsformel,'" in *Nach den Anfängen fragen* (ed. Cornelius Mayer; Giessen: Gesellschaft für Interdisziplinäre Theologie, 1994), 235–50.

253. Eden (a Sumerian loanword meaning "steppe"); paradise (a Persian loanword meaning "garden"), see Fritz Stolz and Simone Rosenkranz, "Paradies," *TRE* 25:705–14. Otherwise Manfred Görg, *NBL* 1:467: "theological topography of Jerusalem."

in Gen 3:22: "Then the LORD God said, 'See, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil; and now, he might reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever'—therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden." Being human, as it was known in the postexilic period, included, as a dangerous quality, an unlimited thirst for knowledge and thereby a competitive will focused on God. The human as rival of the supreme deity! On the other hand, Ps 8:5 describes the human as "a little lower than *ēlōhim*, "God," and crowned with the divine attributes of "glory and honor." Genesis 11:6 articulates the fear of God, similarly to 3:22, as fear of unmitigated human technical competency: "they are one people, and they have all one language; ... nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them."²⁵⁴ The two definitely parallel stories about taking the forbidden fruit of paradise and the building of the idealistic tower understand the mortal fate of the human and the confusion of languages as divine defensive measures against an all-too-powerful humanity. The humans created by God have something divine about them; their intellectual and creative abilities point far beyond the abilities of the other creatures. Precisely this is the danger of self-aggrandizement, of "being like God" (see also Ezek 28:1–10). In primeval history, God puts a stop to the megalomaniacal assault of God. This anthropology had had its time; in the ancient Near East, too, it was not a matter of course. The already mentioned Babylonian myths of creation do not grant the human the competitive power against the deities. But they take into account that human noise and human unrest is irksome to those in heaven and may lead to annihilation.²⁵⁵ The Babylonians see the revolutionary potential rather in competing deities, such as the lord of the underworld, Erra.²⁵⁶ However, the figures of thought resemble those of the biblical primeval history. By means of cunning, Erra succeeds in attaining the dominion of the world from Marduk. Absolute chaos enters the earth at once. This manner of questioning the good order of creation belongs to the first millennium B.C.E. in any case, after devastating historical experiences and increasing, radical reflection had demonstrated the fragility of the cosmos that had been construed. For ancient Israel, the experiences of the sixth century were the cause for questioning the anthropological and theological concepts that had been valid until then. A first step, provided by primeval history, is to recognize the ambivalence of power and the arrogance in being human as one means

254. Christoph Uehlinger, *Weltreich und 'eine Rede'* (OBO 101; Fribourg: Universitätsverlag, 1990).

255. See W. von Soden, "Der altbabylonische Atramchasis-Mythos," *TUAT* 3.4:612–45 (esp. 629).

256. See G. G. W. Müller, "Ischum und Erra," *TUAT* 3.4:781–801.

of plunging into misery. The second aspect, in which the community finds itself again equally strongly, is the fact that evil fills the human. Evil is nothing more than the criminal negation of the world order that God has established, the active desire to annul this order.²⁵⁷

The primeval history offers several examples of this fateful yearning for destruction. In the postexilic community, one found one's own doubts about the moral quality of the human again. Cain's killing of Abel stands for unfathomable hatred between brothers and Lamech's song of revenge for excessive desire of murder (Gen 4). In the flood narrative the reason becomes lost in mythical darkness. The sons of God marry human wives; a race of giants comes into being, and Yahweh, again as a defensive measure over against an extravagant rival power, limits the span of life to 120 years (Gen 6:1–4). The flood narrative then resumes and notes categorically (probably because the deterrent example just mentioned): "The LORD saw that ... every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually. And the LORD was sorry that he had made humankind on the earth" (Gen 6:5–6). The decision of extermination follows.

Evil is embedded deeply in the human; together with others, this is one of the convictions of the Judaic community in the Persian period. Psalm 14:3 expresses it in this way: "They have all gone astray, they are all alike perverse; there is no one who does good, no, not one." The major individual and corporate laments (e.g., Pss 51; 106; Neh 9) chime in. A profound awareness of sin (which certainly can parallel occasional confessions of innocence) has taken hold of people and is expressed in worship rituals for remission of sins and liberation from guilt. In postexilic texts we hear of such perpetrations (see Zech 7:2–6) and even find liturgies for communal use (Isa 63:7–64:11). In the Babylonian realm it is precisely for the first millennium B.C.E. that rituals for rehabilitating the debt of sin or other disaster threatening the human are widely known. Examples of this are Akkadian confessions of repentance such as those found in the collections of incantations of Shu-ila.²⁵⁸ The second tablet of the *šurpu* ("burning")²⁵⁹ series contains an extensive admission of

257. Eugen Drewermann's (*Strukturen des Bösen* [Munich: Schoeningh, 1978]) interpretation of primeval history makes an important point but exaggerates it and causes other dimensions to disappear.

258. See Erich Ebeling, *Shu-Ila (Assyro-Babylonian Prayers)* (Berlin: Akademie, 1953); Anette Zgoll, *Die Kunst des Betens* (AOAT 308; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2003).

259. Still the definitive work on this is Erica Reiner, *Šurpu: A Collection of Sumerian and Akkadian Incantations* (AfOB 11; Graz: Weidner, 1958).

guilt, whereas the *nam-burbi* ("his solution"?)²⁶⁰ collection apparently leaves personal guilt out of consideration.

Who is there that has not sinned against his God,
 who has kept the commandments consistently?
 All of humanity that is alive is sinful.
 I, your servant, have committed every kind of sin!
 Although I served you, I did so in untruthfulness;
 I told lies and thought little of my sins,
 I spoke impertinently; you know it all!
 I went against God who created me,
 I did heinous things, always sinning.
 I was after your distant possessions,
 I was greedy for your precious silver.
 I raised the hand and profaned what was inviolable,
 In impure condition I entered the temple.
 I constantly desecrated you shamefully;
 I transgressed your commandments in everything displeasing to you.
 In the frenzy of my heart I blasphemed against your divinity.
 I continually acted shamefully, consciously and unconsciously,
 Acted entirely according to my own mind and sank into sin.²⁶¹

Human feelings of guilt over against deities probably have always existed. As already indicated, this became noticeable in a more focused way in the first millennium B.C.E., and the writings of the postexilic community are replete with it. Hence in the light of the late period the flood account is a characteristic expression of the epoch. In anger and regret Yahweh is intent on undoing the creation, just like the deity Enlil in the Epic of Atramhasis, albeit with a slightly different motivation: anger (see Gilgamesh, Tablet XI).²⁶² From

260. See the text edition with extensive comments by Stefan M. Maul, *Zukunftsbewältigung: Eine Untersuchung altorientalischen Denkens anhand der babylonisch-assyrischen Löserituale (Namburbi)* (Mainz am Rhein: von Zabern, 1994). In this type of incantation, disaster emanating from evil omens is driven away. Nevertheless, the patient's prayer of petition is frequently directed to the "judge" Šamaš and pleads for "justice." In addition, evil, which has already infiltrated the body of the one suffering, must be washed off.

261. From the German translation by H. Schmökel in Beyerlin, *Religionsgeschichtliches Textbuch zum Alten Testament* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1975), 133.

262. The Atramhasis Epic revolves around the distribution of (slave) labor on earth. To begin, the low gods, the Igigu, have to work like Trojans for the high deities, the Anun-aki. Following the rebellion of the former, Mami (Nintu), the mother goddess, and Enki create the human as a substitute for the Igigu, of whom too much had been demanded. The human, Edimmu (Adam!), originates from the remains of a slaughtered god and thus

the perspective of the postexilic communities, this means that God rescinds his covenantal obligations over against the people of Israel. By means of the dreadful flood he destroys everything he had promised to Israel. The catastrophe annihilates any basis for livelihood on the earth. Nevertheless, sparing Noah and his family is a ray of light in a dismal reality. Even now God's grace is not completely at the end. For a small number of humans—but this is precisely what Israel's ancestors will be as well—there is a chance of survival. The flood, as well as the Bible's entire primeval history, holds a ray of hope in spite of the tragic darkness surrounding human fate. Indeed, the believers in Yahweh who were liberated from Babylonian captivity by Yahweh and the Persians are able to claim the positive outlooks of the history of beginnings entirely for themselves.

In the context of examining ancient Near Eastern motifs, the question of possible traces of Persian religious thought must also be posed. Some brief suggestions may contribute to the hypothesis that the Pentateuch was essentially composed in the period of the Second Temple. The scholars who pay attention to the Persian background²⁶³ mention the concept of paradise, among other things, as an Eastern heritage with a supposedly Persian coloration. Now there are no more detailed explanations about a primeval garden of God handed down in the Old Avestian parts of literature. The more recent layers mention the blissful life in heaven in the presence of God, without aging, disease, and evil. It does not begin until after death or after the last judgment.²⁶⁴ The conception of a perfect, eternal life together with the deity alluded to in Gen 3:22 is also found in the Mesopotamian epics, though not with the same intensity and referring to the inferior human. For the Sumerians, the land of Dilmun has paradisiacal qualities; it is the mythical place of origin of the rivers as the residence of the gods for the Akkadians.²⁶⁵ The commissioned work to be carried out by the first humans is reminiscent of the (slave) labor in the Atramhasis Epic; the apparently presupposed bliss of the couple in the presence of God, which is to be deduced from Yahweh's con-

also bears divine qualities. The humans obligated to slave labor multiply very rapidly and stop Enlil from getting his rest. Now Enlil attempts to destroy humanity, with the exception of Atramhasis.

263. See, e.g., Widengren, *Die Religionen Irans*, 103–4; Hans-Peter Müller, "Kohelet und Amminadab," in *"Jedes Ding hat seine Zeit...": Studien zur israelitischen und altorientalischen Weisheit: Diethelm Michel zum 65. Geburtstag* (ed. Anja A Diesel et al.; BZAW 241; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1996), 149–65; Hermann Gunkel, *Genesis* (7th ed.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1966), 7–8; Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 283–96.

264. See Michael Stausberg, *Die Religion Zarathushtras*, 1:144–53.

265. See Müller, "Kohelet und Amminadab," 149.

versation with Adam following the act of disobedience (Gen 3:8–13), may be more in line with Persian religious orientation. Already in the “late Avestian texts” (sixth–fourth century B.C.E.) the individual and collective paradise is developed quite broadly. For instance, in chapter 2 of the *Hadōxt Nask*, Ahura Mazda answers Zoroaster’s question about the journey of the deceased just one (i.e., the one who thought, spoke, and practiced *Aša*). In the transmigration of his soul he meets a pretty young woman who is the good alter ego of his own. Step by step she introduces him to the celestial regions of paradise, presumably up to the presence of the highest god himself.²⁶⁶ Compared to the Avestian reflections, the biblical account of paradise is almost childlike in its simplicity. Nevertheless, in the basic conception there are certain analogies between the two. In both instances the issue is the individual human being setting an example or living on in the sphere of divine perfection and of a bliss that, if need be, is given some thought in the Egyptian cult of the dead,²⁶⁷ but that has no correspondence like this in the Mesopotamian realm.

There is another element to be considered that is more supportive of a Persian backdrop of the concept of paradise than of an Egyptian one. For the first humans in the biblical narrative context, everything depends on accepting the well-meaning authority of Yahweh, the creator and guide of the world, and not to follow any other voices. In the situation of the postexilic community, this means that there is only one option to remain in perfect harmony with God, who makes decisions alone and everywhere; alternative instructions and orders, cults and lifestyles must be refused actively and with personal responsibility. The serpent in Gen 3 is the hostile power questioning the sovereignty of the supreme God, and it wants to get humans, creatures of the supreme being, on its side. It exercises the functions of seductive demons (Gen 3:1–5). “You will not die. ... you will be like God” (3:4–5), it suggests to Eve. It seems to me that the underlying conception of the human as someone who has to make a positive decision of faith and life for the supreme God and a further negative decision against demons is clearly shown in Persian religiosity, whereas it is lacking entirely in Mesopotamian or Egyptian religious orientations. The personal professed intention for the only true God and against his adversaries belongs to the core of Avestian religion. Already the oldest texts clearly discuss the matter; the Gatha, for instance, most likely picks out the beginning of the world as a central theme.

266. See Carsten Colpe, *Die religionsgeschichtliche Schule* (FRLANT 78; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996), 149.

267. See Raymond O. Faulkner, *The Ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead* (rev. ed.; New York: Macmillan, 1985).

Hear with (Your) ears the best (things)! View the radiance (of the fire), with (Your) thought, the invitations resulting from the discrimination of each single man, for his own self, before the great sharing (of good things), expecting (someone) to announce that to us. These (are) the two spirits (present) in the primal (stage of one's existence), twins who have become fames (manifesting themselves) the two (kinds of) dreams, the two (kinds of) thoughts and words, (and) the two (kinds of) actions, the better and the evil. And between these two, the munificent discriminate rightly, (but) not the miserly. (Yasna 123:30,2–3, following Humbach, *Gathas*)

In the Avesta the decision on whom to vote for between Ahura Mazda and Angra Mainyu (or his demons or hypostases) is even personified as *Frauvaši*, a divine principle promoting the positive side with lasting effect. A formulaic, frequently used liturgical confession stresses the two aspects of the choice: "I declare myself as an admirer of Mazda, adherent of Zoroaster, one who rejects demons, a follower of Ahura" (Yasna 12, in Stausberg, *Religion*, 473). The hymn Yašt 13 is entirely dedicated to the topic of the "decision for Ahura Mazda." From all of these and related Avestian texts comes the great significance of the personal decision of faith for the Zoroastrian religion. The texts of the postexilic Jewish community are attuned in a much more economical way to the confession of Yahweh and the renunciation of other deities. We recall Deut 29:9–29; 30:15–20; Josh 24:14–27; 1 Kgs 18:21–40, and other texts. This same decision-making situation for or against Yahweh is already in place in Gen 3, at least in the view of the postexilic listeners. The alternative between the one God and the powers of ruin (lie, unfaithfulness, etc.) tends to be assessed in terms of monotheism. While it cannot be found in this form in the sources of the ancient East and of Egypt, it occurs in the Persian religion. The conclusion that Israel only became acquainted with the subject of decision under the Persian rule and adapted it in its own way can hardly be avoided.

What remains is glancing at the genealogies. The common view is that they are the product of Priestly creativity or compositional technique. Some analogies to Near Eastern lists are noteworthy; conversely, however, the creative will of the Judaic community shows clearly. The Sumerian list of kings speaks in various ways about seven to ten original "kings before the flood," showing unimaginably lengthy terms of office, mostly longer than twenty thousand years. Yet the cities in which they are supposed to have functioned can be identified: Eridu, Bad-tibira, Larak, Sippar, and Šuruppak.²⁶⁸

268. See D. O. Edzard, "Königslisten und Chroniken," *RIA* 6:77–86; W. H. P. Römer, "Sumerische Königsliste," *TUAT* 1.4:328–37; Piotr Michalowski, "History as Charter: Some Observations on the Sumerian King List," *JAOS* 103 (1983): 237–48.

The recorded rulers after the flood get closer to historical reality; the spans of their rule are reduced to several hundred years, and comprehensible city states are cited: Kiš, Uruk, and Ur. Of the twenty-nine listed rulers, there are certainly some who can be identified, even if mythical figures, such as Lugalbanda and Gilgamesh, are among them. Thus biblical writers of primeval history adapted to the well-known Mesopotamian schema of “primeval time—flood—normal course of history.” The great flood exterminating humanity is the dividing line between the two main periods of human history. The Hebrew preflood (Gen 5) genealogies are about individual hero-like figures without political connotations. All of the Sumerian heroes of prehistoric times, at least secondarily, are kings. This is to be rated as a reflection of the society in which the lists were compiled. The Hebrew record of the progenitors before the flood contains private individuals; they descend from Adam and distinguish themselves only by their fertility, the protection of the patriarchal lines, and their high life expectancy, in some instances approaching a thousand years (top: 962 years) but slowly decreasing (as in the Sumerian kings list as well). The final preflood hero, who is preserved through the phase of extermination, still attains an age of 777 years (Gen 5:31). Incidentally, in many textual variants he is juxtaposed by Ziusudra (Akkadian Utnapištim), the Sumerian hero of the flood. The nonpolitical nature of the biblical prehistoric heroes is either an older or parallel tradition, or it is a reflection of the communal, private conditions of the postexilic period. At that time they were no longer inclined to portray the primeval beginning of human history under the omen of the monarchy.

The other genealogy of biblical prehistory is found in Gen 10. Instead of continuing the succession of rulers and heroes as in the Sumerian-Babylonian lists of kings, the biblical tradents of the postexilic period focus on a kind of genealogy of nations. From the three sons Shem, Ham, and Japheth, who survived the flood together with their parents, derive the well-known peoples of the world at the time. The form of the genealogy is retained, but at the core the text is rather a “list-like compilation of the peoples of the earth.”²⁶⁹ The listing begins with the youngest son of Noah, Japheth (Gen 10:2). From the perspective of the Judaic editors or hearers, he is regarded as the progenitor of the nations or regions of Gomer, Magog, Madai, Javan, Tubal, Meshech, and Tiras. Some uncertainties in locating the names have to be accepted; broad agreement exists in understanding Madai as the Medes (who *pars pro toto* may also be understood as the place of origin of the Persians) and Javan as the (Ionian) Greeks. The other five regions can be established with more

269. Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 503.

or less good probability in Asia Minor, northern Iran, and the Mediterranean islands. For the geographical horizon of the tradents, this means that they do not focus on Mesopotamia first but rather on the north and beyond Mesopotamia to the east. Could there be a better clue for the dominant politico-geographical reality having something to do with the Persian hegemony? It is true that more specific references to the centers of power in Persia are lacking; Elam, too, is not yet mentioned. However, the reference to the Medes carries a lot of weight, and the Greeks appear as the neighbors of the Medes, although spatially they were far apart from one another.

The descendents of Ham—Cush, Egypt, Put and Canaan (Gen 10:6)—encompass the inhabitants of the valley of the Nile and the more southern nations, but also the Canaanites. If Cush stands for the Cushites, that is, the Nubians, or the Greek for Ethiopians, then the derivation of the eastern Semites (Nimrod, Babel; Erech, Akkad, and Calneh “in the land of Shinar”; according to 10:10; differently in 10:7) is extremely strange. But historically and ethnologically precise kinship relations are not to be expected from these lists; furthermore, faults in the transmission may have muddled the text. If we accept it as is, the descendents of Ham reflect the existence of the nations that surrounded Israel in the south and the west. The Canaanites (10:15–19: Sidon, Heth, Jebusites, Amorites, Girgashites, Hivites, Arkites, Sinites, Arvadites, Zemarites, and Hamathites) play a special role in this context as competing neighbors who also have to be driven out by the invading Israelites, according to the Deuteronomistic work.

Finally the descendants of Shem, Noah's eldest son, appear: Elam, Asshur, Arpachshad, Lud, and Aram. The most important three are Elam, Asshur, and Aram, historically active states that exercised great influence in the Near East for long periods of time. From the perspective of the postexilic community, Ashur and Aram represent centers of power to which Israel was obligated to pay tribute at times or into which they even were integrated. It is surprising that no states are mentioned for the land east of the Jordan and the southwest. In other Old Testament references, Moab, Ammon, and Edom are important and dangerous neighbors. Is their time up, or are they no longer a threat for Judah in the common province of Trans-Euphrates, under Persian sovereignty (contrary to the allusions in, e.g., Neh 2:19; 4:)? This question can hardly be answered. If we position the table of nations in Gen 10 in the Persian period, it portrays the map that was in effect from the Judaic perspective. With its capital Jerusalem, Judah is surrounded by a more or less related yet always also competing belt of foreign nations; the text does not mention anything about their interrelationship, apart from the anticipatory note in 10:25. Thus it represents a purely descriptive listing of the nations settled right around Judah, yet for what purpose? The community makes cer-

tain about its world and its location. It seems to be situated at the center: beginning with the north, across the Mediterranean Sea with the island peoples, then jumping to the south and the east and including the Phoenicians, the map of the nations ends with the Elamites in the distant southwest and the Arameans in the immediate northwestern neighborhood. For us this is not a clearly laid out order. Numerous unknown, perhaps mythically colored names have found their way into the list. Nevertheless, those listening to the plan of the world likely understood themselves as its leading lights.

The story of the building of the tower (Gen 11:1–9) demonstrates what the world map assumes; in this mixture of nations there cannot be any good order. Because of their human presumptuousness, the numerous nations have lost their ability to communicate harmoniously and are scattered across the whole earth. After this fact the genealogy continues (Gen 11:10–32), again in the form of Gen 5 and only with the line of Shem and moving straight toward Abraham. Noah's eldest son begets Arpachshad and then lives for another five hundred years and has other children who are not mentioned by name (11:10–11). This is followed by the next step. The one true, important son and heir, Arpachshad, fathered Shelah, lived for another 403 years, and had further children (11:12). Thus via Eber, Peleg, Reu, and Serug, nothing but otherwise unknown figures, the patriarchal lineage reaches the immediate forebears and relatives of Abraham: his grandfather Nahor and his father Terah, who, after his firstborn Abraham, brings two further sons into the upper Mesopotamian world: Nahor and Haran. These personal names are apparently also attested as place names.²⁷⁰ This indicates a fictitious or real focal point of the genealogy in upper Mesopotamia. In any case, the postexilic community claimed Babylonian roots for themselves and thereby perhaps made the stay in the region more plausible and more tolerable. Their situation in the Persian Empire is not a major theme within the Mosaic Torah but can be deduced from the circumstantial evidence adduced, especially from the spiritual climate revealed by the texts.

III.2.4.5. Conclusion of the Pentateuch

In spite of all the ascertainable dates and circumstances, the actual formation of the Pentateuch is largely shrouded in mystery, and this will presumably remain the case. We would love to know more precisely who in the end did the necessary compositional and redactional work, with what communicative

270. See Manfred Görg, "Abra(ha)m—Wende zur Zukunft," in Görg, *Die Väter Israels*, 61–71; Detlef Jericke, "Die Liste der Nahoriden Gen 22:20–24," *ZAW* 111 (1999): 481–97.

actions by the Judaic community the individual texts, as well as the complete work were linked, whether or not and to what extent the imperial government of Persia was instrumental in the compilation of the Torah, and many other aspects. The supply of probings of the literary critical and the history of tradition sort is ample;²⁷¹ they do not need to be repeated here.

The individual compositions or the various redactional levels of the Pentateuch presumably merged in the fifth and fourth century B.C.E. into a final form that can no longer be precisely determined. Changes and additions in the following decades are not out of the question. In the prologue to the Greek Sirach (117 B.C.E.), the Torah is (completely?) in existence. Already Neh 8:11 (presumably around 400 B.C.E.) presupposes an authoritative writing that was to be read out and interpreted for hours in worship. These are key elements, but they do not clarify our questions of detail. I have pointed out several times already that the community and communal worship were the driving forces for the collection of the Torah and that leading powers in the community, namely, priests, Levites, scribes, and sages, were possible as actual authors or executing organs. In this context, the open question is whether or how an imperial government ordered an introduction of the Torah as the Jewish civil and cultic law. The argument for the "imperial authorization" of the Torah is suggested in Ezra 7 (cf. §§I.2 and III.1.1.2 above) and has been taken up and developed by many exegetes. It should be addressed with serious caution, however.²⁷² The vested interest of the Judean reporters in a governmental sanctioning of the Torah was so strong that we are not very easily able to trust the Persian initiative (just as in the case of the royal commissioning of Nehemiah and Ezra). The endeavors of the Achaemenids are well-known indeed, as already cited above, in pacifying the regions and religions of the vast empire with autochthonous legal and cultic orders. Whether such a law ever existed for all Jews in the province of Trans-Euphrates, however, and whether this law, if it was ever enacted, was identical or partly identical to the Torah cannot be resolved. In any case, the interest-led account in Ezra cannot serve as evidence for a governmental action such as this. A possible "natural" development toward the authoritative Torah is to be preferred by far as an explanatory paradigm.

Accordingly, the collection of orientating sacred writings, conveying Yahweh's will, depends largely on the rise of the Judean communities in the native land and in foreign countries but not on the politics of the religion of the

271. See Van Seters, *The Pentateuch*; E. Blum, *Studien zur Komposition des Pentateuch*; Blenkinsopp, *The Pentateuch*.

272. For many good reasons, e.g., in James W. Watts, ed., *Persia and Torah*; Grabbe, *Yehud*, 215–16, 235–36, 324–37.

Achaemenids. The parochial communities of those who had adopted belief in Yahweh gathered together for seasonal festivals and commemorations, for discussion about common concerns, and increasingly also more regularly on "lunar days" or Sabbaths. Part of the gatherings was to make certain of that which the ancients had done and said at times of established circumstances of life and what they had received and formulated as the basic order of life and faith. Precisely this question about the "ancient paths" (see Jer 6:16; at times, however, it was also perceived as burdensome and misleading, cf. Jer 31:31–34) is the decisive impetus for the collection and formation of tradition. It is written down because it was used over and over; in other words, it is recited during the gathering. The practice of putting into writing traditions for the purpose of communal use, hence of producing a functional collection of sacred texts, presumably originated in Mesopotamia and was reinforced among the Persians. The uprooted Judeans adopted the practice.

The indicators for the use of the Pentateuch in gatherings of the community are all too obvious. They are stylistic in kind: the use of the second-person plural (sometimes singular) address, as is broadly customary in Priestly and Deuteronomistic texts, cannot be rated other than as evidence for addressing the hearers live. The channeling of divine communication through Moses, the spokesman (or Ezra who read aloud), is a standard configuration in both the Priestly and the Deuteronomic realm of tradition.²⁷³ It anticipates the situation of the community. An authorized speaker or reader confronts the community directly with the Word of God. Moses, Joshua, Jeremiah (Baruch), and Ezra are the major examples. Analogous to them, the liturgists of the community allow the "I" of Yahweh (first-person singular, used representatively by the mediator) to be heard. The texts have homiletical and catechetical character.²⁷⁴ They build up the community and show it the way. Unfortunately, the Pentateuch lacks the responses, the "we" passages that are so frequent in the Psalms. We are not able to make out clearly how the hearers react, what texts they might say together (cf. Josh 24:16–18; Neh 10:31–40). Reactions of the community are only hinted at indirectly (Deut 1:14, 26–28, 41, etc). In the Pentateuch, the declaration of Yahweh's will has priority; Yahweh speaks through his mediators; the people listen and are shaken or delighted (cf. Deut 5:23–27). The order of part of the worship liturgies may reflect this one-sidedness of the divine action.

273. For the Priestly strand of tradition, see Gerstenberger, *Leviticus*, 6–9, 23–25, 238–40.

274. See Erhard S. Gerstenberger, "Predigt. Altes Testament," *TRE* 27:231–35; Rex Mason, *Preaching the Tradition* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

From the fragmentary traditions remembered and recorded, those safeguarding the sacred heritage who are well versed in writing initially made a motley, not very "orderly" collection of orienting norms and instructions, as found, for instance, in Exod 20–Num 36. Guidelines for everyday life, as well as for the worship of Yahweh, were critically important for the young, inadequately established communities. An explanation of how the communication of the complete will of God came about under Moses is explained in the prior narrative structure of Exod 1–19. By moving back further in history, the narratives about the patriarchal parents explain the claim to the land in Palestine and both the sojourn in and the deliverance from Egypt. The primeval history, pushed back still further in the direction of the beginnings, links Israel with humanity altogether or, stated concretely, with the imperial society dominated by Persia. The fifth book of the Torah (Deuteronomy) is a unique creation. Due to circumstances that cannot be discerned and given unknown occasions, Deuteronomians and Deuteronomists compiled the Moses event once again. Or could this synthesis be the heart of the formation of the Pentateuch? Perhaps they wanted to consolidate afresh that which had been handed down in terms of commonplace rules of life for believers in Yahweh, for the expressly cultic regulations of the well-represented theology of holiness in the book of Leviticus are not found in Deuteronomy. The "reiteration of the Torah" in any case is addressed to the community of Yahweh, as are the Priestly parts of the Pentateuch; it is not a national law,²⁷⁵ for all the institutions shining through are not monarchic.

Thus without being able to determine with precision the shape it gained in the Persian period, in the Pentateuch we have the remarkable product of a Holy Scripture in front of us, produced by the multilayered Judean community. Comparable constitutive works that have given religious communities their identity are the Vedic texts, the Persian Avesta, enlightening Buddhist writings, some gnostic collections, and the Qur'an of much later times. Accordingly, religions of the book²⁷⁶ have only emerged roughly since the fifth century B.C.E. and have contributed to shaping the history of the world. In the Hebrew writings of the Old Testament, the beginnings of canon formation are clearly visible. In many correlations between texts the "book of

275. With Lothar Peritt, *Bundestheologie im Alten Testament* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1969), and others, against all attempts at linking the Deuteronomic/Deuteronomistic regulations with the preexilic society of Israel/Judah! See Georg Braulik, *Studien zum Buch Deuteronomium* (SBAB 24; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1997); Otto, *Das Deuteronomium zwischen Pentateuch und Deuteronomistischem Geschichtswerk*.

276. See Johannes Leipoldt and Siegfried Morenz, *Heilige Schriften* (Leipzig: Harrasowitz, 1953); James Barr, "Scripture," *RGG*⁴ 3:1549–51.

the Torah of Moses” is an established entity; the canonical formula “neither add anything ... nor take away” (Deut 4:2; 12:32) is applied to the declaration of Yahweh’s will through Moses. Thus the Torah joins the succession of sacred writings of humanity, with incredible consequences for the realm of the Mediterranean and the so-called Western civilizations. In spite of all the definitions of content, the fact that in the Jewish stream of tradition the canon in its own way remains open—Prophets and Writings follow, and rabbinic interpretation follows swiftly—is evidence for a beneficial theological pragmatism. The Christian dogmatic assertions on canon and biblical orthodoxy, too, have been revised time and again by the practice of interpretation.

IV. THEOLOGICAL CONTRIBUTION

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Theological reflections and patterns of argumentation have already been discussed broadly in chapter 3 above. This anticipation of the concluding topic was inevitable because the main motivation for drafting sacred writings is, after all, theological. Nevertheless, the final chapter should not turn out to be overly redundant. The task is to summarize the theological developments of the Persian period to which we have already alluded, to portray essential connections and additions, and to draw some trajectories to the present, for the "contribution of the period" is worthwhile only if it is intended for someone. As things stand, this can only be the contemporary reader, the recipient, of those sacred writings that originated 2,500 years ago. Over the entire, lengthy period since that time, communities of faith of both Jewish and Christian provenance have adopted, interpreted, and passed on those texts. With every right even religious skeptics such as Bertolt Brecht and Rudolf Augstein have acknowledged that biblical conceptions have penetrated deeply into our subcutaneous cultural system and often influence our decisions extensively, even if unconsciously.

Of the two centuries of Achaemenid rule in the Near East (539–331 B.C.E.) it can be said with complete justification, as Rainer Albertz already claims for the fifty-eight years of the Babylonian yoke over Judah and the deported Judeans, that "No era in Israel's history contributed more to theology."¹ Even if the improved situation for the subjugated in 560 B.C.E. (releasing Jehoiachin from prison and the alleged promotion to guest of honor status at the table of Evil-merodach) is taken into account, the actual liberation of the deportees only occurred after the takeover by Cyrus in 539 B.C.E. (Isa 45:1–7). Beginning with this point in time, the living conditions of the exiles and of those who remained at home changed for the better, especially with regard to religion. The new rulers granted their subjects freedom of worship. Only with this political setting, of course, could the reorganization of the temple establishment and the new formation of a confessional community of Yahweh truly begin. The reordering of the religious and civil conditions initiated or tolerated by the Achaemenids made possible the

1. Albertz, *Israel in Exile*, 435.

organization of the Judean community of Yahweh, and this genuine new beginning of an autonomous religious community provided the most important impetus for the formation of situationally relevant theological concepts, for regulating the necessary cultic matters (rededication of the temple in 515 B.C.E.), forming the essential ordinances of the community, establishing offices and leadership functions, systematizing the annual cycle of festivals, introducing the Sabbath and circumcision as public confessional acts, finishing the compilation and redaction of the Torah, and initiating other structural measures. Coping with the past in celebrations of lament must surely have begun soon after the collapse of 587 B.C.E. There may well have been local attempts also to provide belief in Yahweh with an external form and public validity. The ordinances, reflected on a broad basis and binding for all adherents of Yahweh, were probably only implemented after the emergence of the Persians. The practical process of establishing civil and religious structures is prerequisite for producing theological literature. As a rule, an imprisoned and oppressed people is unlikely to muster much strength for a visionary reorganization. In any case, the consequences of "Israel's" reorganization had been incredibly great; they still continue today.

IV.1. BACKGROUND: BABYLONIAN AND PERSIAN SPIRITUALITY

Bottéro, Jean. *Religion in Ancient Mesopotamia* (trans. Teresa Lavender Fagan; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001). **Boyce**, Mary. *A History of Zoroastrianism* (2 vols.; HO 1/8.1.2; Leiden: Brill, 1975). **Colpe**, Carsten. *Iranier—Aramäer—Hellenen: Iranische Religionen und ihre Westbeziehungen* (WUNT 154; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003). **Edzard**, Dietz O. *Geschichte Mesopotamiens: Von den Sumerern bis zu Alexander dem Grossen* (Munich: Beck, 2004). **Gnoli**, Gherardo. *The Idea of Iran* (SOR 62; Rome: Ist. Italiano per il Medio et Estremo Oriente, 1989). **Hausleiter**, Arnulf, ed. *Material Culture and Mental Spheres* (AOAT 293; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2002). **Hutter**, Manfred, ed. *Offizielle Religion, lokale Kulte und individuelle Religiosität* (AOAT 318; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2004). **Jacobsen**, Thorkild. *The Treasures of Darkness: A History of Mesopotamian Religion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976). **Kratz**, Reinhard G., ed. *Religion und Religionskontakte im Zeitalter der Achämeniden* (Veröffentlichungen der wissenschaftlichen Gesellschaft für Theologie 22; Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2002). **Krebernik**, Manfred, and Jürgen van Oorschot, eds. *Polytheismus und Monotheismus in den Religionen des Vorderen Orients* (AOAT 298; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2002). **Loretz**, Oswald. *Götter—Ahn—Könige als gerechte Richter* (AOAT 290; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2003). **Meissner**, Bruno. *Babylonien und Assyrien* (vol. 2; Heidelberg: Winter, 1925). **Oppenheim**, A. Leo. *Ancient Mesopotamia* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1964). **Stausberg**, Michael. *Die Religion Zarathustras* (3 vols.; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2002–2004). **Watanabe**,

Kazuko, ed. *Priests and Officials in the Ancient Near East* (Heidelberg: Winter, 1999). **Widengren**, Geo. *Iranische Geisteswelt* (Baden-Baden: Holle, 1961). **Widengren**. *Die Religionen Irans* (RM 14; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1965).

An important factor in the spiritual birth of the community of Yahweh surely was the common intellectual and religious climate with which Israel had to deal as a defeated and uprooted minority or at whose mercy they were, like it or not. By means of the Babylonian and Persian sources, we are able to gain a fairly satisfactory picture of the situation in Mesopotamia and Palestine. We are especially interested in the differences between Babylonian and Persian religiosity, because it is to be expected that signs of one or another stance of the Babylonian and Persian worldview and manner of faith (even if they vary significantly) might possibly have been reflected in the Old Testament theologies of the time. In this context, the religious atmospheres of the two empires have to be taken very seriously as expressions of human belief. We select some important theological statements as examples.

First, many experts attribute a tendency toward monolatry or even toward monotheism to the Near Eastern world of the first millennium B.C.E. This could be a reflection of the absolutist, universal kingdom.² More meticulous studies on how the claims to power in the name of specific deities developed³ underscore the political and extensive character of such claims of the “imperial God” to be worshiped, ranging from preferred to exclusive. This is true also of the emperors of all Mesopotamian kingdoms and, with restrictions, of the Achaemenids as well. On the level of personal religiosity, however, considerable differences in the structuring of the relationship with God comes to light. Ahura Mazda, the only and supreme god, appears neither in religious nor in official governmental writings as king of the gods. There are no monarchic metaphors attributed to him. In the personal sphere, he is the epitome of universal wisdom, truth, and justice, sharply antithetical to the opposing evil (lies). The believer has to decide for him and renounce the evil demon. This emphasis on choice between the good principle and its negation is foreign to the Babylonian religions. On the Persian side, as already mentioned several times, it belongs to the essence of faith. This distinct religious structure is to be given careful attention.

Second, Babylonian literature is familiar with the longing for eternal life, the fear of transitoriness, and the daily struggle for health and well-being. Especially in the first millennium B.C.E. it also takes up the skepticism

2. See, e.g., Jacobsen, *Treasures of Darkness*, 233–36.

3. See, e.g., Walter Sommerfeld, *Der Aufstieg Marduks* (AOAT 213; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1982); Ahn, *Religiöse Herrscherlegitimation im achämenidischen Iran*.

and despair of the divine world order. In contrast to the earlier composure and totally positive attitude to life, a certain resignation spread in Babylon in the first millennium B.C.E., indeed a readiness to lambast sarcastically the harmony offered by the gods. In the “pessimistic dialogue,” a paragraph states the following:

“Servant, obey me.” Yes, my lord, yes. “Bring me at once water for my hands, and give it to me: I will offer a sacrifice to my god.” Offer, my lord, offer. A man offering sacrifice to his god is happy, loan upon loan he makes. “No, servant, a sacrifice to my god will I not offer.” Do not offer (it), my lord, do not offer (it). You may teach a god to trot after you like a dog when he requires of you, (saying), “(Celebrate) my ritual” or “do not inquire (by requesting an oracle)” or anything else. (*ANET*, 438)

Apparently derision of this kind was no longer perceived as blasphemous. It reflects a disposition that also considers the reversal of the beneficial world order. The epic of Erra produces the takeover by the underworld and the catastrophic consequences on earth.⁴ For several tablets the unspeakable disaster that Erra had instigated is described and lamented, partly by his steward Ishum, partly by affected deities. Thus Ishtaran, the god of the city of Der (Tel Aquar, southeast of Baghdad, near Badra) accuses him:

You have made the city of Der a desert,
its people you snapped like a reed.
You extinguished their noise like foam on the sea,
and you did not leave me out; you handed me over to the Suteans!
Because of my city Der I will pronounce no (more) judgments of righteousness,
make no decisions concerning the land.
I will issue no command and grant no wisdom.
The people have flouted the law and chosen force;
they have left justice and planned evil.
I will rouse the seven winds against the one lad.
Whoever does not die in battle will die on account of the plague,
whoever does not die because of the plague will be plundered by the enemy,
whoever is not plundered by the enemy will be struck dead by the robber,
whoever the robber does not strike dead, him the weapon of the king will reach,
whom the king's weapon does not reach, he will be brought down by the prince,

4. See Luigi Cagni, *The Poem of Erra* (Malibu, Calif.: Udena, 1977); G. G. W. Müller, “Ischum und Erra,” *TUAT* 3.4:781–801.

whom the prince will not bring down, he will be washed away by Adad,
 whom Adad does not wash away, he will be carried away by Shamash,
 whoever goes out into the country, him the wind will sweep away,
 whoever enters his home will be beaten by the one who lies in wait,
 whoever climbs on a hill will die of thirst,
 whoever descends into the valley will die through water.⁵

The descriptions of the catastrophe continue endlessly; they are reminiscent of many sayings by biblical prophets or of many threats of a curse. The destruction of the good order is complete. Erra, the god of the underworld, is behind it. Yet human culpability is involved as well; especially the “good” gods share in the catastrophe as well. They do not stop Erra; indeed, at times they seem to support him. Thus desperate reproaches ring out against the destructive god. The solution offered at the end is that Erra desist from causing havoc; he admits to having been excessive in the effect of his destructive campaign and promises to assist in rebuilding the devastated land. The writer of this poem who comes out at the end (he alleges to have received it in a vision at night) commends it (in the first-person singular address of Erra) as a proven incantation text against all kinds of trouble. “For the house in which this tablet is placed, no matter how angry Erra might be and even if the Sibitti should commit murder, the sword of the plague will not come near, for welfare is destined for him” (Tablet V, 57–58; according to Müller, “Ischum und Erra,” *TUAT* 3.4:801).

The contrasts to Zoroastrian solutions for the problem of theodicy are tangible now. Whereas in Babylonian religiosity good and evil basically issue from one and the same divine will, Zoroaster from the beginning separated evil from good in a dualistic fashion. Ahura Mazda and his “benevolent immortals” are good through and through and not capable of any evil stirring. On the other hand, the *daevas*, the evil demons and antagonistic counterforces against that which is true and good, are bad from the beginning; they will be destroyed at the end of time. From such varied basic perspectives also arise varied theological conceptions and ethical behaviors on differing societal levels of human existence.

This identifies a broader, significant difference between the religions of Mesopotamia and the message of Zoroaster coming from the Eastern regions, namely, the perspective of history and eschatological judgment and the valuation of individual life as a stage prior to entering final paradisiacal existence. collective and personal level, respectively. Detailed accounts of last things are not yet found in the Old Avestian Gathas. Nevertheless, references to impor-

5. Tablet IV, 66–86; according to Müller, “Ischum und Erra,” *TUAT* 3.4:796.

tant decisions about the future can already be encountered there. Babylonian religion lacks an orientation toward ultimate decisions (judgment of the dead, reception into paradise, comprehensive historical reckoning at the end of days, etc.). Human and political life takes place in the horizon of immanent reality; its transformation into a reality that is somehow different, other-worldly, heavenly is not anticipated at any point. The various epics and poems about the underworld in the Near Eastern realm always are a dark backdrop to the experiential and known sphere of life.⁶ On the other hand, realization of existence in the life to come appears in Zoroastrian belief from the outset. The personal confession of the absolute good and the individual lifestyle in keeping with the authentic rules of the “good meaning” and the “harmony of truth” obtain their confirmation and completion after death. Similarly about the life of the nations: in many later texts the body of thought drawn up in the Old Avesta is developed broadly. The teaching of the ages of the world through which humanity goes and thereby experiences its tests and purifications brings universal history to a conclusion in the final judgment. Then, untarnished by any guilt or error, eternity begins.⁷

There is no doubt that the assumption of power by the Persians in the second half of the sixth century B.C.E. brought new intellectual and religious components into play in the Near East. Since the rediscovery of the Persian (Zoroastrian) heritage in Europe in the mid-nineteenth century, the novel and Asian aspects of the conception of the world and of faith have triggered both fascination and shock. Its effects on Greek thought, Judaism, Christianity, and gnosis have been examined.⁸ However, that Old Testament insights of faith also emerged during and following the intellectual periods of radical change of the sixth century, or at least matured there and then, has by no means been fully appreciated. Since the deportations by the Babylonians and the integration of their native country into the Babylonian Empire, and particularly after the more permanent occupation by the Persians, the Judeans came into direct contact with the imperial ideology and the ideals of religion of the East. In the judgment of the history of religions, their western Semitic religion, as reflected

6. On the Babylonian ideas on this life, the life to come, the purpose of life, etc., see Meissner, *Babylonien und Assyrien*; Jacobsen, *The Treasures of Darkness*; Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia*; Krebern timer and van Oorschot, *Polytheismus und Monotheismus*; Edzard, *Geschichte Mesopotamiens*.

7. See Stausberg, *Die Religion Zarathushtras*, 1:135–53; Widengren, *Die Religionen Irans*, 102–8; Boyce, *History of Zoroastrianism*, 1:192ff.

8. See Franz Altheimer, *Zarathustra und Alexander* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1960); Wilhelm Bousset, *Die jüdische Apokalyp tik* (Berlin: Reuther & Reichard, 1903); Norman Cohn, *Cosmos, Chaos and the World to Come* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).

in the Ugaritic texts, for instance, must have been shaped by encountering new, Persian ways of thinking.

IV.2. GENESIS OF ECCLESIAL STRUCTURES

Blenkinsopp, Joseph. *Wisdom and Law in the Old Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995). **Brennecke**, Hans C., ed. *Volk Gottes, Gemeinde und Gesellschaft* (JBTh 7; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1992). **Fabry**, Heinz-Josef. "Studien zur Ekklesiologie des Alten Testaments und der Qumrangemeinde" (Habil. Diss., Bonn, 1979). **Gunneweg**, Antonius H. J. *Understanding the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978). **Hanson**, Paul D. *The People Called: The Growth of Community in the Bible* (2nd ed.; New York: Harper & Row, 1990). **King**, Philip J., and Lawrence E. Stager. *Life in Biblical Israel* (Library of Ancient Israel; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001). **Kippenberg**, Hans G. *Religion und Klassenbildung im antiken Judäa* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1978). **Pilch**, John J., and Bruce J. Malina, eds. *Handbook of Biblical Social Values* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1998). **Rost**, Leonhard. *Die Vorstufen von Kirche und Synagoge im Alten Testament* (2nd ed.; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1966). **Schäfer-Lichtenberg**, Christa. *Stadt und Eidenossenschaft im Alten Testament* (BZAW 156; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1983). **Schaper**, Joachim L. *Priester und Leviten im achämenidischen Juda* (FAT 31; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000). **Smith**, Morton. *Palestinian Parties and Politics That Shaped the Old Testament* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971). **Strecker**, Georg, and Johann Maier. *Neues Testament, antikes Judentum* (Grundkurs Theologie 2; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1989). **Weber**, Max. *Ancient Judaism* (trans. and ed. Hans H. Gerth and Don Martindale; Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1952). **Weinberg**, Joel P. *The Citizen-Temple Community* (JSOTSup 151; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992). **Willi**, Thomas. "Kirche als Gottesvolk?" *TZ* 49 (1993): 289–310. **Zevit**, Ziony. *The Religions of Ancient Israel* (New York: Continuum, 2001).

What has been mentioned already (§§II.3.3–II.3.6 and II.4 above) is to be grouped briefly and adapted in terms of the sociology of religion concerning the belief in Yahweh being expressed. Modern findings about the formation of groups and communities, also from the vantage point of displacements by force and emigration, should be taken into consideration as much as possible. The particular living conditions of the communities in Palestine, the place of origin, as well as in the Diaspora (Babylon, Egypt), have decisively contributed to the shaping of the theological views. In other words, what we today recognize as "unique" forms of the Old Testament belief in God are contextually bound up with the historical and sociologically "unique" experiences of the Judean minorities in the Persian Empire, but which nevertheless are to be made comprehensible through analogous situations.

IV.2.1. IDENTIFICATION AND DELIMITATION

In the history of humanity, countless examples can be found for the fact that communities of people and religion became extinct, whether under the pressure of aggressive conquerors or for other reasons. The fate of the native inhabitants on the American continents, in Australia, or in Japan speaks for itself. Ethnic minorities have a chance to survive only if their numbers do not sink below the critical boundary of several thousand individuals; a "last Mohican" cannot rescue his people. Those who are left also have to live within easy reach of and remain in contact with one another; an atomizing scattering of foreign groups inevitably leads to assimilation in the dominant society. The familiar formation of ghettos by foreigners everywhere, especially in cities, is an attempt at preserving one's own culture, language, and religion. Chinatowns and miniature Turkeys seem like genuine branches of their native societies. Besides these purely physical, basic assumptions for the continuity of autochthonous life, defeated and humiliated minorities and immigrants, however, have the courage to continue their own group's common life under fundamentally different conditions. The self-abnegation occasionally encountered among Latin American Indians in extreme situations, which manifests itself in general apathy, refusal of food, and a tendency toward suicide, does not help, even if physical chances of survival exist from an "objective" vantage point. Thus ultimately the intellectual, mental, and spiritual constitution is to a high degree responsible for the survival of a minority group, and this inner state of mind is necessarily accompanied by a high regard for one's own tradition and language. Only those small communities are able to survive that actively cultivate significant parts of their cultural, religious, and moral traditions and visibly express them in their communal life. For centuries the Amish in Pennsylvania, the Parsis in India, the Maori in New Zealand, and thousands of other minorities around the world have held on to the customs of their ancestors, with considerable modifications of the heritage handed down as well, to be sure. The cultivation of internal and external distinguishing features or identity markers is an essential, logical consequence of the will to survive. At the same time, a more or less strongly emphasized dissociation from the different environment belongs to the portrayal of the essential characteristics.

At the time of the Babylonian conquest, the population of the ancient kingdom of Judah still had a critical survival mass of some ten thousand individuals. Several thousands of individuals of the upper strata were deported in several phases; given the preferred resettlement in designated towns (Ezra 2:59; Ezek 3:15), these numbers also were above the alarming limits. Presumably the decisive will to survive was further fanned by the Persian politics of

religious decentralization. It crystallized out of faith, customs, and worship and partly found expression in radical separation from all "idolaters," as well as in an elevated belief in election.

The characteristics of the formation of the Judean identity are well-known and have already been mentioned here and there. In the first place, belief in Yahweh became the foundation of the new confessional community.⁹ How should this development be understood? The worship of Yahweh was not set in popular belief. The latter followed familial tutelary deities for thousands of years, the signs of which can still be clearly recognized in the Old Testament.¹⁰ In the local cults (open-air shrines), area numina were celebrated, who occasionally were given names of higher gods or goddesses. The Israelites had come to know Yahweh as a warlike tribal god. He proved himself as the leader of tribal alliances and was associated with the portable sanctuary, the ark of the covenant. Then, probably under David, he had become the God of the ruling dynasty and of the kingdom. The popular cults on the lower social levels, however, had not been touched directly by the cult of the state. As in the case of Ashur or Marduk, the religion of the dominant society rubbed off only superficially on the religion of the minor groups. By name the major deities were also venerated among the people; like local deities, they were functionally effective in family, village, and town as protectors, healers, and exorcists. After it had ceased being a state, why did Israel, now in its new form as the Judean communal association, decide that Yahweh was the central, only legitimate God? The answer may be found in the nature of things. Since Yahweh had not grown out of popular religion but as the official deity of the state of Judah and of the Davidic royal house, he had become the best known deity. Yahweh represented the totality of the political whole. If they wanted to preserve a smidgen of cohesion in the period without a king, only Yahweh presented himself as a deity serving as a role model. For the clans and towns, no local numina could have the uniting aura that Yahweh brought from the national tradition. For the theologians of the time, it must

9. According to the current developments in Old Testament scholarship, it is out of the question that in its early period Israel took the first step in joining together to become the people of Yahweh; see Gerstenberger, *Yahweh—the Patriarch*; idem, *Theologies in the Old Testament*.

10. Rainer Albertz, *Persönliche Frömmigkeit und offizielle Religion: Religionsinterner Pluralismus in Israel u. Babylon* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005); Gerstenberger, *Der bittende Mensch*; idem, *Yahweh, the Patriarch*; K. van der Toorn, *Family Religion in Babylonia, Syria, and Israel: Continuity and Changes in the Forms of Religious Life* (SHANE 7; Leiden: Brill, 1996); Leo G. Perdue, ed., *Families in Ancient Israel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997).

also have been most welcome that Yahweh was not completely wrapped up in the monarchic tradition. He had already led the tribal wars and only reluctantly allowed an earthly king to be imposed (1 Sam 8). Therefore his destiny was not completely coupled with the Davidic dynasty. Further, step by step those forming the tradition in the postexilic period moved the origin of Yahweh's covenant back into the distant times, all the way into primeval history. In this process they say little about the kingdom of Israel and its task of establishing a religion, if anything at all in the Pentateuch; it is only in the Chronistic work that a few monarchists get a chance to speak.

There may have been yet another, time-related reason for Yahweh becoming the divine role model. Beginning with the sixth century B.C.E. to the Islamic conquest almost a thousand years later and beyond, the Babylonian Diaspora became a primary center of Jewish culture and religion.¹¹ As in the case of many emigrants and exiles of all times and cultures, the yearning for the old native home burns more strongly than for those who did not have to give up their ancestral country, so the zeal for Jerusalem and the promises of Yahweh for his people must have been extraordinarily intense among the exiles of ancient Israel as well. Many theological insights and formulations, and surely the one of the other literary legacy (Priestly material, Ezekiel), originated from the Babylonian colony, in which the more extensive Talmud was composed many centuries later as well. According to some Deuteronomistic sources (e.g., 2 Kgs 25:11–12; Jer 52:28–30), the Babylonian Diaspora was made up of the elite stratum of the Davidic Jerusalem. They were familiar with Yahweh as the God of the royal house, of the capital city (theology of Zion!), and of the state of Judah. It is also due to their substantial influence in the shaping of the new confessional community that the worship of Yahweh became its pivotal point. The continuation of the ideology of the capital city (e.g., Pss 46; 48; 76; 87; 132; in Jer 44:15–19 the “queen of heaven” is a serious rival of Yahweh), in part with a Davidic element, and the rise of messianic hopes (see below) are evidence for a religiosity that continued to be nurtured in the horizon of governmental structures. Furthermore, the tendency in Babylonian and Persian imperial thought toward integrating what belongs together encouraged the formation of a theology of unity. In Mesopotamia, the Judeans learned to think universally.

However we picture the turning to Yahweh as the only, legitimate God of the Judean people-group, what is certain is that internally the personal and collective confession of this God of Israel became the foundation of faith.¹²

11. See Nahum N. Glatzer, *Geschichte der talmudischen Zeit* (2nd ed.; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1981), esp. 85–94.

12. See Erhard S. Gerstenberger, “Glaubensbekenntnis. Altes Testament,” *TRE* 13:386–88.

The exclusive relationship with Yahweh is the essential content of the exilic and postexilic proclamation: "Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might" (Deut 6:4–5). Following this fundamental admonition, the exilic and postexilic community responds with a vast choir of confessional formulations, both handed down and newly formulated, confirming the incomparable relationship with God by means of praise and petition: "You are my God" (Ps 31:15); "you are my rock" (71:3); "my hope, my trust, O LORD, from my youth" (71:5); "my mighty rock, my refuge is God" (62:7); "O LORD, our Sovereign" (8:1, 9); "for who is God except the LORD? And who is a rock besides our God?" (18:31); "this is God, our God forever and ever. He will be our guide forever" (48:13–14); "O come, let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker! For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture" (95:6–7); "extol the LORD our God; worship at his footstool. Holy is he!" (99:5); "he is the LORD our God; his judgments are in all the earth" (105:7); "save us, O LORD our God, and gather us from among the nations" (106:47). The confessional formulations are legion; the liturgical tradition lives on these spiritual bearings. Especially in the Persian period Yahweh becomes the anchor of faith for the Judean communities. The sharp rejection of all "other gods" (see Exod 20:2–6) is the consequence. This is a new development in the history of ancient Israel's religion, for prior to the exile the conditions for the constitution of a confessional community such as this were missing. Later on, in the Hellenistic period, the self-definition of the religious group (instead of the place of birth or of the family) no longer has rarity value, as demonstrated by the followers of the mystery cults.¹³ In the Persian Empire, apparently there were religious communities based on volitional decisions for Ahura Mazda,¹⁴ and a way of perceiving oneself opens up whereby priority is given to a particular religion. Now the personal affiliation with a cult can become a person's essential trait. When the sailors ask for the identity of their eerie passenger Jonah, he responds: "I am a Hebrew; I worship the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land" (Jonah 1:9). The location, clan, and profession of the person asked are not of interest. Only his ethnic group, tallying with the religious conviction, is important. Furthermore, the God he worships is the universal creator; Jonah's self-perception agrees with the dominant mentality at the time. Since then commitment to a particular

13. In part (albeit not without Persian influence), membership is realized mystically sacramentally; see Richard Reitzenstein, *Hellenistic Mystery-Religions: Their Basic Ideas and Significance* (Pittsburgh: Pickwick, 1978), 305–51.

14. The Avestian texts are predominantly of a liturgical type and suggest a cultic community; see Stausberg, *Die Religion Zarathushtras*, 1:81–82.

deity or confession has often played a decisive role; a case in point are the “religious and confessional wars” in Europe. In turn, other determinants, such as nationality, race, gender, and so forth dominated the valuation of humans. In Western civilization today, belonging to a confession has only segmentary significance regionally or socially. But the innovative power of the communities of Yahweh (and of their Zoroastrian counterpart) is significant. For the first time religious associations developed between “natural” minority groups and political macro-societies.

Almost by itself, the found identity of a group develops an effect toward the world around: whoever does not share the accepted special criteria of the community presenting itself does not belong to it and has no access to the inner circle of the community. The issue of the Sabbath, circumcision, Torah, and festival calendar (including the covenant) of the Judeans has been discussed many times already. All of these symbolic acts emphasize the exclusive nature of the community. The postexilic community even picked out as a central theme the express question, Who belongs to us? Who is allowed to be admitted? As already mentioned, this also led to quite controversial responses; the communities, after all, were not homogeneous in their perspectives of faith. It is not clear where the boundary lines ran between the theological orientations or camps fighting one another. What is certain, however, is that, in religious communities appealing to the personal profession to a deity demanding absolute truth, arguments between schools of confession or opinion are inevitable. This heritage of theological dispute has left its mark also on the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim history and even today still concerns many confessional minds. Viewed from a distance, it is astonishing what trifling causes and characteristics can ignite factional disputes, with what vehemence and bitterness they are often pursued, and how often they lead to divisions and reciprocal condemnation. Presumably the consciousness of continually fighting for eternal things, however minute they might be, in the presence of the absolute God shares the blame for many merciless denunciations of those deviating.

As far as the relationship to those in a different religious environment is concerned, the postexilic communities and their theologians in charge on the one hand demanded the community’s holiness (Lev 19), which was not to be soiled by anything foreign. Of course, there were varied concepts of holiness and impurity.¹⁵ On the other hand, the same mentors of the

15. See Saul M. Olyan, “Purity Ideology in Ezra-Nehemiah as a Tool to Reconstitute the Community,” *JSJ* 35 (2004): 1–16, and the studies he mainly engages: Jonathan Klawans, *Impurity and Sin in Ancient Judaism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); and Christine E. Hayes, *Gentile Impurities and Jewish Identities: Intermarriage and Conversion from the Bible to the Talmud* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

community or deviating colleagues wanted to keep the door open for foreigners. They formulated qualifications for entry and criteria for expulsion with regard to the purity of the community (*qāhāl*, “assembly;” *’ēdā*, “people’s assembly;” *’am*, “people;” *miqrā*, “convocation;” *sôd*, “circle of dialogue;” *yahad*, “close fellowship,” etc.).¹⁶ The phenomenon of unification based on belief in Yahweh is brought up strongly in the postexilic texts of Deuteronomy and Chronicles. Out of many, two contrasting examples may be cited. First, those emasculated, bastards (?; *mamzēr*), Ammonites, and Moabites are perpetually excluded from the community (Deut 23:2–4). Edomites and Egyptians, however, can be admitted after three generations (23:8–9). With unrelenting severity the tradents of this passage erect barriers in front of the Jewish community, first against males whose sexual organs are mutilated (Lev 21:16–21) and against children from mixed marriages (?; cf. Zech 9:6; Neh 13:24), then against Ammonites and Moabites, who allegedly resulted from an incestuous relationship (Gen 19:30–38). Because of the direct genealogical kinship, Edomites obtain admittance (25:21–28; 27–29; 33), as do the Egyptians, because they granted Jacob “hospitality” (Gen 46–50; the exodus events are left out). The narrow point of view of these regulations is conspicuous. Sexual and descent-related criteria seem to be dominant. The selection of a few neighboring nations is surprising; why is there no reference to the many ethnicities in the Syrian, Mesopotamian, and Persian realm at all? Perhaps it would be wrong to expect completeness at this juncture (cf. the table of nations in Gen 10). Evidently the leading theologians focused on sexual defects and those foreign tribes that bore sexually conditioned blemishes. They disturb the holiness of the community of Yahweh. Evidently the “law-makers” obtain their information from the already available Pentateuch. They allow themselves to be inspired by the sacred writings; this fact alone favors the postexilic writing of the “community law” in Deut 23. Hence the reality of the community is constructed from Scripture, based on the example of stringent restrictions of admission, rather than from everyday life.

Second, the tradents of Isa 56 proceed very differently. They obviously refer to Deut 23 and decisively contradict the concept found there. Foreigners, without any restriction with regard to ethnic origin (!), and eunuchs, under certain conditions (keeping the Sabbath holy, keeping the requirements of the covenant), have full access to the “house of prayer for all peoples” in Jerusalem. Yahweh wants to give them an “everlasting name” (56:5), which

16. These and other frequently used terms extend as far as the noncanonical Jewish writings and the Qumran texts; see H. J. Fabry, F. L. Hossfeld, and E. M. Kindl, “קהל,” *TDOT* 12:546–61; Rost, *Die Vorstufen von Kirche und Synagoge*.

surely means to be fully accepted into the register of the community. A similar openness for the “others” is also found in the tradents of 1 Kgs 8 or of the novel of Jonah. In Deut 23 and Isa 56, therefore, representatives of a pedantically meticulous observance of the purity rules stand curtly over against a wide open, liberal disposition toward foreigners who desire acceptance into the Jewish community. We could also examine the same type of intra-Jewish theological discrepancy by means of the example of mixed marriages (Ezra 10; Neh 13:23–28, against the book of Ruth). The upshot can only be this: as customary to this day in confessional religious communities, the community of Yahweh of the postexilic period was comprised of varied theological groupings. All of them lived from the traditions of ancient Israel that had been collected, arranged, and codified in those centuries. The relationship with Yahweh, the God of Israel, was for all of them the sacred foundation for faith and lifestyle. Precisely for this reason competing viewpoints came about on understanding and applying the will of God in the search for an Israelite identity and the appropriate relationship to the many other peoples of the surrounding world.

The external delimitation also became noticeable in the designations for the “foreign nations.” The prophetic condemnations of other gods and their adherents have already been addressed, but the terminology of differentiation directed outward in view of the “we-group” and the “others” is developed in many contexts with reference to a devaluation of the “heathen nations.” Since the end of the exile the term, “people” (*am*, singular!) is used increasingly for Israel (see Ps 100:3), whereas the earlier, neutral term *gôy* (“people, nation”) in its plural form is used more and more to emphasize the different quality (see Ps 96:3; 2 Kgs 17:8, 11, 15, 33; Ezek 20:32; Lev 18:24, 28). In the later talmudic use of the language, the singular *gôy* can be used for the individual hostile alien.¹⁷ In the Deuteronomic context, the tradents use a characteristic terminology of holiness and election to describe Israel’s special status:

For you are a people holy to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on earth to be his people, his treasured possession. It was not because you are more numerous than any other people that the LORD set his heart on you and chose you—for you were the fewest of all peoples. It was because the LORD loved you and kept the oath that he swore to your ancestors. (Deut 7:6–8a; cf. 4:37; 10:14–15; 14:1–2; 1 Kgs 3:8; Ezek 19:4–76)

17. See Ronald E. Clements, “יִשְׂרָאֵל” *TDOT*, 2:432; E. A. Speiser, “‘People’ and ‘Nation’ of Israel,” *JBL* 79 (1960): 157–63.

The smallest nation on earth (an imperial perspective!) becomes the special, holy possession of the God of the world. This conception fits particularly well in the intellectual climate of the Persian Empire; all nations are integrated into the only really existing world power. They stand competitively side by side and yet belong to something whole. Israel's belief in election has its locus in this ancient global context and demands priority. The Western, as well as the Islamic, claims of exclusiveness derive directly from this Old Testament heritage.

IV.2.2. SPIRITUAL PROFILE OF THE COMMUNITY

We have established several times already that the social construction of a confessional community with its offices, symbols, and festivals was a momentous reform in the Persian era. Not without good reason the formation of the private religious entity that, in principle, is not controlled by ethnicity either represents a new fundamental datum in the history of religion that has not been outdated until today. In the Western world, in both Judaism and Christianity the model of the local community, in other words, the joining together of those of like confession living together, has held in spite of many modifications of details. As occasionally remarked above, the core pattern shines through many biblical texts; apparently the exiles in Babylon initially settled in various, predominantly Jewish towns and established such "ecclesial communities." They enjoyed a certain autonomy (e.g., the elders who go to Ezekiel) and gathered for lament and annual festivals, increasingly also for public readings of the Torah, on designated lunar days and later on Sabbaths. With regard to leadership-related offices, apart from the elders, the following are ascertainable from the biblical witnesses: priests, prophets, scribes, arbitrators, as well as some functions that are difficult to interpret.¹⁸

We shall endeavor to portray the spiritual profile of the early confessional community of Yahweh. How did the Judeans of the Persian period live their faith? A glance back at the preexilic conditions helps in appreciating the peculiarities of the emerging community of Yahweh. In the imperial society organized by the state, there were at least three levels on which reli-

18. For instance, the *šārīm* over a thousand, hundred, fifty, and ten men (Exod 18:21) were surely military leaders originally; equally surely they had civic responsibilities in the context of the postexilic community. Similarly obscure are the specific functions of the *nāšī'* in the local community (Exod 16:22; 35:27; Lev 4:22–26; Num 3:24, 30, 33; see §III.2.1 above). Some move Exod 18 into the postexilic period, see H. Niehr, "שר," *TDOT* 14:209.

gious associations practiced their cultic celebrations. In the family and kinship group, humans in the Near East worshiped the personal or familial tutelary deity; together with the neighbors of one's place of residence, one celebrated weather and fertility gods at open-air shrines, and the royal cult of the state was a protective umbrella over the entire country. However, none of the socioreligious levels exerted control over another.¹⁹ How fundamentally different belief in Yahweh is constructed in its lived reality now: although the community inherits all three forms of belief and adopts many of their aspects, only the rules and forms accepted by all are in force now. Especially in its ritual practice, the life of faith is homogenized, compared to the earlier social stratification. That which is permitted in terms of worship routines has to be recognized by the community. All of the cults that have not been approved are taboo, especially those turning to a deity other than Yahweh, for the name of Yahweh is the supreme symbol of their own identity. According to the theory of the personal decision of faith, the veneration of an alien deity signifies exclusion from one's own communal association. The community's monolatrous structure of belief is vertically closed through the authority of Yahweh. Divine authority also provided orientation to those worshipping God in the multilevel model, albeit only in different social organisms and in differently structured cults. Now a certain clarity prevails; the will of God flows through the respective offices, rituals, and institutions to the community. Quite differently from the preexilic period, his will is drawn up in writing. Scripture addresses the entire community; it is not a manual for cult specialists. In other words, by means of the introduction of this Holy Scripture, providing orientation for the life of the community and the confessing person, the pure sacrificial ministry as it was practiced at the royal temple, for instance, is revised or at least significantly qualified (see Pss 40:7–11; 50:3–15; Isa 1:11–17).

The Deuteronomistic centralization of the cult (Deut 12) takes into account the postexilic situation; it was impossible and undesirable to set up sacrificial altars for Yahweh in every place where Jews resided—according to the official ideology of Jerusalem, in any case. The existence of the temple of Yahweh at Elephantine intensifies the dilemma for the theologians of Jerusalem even more. The foundation of the community was not the sacrificial system but the will of Yahweh, mediated by men of God and partly established in writing. In a society that clearly was not organized for everyone, either by means of paternal traditions and customs or by governmental power structures, and consequently had to search for its way painfully in

19. See Gerstenberger, *Theologies in the Old Testament*, 25–205.

new situations (e.g., abroad, foreign rule, points of contact with other cults), a mere sacrificial service for the supreme God could not suffice as a guide. The believers in Yahweh needed instructions for their entire life focused on him. They needed Torah (Pentateuch, prophetic instruction, Torah-psalms, etc.). Psalm 50, mentioned above, seems to state exactly the opposite. It qualifies the sacrifice yet does not present the gift of the Torah as an alternative but rather the personal practice of faith. It possibly includes the sacrifice of thanksgiving for deliverance received (Ps 50:14a);²⁰ then the speaker of the Word of God presses for trusting prayer in trouble (50:15a.). Hence the concern is faith, absolute trust in Yahweh. It can also be practiced in the sacrifice of thanksgiving but more intensively and in more detail by heeding the commandments, of course, a selection of which is addressed in 50:16–20. Hence the Torah, containing the clear definition of right conduct in fellowship with Yahweh, gains the upper hand in this psalm all the same.

The new Yahweh community adopts many theological ideas from the earlier household cults. Trust with respect to the deity in partnership has also been practiced since prehistoric times in the smallest circle of believers. This heritage belongs to the most precious that is available to humans for their relationship with God: the primal sense of trust in a well-meaning divine opposite. But the postexilic community is not content with collective trust (see Ps 22:5–6). It challenges, as we said, the individual to a personal confession of Yahweh, even though this individual remains far more integrated into his or her environment than we are accustomed today. Already at that time collective accountability was no longer in force (Ezek 18). The individual was to lead life with Yahweh with the guidance of the Torah, even if the family should be more of an obstacle than a support for one's faith (see Job 2:9; 19:13–22; Pss 55:13–15; 69:8–9; Jer 16:5–9). In a certain sense the community, or the orthodox faction of the community, becomes a substitute for the family. The adherent of Yahweh seeks Torah and the fellowship of the "righteous" (Pss 1:1; 33:1; 73:13–15; 111:1). One is fully responsible for oneself and stands in solidarity with those of like faith. The "we" of the community pervades the Psalter; in it the "I" of the individual confessor always supersedes. Since the postexilic constitution of the community, this personal structure of faith, encountering God as the "you"—as a matter of fact, the "you" always constitutes the "I" (Emmanuel Levinas)—has been adopted in the history of faith in the Western world and continues to have an effect. Today, of course, the constellations have changed over against antiquity. Our individualization,

20. According to F. L. Hossfeld, in *Die Psalmen* (ed. F. L. Hossfeld and Erich Zenger; NEB; Würzburg: Echter, 1993), 314–15. The translation on 311 differs, however.

which can be traced back to work in an industrial context, in many regards is more brutal than the ancient personal responsibility could ever have been. Yet for the individual, necessity and longing still exist today to experience interpersonal security. For this reason the specific paradigm of the individual in community, which we encounter in postexilic Israel, can still be the basis of discussion for our situation.

The communal structures that originated at that time, so we assume, still exist today under different conditions. A closer look at the interplay of functions, offices, and groups of the postexilic model lead us further. Initially it is difficult to understand the cooperation and conflict of certain representatives of interest in the biblical texts. Priests fight against lesser priests, genuine prophets against false ones, kings against men of God, and women against men, while brothers kill brothers. The full human reality, as it also surrounds us daily, encounters us in the biblical narratives. The interpersonal conflicts approaching us in the Hebrew Scriptures belong to a large extent to the postexilic period or are to be understood as reflections of this era. In this fact we see that the coordinators and editors of the contemporary literature were no naïve zealots but rather theologians observing very realistically. At times their skepticism over against human nature even seems to be overextravagant (Ps 14). After somewhat longer historical experience than our biblical predecessors, we know today that the estimation of the person is exposed to booms and lulls, and we have every reason to consult the witnesses of the past concerning their experiences. "What are human beings?" is one of the questions posed frequently during that time. The answers are conflicting, as is life itself: human beings are "a little lower than God," crowned "with glory and honor" (Ps 8:6), and born "to have dominion" (Gen 1:26, 28). They are "like a breath," "like a passing shadow" (Ps 144:4); they are "abominable and corrupt"; they "drink iniquity like water" (Job 15:16). The human is stubborn and has to assert his or her position after all. The splendor and misery of this being, which we are ourselves, still keep us occupied.

In interaction with and discussion of the powers that imbued the Judean communities in the Persian period, however, we not only discover antiquated problems. Remarkably modern features come into view. One of them, for instance, is the relationship of the theological experts to the lay people, or rather conversely, of the community to their leaders. From a practical theological perspective, an important contribution of the community of Yahweh in the Persian period can be seen in this for our arduous discussion about tasks and forms of the communities today.

The flow of divine blessing runs in the community, just as in the earlier forms of religion, preferably through called or appointed individuals to the "normal" people. This is a very ancient model of spiritual transmission

of power. Moses, Joshua, Samuel, Elijah, Jeremiah, and Ezra, to mention only the most outstanding figures of the history of faith in ancient Israel, had special access to Yahweh and were commissioned by him with passing on the divine communication, the Torah, to the people. In monarchic societies the mediating person in addition is often equipped with political authority. This can lead to serious distortions of the religious system in the direction of autocratic rule. The Old Testament mediators of Yahweh's Word and blessing are marked more democratically to a fair degree. Each of them can be questioned and has to be prepared to answer questions about the skeptical questions concerning authorization—a reflection of the community of Yahweh in the period of the Second Temple. Authentic political figures (e.g., Nehemiah) play a subordinate role in religious matters (Neh 10; 13). In strengthening the lay element and lifting the control on critiquing those responsible for leadership (and achievement!) in the Judean community of Yahweh, there is a forward-looking element. Neither Moses nor David is sacrosanct for the tradition. The following are some examples: "(Miriam and Aaron) said, 'Has the LORD spoken only through Moses? Has he not spoken through us also?'" (Num 12:2). All the people "grumble" against the wilderness conditions and thereby against Yahweh and his representative (see Num 11); now a woman (Aaron, the brother, may be a later addition) also rebels against the spiritual leader's claim to sole representation. To be sure, Moses was right in both pericopes; for the tradents, it is especially the sister's critical (feminist?!) question that provokes a strong explanation in support of the chosen leader Moses (Num 12:6–8). Nevertheless, these and similar doubts about the sole authority of the leader of the community demonstrate that (1) in the postexilic period serious opposition existed and was discussed and (2) they were aware of the fundamental right of "opposite views." This can also be deduced, for instance, from one of the interesting episodes in Jeremiah. Against the stereotypical "Yahweh-only preaching" of the prophet, women, again, argue:

We will do everything that we have vowed, make offerings to the queen of heaven and pour out libations to her, just as we and our ancestors, our kings and our officials, used to do in the towns of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem. We used to have plenty of food, and prospered and saw no misfortune. But from the time we stopped making offerings to the queen of heaven and pouring our libations to her, we have lacked everything and have perished by the sword and by famine. (Jer 44:17–18)

Here also the tradents acknowledge that Jeremiah is right (44:20–23), though only in a curiously weak reply, which above all does not lead to a judgment of condemnation, as we might expect in the case of a breach of covenant and apostasy (see Lev 10; Num 16; Deut 27:14–26; 28:15–44). The community did

not concede to the leadership elite (in spite of Lev 10 and Num 16) absolute power in matters of faith and life. Rather, in theory and practice the community of Yahweh itself, the people of the God of Israel, in a manner that seems to be somewhat democratic to us, appears to have been the actual subject of faith and the object of God's love, solidarity, and attention.

There is plenty of circumstantial evidence in the Old Testament writings for this assumption. The "people" (*am*) of Israel, the descendants of Jacob, represent the covenantal partner for Yahweh, not the leadership figures of the community. When the community gathers together, it is often all of the devotees of Yahweh, the people as a whole, and sometimes pointedly the men, women, children, and the elderly (1 Kgs 8:2; Neh 8:1, 3). "They told the scribe Ezra to bring the book of the law of Moses" (Neh 8:1b); the scribe acts on the instruction of the community. In many texts, especially in the Psalms (see §III.1.3.2 above) but also in responses to the reading of the Word of Yahweh (see, e.g., Josh 24; Neh 10), the gathered people get a chance to speak with a hearty "we." Most of the relevant references are authentic formulations spoken in chorus rather than distinguished, inclusive stipulations of an official liturgist. In the extensive ancient Near Eastern literature, especially in ritual and liturgical contexts as well, texts in the first-person plural are very scarce. A plausible reason for this would be the absence of religious confessional communities. Cultic associations based on personal decisions exist only since the Persian period. For this reason community responses should also be expected in the Avesta, and they are extant, albeit sparsely.²¹ Thus in its (attractively) constructed multilayered organism the Judean community of the postexilic period also contains an element of (legitimate) theological contradiction,²² which is needed in every religious community, if it does not want to sink into a narcissistic ideology and a lethal form of fundamentalism.

Even if the sacrificial regulations in the book of Leviticus may be dry, they nevertheless provide us with a picture of the relationship between the priests and the community, as well as of the groupings existing within it. A closer look shows that the sacrificial specialists carry out specific rituals, such as the sprinkling of blood at the altar. In the case of private ceremonies, the killing and skinning of the sacrificial animal is the responsibility of

21. See Yasna 28:6: "And us, too, Lord," an interjection that Geo Widengren regards to be a response.

22. Ernst Bloch recognized this correctly but gave this phenomenon a misleading label in *Atheism in Christianity: The Religion of the Exodus and the Kingdom* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1972); Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, speaks of "counter-testimony," "dispute."

the one in charge of the ceremony, in other words, the layman who presents the offering (Lev 1–7). The blood rituals are reserved for the priests, but the overall picture shows a dominance of the laity.²³ In the case of sin and guilt offerings, the community of Yahweh distinguishes the instructions by their components: priests—the entire community (Lev 4:1, 13) and community-leader—ordinary member (4:22, 27). Consequently there are particular ranks to which still others were added in many situations, such as of age, gender, social level, status of purity.²⁴ In spite of everything, the superordinate theological significance of the community is not done away with. The community is and remains the goal of divine activity; for instance, it controls the compensation of the priests (Lev 5:13; 7:8–9; Ezek 44:29–31) and sees to it that the office of the mediator is practiced appropriately, according to the rules of solidarity with humanity (see 1 Sam 2:11–17). Just as prophets are not subject to the supervision of the temple authorities as much as they are to the community and can be denounced on account of their selfish speech and conduct, falsifying the word of Yahweh, so also the priests who perform their service at the altar and are neglectful of their duty and disrespectful (Mal 1:6–9). In the Qumran community, which split off later, the priests of Jerusalem are regarded as employees of Belial, the antagonist of Yahweh. In this way a healthy mistrust against spiritual hierarchies is imbued in the tradition of the postexilic community, with a clergy moving toward independence, which in the course of Jewish and Christian history has blazed the trail again and again.²⁵

A fundamental sociological philosophy plays an important role in all questions about the formation of identity and internal structure: the Judeans of the Persian epoch of necessity organized in a form that has to be situated between family and clan, on the one hand, and an impersonal and bureaucratic imperial society, on the other.²⁶ Such sociological patterns of a “middle”

23. See Gerstenberger, *Leviticus*, 77–86; Lester L. Grabbe, “The Priests in Leviticus,” in *The Book of Leviticus: Composition and Reception* (ed. Rolf Rendtorff and Robert A. Kugler; VTSup 93; Boston: Brill, 2003).

24. See Gerstenberger, *Leviticus*, 67–69; Saul M. Olyan, *Rites and Rank* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

25. Luther’s writing of 1525, “that a Christian gathering or community has the right and the authority to test all doctrine etc.,” is only one example of the continuing dynamic of the community’s responsibility; all modern grass-roots movements in the major denominations may serve as additional support; see also the major emphasis on the “people of God” in many documents of Vatican Two.

26. Ferdinand Tönnies introduced this distinction in 1887 (*Community and Society* [trans. and ed. Charles P. Loomis; East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1957]). See also René König, *Grundformen der Gesellschaft: Die Gemeinde* (Hamburg: Rowohlt,

position still participate in the personal relationships and conceptions of solidarity of the familial small groups, but they also share in the relations that are no longer based on the "I-you" relationships but on broader governmental and nongovernmental levels of organization. Precisely this in-between existence holds major possibilities and risks for the communities of all times and their paradigms of faith. It explains the predominantly personal categories in theology and ethics that can be ascertained in the Judeo-Christian tradition. It also suggests that the biblical witnesses lack concepts representing the interests of the state due to lacking responsibility in the imperial realm.

IV.2.3. GENDER IN THE COMMUNITY

The question of gender has always played a role in religious communities. Contemporary women's research and feminist movements, which have sharpened the awareness for the relationship of women to men and vice versa, with all of its social, institutional, and spiritual consequences, represents a basic problem of human life. This was also the perspective of the tradents of the second creation account; nevertheless, they had their clearly discernible contemporary patriarchal glasses on. The "human," construed as a male, of course, is not able to survive on his own; he needs an adequate female partner (Gen 2:18). Thus the woman is assigned her position at the "side" and the support of the man, albeit not without the almost sympathetic commentary from the pen of male editors that the woman, unfortunately on account of her primeval temptation to disobey Yahweh, is a person to be "ruled," we would say "to be controlled," by the man (3:16). This ideology of male superiority, contradicting all experience of reality and the ancient tradition in Gen 2–3, seems to shape part of the postexilic attitudes to women. From the female perspective, opinions about men are not exactly handed down in great number. What little there is suggests that wise women had their own ideas about men (1 Sam 25:25; Prov 23:29–35; Judg 4:4–9); for their part, perhaps they occasionally worked themselves into similar fantasies of priority as did the men of creation. Unfortunately, the traditions of the Bible continue to be determined largely by masculine perspectives. They come from a patriarchal period in which men played the major roles of public life. The societies of the Near East of that time can at least be described as patrilocal and patrilinear; male interests were decisive for the line of descent, the domicile of the family,

1958); Joachim Wach, *Sociology of Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958); and the American research on community.

and its representation in the public. In spite of this, we must not impose criteria of patriarchy, such as those gained from the industrial working world, on the ancient texts. Even in public life women often had an unexpectedly strong position, to say nothing of their dominance in the family units and in the domestic realm. Therefore a more detailed analysis for the purpose of understanding the relation of genders with reference to God and the theological exploration of religious experience more properly and without generalizing prejudice is worthwhile.

We begin with the important position of the woman in domestic and procreative functions, which presumably resulted in a dominant position in the domestic cult.²⁷ The handling of the household gods in some Old Testament passages already mentioned, the numerous finds of “nude goddesses” unearthed in ancient Israelite private homes, naming both the father and mother as authorities in bringing up the young generation, the aggressiveness of male leaders against “other” rituals practiced by women, and the resultant suspicions of women being seductresses to idolatry—all of this speaks for the religious significance of the accused. The reconstruction of an exclusive confessional community certainly signaled a turning point that calls for a closer examination.

In religious matters women may well have been watched with suspicion at all times by the male competition. When all foreign cults were excluded in the exilic and postexilic community of Yahweh, the women were affected with particular severity, given their responsibility for the domestic worship of God and their expertise in particular realms of the art of incantation and healing (see 1 Sam 28). A harsh prohibition is found in Exod 22:17: “You shall not permit a female sorcerer to live.” This exclusion of female religious practices in particular—a corresponding condemnation of the art of incantation by males is not found in the Book of the Covenant—may very well be an older rule that could also have been understood bisexually (Lev 20:27). At this point in the new postexilic community, however, it must have been understood against the contemporary context as a targeted defense against feminine magic. Some other passages with similar content are not laid down against one gender. Nevertheless female professionalism in dealing with spirits and demons is the preferred target. The narrative parts of the Old Testament indeed describe the eerie female necromancy (cf. 1 Sam 28 with Num 22–24) very vividly. Although the catalogue of nine illegitimate prac-

27. See Carol Meyers, “Procreation, Production, and Protection: Male–Female Balance in Early Israel,” *JAAAR* 51 (1983): 569–93; Gerstenberger, *Yahweh—the Patriarch*, 55–66.

tices in Deut 18:10–11 uses only the masculine forms, the intention is surely inclusive. The awareness of the tradents is clear; by means of prohibiting any science of omens, astrology, and exorcising demons, they were to disassociate from the Mesopotamian environment in which all of this blossomed (cf. also the magi in the narrative of Jesus, Matt 2:1–12).²⁸ The people of God cannot become involved with the cults of different religions, because this would mean acknowledging foreign deities alongside and against Yahweh. Again we are reminded of the rejection of demons in the religion of Zoroaster. Women had a permanent, if not excellent, position in the forbidden incantation-related professions. Of the so-called magical professions mentioned in Deut 18:10–11, the profiles of which can no longer be determined clearly from our distance, at least four were also practiced by women, according to the Old Testament sources, foremost women calling up the dead.²⁹ According to textual witnesses, “performing wizardry” (*kšp, piel*), various kinds of “fortune-telling” (*ʾnn, pual* [?]; *qsm, qal*), and the knowing, professional peering into the future by “mantics” (*yiddēʾōni*) includes women (see Exod 22:17; Lev 20:27; Ezek 13:23; 1 Sam 28:3, 9; 2 Kgs 9:22; 23:24; Isa 8:19). Even the reproach of having sacrificed children to foreign gods, appearing separate from the list opposed to magic in Deut 18:10, is tailor-made for women in Ezek 16:20–21. In the case of having sexual relations with animals, women, following the men, are named explicitly (Lev 18:23). A mysterious activity by women in the restored temple is to be associated with magic and manticism (Ezek 13:17–19). Those accused “sew bands on all wrists, and make veils for the heads ... in the hunt for human lives.” They are “putting to death persons who do not want to die” and others “who should not live they bring to life” (13:18–19).³⁰ On account of their religious traditions and functions in the postexilic community, women were especially suspected of embracing foreign cults and of representing a religious danger for orthodox men. On closer examination, these are religiously veiled male prejudices against the other gender, on the one hand, and, on the other, stances of community theologians to be explained from the tradition in the history of religion. In postexilic Israel these no doubt led to theologically based mistrust of everything femi-

28. This does not yet answer the question of how the Judean communities handled curative treatments; see 2 Kgs 4:30–37; 5:8–17; Ps 38; Erhard S. Gerstenberger and Wolfgang Schrage, *Suffering* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1980); Gerstenberger, *Der bittende Mensch*, 134–60.

29. Deut 18:11 mentions two functions having to do with conjuring up the dead: “consulting ghosts or spirits” (cf. 1 Sam 28:7) and “seeking oracles from the dead.”

30. According to Walther Zimmerli, *Ezekiel* (trans. Ronald E. Clements; Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 1:344.

nine—for instance, the increased danger of impurity caused by menstruation, mentioned in the purity stipulations of Lev 12–15, the heaping of guilt on the woman, also already mentioned, in the wake of Gen 3,³¹ as well as the general insinuation that in the course of Israel's history again and again women had dissuaded valiant men from the right way of worshiping Yahweh; this is especially the case in the Deuteronomistic work of history. Solomon is the victim of his many wives (1 Kgs 11:1–2), and Ahab is on a drip feed from his wife Jezebel, the Sidonian princess (1 Kgs 16:31–33; 21:4–10). These are retrospective assessments because in the period of the monarchy hardly anyone would have been offended by diplomatic marriages at the court (see 2 Sam 3:2–5; 5:13–16 and the mixed naming of the sons). They verify, as before, the dispositions of the postexilic period, but they require us to inquire into the interest in women in contemporary theology.

The suspicion and exclusion of women in the postexilic period cannot possibly be the result only of an examination of the conditions of gender at that time. We have already encountered different facts that point to a distinct religious share of responsibilities by women in the communities of the Persian period. How did women fit into the new community structures? What spiritual profile did they leave behind? The following is the most astonishing observation: in the tradition of the confessional community, which is still predominantly shaped by men, the emphasis is repeated and surely authentic that women shared in the important ministry of proclaiming prophecy (mediating Torah!). The feminine designation “prophetess” (*nēbīʾā*) is granted without inhibition to the female office-bearers (see Exod 15:20; Judg 4:4; 2 Kgs 22:14; Neh 6:14). More important, Huldah the prophetess, in an exceptionally explosive situation following the “rediscovery” of the Torah under King Josiah, is the decisive and seemingly scribal authority who also provides an oracle and who has to confirm the find. She announces the covenantal curses (2 Kgs 22:16–17) but exempts Josiah the king from the dreadful punishment (22:18b–20). The prophetess is agent and mediator of the divine oracle; from the Deuteronomistic perspective,³² of course, she is positioned above the king and able to correct and strengthen him. From the key position of the prophetess Huldah in 2 Kgs 22, it is to be deduced that the postexilic community in principle allowed women in the prophetic service of proclamation. This probably was not a theoretical disposition. In the wake of the

31. See Helen Schüngel-Straumann, *Die Frau am Anfang* (Freiburg: Herder, 1989).

32. That the violent death of Josiah (2 Kgs 23:29) contradicts the promise of a peaceful end (22:20) cannot be cited in favor of dating the account of Huldah in the preexilic reality. The Deuteronomistic tradition is a thoroughgoing theological tract placing little value on historical reality.

female canonical leadership figures, such as Miriam, Deborah, and Esther, there had been occasions time and again in which women in the Persian period presumably took matters into their own hands. For practical reasons this could happen especially in areas of life where spontaneous action was of essence. As a rule, the lengthy periods of training that the study of Scripture required were not available for women. As long as they were capable of bearing children, they had to be available to their families as mothers. Studying Scripture at that time was even less compatible with the everyday obligations of women than today. In spite of an intimate relationship with the Torah, there still was sufficient freedom from the letter and spiritual gifting available in prophecy that women perhaps occasionally were able to function as spokespersons of Yahweh. Concerning Huldah, however, the Deuteronomistic narrator presupposes a more comprehensive knowledge of the Torah. In any case, it remains remarkable that precisely at this point in the reform of Josiah, which was so central for them, the Deuteronomistic tradents introduced a woman as a decision-making authority with prophetic and scribal legitimation. Or was it their intent to blame Josiah's failure on a prophetess, so as to insinuate that a male mediator might perhaps have been able to use his potential as an advocate over against Yahweh and thus turn the tables? In 2 Kgs 22 there is no mention of Huldah entreating Yahweh. She declares the case closed and returned to Yahweh. The failure of the efforts is communicated without theological analysis in 2 Kgs 23:25–27. Josiah made almost superhuman efforts to follow the Torah and to reform the city and the country. "Before him there was no king like him ... nor did any like him arise after him. ... Still, the LORD did not turn from the fierceness of his great wrath ... because of all the provocations with which Manasseh had provoked him" (23:25–26). This strikingly contradicts understandings written in the book of Jeremiah and of Ezekiel, according to which the sons are not to be punished for the transgressions of their fathers. However, theological authors such as the Deuteronomist follow a concrete track of history; their focus is singular. For them Huldah, the executrix of Yahweh's established will of blotting out Judah, is the coordinating point. She has no other task apart from announcing the disaster in this context. She is a full-fledged prophetess.

A second track of involvement in religious matters was already broached in the context of references to wisdom and other literature. Both parents were involved equally in bringing up the children, above all else in the religious socialization of male descendants. The serious sacral stipulations for protection on the part of the father and the mother, in one instance even the mother and the father, confirm the portrait that we gained from the didactic speeches and sayings of the book of Proverbs (e.g., 1:8–9; 6:20–23; 20:20; 30:17). "Honor you father and your mother, so that your days may be long

in the land that the LORD your God is giving you" (Exod 20:12). "You shall each revere your mother and father, and you shall keep my Sabbaths: I am the LORD your God" (Lev 19:3). These are weighty statements theologically. The instances show that mothers were included equally in the religious process of upbringing. Especially the postexilic period stands out through this acknowledgement that parental authority was practiced jointly. In the context this must signify that fathers and mothers were to pass on the traditions of the community to the new generation. In other words, they imparted Torah. The programmatic introduction to the didactic speeches (Prov 1:8) states it straightforwardly: "Hear, my child, your father's instruction, and do not reject your mother's teaching." Perhaps this alludes to the sternness of the father and the understanding orientation of the mother. In any case "Torah" in postexilic texts should not be interpreted in a minimizing way as merely momentary, relatively unimportant instruction. While the concrete instruction or order by an authorized female educator is intended, the binding will of God transcending human authority is behind every "teaching" of this kind. Consequently, the mother is the mediator of Yahweh's directives in the pedagogical contexts mentioned. Thus she gains a key religious position in the community of Yahweh. The references to women being an integral part of the gathered community (see, e.g., Neh 8:2–3; Deut 29:9–10, 17) confirm that structurally they belong to the religious community. The formula of inclusiveness, "the assembly, both men and women and all who could hear with understanding" (Neh 8:2; cf. Josh 6:21; 8:25; 1 Sam 15:3; 22:19; 1 Chr 16:3), circumscribes the totality of the company addressed. The intracommunal hierarchy can be read in Deut 29:10–11: "You stand assembled today, all of you, before the LORD your God—the leaders of your tribes [emended to *rāšê šibtêkem*] your elders, and your officials [*šōṭērîm*], all the men of Israel, your children, your women, and the aliens who are in your camp, both those who cut your wood and those who draw your water." The priests, prophets, and wise are missing among the leadership figures; perhaps they are included in the very vague term "officials." On the level of the community, the men with full legal capacity lead the list; in second place are the children (sons), third the women, followed by the slaves or workers with partial freedom. Accordingly, women belong to the nucleus of the community. For us it is disappointing that they are only ranked after the children who guarantee the family line. How were they able to assert their spiritual experiences?

The collectors and editors of the sacred Scriptures in postexilic Israel did not ignore the women in the community, although they sometimes met them with mistrust or pushed them back into the roles within the family. Experiences of women did make it into the canonical books, by means of scribal men or women (Huldah?), about whom, however, we have no knowledge.

Figures such as Queen Athaliah or the Sidonian princess Jezebel are characterized only negatively by later editors (see 2 Kgs 11; 1 Kgs 21:1–16; 2 Kgs 9:22). Together with the many foreign wives of Solomon they embody a continuous evil principle in the history of the kings. Conversely, late redactors idealize certain heroines of the early period, such as Miriam, Deborah, Abigail, and Esther. Occasionally there is the impression that the men who wrote were holding up a mirror of the exemplary women to their contemporaries. Deborah and Esther are foremost examples of this stance. But Abigail is also pointedly allowed to downgrade her husband: “for as his name is, so is he; Nabal is his name, and folly is with him.” (1 Sam 25:25). Where women become victims of male aggression or male privileges (Gen 12:10–20; 20:1–18; 26:7–11; 34; Judg 11; 19; 2 Sam 13, etc.) there is only minimal literary sympathy (cf. the emotionally charged descriptions of the misfortune of men in 2 Sam 1:11–12, 17–27; 3:15–16, 31–39; 12:16–20; 19:1–3). Most likely the motif of the one giving birth with trepidation and pain still serves as a metaphor for hardship and distress (Gen 3:16; 35:16–18; Jer 4:30–31; 31:15). In brief, conveying female experiences and feelings by male writers is limited. In this case the question has to be whether in some way women also had direct access to canonical literature.

The likelihood that women could acquire the skill of writing and were entrusted with the cultivation of religious tradition in the postexilic period is not very great. In the literary legacy of Mesopotamia and Egypt, which is vastly more extensive, there are also only few known instances of literary activity by women. In the empire of Akkad, for instance, Enheduana, the daughter of Sargon I, a high priestess of Inanna, wrote and published a collection of hymns.³³ This is a scarce event in the three-thousand-year history of Sumerian-Akkadian literature. At least it shows that the possibility did exist, if women were able to devote themselves to studies. In this case, as already shown, they could not take on family obligations. If we begin with the textual evidence, there is the possibility that parts of the canonical literature were written by women. As already set out, this applies particularly to the book of Ruth and parts of the Song of Solomon, perhaps also to some liturgical texts for specific events. The book of Ruth is focused on the interests and actions of women to such an extent that its writing by a woman is likely (see §III.1.1.4 above). In the case of the Song of Solomon, the dating of which is uncertain, female emotions surely play a major role. Yet we are not able to determine with certainty whether the texts have come down to us by means of a male

33. See Annette Zgoll, *Der Rechtsfall der En-hedu-Ana* (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1997).

writer only. In the liturgical forms it may well be the case, too, that directly or indirectly experiences of women are reflected. The “domestic” psalms (Pss 123; 127; 128; 133) that have been mentioned already praise the familial harmony—a domain of women. Based on their content, other texts are also conceivable as prayers of women.³⁴ Thus the female share in the Holy Scriptures remains obscure in part, but we surely should not underestimate it. Perhaps more detailed analyses of the metaphorical language in Old Testament poetry might yield still further information about the literary activity of women.

The domestic sphere comes to light in the group of psalms just mentioned. For this reason many exegetes do not hesitate to plead for their authorship by women.³⁵ These texts speak from the imagination of familial security; they seek to preserve peace in the small group or to restore it again. This intradomestic perspective also results in another perspective of God. He who lives predominantly in the sphere of the outside and is responsible for it—protection from and to the outside is the husband’s responsibility (Carol Meyers)—will also prefer to describe God as a factor of power and in military images. Thus expressions of trust in Yahweh occur increasingly often: “You are my fortress, my rock, my shield, my king” (Pss 18:2; 31:3–4; 44:5; 68:25; 71:1–3; 84:4). How much more civil and human it sounds when God is addressed as “light,” “salvation,” and “stronghold” (27:1), “midwife” and “mother” (22:9–10; 71:6), “close friend” (25:14), parent (27:10), refuge and shelter (31:19–20; cf. 32:7; 61:5), teacher and chastiser (39:4, 11), relative who owes solidarity (40:11–12), physician and healer (4:3–4), and good friend (60:5). Occasionally the pedagogy of the parents comes to the fore: God leads the one who prays “with his eyes” (32:8), as the body parts of God generally play a major role in the language of prayer.³⁶ Yahweh is brought close to those worshipping with kind, motherly-fatherly admonition:

Come, O children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD. Which of you desires life and covets many days to enjoy good? Keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking deceit. Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it. (Ps 34:11–14)

34. Ulrike Bail has attempted to demonstrate this in the case of Ps 55 in *Gegen das Schweigen klagen* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1998).

35. See Patrick D. Miller, *They Cried to the Lord: The Form and Theology of Biblical Prayer* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 239–43.

36. See G. Baumann, “Das göttliche Geschlecht,” in *Körperkonzepte im Erste Testament* (ed. Hedwig-Jahnow-Forschungsprojekt; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2003), 220–50.

These are basically familial teaching contents as passed on by the parents (see Ps 37). The housewife and mother, just as today, may have borne the lion's share of this task of raising children (Prov 31:1). In the psalms the mother relationship is an important human component (see 35:14; 50:20; 51:7; 69:9; 109:14; 131:2; 139:13). In antiquity, caring for the sick is mostly associated with the mother (see 2 Kgs 4:18–24); for this reason all of the psalms dealing with sickness may directly or indirectly have to do with the duty of housewives to care for the members of the family. While the psalm of protection, Ps 91, uses hunting metaphors (91:3), it otherwise fosters very intimate language and imagination. In its concluding oracle for the patient, who was hounded by demons, the intimate personal relationship with God is expressed: "Those who love me, I will deliver; I will protect those who know my name" (91:14). The personal intimacy with the deity originates from the treasure of age-old family piety, for which especially the women were responsible in the domestic cults. The Judean community adopted this vast supply of experiences with God into their spiritual structure and presumably also continued to entrust it to women.

A particularly meaningful and effective metaphor for God's protection and care is his/her wings (see Ps 36:8; 57:2; 61:5; 63:8; 91:4, etc.). In terms of the history of religions and iconography, it is interesting that the symbolized security and healing activity actually befits many ancient Eastern goddesses and was adopted by Yahweh as part of his "motherliness."³⁷ From these facts I would like to conclude further that the religious symbolism of "wings" in the liturgical texts actually originates from the language and experiential sphere of the women. The chicken pen with its clucking hens virtually was the place of origin for such true-to-life metaphorical language and was part of the area of responsibility of the lady of the house (not only in antiquity but also in the present on European farms).

The gender roles and family ideals that were fixed in the postexilic period continue to have an effect until the present time via Jewish, Christian, and Muslim traditions, initially in rural societies until the high medieval period and then in the radical changes leading to the modern, scientific, industrial economic era. To the largest extent Christian churches have found it difficult to acknowledge social changes as important factors of responsible ethics. Thus in the "battle of the sexes" ancient role models and prejudices against women, as well as against sexuality in general, have often continued to be handed down at face value, and the necessary equality of all humans

37. See Silvia Schroer, "Im Schatten deiner Flügel" in *Ihr Völker alle, klatscht in die Hände!* (ed. Rainer Kessler; Exuz 3; Münster: Lit, 1997), 296–316.

before God today (just as then) is still far from being translated into the reality of life.

IV.2.4. FESTIVALS, WORSHIP, RITUALS

Bell, Catherine M. *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997). **Cohen**, Mark F. *The Cultic Calendar of the Ancient Near East* (Bethesda, Md.: CDL, 1993). **Diebner**, Bernd-Jörg. "Gottesdienst II. Altes Testament," *TRE* 14:5–28. **Elbogen**, Ismar. *Jewish Liturgy: A Comprehensive History* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1993). **Henrix**, Hans Hermann, ed. *Jüdische Liturgie* (QD 86; Freiburg: Herder, 1979). **Klinger**, Elmar, ed. *Geschlechterdifferenz, Ritual und Religion* (Würzburg: Echter, 2003). **Körting**, Corinna. *Der Schall des Schofar* (BZAW 285; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1999). **Mikesa**, Takakito Prince, ed. *Cult and Ritual in the Ancient Near East* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1992). **Müllner**, Ilse, and Peter Dschulnigg. *Jüdische und christliche Feste* (NEB 9; Würzburg: Echter, 2002). **Olyan**, Saul M. *Biblical Mourning* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004). **Otto**, Eckart. *Das Mazzotfest in Gilgal* (BWANT 107; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1975). **Otto**, and Tim Schramm. *Fest und Freude* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1977). **Robinson**, Gnana. *The Origin and Development of the Old Testament Sabbath* (BBET 21; New York: Lang, 1981). **Trepp**, Leo. *Der jüdische Gottesdienst: Gestalt und Entwicklung* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1992). **Volgger**, David. *Israel wird Feiern* (ATS 73; St. Ottilien: EUS Verlag, 2002). **Vries**, Simon Ph. de. *Jüdische Riten und Symbole* (Wiesbaden: Fourier, 1981).

Until the end of the period of the monarchy, the religious and cultic life of the ordinary ancient Israelite farmer's family presumably was structured as follows: In the house the familial tutelary deity was worshiped, and, together with the village community or as a clan, one celebrated the annual festivals at the nearby open-air shrine (1 Sam 9:12–13; 20:6). On special occasions for petition or thanksgiving (vows!), the whole family undertook a pilgrimage to a regional sanctuary (temple; see 1 Sam 1–2). More extensive religious obligations could arise through the tribal association or state agencies in the event of acts of war. The levy gathered and carried out preparatory ceremonies (Judg 7:1–8; Deut 20:5–9: retrojective portrayals). A permanent integration of familial and local cultic groups into higher structures did not exist.

The exile fundamentally, not abruptly but gradually, changed the cultic practices and structures, especially following the Persian takeover and the rededication of the temple of Jerusalem. The forms of worship now emerging and the differentiating cycle of annual festivals profoundly shaped the subsequent history of Jewish, Christian, as well as Islamic liturgies and experiences of God. In fact, all of the Western worship-related structures are direct descendants of the basic patterns developed in the early Jewish com-

munities of that period. In this respect it is precisely the latter that belong to the abidingly important return of the Persian period; the further developments of Jewish worship in the Hellenistic period and later have to be left out of consideration.

Reports about the worship-related life of the Jewish communities are available in three "festival calendars" and all kinds of scattered references to cultic ceremonies. Generally a certain temporal sequence of calendars is assumed, in which the intervals were fixed differently; the oldest text is Exod 34:10–28 (prestate?), followed by the so-called cultic decalogue. Then comes Deut 16:1–17 (late monarchic period?); Lev 23 (Priestly!) is supposed to be the most mature; in addition, there are a number of laws concerning the Sabbath, the regulations for the Sabbatical year (Deut 15; Lev 25), and many different sacrificial requirements (esp. Lev 1–7). These Sabbath laws represent the foundational texts. In my view, it is fairly certain that all of these originated in the Persian period; there is only sporadic information about earlier cultic customs and practices. The various profiles of the calendar of festivals in part are to be traced back to changes in cultic history but partly also to regional differences. All three texts assume the (theoretical!) centralization of the ministry of Yahweh in Jerusalem and therefore are to be dated after the rededication of the temple in 515 B.C.E.

The annual festivals no doubt were the firm framework of the life of worship. Originally they probably were practiced locally, but following the radical change one endeavored to make them official as a sign of the common faith in Yahweh, the only God for all Jewish communities.³⁸ Apparently the canonizing of three annual festivals is due to these efforts. From the unique, local celebrations (1 Sam 1) emerged three cultic gatherings, linked to the cycle of the agricultural year, that, in the course of unifying the Yahweh ceremonies for all the scattered communities, were organized as pilgrimages to Jerusalem. After the Babylonian reform of the calendar (changing the beginning of the year from fall to spring), the Passover festival began the round of major public gatherings (Exod 34:18; Deut 16:1–8; Lev 23:4–14). The accounts of the exodus constituted the festival's content. For the postexilic community, however, this contained more than a historical reminiscence of the distant time of Moses. The liberation from Egyptian "slavery" at the same time symbolized the liberation from the Babylonian yoke by the Persians; the acquisition of the land under Joshua in the same breath also represented the return to the promised land of the fathers. As it can be seen especially from

38. See the correspondence between Jerusalem and Elephantine concerning the date of the Passover, §II.4.3 above.

the late texts of Isaiah,³⁹ the great acts of Yahweh on behalf of his people in the distant and immediate past blend into one entity in the Passover. Not least some passages in the Deuteronomistic History and Chronicles show what status this formerly rustic, early summer festival had in the new community of Yahweh (2 Kgs 23:21–23; 2 Chr 35:1–19; Ezek 45:21–24; Josh 5:10–12; 2 Chr 30:1–37; Num 9:1–14). The assertion that the Passover is newly discovered in the respective contexts, that previously the festival had not obtained the appropriate attention, indeed, that it had been neglected (see 2 Kgs 23:22; 2 Chr 30:5; 35:18), sheds significant light on its paramount significance in the community. The latter is also demonstrated by the Chronistic arrangement of the Passover requirements. Especially 2 Chr 30 and 35 contain, as already presented, two competing forms of the Passover law. They include a number of controversial problems in the portrayal: the question about the correct date of the festival, the purity requirements for priests, their relationship to the lower Levitical families, and various sacrificial regulations (cf. also the remaining Passover texts mentioned above). We see that in the Persian period the major early summer festival became a heavyweight in the liturgical course of the year; it has retained its significance in the various confessional communities in subsequent centuries. The integrative power of lasting experiences of liberation, not least at the outset of the Persian rule, is expressed as an example in the often very emphatic joy, namely, in the Passover jubilation. Although no absolute classification is possible, we may imagine a number of psalms in the context of the festival, for example, 66, 84, 87, 105, 106, and 136. The Passover became an identity marker of Jewish communities. Christians modified its content and fixed the dates for their Easter celebration of the resurrection differently; nevertheless, they also adopted substantial parts of the content of the ancient liberation theology of the early Jewish communities.⁴⁰

The second of the three festivals is the ancient harvest thanksgiving for the agricultural crop, the Festival of Weeks, later identified as Pentecost. It was celebrated seven weeks after the start of the season of harvest (*mazzâ*) and later received its festal legend in the story of Ruth. The most detailed regulations of the festival are handed down in the calendar of festivals in Lev 23. They are clearly in tension with older rules in Exod 23:16, 34:22, and Deut 16:10–11 and follow directly from the preceding requirements for the Passover:

39. See Kiesow, *Exodustexte*; Wilhelm Caspari, *Lieder und Gottessprüche der Rückwanderer*; Pixley, *On Exodus*.

40. Herbert Haag, *Vom alten zum neuen Pascha* (SBS 49; Stuttgart: KBW Verlag, 1971).

And from the day after the Sabbath, from the day on which you bring the sheaf of the elevation offering, you shall count off seven weeks; they shall be complete. You shall count until the day after the seventh sabbath, fifty days; then you shall present an offering of new grain to the LORD. You shall bring from your settlements two loaves of bread as an elevation offering, each made of two-tenths of an ephah; they shall be of choice flour, baked with leaven, as first fruits to the LORD. You shall present with the bread seven lambs a year old without blemish, one young bull, and two rams; they shall be a burnt offering to the LORD, along with their grain offering and their drink offerings, an offering by fire of pleasing odor to the LORD. You shall also offer one male goat for a sin offering, and two male lambs a year old as a sacrifice of well-being. The priest shall raise them with the bread of the first fruits as an elevation offering before the LORD, together with the two lambs; they shall be holy to the LORD for the priest. On that same day you shall make proclamation; you shall not work at your occupations. This is a statute forever in all your settlements throughout your generations. (Lev 23:15–21)

The postexilic authors and tradents pointedly integrated the Festival of Weeks in the Sabbath cycle; compare Lev 23:3, the *leitmotif* for the entire calendar, as well as the chronology of counting (23:15–16). They order rest from work (23:21) and reckon with a network of settlements that is also concretely linked with the temple in Jerusalem through the offerings being brought (23:17). The priests celebrate the offering of firstfruits (23:20), which previously had been presented on the field by the farmers themselves. Apart from the festival calendar, however, the festival of weeks has only scarce attestation. Its significance probably was more cultic-ideological than practical. It is also difficult to comprehend that during the harvest period farmers were to participate in a central cultic celebration twice in a span of seven weeks. In the postexilic calendars, festal periods with merely regional significance were surely not adopted. Thus there are merely coincidental remarks about the “festival of sheep-sheering” (Gen 38:12–13; 1 Sam 25:2–8) or the “mourning for the virgins” (initiation ritual: Judg 11:38–40; cf. 21:19–21). The normative tradition of the community adopts regional customs selectively and turns them into a fixed framework of rituals (theoretically) binding for everyone.

This temporally elongated course of events is particularly clear in the regulations concerning the fall festivals of the seventh month (Lev 23:23–43). Various levels of growth can be ascertained: the original Festival of Booths at the time of the grape and fruit harvest is already embedded in the framework of the Sabbath (23:39). All of the members of the community are to live in booths for seven days in commemoration of the exodus from Egypt (23:42–43). This festival, beginning mid-month, is (presumably secondarily)

preceded on the tenth day of the month by the great annual Day of Atonement, the ritual of which is handed down in Lev 16 (Lev 23:26–32; Yom Kippur). It is fully observed as a Sabbath day, just as the first and last day of the Festival of Booths (23:31–36). Whoever desecrates the festival by working is to be cut off from the people (23:29). Only in Lev 16 do we learn something about the extensive rituals of atonement, including the ritual of the scapegoat.

The first day of the month, a Sabbath again, is distinguished as the starting point of the most important season of festivals; the rams' horns sound, and it gains the quality of an outstanding day of rest for Yahweh (*šabbātôn*, major Sabbath, 23:23–25; cf. 23:3⁴¹). The liturgical course of the year develops into a series of holidays embedded in the close web of Sabbaths every seventh day. Spring and fall festivals are given particular importance. For both festivals the association with the exodus-event is constitutive. The gift of the Torah is added to the festival later as additional content (yet cf. already Neh 8:1!), as the seventh month generally underwent numerous modifications in the Jewish cultic history.⁴²

In the major emphasis of the schema of the Sabbath, the notion comes to mind that the editors of the annual calendar ordered the ritual life of the community in keeping with the Sabbath commandment (Exod 20:8–11; Deut 5:12–15). This was of paramount significance for them; as a divine command, it was anchored deep in the creation narrative (Gen 2:2–3). Why did the Sabbath take on such significance for the postexilic community? In ancient ideas there was not one day like the other. Particular days brought specific dangers and also unique fortune. Many periods were associated with particular deities; in Babylonian astrology, choosing favorable days for certain tasks played a major role. The choice of specific days is not foreign to Old Testament sources either. The husband of the Shunammite woman is surprised that his wife sets out so hastily to the prophet Elisha. “Why go to him today? It is neither new moon nor Sabbath” (2 Kgs 4:23). The days when the phases of the moon changed were considered particularly charged with power or misfortune. There can be no doubt about the Sabbath originally having belonged to the lunar days and virtually having meant the full moon.⁴³ On the latter and at other changes of the phases, special offerings were always brought in

41. It occurs only ten times in the Hebrew Old Testament, four of them in Lev 23, as well as in Exod 31:15; 35:2; Lev 16:23, 31; 25:4–5. See Gerstenberger, *Leviticus*, 311–12.

42. Georg Fohrer, *Glaube und Leben im Judentum* (2nd ed.; Heidelberg: Quelle & Mayer, 1985), 114–30; supplemented by days of repentance and the New Year festival.

43. The Akkadian *šapattum* means “day of the full moon” (W. von Soden, *AHW*, 1172). The ancient combination with the “new moon” in the Old Testament also supports this (except in 2 Kgs 4:23; Hos 2:13; Amos 8:5; Isa 1:13).

Mesopotamia,⁴⁴ and exceptional precautions were made. The young Yahwistic confessional community adopted existing religious practices and cultic celebrations in its own way and developed them into a distinctive feature of its own. We may understand this evolution as follows: In reflecting upon Israel's peculiarity, the adherents of Yahweh agreed that the Torah of their God was a special gift, or, in other words, the written tradition of Yahweh's revelation of his will and influence of history was regarded as a distinctive sign of the identity of the community. In a religious environment that heavily impacted the world astrologically, the question of Yahweh's world-shaping work arose. At what places and times was he powerfully present? During the preexilic period, this question was not posed in competition with other deities. Only the religious pluralism of the Babylonian and Persian period produced this reflection. Analogous to the great Mesopotamian moon deity Sin, the dispersed Judeans also saw Yahweh at work in the world. On many days his power was particularly effective. Already after completing the work of creation, he set aside a unit of time (Sabbath) as his possession, originally perhaps the day of full moon. Gradually, however, the community of Yahweh broke away completely from the lunar cycle and celebrated initially four changes of the lunar phases. On each of these days special care was to be in force in matters of lifestyle, for the followers of Yahweh moved in the immediate presence of Yahweh for practically twenty-four hours. The Sabbath was God's temporal abode. He dwelt in it, and the humans situated in the same place and time had to do everything to avoid disturbing or offending him—hence the absolute prohibition of work.⁴⁵ The systematizing of six days of work and one holiday then brought about the final break with the lunar cycle and the solar year. The seven-part week was compatible neither with the temporal structure of the lunar cycle nor with that of the sun. The worshippers of Yahweh who deemed themselves superior to everything pertaining to the astral cult continually counted days and weeks, without regard for the heavenly bodies, and accepted the resulting difficulties in communicating the dates of Sabbaths and months. In any case, the weekly Sabbath developed into a rhythm of life and culture of its own; untouched by the absolute prohibition of work, the habit of gathering on the communal level and holding liturgies dedicated to Yahweh eventually emerged. Here the Jewish and Christian order of worship have their roots.

44. Walther Sallaberger, *Der kultische Kalender der Ur III-Zeit* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1993); Manfred Krebernik, "Mondgott," *RIA* 8:360–69.

45. In Babylonian epics, human noise provokes the wrath of the gods; cf. *TUAT* 3.4:626–27, 629 (Wolfgang von Soden).

The bulk of Old Testament texts mentioning and describing the Sabbath originate from the exilic and postexilic period. From these we are able to reconstruct roughly what the Judean community thought about the Sabbath and how one followed the commandment to hallow it. In the forefront are the prohibition of work and trade. A strict interpretation of the respective commandment also forbids the preparation of meals as a disruption of the rest of God; in Num 15:32–36 the one violating the Sabbath by gathering sticks for his fire, upon orders received, was stoned (cf. Lev 24:10–16). Even kindling a fire is prohibited with the threat of death (Exod 35:2–3). Exceptionally, the manna in the wilderness does not spoil on the Sabbath; hence it can be gathered on the sixth day for the seventh. However, whoever searches for it on the hallowed day does not find any (Exod 16:22–30). Nehemiah strictly prevents any business activity in Jerusalem (Neh 13:15–22). Important admonitions concerning the Sabbath refer to the “holy Sabbath of solemn rest to the LORD” (Exod 31:15; 35:2). According to this tradition, violating the Sabbath commandment is supposed to have caused Jerusalem’s catastrophe. After an admonition concerning the Sabbath for foreigners and eunuchs, linked with the mutual obligation (Isa 56:1–8) and a stirring address about the right fast and the connection with fasting and compassion, Third Isaiah gets to talk about the sanctity of the Sabbath. It seems as if the related topic of fasting and Sabbath also had a common ritual base.

If you refrain from trampling the Sabbath, from pursuing you own interests on my holy day; if you call the Sabbath a delight and the holy day of the LORD honorable; if you honor it, not going your own ways, serving your own interests, or pursuing your own affairs; then you shall take delight in the LORD, and I will make you ride upon the heights of the earth; I will feed you with the heritage of your ancestor Jacob, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken. (Isa 58:13–14)

The motif of the sanctity of the day of Yahweh sets the standard everywhere; the social component, resting from the daily grind (Deut 5:14), can clearly be recognized in Isa 56 and 58 as well. But this does not yet express anything about a possibly positive content of the Sabbath day. In fact, the community’s activities on the Sabbath do not become as clear as the actions to be avoided that disturb Yahweh on his day of rest. The festival calendar of Lev 23, which we have already dealt with, possibly offers a pointer. At the core of all the “holy convocations, appointed festivals” throughout their “settlements” are Sabbath days (23:2–3). The term “convocation” (*miqrā*) may denote the gathering of the community, especially in association with the noun “holy things” (*qōdes̄*). The expression occurs particularly frequently in Lev 13, as well as in closely associated segments of the priestly tradition (Exod 12:16: Passover;

Num 28:18, 25–26; 29:1, 7, 12: Passover, Festival of Weeks; festivals in the seventh month). Only at the beginning of the festival calendar of Lev 23 does the Sabbath also obtain the designation of his “holy convocation.” Is this perhaps a reflection cast from the major annual festivals on the introduction to the calendar of festivals as an introductory *leitmotif*? Or are only the “major Sabbaths” of the annual festivals addressed (23:2), so that the Sabbath rule of “six days of work” in reality only denotes the weekdays prior to the respective major festival-related Sabbath? The latter interpretation is possible. Even if so, it would at least still provide a piece of evidence that on holy days of rest large gatherings of the community could and should take place in conjunction with annual festivals. However, the simple end of the week can also be awarded an important title such as “great, holy Sabbath,” as attested in such passages as Exod 31:15; 35:2. Precisely this day Yahweh claimed for himself as his possession from the start (Exod 35:7).

The hypothesis of gatherings also receives cautious support from other parts of the Hebrew Bible. The people of Israel gathered as a large community to hear Ezra’s Torah address “when the seventh month came” (Neh 8:1). The time is probably to be understood as the beginning of the month, and the first day of this month, according to Lev 23:23, was to be a Sabbath or to be treated like a Sabbath. In this case the reading of the Torah is not a violation of the Sabbath commandment, but as a period of rest with and for Yahweh, it could be a meaningful act precisely supporting the regulation. Prayer and sacrifice indeed were also pleasing activities on the Sabbath (Num 29:9–10). Unfortunately, the many references in the postexilic writings do not contain any precise calendrical information on the gatherings of the people of Yahweh. They only speak about the fact that Israel congregates or is summoned as a community of faith (e.g., Deut 29:1;⁴⁶ Josh 24:1, 25; 1 Sam 10:17, 19; 1 Kgs 8:2⁴⁷). However, in the postexilic community it may already have been perceived as self-evident that worship-related gatherings took place on the Sabbath. What is self-evident is rarely explained explicitly.

Thus the Sabbath structure of the religious calendar opens up and in part is already firmly established. The annual festivals are constructed from the pattern of the Sabbath. From this division of time, which is peculiar and found nowhere else, the projection of Sabbath years, the seven weeks of years, and the calendar of Jubilees are to be explained. The basic idea is that the land that is sacred to Yahweh is in need of sabbatical times as well, for these

46. Does the emphatic “today” in the Deuteronomistic accounts of assemblies intimate the Sabbath as “this day”? Cf. Deut 29:3, 9, 12, 14, 17; Ps 95:7.

47. The reference to the month and festival (Booths) indicates the correlation with the Sabbath.

sabbaticals are at the disposal of the creator and sustainer and are not needed for the purpose of feeding people. Normal agricultural tilling is construed as slave labor of the soil (of mother earth?). Because Israel did not keep the regulation of fallowness and thus the sacred times of rest for the fields, they had to go into exile. During the absence of the exiled people, the land was able to make up the Sabbath years it had missed and had not been granted (Lev 26:33–35). Consequently, in the new community of Yahweh the fundamental rule of the holy Sabbath year is to be in force, which is to be crowned by the great Year of Jubilee after seven weeks of years (Lev 25). The fallow period applies every seventh year (25:1–7; cf. Exod 23:20–21; Deut 24:19–22). What the field yields on its own has to suffice for food (25:6–7). After seven times seven years, a year of Jubilee is to be celebrated, when those enslaved are to be set free and confiscated property returned (25:8–12).

The year of release is part of a long tradition of ancient Eastern debt relief (see the excursus following §II.3.4 above). In turn, it continued to have an effect deep into Jewish and Christian history, all the way to the modern campaigns of relief for the most impoverished countries on earth.⁴⁸ Apart from the biblical and postbiblical sources (see the apocryphal book of Jubilees), however, the polished framework of time is not present anywhere else. In the original text, too, it strikes one as most artificial. Who in the reality of life is able to establish and carry through fifty-year plans? Even the millennial organization of the Roman Catholic Church had its difficulties with the “holy year” conceived in the thirteenth century C.E.⁴⁹ The most plausible assumption is that the ancient rules of fallowness and remission, elevated to high theological position, are largely of an ideological and theoretical character. Actually, even Yahweh’s right of ownership of land and animals should be celebrated visibly in an expanded Sabbath regulation, analogous to the human daily and weekly routine. The fact that the following regulations of implementation in Lev 25:13–55 had practical significance does not contradict the overall abstract construction. The theoretically polished framework of rhythmic work days and Sabbaths, annual festivals and year weeks surely did not go off quite as methodically in reality. Numerous instances of conflict with regard to keeping the Sabbath holy and festival dates, as well as divergent rules in distant communities, such as the one at Elephantine in Egypt, seem to render it a certainty that exceptions and special provisions were quite fre-

48. See Erhard S. Gerstenberger, “... zu lösen die Gebundenen,” in *Kampagne Erlassjahr 2000: Entwicklung braucht Entschuldung* (ed. Kirchlicher Entwicklungsdienst der EKH; Frankfurt, 1999), 59–96.

49. See Arndt Meinhold and Heribert Smolinsky, “Jubeljahr,” *TRE* 17:280–85.

quent and that the Jerusalem (or Babylonian?) “headquarters” often found it difficult to assert itself in general.

If the theological, hypothetical character of the liturgical order of new Israel is acknowledged, there are questions that arise immediately concerning the nonofficial expressions of faith in the Persian period, from those tolerated to those banned, and their significance for the theological yield of the period. Scholarship in church history had to learn what Jewish theology has always practiced to a significant extent: deviating opinions, too, are theologically relevant. Occasionally resistance against “canonical” theology is noted in the Hebrew Scriptures (see Num 12:2; Ezra 10:15; Isa 66:5; Jer 44:16–19; Job). Ceremonies apart from the accepted liturgical system shine through here and there, either causing offense and therefore being fought or remaining harmlessly on a folkloric level, as we would say. Among the first group were the “gray” rituals in private gardens and inside tombs (Isa 65:1–5, 11), consulting the dead (1 Sam 28), consulting Baal (1 Kgs 1:1–3), idol worship and witchcraft (Ezek 8), and many other deviant practices. The second category includes rituals and festivals that are not commented upon, which were in vogue primarily in local communities, such as the consecration of the young women (Judg 11:39–40; cf. 21:19, 21), the shearing of the sheep (Gen 38:12), wedding festivities (Song), circumcision of lads in puberty (Gen 17:23–27), and the tradition presumably turned into the circumcision of infants in the postexilic period (Gen 17:10–14). We should not underestimate the number of unofficial ceremonies. Especially in the realm of the anthropologically thoroughly researched rites of passage, we should expect a considerable range of rites in the early Jewish community as well. Archaeological finds are able to provide us with indicators for this. Apart from figurines of goddesses, domestic incense stands, and the temple facilities in Arad and Elephantine, which were not granted Deuteronomistic license, the numerous private seals of the epoch, with their continued broad religious symbolism, are an unambiguous attestation of the variety of cultic practices.⁵⁰ The archaeological investigations relative to the Persian period do not yet allow for comprehensive conclusions.⁵¹ To the extent that it can be ascertained, however, biblically indirectly, attested positions of faith and cultic practices, as well as theological attitudes that can be inferred from extrabiblical evidence, belong to the theologically relevant overall portrait of the Jewish faith, for life from which

50. Cf. Keel and Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses and Images*, 373–91; while the frequency of finds referring to other cults decreases (see §216), they nevertheless did not completely vanish under the pressure of monotheistic faith. See §II.3.6 above.

51. See Keel and Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses and Images*, §216; Weippert, *Palästina in vorhellenistischer Zeit*, 687–918; see §II.1.2 above.

the text originated is part of the text. Further, the mass of texts received coincidentally in a Holy Scripture (cf. the very patchy quantities in the various “canonical collections”!) is in need of critical supplementing with suppressed, forgotten voices from the spectrum of the people of Yahweh. In the Old Testament, in any case, the religious subject is first of all the individual confessing adherent of Yahweh and second the community as a whole, which is implored so frequently as Yahweh’s feminine partner, with its leaders who are in charge overall. All of them together get a chance to speak in the rituals and festivals.

The postexilic community created basic liturgical and “ecclesial” patterns that have become formative for the Western world. The Christian churches are daughters of the synagogue, not competitors of the same age. Forms of worship, annual festivals, preaching the Word, understanding the sacraments, vestments, songs, in short, the sacred realm, the sacred time with participants and rituals we use are directly linked with the early Jewish community of Yahweh. This is why it is necessary to take a critical look at it.

IV.3. ON THE WAY TO MONOTHEISM

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EXCURSUS: WHAT IS MONOTHEISM?

The debate about the one and only God is burdened with several handicaps, of which those debating often are altogether unaware. For one, the term and the formulation of the question about “monotheism” come from the modern milieu of the Western Enlightenment. In their contemporary form, they are not anchored in antiquity. Today monotheism, alongside a number of other “-theisms,” is meant to denote a worldview in which the one deity guides the history of all humans and of the entire universe more or less according to the logic of critical scholarship. Motives other than the one divine causality for all being and events are impossible. This perspective is shaped rationally, indeed scientifically. Popular discourse is fond of broaching and discussing ad absurdum the internal inconsistency of the concept of a solitary, omnipotent mover. Philosophers of life are able to postulate further arguments against the single dimensionality of being and becoming. Further, no one among the biblical tradents would want to engage in the modern question about the only valid divine principle of causality; perhaps it could not be understood at all in the context of the ancient mentality.

A further caveat arises from church history and the history of theology. Wherever belief in the God who alone is effective was linked with state interests, it automatically served as legitimation of the power of the latter. This became horribly clear in the major religious wars that started from Europe: in the Crusades of the Middle Ages, the campaigns of conquest in the New World, and the confessional battles, especially of the seventeenth century. Reduced to a rational denominator, monotheism in its political form meant that the ruling representatives of the only valid religion felt appointed to impose their knowledge of God (claiming to be the only true and saving one) upon all “unbelievers.” The asserted uniqueness of God all of a sudden changed into an absolute claim to power by those who insisted they had found the one true God. In other words, monotheistic faith could easily be misused for the purpose of pushing through one’s own interests. In the Christian history of the church, this has almost inevitably always been the

case when secular or spiritual dictators wanted to carry out the will of God in reality.

With these facts of the case as a background, we are able to ask about the monotheistic tendencies in the community of Yahweh in Judea and generally in the ancient Near East. For the biblical tradents, the following is established: faith in Yahweh, the only God who is creator and guide of the world, predominantly involves a question of the resolute, exclusive relationship of the people with the truly acting supreme and best power in the known world; in no wise does it involve a philosophical problem of divine existence. Time and again Second Isaiah appeals to Israel to worship and actively follow Yahweh. The unknown prophet or the unknown mediators of the respective words of God cover other, especially Babylonian, cults and thereby other deities with bitter ridicule because of their weakness and hence of the entirely illusionary trust placed in them. The debate about the true deity in the second part of the book of Isaiah needs to be seen entirely as a test of the effectiveness of the spirit and the power of the deities mentioned. This also remains true in the case of those sayings that for our understanding come suspiciously close to statements of being: "I am the first, and I am the last; besides me there is no god" (Isa 44:6b; see also, e.g., 41:4; 43:11; 48:12); "I am the LORD, and there is no other" (45:18). These statements of exclusiveness likewise aim at the real power of the God of Israel and his ability to assert himself rather than at his divine substance. This is also true of the theological statements in Deuteronomy that have a monotheistic orientation, especially in chapters 4–6. The prohibition of images is central to Deut 4. In its worship, Israel is to refrain from all pictorial comparisons, since no metaphor is capable of matching Yahweh's overwhelming power and even because the God of the universe indeed places these inferior sources of power such as the astral bodies (in which the Babylonians had great confidence) at the disposal of other nations as secondary deities (Deut 4:19). The prohibition of foreign gods and images in the Decalogue of Deut 5–6 certainly takes the existence of other deities seriously; otherwise it would be quite superfluous. Moreover, the essential confession of Deut 6:4, "Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone" (note the communal-collective formulation), summarizes the intentions of the monotheistic belief in God in the postexilic Judaic community. Similar observations can also be made in the ancient Eastern history of religion, especially in the Persian veneration of Ahura Mazda. The ontological concept of God of a later time dates from the Greek and Roman philosophical tradition and needs to be discussed from a different perspective. The Old Testament texts are concerned with the genuine power and effectiveness of a relationship with God. What is indeed amazing is that the Judean community ventured such statements about Yahweh from a position of extreme powerlessness, hence in sharp contrast to

reality. Should these lofty theological sentences only denote a reaction of defiance on the part of an unreasonable people or of a few obstinate theologians? At times history has agreed with these theologians, but in other instances it also severely put them in the wrong, for the power of God that transcends the world after all has not given reasons for the enduring realm of righteousness among humans.

The traditional history of religions model for Israel's faith was and still is the one given in the Deuteronomistic History and Deutero-Isaiah: at the beginning of their existence as a people, Israel experienced the revelation of God at Sinai and the covenant relationship with this particular, unique God. The centuries until the Babylonian exile are one single history of breaking away from and returning to this global God who made Israel his preferential partner. Through his chosen people he wants to bring all nations under his rule.⁵²

In the course of the last two or three decades this picture began to crumble at every conceivable point. The conviction gaining more and more acceptance is that belief in the one God, excluding all other deities, emerged gradually in the course of the varied history of Israel. Accordingly, the final, decisive impetus to Old Testament monotheism came about through the new constitution of the community in the Persian Empire.⁵³ This is the hypothesis we now need to retrace with a few brief strokes. The monotheistic belief in Yahweh in Judea probably has become the most important yield for the history of ideas of the Western world.

IV.3.1. TRANSFORMATIONS OF IDEAS OF GOD

As already mentioned several times, the early Jewish theological development took place in the midst of the ancient Near Eastern environment, in other words, primarily in the Babylonian and Persian world of thought and partly also in the Egyptian one. The decisive social constellation was that of a communal organization based on the confession of Yahweh that became aware of its universal significance. How are the transitions to be understood from

52. As a typical example of this perspective, I mention only the well-known textbook of W. H. Schmidt, *Israel's Glaube*, which was first published with the title *Alttestamentlicher Glaube und seine Umwelt* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1968). Beginning with the second edition, the book was titled *Alttestamentlicher Glaube in seiner Geschichte* (1975), and from the eighth edition on *Alttestamentlicher Glaube* (9th ed.; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2004).

53. See the discussion in Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism*, e.g., 163–66.

preexilic ideas of God, established on the social levels of family, local community, and tribal and state government, to an exclusive, personal, universal, and at the same time particular deity of creation and history? The point of departure is the new structure of the autonomous religious community (see §IV.2.2 above). This type of community of faith is a typical organization of the social middle. Straitjacketed between stable small groups (family, clan) with their age-old customs and theological ideas and larger social conglomerates determined by instruments of power, the community has to assert itself. It is exposed to pressures but also has to be open in every direction. It nurtures the individuality of the members but also places great value on cohesion and a fundamental unity of all members of the community of faith. To a large extent it replaces the family, but it is also expected to be the organizing authority of a large society. Hence it is a cross between a micro- and macro-society, with the demand of satisfying everyone. It is little wonder that the concepts of God, developing in the bosom of the community, change in several directions. They borrow from the ideas of the small and the large social framework.

Yahweh takes on all of the essential functions of a deity for this multidimensional community of faith. The name of God links the various aspects of the image of God; however, it cannot guarantee a binding unity. By calling upon the only and exclusive deity, the stereotypes of God shaped by social systems are preserved.

The personal tutelary deities familiar from the small groups are the foundational heritage of the history of religion. Yahweh takes their place and offers the individual believer in the early Jewish community companionship, welfare, and blessing. Individual prayers of petition previously addressed to various deities are strictly associated with Yahweh or Elohim in the preserved tradition. In the narratives of the parents (patriarchs), he sides with his clients without thinking twice, even though they are morally shady. The title of father and mother, or epithets of kinship, are aimed at the God of the community, even if to a lesser extent than one might perhaps want to assume (see Ps 103:13; Isa 66:13). Such attributes as “faithful,” “true,” and “caring,” always in terms of a close, personal relationship between the deity and the worshiper, are constant designations for the nature of Yahweh. Like the earlier familial tutelary deities, he is now devoted with complete solidarity to the individual member of the community: “Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him, and he will act” (Ps 37:5). As personal God, the universal Yahweh promises especially security and happiness.

However, the relationship between the believer and deity is not quite as undiminished as this. No longer is there a complete automatism of divine support, as perhaps in earlier family religions. This God Yahweh demands

a personal decision for him, a decision that also excludes other religious practices. This situation of decision, already addressed above, may also be associated with the Persian religious climate. For Israel, it was essential, because belief in Yahweh was the only binding element for the community and because there were no other identity markers available to them. The God for whom one had to declare oneself publicly, if one wanted to belong to him, was no longer the ancient tutelary deity organically affiliated with the family. He establishes a new kind of primary group, a community of God. For this reason Yahweh becomes the passionate father figure who teaches, orients, watches, leads to the right path, and, if necessary, punishes all spiritual members. The features of a God directing a larger community partly stem from the local village traditions. Yahweh becomes the upright God who also sees to it that those who are weaker in the community have their livelihood and dignity. This happens without the use of significant power. The threats of death of many "legal" pronouncements in reality are built up into warnings without really intending an implementation.⁵⁴ Yahweh was the God of a mutually supportive society; he saw to good harvests (Ps 65), justice, and humanity (Ps 82; Exod 22:20–26; 23:1–9), in other words, to the external and internal conditions for the well-being of his community.

However, the community of Yahweh no longer consists simply of those ancient agricultural settlements of the past. It forms a network of parochial groups extending deep into the empires of the Babylonians and Persians. It is the extensive community of Yahweh; the spiritual focal point is the temple of Jerusalem in which Yahweh dwells. The sanctuary stands free from the encumbrance of the monarchic state. Holiness emanates from it. It is no longer the king and not only the priesthood who participate in the vitality of God. The people as a whole are to be holy (Lev 19:2; Exod 19:6). In spite of his energy arousing fear, the holy, unapproachable God dwells in the midst of his own people; time and again he can be called upon; he overcomes the qualitative distance, communicates with the representatives of the community, and now and again can even be seen (see Exod 33:18–23; 1 Kgs 19:11–13; Ezek 1:26–28). The mystery of the figure of Yahweh remains preserved by means of the prohibition of images. Yet every approach of God to his community and each turning to Yahweh on the part of the community in itself calls this mystery already into question.

Further, the community did not live in seclusion but in the midst of those with different beliefs and under political, military, and economic structures

54. See Erhard S. Gerstenberger, "'He/They Shall Be Put to Death': Life-Preserving Divine Threats in Old Testament Law," *Ex Auditu* 11 (1995): 43–61.

that were largely perceived as burdensome. Even in this web of superior societal powers, the people experienced Yahweh's might. Those who experience pressure from the outside must position themselves accordingly. The community's reaction could not be taken on the political or military level; only a theological response was possible. Thus Yahweh became the superior God of the world to whom all nations, hence the imperial rulers as well, were subject. At this point the community of Yahweh may have fallen back only partly upon tribal and state traditions. To be sure, the history of Israel knew the warrior god Yahweh who moves into battle for his people (Judg 4–5), but the tribal traditions did not talk about an intrinsic superiority of their own God. Victories against hostile deities and groups were celebrated from case to case; in the case of lost battles, laments were mingled with the account of victory (1 Sam 4–5; Pss 44; 68; 89). In postexilic Israel the conviction increasingly gained importance that Yahweh, the only and omnipotent God, continuously has the fate of all nations in his hand and that any resistance against him is futile. Ancient portrayals of the deity treading powerfully are picked up by the theologians of the time and extended to become universal.

Have you not known? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth? It is he who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers; who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them like a tent to live in; who brings princes to naught, and makes the rulers of the earth as nothing. Scarcely are they planted, scarcely sown, scarcely has their stem taken root in the earth, when he blows upon them, and they wither, and the tempest carries them off like stubble. To whom then will you compare me, or who is my equal? says the Holy One. (Isa 40:21–25)

We must ask about the origin of the notion of Yahweh's stable dominion of the world; from the tradition of their own tribes and states, there are probably traces at best. The local kings of the time were not presumptuous to the extent of adorning themselves with the titles of the world rulers or of claiming them for their national deities. But awareness of the empires of the Assyrians, Babylonians, and Persians might have provided the intellectual-political backdrop for the conception of permanent power.⁵⁵ In this case this small minority of followers of Yahweh in the vast Persian Empire boldly adopted the parameters of world dominion from the earthly rulers and transferred them to their

55. See Erhard S. Gerstenberger, "‘World Dominion’ in Yahweh Kingship Psalms," *HBT* 23 (2001–2002): 192–210.

own God: "For great is he LORD and greatly to be praised; he is to be revered above all gods" (Ps 96:4; cf. the royal hymns of Yahweh: Pss 47; 93; 95–99).

The contours of this universal dominion of the God of Israel in the so-called royal hymns of Yahweh (§III.1.3.1 above) indeed correspond with the ancient Near Eastern paradigms, not with a Davidic or Solomonic archetype. Such sounds are unknown from vassals or governors of the actual world rulers. But the new community of Yahweh dared to counter the almost absolute claim of the centers of power with the declaration of belief in the superior God Yahweh. Was this legitimate self-defense or pure insanity? In the Babylonian Empire, statements such as this would rouse suspicion of subversive activity. The government of the Persian Empire, as already mentioned, did not concern itself with the religious life of the subjects but rather promoted independent forms of faith, perhaps under the general assumption that every religion was only a form of expression of the one belief in Ahura Mazda, after all.

We see that the Judaic community of Yahweh lived and developed its new belief in Yahweh out of the situation of a tiny minority group in a multiracial empire. The various portraits of God fit that time. The main concern was the right decision for the one God who was the God of Israel. This decision was important both for the individual member of the community and for the local community as a whole. Daily life longed for orientations in the horizon of small, personal interests. Here it was necessary to bear witness to Yahweh. All of the expressions about the (omni)potent, as well as the violent, God probably served the purpose of defense and separation from the world outside. It is interesting how theological statements of the Old Testament deal with this tension between various dimensions of the concept of God. A very important liturgical formulation describes Yahweh as "merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, yet by no means clearing the guilty, but visiting the iniquity of the parents upon the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation" (Exod 34:6–7; see also Pss 86:15; 103:8; 111:4; 145:8; Neh 9:31; 2 Chr 30:9, etc.).

The epithets come from different areas of life of the community; they merge in this liturgical formulation. Familial as well as governmental and communal perspectives were the forces behind it. For as much and clearly such terms as *rahûm* "merciful," *'erek 'appayim* "patient, longsuffering," *rab-ḥesed we'emet* "full of faithfulness and truth" point to the closest relationship in the family, the semantic field of "being merciful," just as in the German equivalent, also suggests a more strongly social tendency. Especially in the common formulation "merciful and gracious" (see Pss 86:15; 103:8; 111:4; 145:8; Neh 9:17, 31), the two terms, originating from different

social constellations, seem to be consciously combined, and the exceptional three-part combination of “gracious, merciful, and righteous” in Ps 112:4 underscores this analysis: here the typical expression for the overall social balance is added. Exodus 34:7b refers to this impartial, harsh (on account of basically not being willing to forgive), objective “righteousness,” while verse 7a still attempts to extend the familial solidarity and the expiation of guilt to all descendants. In this “formula of grace,” used frequently and intensively in worship contexts both then and now, different concepts of Yahweh’s solidarity with his faithful and his community are consciously composed together.⁵⁶

Traces of a complex and synthesizing theology such as this can be found in many places in the Old Testament, and in these instances they logically are hallmarks of a theology of the community that, as such, was multilayered and lived on the multifaceted heritage of traditions handed down. A good example is provided in the narrative of Elijah’s encounter with God on Mount Horeb: “there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the LORD...; after the wind an earthquake...; after the earthquake a fire...; after the fire a sound of sheer silence” (1 Kgs 19:11–12). Yahweh is not in the demonstrations of power but in the “sheer silence,” for Yahweh’s essence cannot simply be circumscribed by majesty and power. Storm, earthquake, and fire are the elemental forces at the disposal of a global God. Indeed, he stirs up the strongest cosmic powers when he appears (see Pss 18:8–16; 77:17–20; 104:1–9; Hab 3:3–15). Why the reversal of the *theologia gloriae* in this instance? Because through exile and liberation the experience of the community of Yahweh has demonstrated that power, even the most sublime divine power, is not the (only) solution of all earthly problems. Power cannot enforce righteousness. The authority of the Torah must be internalized before it can become truly effective (Jer 31:31). Suffering, not brute force, has redeeming functions (Isa 53:3–12). What is small and despised is often of greater value than what is powerful and riches (Deut 7:6–8). The reevaluation of the human scale of worth, occurring ever so frequently in the Hebrew Scriptures, rubs off on the concept of God. Yahweh is not only the superior warrior, creator, and judge; he is also and precisely “made perfect in weakness” (Paul in 2 Cor 12:9).⁵⁷ He manifests himself not only, and not at all primarily, in the elemental forces

56. See Hermann Spieckermann, “Barmherzig und gnädig ist der Herr...,” ZAW 102 (1990): 1–18; idem, *Heilsgegenwart: Eine Theologie der Psalmen* (FRLANT 148; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1989).

57. See Nürnberger, *Theology of the Biblical Witness*, e.g., 218–19; Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, e.g., 319–32.

but in sheer silence and only then speaks to the prophet. The theological conception including the lowliness, self-emptying, and suffering of God is a result of the blending of different portraits of God. It had incisive consequences for Jewish-Christian theology.

Thus in its theological conception the early Jewish community was dependent upon diverse portraits of God. It was a new religio-sociological phenomenon and as such could not be compared with the organic structures of family, local community, tribe, or state. In the latter systems deities practiced relatively homogeneous functions, in harmony with the daily life of the members. The new, multilayered community had to reconstitute itself completely as a community of confession and agreement with Yahweh within different political and religious communities and in the framework of an imperial society. The community of Yahweh shared in or was touched by all of these socioreligious structures. From all of these it accepted stimuli, and with all of them it had to enter compromises. The complexity is expressed in the breadth of variation in the portraits of God. For the community and the individuals within it, Yahweh was father and mother (apart from the texts already cited, see Hos 11:1–9; Isa 1:2–3), lover and husband (Isa 62:1–5; Hos 1–3; Ezek 16; 23), but also king and emperor (Pss 95:3; 96:10; 97:1, 9), creator of the world, the one who guides history and the cosmos (Isa 40:12–17; 41:1–5, 25; 43:14–21; 44:24–28; Amos 4:13; 5:8–9; 9:5–6). A broad range of further borrowed, functional portraits of God from the social life of the community could be brought into play.⁵⁸ A comparison with the breadth and functionality of ancient Near Eastern attributes of God would be very instructive.⁵⁹ Through the centuries the Old Testament portraits of God have been further handed down in various contexts. Occasionally the silent and compassionate God surfaces again, as in theologies of the poor or in mystical movements. Frequently, however, the majestic, omnipotent deity is dominant; absolute authority as antithesis seems to be in accordance with a deep human need for one's exercise of power.

58. The variety of portraits of God plays a significant role in the theological acknowledgements but is not given adequate explanation; see vol. 1 of Horst Dietrich Preuss, *Theology of the Old Testament* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995); Schmidt, *Israel's Glaube*; Kaiser, *Der Gott des Alten Testaments*.

59. Cf. summarizing presentations, e.g., Jeremy Black and Anthony Green, *Gods, Demons and Symbols of Ancient Mesopotamia* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992); Keel and Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses and Images*; and Karel van der Toorn et al., eds. *Lexicon of Deities and Demons in the Bible* (2nd ed.; Leiden: Brill, 1998).

IV.3.2. UNIVERSALISM AND PARTICULARISM

What Judaic theologians of the Persian period learned and formulated about Yahweh, their God, appears like the squaring of the circle until the present. In most Christian traditions the problem remained virulent, and many Western thinkers and politicians busy themselves with it in the present global situation. How is it possible for a particular tiny minority of people in the mass of the population of the world to claim that it alone has the only true information of faith and life alone, that it alone is chosen by the omnipotent creator God encompassing all nations for a particular world project, and that it is destined exclusively to bring truth and righteousness to humans? For the Judeans, key passages for belief in election are, for instance, Gen 12:1–3; Exod 19:4–6; Deut 7:6–10; Isa 43:20–21; and 44:1–5. The consciousness of being the only nation on earth chosen by the only God has deep consequences for their self-understanding and relationship to neighboring peoples and religions. A common human option is to rate all others as inferior, harmful, and unpleasant; after all, none of them has any access to the only God. They are not given any right to remain in the holy land that Yahweh promised his people. The Deuteronomic conclusion is that all other ethno-religious groups must leave the land of Israel or either be destroyed or, as exceptions, reduced to slavery (see Deut 7:1–5; 20; Josh 9). The subjugation hypothesis also shines through in the second part of Isaiah (49:22–23). The reversal of the balance of power brings the ravaged people of Israel into the lead: this is an understandable reaction, albeit hardly properly thought out theologically, of those who have been deprived of their rights. That it can also be different is demonstrated in numerous passages dealing with the participation of the nations in Yahweh's salvation (Isa 19:19–25): “the Egyptians will worship with the Assyrians. On that day Israel will be the third with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth” (19:23–24; cf. 2:1–4). Thus the scale of the conduct of “chosen” nations, groups, religious communities is very broad theoretically. In the history of religions we are able to find many examples for the mentality of election. Psycho-social attempts have long confirmed that human communities tend to grant themselves the right to be in the first place in a list of comparable groups.⁶⁰ From here the path is short to devaluing the other, indeed to xenophobia.

60. See already Peter R. Hofstätter, *Gruppendynamik* (Hamburg: Rowalt, 1957), 96–111 (with reference to the “summer camp of M. Sherif”: experiments with youth groups that developed ideas of superiority very quickly).

The question is how the spiritual descendants deal with the experience of election of the Judean communities of the Persian period. In the Christian tradition, the efforts are unmistakably either to take the place of the chosen people of Israel and to come alongside the only God or at least to share in the grace of God alongside the ancient community of Yahweh (see Paul in Rom 9–11). Today this path may well be outdated. Instead, it is much more important to take to heart the realization, bitter as it may be for many, that any awareness of election is relative and cannot be dealt with as an objective and eternal truth. Too many time-conditioned factors are involved in the statements about the omnipotence of the only deity and its choice of only a tiny minority for the salvation of the whole world. Too much ego-centricity and chauvinism plays a part in the assertion of one's own election and the inferiority of others. The ideologies of election of religious communities can be explained by the respective prevailing circumstances. Together with the insights of group psychology and the analysis of national stereotypes, it also becomes comprehensible that since the Persian period in any case religious communities (the Zoroastrian religion also reflects such features) have developed a tendency toward particular exclusiveness by means of a growing realization of the oneness of God and the world. Our current conclusions must be different from what was common for centuries.

We may argue that statements about election of any kind and of all times are of the same kind as other theological affirmations as well; they are bound by context and have a temporal, not an eternal, quality. The Old Testament prophets knew this much better than subsequent Christian theologians. Hosea, Amos, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel reckoned with the conditionality of Israel's election and occasionally announced the end of its relationship with God. Within the covenantal ideas and outside of them, the Pentateuch addresses the precarious existence of the chosen people. Especially the critical self-consciousness of the community of the Second Temple is developed with remarkable breadth. Election by the only God cannot be an irrevocable permanent subscription, however much one wanted to rely on Yahweh's faithfulness. According to other texts, being chosen out of the powerful mass of the other humans and nations ushers the elect into a position of service, not of dominion. In a nutshell, in light of the multilayered biblical sources, an intrinsically anchored, eternal, special position based on a particular quality of those chosen by God is out of the question. According to Deut 7:7–8, Yahweh's love is the only reason for Israel's election. To be sure, love shows solidarity and is enduring, but already in antiquity it could be disappointed and frustrated (Hos 1–3; Ezek 16; 23), and relationships based on both love and covenant are transitory. Biblical insistence on an eternal duration of covenant and election is the language of hope, not a description of facts. Hence

already from the biblical perspective it is possible to speak about the relativity of election. In our situation today and given the historical experiences with presumed Christian election, through centuries of fateful developments in the state church, we need to practice this contextuality more clearly and with a sharper focus. For when biblical, contextual belief in election became bound up with the ideology of power on the part of so-called Christian societies, bloody religious wars for the purpose of converting or exterminating those of other religions followed (the Crusades, the conquest of the American continents by Christian armies, the Thirty Year War, and similar phenomena until now).

Nevertheless, statements about election have some validity, even from a theological perspective. If suppressed minorities pointedly express the fact that they are loved and chosen by God against the oppressive powers, this agrees not only with various biblical witnesses but certainly also with a human sense of justice and theological insight. Certainly the liberating confession of election will never be heard as clearly in the industrial countries of the Western world that set the tone as in the so-called underdeveloped regions of the southern hemisphere. There in recent decades the emphatic topic has been God's "preferential option" in favor of the poor, both in the grass-roots communities and at the diocesan conferences, at theological seminaries as well as in Christian publications. The topic of the election of the suppressed penetrated deep into the organs of the World Council of Churches and has always produced a certain disquiet among proprietors and the powerful; at times it also triggered strong resistance. A simple song of the Brazilian community of those who own no property expresses the concern of the elect as follows (the text is handed down anonymously but definitely originated with Bishop Pedro Casaldaliga, São Felix do Araguaia):

We are ordinary people,
we are the people of God;
We want property on earth,
property in heaven we already have.

This stanza contains all of the ingredients of a classic awareness of election. It assumes the situational tension in which the underprivileged exist. They are explicitly or subliminally denied full human dignity. The poor set their newly gained understanding of their own worth over against this insidious dehumanization: "We, too, are people!"⁶¹ This entitlement of recognition as

61. A stirring report and a significant theological reflection on the reclamation of self-esteem is offered in Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 1973).

humans is predicated on a theological premise: we are the people of God! The demand is aggressive and formally excludes others, namely, the powerful oppressors. Reaching for the honorary designation "people of God" wrests the deepest legitimation from the rulers. Indeed, they asserted themselves as God's governors and carried out their devastating, exploitative power in the name of the highest values. Therefore, whoever wishes to rise up from subhuman damnation must take away the divine legitimation from the dominant elite and their apparatus and themselves take on the role of the "beloved" and "chosen." In the political realm in Germany, we have experienced a shining example of such redesignation of power. For the demonstrators in the GDR (German Democratic Republic), the slogan "We are the people!" was a central confession that undermined the power of the state and brought into play their own worth.

If we focus on the theological content and the theological justification of expressions of election, we acknowledge their legitimate criteria. Judgments about their limited legitimacy are impossible without a careful examination of the social contexts and the societal locus of assertions of election. However, this also applies to theological statements altogether. Theology is always bound by context and never takes place in a vacuum.⁶² Legitimate are a challenged self-consciousness and insisting on preferential treatment by God in cases where justice and the dignity of a minority are trampled underfoot. Applied to situations in the life of ancient Israel, this means that the theological assertions that Israel had been chosen out of the world of nations by Yahweh, raised to an exemplary position, and furnished with universally prevailing salvation (land, temple, Messiah, etc.) presumably originated entirely in the perilous time after the collapse of the Judean state. In that exilic and postexilic period, the communities of Yahweh existed as threatened minorities in complex imperial governmental structures. The communal theologians resisted claims of imperial omnipotence and the craving for power by neighboring societies by regarding themselves as the privileged of God. They used the ideology of the superior for themselves. The covenant with God, election, and the giving of the Torah were for them irrefutable proofs of a special status in Yahweh's universal dominion. With a theological consciousness built up like this, it was possible to survive and preserve one's own values through history. Thus consciousness of election is legitimate in part. Only, what happens when it also continues to be effective in times of power and domination of others? *Vestigia terrent*.

62. See Erhard S. Gerstenberger and Ulrich Schoenborn, eds., *Hermeneutik, sozialgeschichtlich* (Exegese in unserer Zeit 1; Münster: Lit, 1999).

IV.3.3. CREATION OF THE WORLD AND OF HUMANS

Albertz, Rainer. *Weltschöpfung und Menschenschöpfung* (CTM 3; Stuttgart: Calwer, 1974). **Bauks**, Michaela. *Die Welt am Anfang* (WMANT 74; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1997). **Callender**, Dexter E. *Adam in Myth and History* (HSM 48; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2000). **Clifford**, Richard J. *Creation Accounts in the Ancient Near East and in the Bible* (CBQMS 26; Washington, D.C.: Catholic Biblical Association, 1994). **Dohmen**, Christoph. *Schöpfung und Tod* (SBB 17; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1988). **Eberlein**, Karl. *Gott der Schöpfer, Israel's Gott* (2nd ed.; BEAT 5; Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1989). **George**, A. R. *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic* (2 vols.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003). **Görg**, Manfred. *Nilgans und Heiliger Geist: Bilder der Schöpfung in Israel und Ägypten* (Düsseldorf: Patmos-Verlag, 1997). **Groh**, Dieter. *Schöpfung im Widerspruch: Deutungen der Natur und des Menschen von der Genesis bis zur Reformation* (Frankfurt: Surkamp, 2003). **Hüllen**, Jürgen. *Zwischen Kosmos und Chaos: Die Ordnung der Schöpfung und die Natur des Menschen* (Philosophische Texte und Studien 56; Hildesheim: Olms, 2000). **Keel**, Othmar, and Silvia Schroer. *Schöpfung: Biblische Theologien im Kontext altorientalischer Religionen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht; Fribourg: Universitätsverlag, 2002). **Lambert**, W. G. "Enuma Elish," *TUAT* 3.4:565–602. **Pope**, Marvin H. *El in the Ugaritic Texts* (VTSup 2; Leiden: Brill, 1955). **Rüterswörden**, Udo. *Dominium terra: Studien zur Genese einer alttestamentlichen Vorstellung* (BZAW 215; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1993). **Schmidt**, Wolf-Rüdiger. *Der Schimpanse im Menschen—das gottebenbildliche Tier* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlags-Haus, 2003). **Soden**, Wolfgang von. "Atramhasis," *TUAT* 3.4:612–45. **Streibert**, Christian. *Schöpfung bei Deuteroseia und in der Priesterschrift* (BEATAJ 8; Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1993). **Ward**, Keith. *Religion and Creation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

Why do the Holy Scriptures in Hebrew begin with the prehistory and not, for instance, with Abraham, Jacob, or Moses and Israel becoming a people? From purely intra-Israelite perspectives, the universal horizon of Gen 1–11 is indeed difficult to grasp. Countless ethnological mythologies are content to portray their own respective ethnic past, which may have a more or less exclusive character but precisely for this reason lacks a genuine universal knowledge.⁶³ The assumption suggests itself that Israel became acquainted with the creation paradigms of its environment and from them shaped its vision about the beginning of the world and of the beginning of humanity in its own theological work.

Signs of a dimension of creation in theological thought can be found everywhere in the older literary works of Israel's environment. The Ugaritic

63. Examples are provided in the North and South American Indian tribes, which usually ask questions about the beginning of their own group.

texts do not offer a detailed epic of the creation of the world, but there is plenty of evidence for the related motif of the cosmic conflict between deities or god-like powers of chaos.⁶⁴ Baal fights down the sinister opponents and assumes the reign as king. That the interest in creation and the preservation of the world is also behind these myths is demonstrated in the numerous epithets attributed to El and Baal that point to the dimensions of creation: El is the “creator of heaven and earth,” “creator of the creatures,” “father of the gods,” “father of humankind,” and Baal, his ambitious protégé, is responsible for the preservation of the creation.⁶⁵ In Egyptian mythology, too, the perspective looks back to the very earliest beginnings of the world. It reckons with a prehistoric period in which nothing yet existed; prehistoric deities or powers create themselves. Primordial waters belong here as well, especially Atum, who creates the first divine couple, Schu and Tefnut. From this point on, cosmic history runs its course; the succession of creations of gods corresponds with the ancient Eastern pattern.⁶⁶ At least in the hymn of the sun of Akhenaten, the creation of humans is associated with the origin of the world.⁶⁷

The question about the primeval beginning echoes most prominently in the Mesopotamian cultures. The epic and hymnal poetry has preserved many traces of it. The speculation about the early stages of being, when everything was not yet in a particular form or entirely different, is reflected in the “not-yet” formula or in the synonymous portrayals of the distant primeval times. References such as this occur not only in the well-known epic of Enuma Elish (“when the heavens above had not yet been named and the earth below had no yet been called...” I:1–2) but also in other texts. Atramhasis begins with “When the gods were (still) humans” (I:1). M. P. Streck investigated the prologues of twenty-nine Sumerian epic poems and found that the primeval period was often used as background for the actual topic of the narrative.⁶⁸

1. After those days, the days when heaven and earth (were) se(parated) ...
3. after (those years), the years when the forms of being had been (apportioned).

64. See Mark S. Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 37–38, 167–73.

65. See Werner H. Schmidt, *Königtum Gottes in Ugarit und Israel* (BZAW 80; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1961), 49–52; Kaiser, *Wesen und Wirken* (vol. 2 of *Der Gott des Alten Testaments*; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998), 233–78.

66. See Klaus Koch, *Geschichte der ägyptischen Religion* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1993), 111–23, 377–82.

67. See the hymn of the sun, lines 76ff., in Eric Hornung, *Gesänge vom Nil: Dichtungen am Hofe der Pharaonen* (Zurich: Artemis, 1990), 138ff.

68. See M. P. Streck, “Die Prologe der sumrischen Epen,” *Or* 71 (2002): 189–266.

4. the (A)nuna had been birthed, ...
9. the mighty gods presided over the work. The minor gods were responsible for the drudgery.⁶⁹

The humans still (ate) grass with their mouth like sheep.
In those days they (knew) neither grain, nor barley, nor flax.⁷⁰

The examination clearly shows the endeavor to explain and pay tribute to the level of civilization attained (agriculture, irrigation, food, clothing, sexuality etc.) but also their deficits or difficulties (loss of paradise, reduced longevity, illnesses, etc.). The time of the beginning, and there had to have been a beginning, was differentiated positively or negatively from the present time. Babylonian theologians apparently continued to puzzle over and searched for reasons for the deterioration of the world's state of affairs, whereas improvements, in keeping with the principle of achievement, arose on their own. They blamed the trouble of the subordinate deities for the creation of humans, and the noise of humans, depriving the gods of their sleep, was responsible for the flood (Atramhasis). From these handicaps the Judeans constructed the culpable revolt of the first pair of humans against Yahweh's decree as reason for the loss of paradisiacal life.

The Old Testament editors and authors of the Persian period lived in the general intellectual climate of the Babylonian and Persian cultures. What they thought about the beginning of the world and the creation of the universe and humans, they thought, reported, and wrote down in association with that general intellectual climate. We find their legacy on this theme in the creation narratives of Gen 1–3,⁷¹ in some prophetic texts, especially in Second Isaiah and Ezekiel, as well as in a number of psalms and late wisdom writings. Clearly the ancient Israelite authors are especially concerned with the following theological statements: (1) the world was created by the one God Yahweh; (2) the order of creation is good; (3) evil exists inexplicably in the world; (4) humans are godlike creatures; and (5) they are called to decide for what is good. Concerning (1) and (2), the creation of the world and of humans in Gen 1–3 certainly assumes Yahweh as the only creator God. Competitors

69. Ibid., 197 (from the epic Eni and Ninmah).

70. Ibid., 218 (from *How Grain Came to Sumer*); see also the breakdown into portrayals of primeval times, 231–51. The range of motifs is remarkable; generally the primeval time is considered incomplete.

71. There is good reason for the second account (Gen 2:4b–3:24) here being claimed for the Persian period; at least in its universal horizon it is a late product of Hebrew literature (see §III.2.4.4 above).

with the same authority are not really in view. At least they are not picked as a central theme here. Evil belongs to the acts of creation by the creator God at least indirectly. In the account of Yahweh's works (Gen 1:3–25), the serpent is not found. Surprisingly, in Gen 3:1–5 it is attributed a certain antagonistic role: it is “more cunning” than all the animals and generally has typically human qualities, including the possibility of differentiating between good and evil. These intellectual capacities and the cravings of dominion derived from them render the human the actual opponent of God. Practically and theoretically, however, Yahweh remains the only sovereign of the multiform world. The speeches of God in the book of Job (Job 38–42) are a powerful expression of his absolute claim as creator and sovereign. The Babylonian literature is familiar with multiple comparable statements about the dominance of a creator god, yet in Babylonian mythology the local and cultural peculiarities of the rudimentary deities are retained side by side. In the course of time, various prehistories, from Enki to Marduk, have been narrated. The respective exclusive claim to authority, to the extent that it is formulated, sounds figurative and relative. Ahura Mazda, the Persian god, is the sole responsible sovereign of the world. However, hostile, destructive demons appear against him that are able to lure people away from what is good. In the later body of thought of the Zoroastrian religion, one day, at the end of time, they will be destroyed by the lord of the world. Israelite theologians have adopted the question about the primeval beginning, the creation of the world and of humans, from their environment and assimilated it in their own way in the framework of contemporary religions and worldviews in order to paint a portrait of Yahweh, the universal God of creation.

Questions about the pristine beginning, the fundamental world order, and the conquest of evil have been preserved for humanity in a supplemented and modified form of those ancient narratives about creation out of chaos and darkness. They determine at least the Western world until the present and constitute a culturally preshaped frame of thought; it is fundamentally distinct from Asian models. Temporally and spatially, the universe must have had a single starting point.⁷² A scientific monocausality such as this is the late fruit of Jewish-Christian monotheism. The good yet constantly threatened world order still is our favorite model of thought today. It structures comic plots and stock-market reports. The violent overcoming of evil, which in the ancient Near East was essential to substantiating a redemptive life, still

72. See Stephen W. Hawking, *A Brief History of Time: From the Big Bang to Black Holes* (New York: Bantam, 1988). In the Western world there is virtually no opposition to this thought pattern.

provides the foundation today for a variety of pedagogical, legal, and political conceptions. Christian thought has been supplemented by the added emphasis of “creation out of nothing,” the *creatio ex nihilo*. Presumably the notion that prior to the beginning of our world there literally had been “nothing” probably originates from Greek philosophy. In the ancient Eastern world of thought, the existence of the subordinate that has not been questioned is considered the starting point for the world we know. Another serious change in modernity has ensued from the rising scientific worldview. It is mechanistic and inherent and construes the coherence of everything that is and of all life as an evolution effective on its own accord. Without exception, the ancient ideas of creation see a personal, divine will as the decisive impetus for the creation of the world. In the Christian doctrinal system, this already leads to internal contradictions: where a personal deity exists prior to a world as such, there surely cannot be a possibility of speaking of an absolute void, of nonexistence. However, Christian language fundamentally insists on the essential difference between God and the world. In scientific thought, however, the inexplicable Big Bang is the cosmic self-ignition situated in matter. Ancient theologians generally used personal categories of the human experience of God, so as to explain the trans-social realities clearly as well. Contemporary theology generally follows this ancient pattern of explanation but has not yet learned (for instance, from ancient wisdom and mystical tradition) to make the impersonal powers of God useful for a doctrine of creation that is compatible with scientific knowledge. Despite considerable changes in the parameters of the interpretation of the world, the problem of the beginning of the world basically still is the same today as it was three millennia ago.

On (3) above, the psalms of the Old Testament, more than Gen 1–3, have preserved mythological components of the ancient Eastern ideas of creation. They are still able to speak naturally of the battle of chaos. The only God of creation must be successful against the original powers before he is able to create the good order. They personify the evil powers that can be encountered in various ways and in the reality experienced.

You divided the sea by your might; you broke the heads of the dragons in the waters.

You crushed the heads of Leviathan; you gave him as food for the creatures of the wilderness.

You cut openings for springs and torrents; you dried up ever-flowing streams.

Yours is the day, yours also the night; you established the luminaries and the sun.

You have fixed all the bounds of the earth; you made summer and winter. (Ps 74:13–17; cf. 77:17–20; 104:5–9).

Here the names of the chaotic powers known from the Ugaritic myths are preserved. Only after their destruction or controlling their powers does life have a chance. The wonderfully harmonious Egypticizing Ps 104 marvels effusively at how the tamed chaotic water produces and maintains life. Persian religion does indeed shift the overcoming of evil into the final phase of creation. In Jewish apocalyptic and in Christianity (as well as in Islam), this shift has been adopted creatively. The mythical ideas of the creation of the world and the accomplishment of good today fills, for instance, the productions of comics and cyberspace and are found again in true-to-life reproduction in various religious groups for whom the scientific-technical model of the world seems all too threatening. Such mythical veils are custodians for the lived dilemma of coming to terms with the destructive powers in everyday life. Thus the problem of evil also is attested as a disturbing question to humanity in the earliest written testimonials of Mesopotamia. In spite of different models of explanation for the world (personal, mechanistic), the behavior over against the destructive powers has remained almost monotonously the same. Wherever conflicts exist among people, projections of everything evil begin against the other party, whether in individual, group, national, or global contexts. Psychology and social anthropology are able to explain these strategies of separation and attachment in part.⁷³ The understanding that forced solutions promise little effective success in “eliminating evil” has not been able to change the archaic behavior patterns fundamentally, despite notable successes of peace strategies of many kinds (South Africa, overcoming the dictatorship of the GDR, Amnesty International, etc.).

On (4) and (5), Old Testament anthropology emphasizes the image of God, dependence, rebelliousness, transitoriness, and the culpability of the human. In the Hebrew Scriptures the expressions are spread broadly, very diverse, and cannot be harmonized. To what extent particular strands of anthropological images were dominant in the Persian period is difficult to determine. Since the bulk of the Holy Scriptures were available or were precisely written during that period, we may assume that dynamic concepts, conditioned by situation and society, existed alongside one another and in succession. Some examples may be noted here. Where is the apparently somewhat whining lament about the transitoriness of the human to be established: in a particular historical, social, or cultural situation? “You have made my days a few handbreadths, and my lifetime is as nothing in your sight.

73. See, e.g., René Girard, *The Scapegoat* (trans. Yvonne Freccero; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986); it addresses attempts at ensuring one's own integrity and/or at overcoming bottled-up frustrations.

Surely everyone stands as a mere breath" (Ps 39:5).⁷⁴ "All people are grass; their constancy is like the flower of the field" (Isa 40:6; see also Job 14:1–12; Pss 90:2–12; 103:15–16; 129:6–7). Sometime during the first millennium B.C.E. the self-reflection in view of the fate of death does indeed seem to have reached a particular level. The late Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic is also particularly concerned with the lament about the loss of life and the search for constancy. "At the very first light of dawn, Enkidu lifted up his head, lamenting before Šamaš, his tears flowing before the rays of the sun: I appeal to you, O Šamaš, on account of my life so precious!" (VII:90–93).⁷⁵

His friend Gilgamesh laments the deceased profusely:

Hear me, O young men, hear me! / Hear me, O elders [of the populous city, Uruk,] hear me! I shall mourn Enkidu, my friend, / like a professional mourning woman I shall lament bitterly. The axe at my side, in which my arm trusted, / the sword of my belt, the shield in front of me; my festive garment, the girdle of my delight: / a wicked wind has risen up against me and robbed me. ... Now what sleep is it that has seized [you?] / You have become unconscious and cannot hear [me!]. (VIII:42–49, 55)⁷⁶

This lament is part of the standard version of the epic from the first millennium B.C.E.; in older editions it is not available in this form and thus seems to match the atmosphere of the time. According to the witness of contemporary texts, earlier periods apparently anticipated the individual end of life differently—perhaps with more composure or more submission.

Similar things can be observed with regard to the determination of the nature of the human being. "What are human beings?" is a leading anthropological question in many parts of the Hebrew canon (Pss 8:5–9; 144:3–4; Job 7:17; 15:14). It receives remarkably contrasting responses. Let us take two references from the Psalms as a starting point.

O LORD, what are human beings that you regard them, or mortals that you think of them? They are like a breath; their days are like a passing shadow. (Ps 144:3–4)

74. Gerstenberger, *Zu Hilfe*, 70.

75. Following George, *Gilgamesh Epic*, 1:639.

76. Ibid., 1:655, 657; after Enkidu's burial Gilgamesh sets out in search for the herb of life, which is then stolen from him by a serpent on the journey home from the end of the world (see 70–99). Alongside the standard version of the epic there are extant partial narratives dealing with the fate of death (175–208).

There are many analogous statements about transitoriness and emotional laments about it (see above); over against God the human being appears as infinitely inferior, less well off, a breath. But this is also contrasted by powerful claims to power:

What are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them? Yet you have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honor. (Ps 8:4–5)

The claim to divine authority over creation (8:6–8) also resonates in other passages of Scripture (Gen 1:26–28; 11:1–9). The two identical questions about the essence of the human being in Pss 144 and 8 also provoke contrary answers. It is clear to all tradents in the Hebrew canon that the human being is created by God and is not autonomous due to inherent creativity. It seems that in the Western tradition since the Renaissance and the Enlightenment this foundational biblical assertion has been increasingly relativized and forgotten. Emmanuel Levinas, among others, has castigated the “mistake” of a vainglorious creation (*cogito ergo sum*) that began with Descartes. The fact is that the modern scientific and technical developments, which constantly lend human beings new, incredible possibilities of manipulation, would not be possible without the “modern” consciousness of self and dominion. Yet we are able to trace the problem back to the ancient texts of the Bible. Already in antiquity the self-assessment as “maker,” “responsible,” and “like God” has always captured the individual, even on the premise of creatureliness. To what extent the Persian period is relevant specifically to the strands of experiences of powerlessness and power of the Israelites cannot be established. The contrasting formation of consciousness, however, can readily be fitted into the intellectual climate of an imperial society. The dilemma of the modern “maker” is described by H. E. Richter.⁷⁷

IV.3.4. HISTORY AND THE END OF THE WORLD

Brokoff, Jürgen, and Bernd U. Schipper, eds. *Apokalyptik in Antike und Aufklärung* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2004). **Fukuyama**, Francis. *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992). **Gaisbauer**, R. Gustav, et al., eds. *Weltendämmerungen: Endzeitvisionen und Apokalypsevorstellungen in der Literatur* (Passau: Erster Dt. Fantasie-Club, 2003). **Grabbe**, Lester L., and Robert D. Haak, eds. *Knowing the End from the Beginning: The Prophetic, the Apocalyptic and Their Relationship*

77. Horst-Eberhard Richter, *Der Gotteskomplex* (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1980).

(JSPSup 46; New York: T&T Clark, 2003). **Hanson**, Paul D. *The Dawn of Apocalyptic* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975). **Huntington**, Samuel P. *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996). **Kloppenborg**, John S., and John W. Marshall, eds. *Apocalypticism, Anti-Semitism, and the Historical Jesus* (JSNTSup 275; New York: T&T Clark, 2005). **Koch**, Kurt. *The Rediscovery of Apocalyptic* (SBT 22; Naperville, Ill: Allensn, 1972). **Mowinckel**, Sigmund. *He That Cometh* (trans. G. W. Anderson; Oxford: Blackwell, 1956). **Moltmann**, Jürgen. *In the End—the Beginning: The Life of Hope* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003). **Müller**, Helmut A., ed. *Kosmologie: Fragen nach Evolution und Eschatologie der Welt* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004). **Roose**, Hanna. *Teilhabe an YHWHs Macht: Endzeitliche Hoffnungen in der Zeit des Zweiten Tempels* (Münster: Lit, 2004). **Roose**. *Eschatologische Mitherrschaft: Entwicklungslinien einer urchristlichen Erwartung* (NTOA/SUNT 54; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht; Fribourg: Academic, 2004). **Schmithals**, Walter. *The Apocalyptic Movement* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1975). **Schreiber**, Stefan. *Das Jenseits: Perspektiven christlicher Theologie* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2003). **Wilder**, A. N. "The Rhetoric of Ancient and Modern Apocalyptic," *Int* 25 (1971): 437–53.

For the approaching eschatological and apocalyptic comprehension of the world by Judaic communities, the Persian rule provides excellent conditions for growth. The Zoroastrian religion provided powerful incentives to comprehend the world newly as a unique, moving process with a violent final renewal.⁷⁸ Especially the prophetic writings, or their tradents, arranged the conceptions of the end of the world and the last judgment under a Yahwist sign. We have already referred to the respective passages above.

The language of the "Day of Yahweh" possibly reaches back to the ancient tribal traditions; in this context, perhaps it meant a settlement with enemies based on given events and occasionally the call for accountability over against one's own people. In the exilic and postexilic period, however, it takes on a new quality as a day of judgment for foreign nations that plagued Israel. The book of Zephaniah, for instance, shows a development to increasingly wide-ranging conceptions. The "Day of Yahweh," on which God's wrath breaks out in a limited context (Zeph 1:14–18), receives more universal features and an eschatological horizon:

I will deal with all your oppressors at that time. And I will save the lame and gather the outcast, and I will change their shame into praise and renown in

78. See G. Lanczkowski, "Apokalyptik I," *TRE* 3:189–91; Rudolf Otto, *Reich Gottes und Menschensohn* (2nd rev. ed.; Munich: Beck, 1940); Stausberg, *Die Religion Zarathushtras*, 1:203–4; Norman R. C. Cohn, *Cosmos, Chaos and the World to Come* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).

all the earth. At that time I will bring you home, at the time when I gather you; for I will make you renowned and praised among all the peoples of the earth, when I restore your fortunes before your eyes, says the LORD. (Zeph 3:19–20; see §III.2.2.1 above)

The notion that nations are responsible for the fate of Israel and must be held accountable surely matured in the postexilic situation. The grandiose portraits of the future found in Second Isaiah belong here. The servant of God shall be made the “light to the nations” (Isa 49:6); Egypt, Cush, and Sheba are offered as ransom for Israel (43:3b). The community of Israel sees itself as the center of the world of nations. Yahweh moves history, including that of the powerful Persian Empire, for Israel (see Isa 45:1–4). He wants to deliver Israel and show it off; this will be stage-managed within history and carried out until the end of history. First it affects the closest oppressive power that Israel experienced: Babylon (Isa 47). In cycles of sayings about the nations, the eschatological horizon widens in the various prophets (see §§III.1.2 and III.2.2 above). In the apocalyptic parts of the Hebrew canon (Isa 24–27; Zech 1–8; 9; 14; Ezek 38–39; and later Dan 2:7), the entire world is envisaged or already included. The inhabited earth becomes desolate and void, as at the beginning of creation (Isa 24:1–6; Zeph 1:2–6). In keeping with the multilayered tradition, which does not follow our logic, the nations rebel against the superior might of Yahweh and battle against him and the divine capital, Jerusalem (see Pss 2; 48; Zeph 14:2). Yahweh, however, conquers all of them by his immense sovereignty,⁷⁹ and Jerusalem becomes what it had always been, albeit unrecognized: the center of the world. Yahweh takes his seat of government in Jerusalem, from which paradisiacal rivers make the earth fertile (Zech 14:3–9). Impressive is the consistency with which the eschatological-apocalyptic texts of the Bible (cf. many Zoroastrian hymns) bring to bear the teleological view of history. From the perspective of creation, the development has a beginning point and correlates with the final goal: the thorough abolition or earthly-human structures and their replacement—following catastrophic acts of destruction—by the just kingdom of God. The end accords with the beginning (see already Hermann Gunkel and others): it is chaotic in part because the good acts of creation, such as the creation of mountains or the separation of day and night, are reversed. Yet in the chaos and following it there opens up the chance for a new beginning in keeping with the redemptive order that God had always intended. It makes headway through the influence of Yahweh and his heavenly hosts and creates ultimate peace and divine justice.

79. See the images of the end-time scenario in Zech 14:12–19; Ezek 39; and Isa 24–27.

For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth; the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating, for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy and its people as a delight. I will rejoice in Jerusalem and delight in my people; no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it, or the cry of distress. ... They shall not labor in vain, or bear children for calamity, for they shall be offspring blessed by the LORD—and their descendants as well. Before they call I will answer, while they are yet speaking I will hear. The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox; but the serpent—its food shall be dust! They shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain, says the LORD. (Isa 65:17–19, 23–25)

Paradisiacal conditions come to the entire world. All the people, regardless of their nationality and faith, will be able to share in the Torah (see Isa 2:2–4; 19:23–24). For the individual believer, security, happiness, prosperity, and extraordinarily long life spans begin; peace rules among all creatures (see also Isa 11:6–10). In contrast to the known human systems, all of which are plagued by imperfections, injustices, and disputes, the reign of Yahweh will bring complete peace and perfect fulfillment of life. It is noteworthy that there is no mention of the resurrection of the dead and of eternal life! Both are opening up in Zoroastrian belief but in Jewish belief do not come to light until the Hellenistic period (see Dan 12). Here, in Third Isaiah, fulfillment of life is solidly the worthwhile relationship of effort and yield, the absence of frustrating fruitlessness in all human endeavors, and the securing of familial tribal lines. In addition, the expansion of life expectancy to one hundred years is dreamed about (Isa 65:20)! In this portrait of the future, Israel plays a special and central role. Under Yahweh's guidance (metaphors: shepherd, flock) Israel will enjoy the privileges of the chosen people (see, e.g., Ezek 34; Isa 60–62), but Yahweh's kingdom is conceived as universal. It knows no boundaries and principally is open to all humans, as already in Gen 12:2–3 and still in Ps 82. The discerned monotheism necessitates the opening to humanity.

A special point in Jewish eschatology deserves to be mentioned: occasionally the figure of the Messiah appears in it who will bring about the rule of justice and peace as God's tool, even by force, if necessary, or as a pure, divine new creation. There is little that can be said about the first emergence of this divine-human person.⁸⁰ The natural, ancient expectation, according to which following the end of a nation-state a scion of the fallen dynasty is

80. Classical investigations are those of Hugo Gressmann, *Der Messias* (FRLANT 43; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1929); Sigmund Mowinckel, *He That Cometh* (2nd ed.; Oxford: Blackwell, 1959); see the excursus on the Messiah and the end of the world above.

able to achieve a restoration of the ancient state of affairs, surely plays an important role in the emergence of future expectations. In the forefront, however, there is probably the idea that, in overcoming all opposition resisting the establishment of his just rule, Yahweh also uses human representatives. These, in the first place, are monarchic figures and, in Judaism, occasionally also priestly ones (see Zech 3; 6; Qumran; e.g., Melchizedek). Later the historical contours of the Messiah fade; increasingly the issue is a divine savior figure who extracanonicaly receives, for instance, the title "Son of Man." This term is at home in the Hebrew Scriptures, for example, in Ezekiel, as Yahweh's address to the prophet, or in Dan 7:13–14 as the title of a divine governor. Christian traditions place Christ in the role of the one who carries out the judgment of the world in place of God (Rev 20–22). Thus the beginnings of the messianic figure can be found in witnesses from the Persian period. As examples, mention may be made of Pss 2; 110; Isa 9:5–6; 11:1–9; Jer 33:14–16; and Ezek 34:23–24.

Of interest is the fact that a comparable development can be observed in the Zoroastrian religion. The group of Ameša Spentas, which has already been mentioned, may be construed as an early hypostasis of Ahura Mazda. The individual powers work in place of and in cooperation with the all-wise lord of the universe. Alongside these beings enters the form of the Saošiyant, a warrior and savior-figure, in the later Avesta, functioning especially as Ahura Mazda's eschatological assistant.⁸¹ From a functional perspective, it is given tasks that are also adopted by the developing appearance of Messiah. In contrast to Old Testament imagination, the Zoroastrian theological language is not shaped by monarchic metaphors. A derivation of the support and deliverer beings from the conceptual reservoir of the state is therefore out of the question; we also intimated that the Judaic theology begins in the realm of the royal conceptions but later moves beyond that. The analogies between Persian and Judaic concepts are evident, despite the differences. The supreme, universal deity uses certain mediator authorities, especially in the control of history and the reckoning of the last days, as we have already encountered them in the discussion of the ideas of angels (see §IV.3.1 above).

The teleological course of history has entered especially the Christian and Muslim theology as an essential pattern of explaining the world. In the West-

81. See Stausberg, *Die Religion Zarathushtras*, 1:150–53; Almut Hintze, "The Rise of the Saviour in the Avesta," in *Iran und Turfan* (ed. Christiane Reck and Peter Zieme; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1995), 77–97; Carsten Colpe, ed., "Altiranische und zoroastrische Mythologie," in *Wörterbuch der Mythologie* (ed. Hans W. Haussig; Stuttgart: Klett, 1965), part 1, vol. 4, e.g., "Eschatologie," "Saošiyant."

ern world this thought pattern has developed an incredible effectiveness.⁸² It has fostered end-time speculations and inspired imperial dreams. All the way into modern times, sediments of a theologically eschatologized understanding of history can be demonstrated in Christian churches in their missionary zeal and in many secular political systems. The roots of Islamic drafts of a present and future rule of God also go back to those Judaic forms of eschatology in the Persian period.

IV.4. ETHOS OF BROTHERLINESS IN THE COMMUNITY OF FAITH

Attali, Jacques. *Brüderlichkeit: Ein notwendige Utopie im Zeitalter der Globalisierung* (Stuttgart: Verlag freies Geistesleben, 2003). **Beck**, Ulrich, and Peter Sopp, eds. *Individualisierung und Integration* (Opladen: Leske & Budrich, 1997). **Crüsemann**, Frank. *Bewahrung der Freiheit* (Munich: Kaiser, 1983). **Crüsemann**. *The Torah: Theology and Social History of Old Testament Law* (trans. Allan W. Mahnke; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996). **Ebersohn**, Michael. *Das Nächstenliebegebot in der synoptischen Tradition* (MThSt 37; Marburg: Elwert, 1993). **Franzoni**, Giovanni. *Die Einsamkeit des Samariters: Impulse für eine neue Ethik der Solidarität heute* (trans. and ed. Marie Luise Grün; Glaube und Leben 15; Münster: Lit, 2003). **Gerstenberger**, Erhard S. *Wesen und Herkunft des "apodiktischen Rechts"* (WMANT 20; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1965). **Otto**, Eckart. *Theologische Ethik des Alten Testaments* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1994). **Perlitt**, Lothar. "Ein einzig Volk von Brüdern," in *Kirche: Festschrift für Günther Bornkamm zum 75. Geburtstag* (ed. Dieter Lührmann and Georg Strecker; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1980), 27–52. **Schmidt**, Werner H. *Die zehn Gebote im Rahmen christlicher Ethik* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1993). **Schreiner**, Josef, and Rainer Kampling. *Der Nächste—der Fremde—der Feind* (NEB Themen 3; Würzburg: Echter, 2000). **Segbers**, Franz. *Die Hausordnung der Tora* (Luzern: Editions Exodus, 1999). **Troeltsch**, Ernst. *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches* (trans. Olive Wyon; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1992). **Tutu**, Desmond. *God Has a Dream: A Vision of Hope for Our Time* (New York: Doubleday, 2004). **Vandenbroucke**, Frank. *Social Justice and Individual Ethics in an Open Society* (Berlin: Springer, 2001). **Weber**, Max. *Ancient Judaism* (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1952). **Weinfeld**, Moshe. *Social Justice in Ancient Israel and in the Ancient Near East* (Minneapolis: Fortress; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1995).

The "theological contribution" of the postexilic, Persian period cannot be overestimated. Through the new formation of the community of Yahweh at

82. See, e.g., Augustine, *City of God*; Joachim von Fiore; on the latter, see R. E. Lerner, *TRE* 17:84–88; Karl Löwith, *Weltgeschichte und Heilsgeschehen* (3rd ed., Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1953).

that time, as indicated above, structures, institutions, and theological speech and thought patterns were “invented” that, among other things, profoundly influenced the Western world of thought and today still serve as an orientation for our own coping with life. This is particularly the case with many basic ethical decisions. At that time they were made in the context of the emerging Judaic community of Yahweh, as a plumb line for individual believers and the collective of related confessions. They are concerned with the individual lifestyle and the communal rules of conduct in everyday life, and they operate under the aspect of Yahweh’s holiness and liturgical tasks and obligations. In the burning ethical situations of conflict today there are often Old Testament-based positions voiced, and even more frequently there are attitudes that unconsciously depend on ancient principles (e.g., the modern assessment of homosexuality, the debates about the emancipation of women, attitudes about property and socialism). For the purpose of a proper treatment of the modern problems, therefore, it is necessary to become conversant with the constellations of antiquity.

The point of departure for our ethical considerations is in fact the confessional family consciousness of the Judaic community established in the Persian period. The community of Yahweh did not perceive itself as simply a local association for a particular purpose but emphatically (though this is not frequently treated as a central theme) as a mutually supportive bond of the family-type. This disposition was supported with covenantal and contractual conceptions from the sphere of economy and politics. In terms of substance, however, the mutual responsibility for one another is based on the bond between brothers and sisters under a great father. In the social crisis described vividly and accurately in Neh 5, the insolvent debtors argue as follows:

Now our flesh is the same as that of our kindred; our children are the same as their children; and yet we are forcing our sons and daughters to be slaves, and some of our daughters have been ravished; we are powerless, and our fields and vineyards now belong to others. (Neh 5:5)

The clan consciousness with its obligation of solidarity and with a familial and ethnic justification is appealed to against class development that is perceived as unjust.⁸³ It is intended for the Yahweh community, which is no longer based on blood relationship. A (natural?) transfer has occurred. The internal realm of the community is predominantly constructed with the ethical principles of the clan. The social regulations of the Pentateuch express the

83. Kippenberg, *Religion und Klassenbildung*.

same process in many instances: "You shall not charge interest on loans to another Israelite. ... On loans to a foreigner you may charge interest, but on loans to another Israelite you may not charge interest" (Deut 23:19–20); "if anyone of your kin falls into difficulty..." (Lev 25:25, 35, 39, 47); "for to me the people of Israel are servants; they are my servants whom I brought out from the land of Egypt" (Lev 25:55). To be theologically correct, it should actually say "they are my children," as for instance in Hos 11, Isa 1:2, 63:8, and Deut 32:5, 20. But the mention of slavery in Egypt elicits the use of the term "slaves." In any case, the crux of the matter is that behind the obligation of solidarity of all believers in Yahweh stands the ethos of brothers and sisters adopted from the clan structure.⁸⁴ The lament liturgy in Isa 63:7–64:11 expresses the idea with emotion: "you, O LORD, are our father" (Isa 63:16; 64:11).⁸⁵ In a postexilic passage of the Book of the Twelve, the family metaphor is expressed in its full significance: "Have we not all one father? Has not one God created us? Why, then, are we faithless to one another, profaning the covenant of our ancestors?" (Mal 2:10). The closeness and responsibility of siblings for one another is given through the fatherhood of God. Whoever does not accept the "brother," showing solidarity, and does not care about him puts one's relationship to Yahweh, the God of the covenant, on the line. Or, as the first letter of John says later: "Whoever says, 'I am in the light,' while hating a brother or sister, is still in the darkness" (1 John 2:9). The close link of the love commandment with reference to God and the obligation of solidarity with reference to the "neighbor" (= brother) arises from the familial structures of the earliest Jewish communities (cf. Mark 12:29–31).

The fundamental ethical values of the Old and New Testament, therefore, are developed from the primary group structures. On principle and without question, full solidarity among people is able to exist. The small group, joined together organically, which in antiquity (and until the rise of the industrial age) also still was an economic, intellectual, and religious entity, demanded the full, unconditional commitment of everyone for all. "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Lev 19:18b; see also 19:34) is a sentence that was gained from this solidarity of families and transferred to the community of faith of the people devoted to Yahweh. Indeed, the "love" commandment over against Yahweh himself (Deut 6:5) can certainly be explained from the vantage point of the familial community and its tutelary deity as well. In the small unit, the deity virtually belongs to the group as a

84. Peritt, "Ein einzig Volk von Brüdern."

85. See Fischer, *Wo ist Jahwe?* (§III.1.2.2 above); Gerstenberger, *Yahweh—the Patriarch*, 13–23; idem, *Theologies in the Old Testament*, 50–61.

chief member; hence it may and must be “loved” as family, as it were. On higher social levels the intimate human vocabulary may at most be used of the deity in a figurative way.⁸⁶

From the perspective of our basic contemporary values of anthropology and ethics, both agreements and tensions arise with regard to the biblical view. If we also take the original social conditions into consideration, the situation becomes clearer. The Judaic community ethos of the Persian period has its source in the foundational structures, roles, and customs of the family and clan units of ancient Israel. Our fundamental values (human dignity, freedom of the individual, democracy, etc.) are owed to the modern, enlightened industrial society. Connections between then and now are, for instance, the high regard for the individual, the rejection of a spiritual hierarchy, the relative equality of the sexes before God, and the like. Tensions are perceived in the case of the status of individual realization and group goals, the meaning of gender differences, the evaluation of the holy and the profane, and so forth. Overall, however, a dialogue beyond the times and social differences with the biblical witnesses is possible, necessary, and fruitful.

IV.4.1. LOVE AND RIGHTEOUSNESS

Life in the ancient family unit and, derived from there, in conjunction with the emerging Jewish community was determined by the intense obligation to showing solidarity in action.⁸⁷ In the ideal case, this meant one for all and all for one, even if this basic behavior pattern also seems to be changed in terms of a masculine prerogative. The male members of the community had to watch over the honor of the family (Gen 34) and to take on obligations of a blood feud among themselves (2 Sam 3:27; Ps 127:5). Feuds among brothers was an exemplary case of the clan's self-destruction; actually, siblings had to support one another unconditionally (see Ps 133). The internal cohesion, of course, was a given and the only guarantee for the common life. As the family narratives in Genesis demonstrate, the family situations were never as exemplary as the ethical obligation intended. Nevertheless, the demand on every member of a group was commonly acknowledged: behave in conformity with the community and be useful to your group, then you will also do well. Different from today, no individual as such had a good chance of survival. This

86. On the social differentiation of ideas of God, see Gerstenberger, *Theologies in the Old Testament*.

87. See David L. Petersen, “Genesis and Family Values,” *JBL* 124 (2005): 5–23.

same ethos of the sibling and familial common good has found its way into the Judaic community of the exilic and postexilic period, with some modifications, to be sure: the authority of the individual heads of families, especially in matters of faith and legal issues and in the outside relationships of the small groups was restricted (see Deut 18:9–13; 21:18–21), and the blood feud was repealed. But the community's responsibility, especially for the weak, the poor, and the disabled, as already mentioned several times, is a feature that ties directly into the ethos of the family and places it under the control of the local authorities (Lev 19:13–14; 25:5–55; Deut 15:4, 11). In a closely knit solidarity under Yahweh such as this, there really must not be any "poor," and the community must support all of its members. The key term "love" (Lev 19:18, 34) is a reasonable demand, if one removes purely emotional, contemporary options and focuses on the partnership in showing solidarity with those denominationally related. The achievement principle, in contrast to all economically driven human organizations, finds no use, or only in a very limited way, in the intimate association of the community. The prohibition of taking interest from the "brother" was a sure piece of evidence for this (Deut 23:20–21; Exod 22:24; Lev 25:36). The form and content of the common ethical prohibitions in the Old Testament⁸⁸ provide further references to the social rootedness of the divine commandments and their communal purpose. It is possible to describe the extensive relevant text material of the Torah as catechetical literature originating to a large extent from the clan ethos.⁸⁹ The negatively formulated instructions serve the socialization of those growing up and the broader instruction and orientation of all those responsible for and in the community. The statements in question (earlier incorrectly labeled "apodictic law") are found mainly in the Decalogue and in some passages in the books of Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy; based on the evidence of ancient Eastern legal edicts and collections, they have not lost anything in the juridical realm but occur more frequently in the wisdom teachings directed mainly to advice and admonition. Their foremost goal is to exclude behavior that leads to the destruction of the community. The social norms of the Decalogue are good examples, as are the sporadically gathered negative regulations in Lev 18; 19 and Deut 22–23; 25. The prohibitive form betrays the style of cautions that continue to be used in the process of education until today: "Do not do this; it harms you and the others around you!" Models of this are the oldest and hence briefest and most elementary prohibition of the Decalogue,

88. See Gerstenberger, *Wesen und Herkunft*, 110–44; idem, *Theologies in the Old Testament*, 62–75.

89. Thus the interpretation as juridical literature common in Old Testament scholarship is rejected; see Gerstenberger, *Leviticus*, 238–61.

translated in an analogous linguistic-mental pattern: "You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal" (Exod 20:13–15; Deut 5:17–19). The legal facts related to murder, adultery, and theft are minor matters; the focus is on the actions that destroy community, which also renders the perpetrator an outcast; in other words, it robs him or her of the familial, communal support, of his or her livelihood. This interpretation applies to all catechetical prohibitions in the Old Testament and beyond this for death threats⁹⁰ and many casuistically formulated statements, which actually do not solve a case but rather intend to describe a special case of prohibition.

Conversely, of interest are the rest of real legal provisions, which are related to the communal practice of law and have been integrated into the canon of Scripture, especially the so-called Book of the Covenant (Exod 21–23) and parts of Deuteronomy (Deut 21–25). Both groups of texts, however, are already interspersed with nonlegal additions and reformulations pointing to communal instruction. Over against comparable ancient Near Eastern legal collections such as the Code of Hammurabi, the later Middle-Assyrian or the earlier Neo-Sumerian laws,⁹¹ or also various royal edicts,⁹² Old Testament compositions in their form of address are used for certain points or significantly stand out. This form of address agrees with the practice of communal proclamation or instruction. All of the texts of the Pentateuch were indeed read aloud to the members of the community, apparently, as already mentioned, in gatherings related to worship or serving the purpose of orientation (Neh 8). The older parts of former legal collections, which in part are still kept legally neutral in the third-person singular, attract attention by the compelling personal style of proclamation. The book of Deuteronomy is almost entirely reshaped into Moses' address to the community and its individual hearers. In this manner, passages reproducing formerly objective facts appear as a sermon, as attested, for instance, by Deut 22:1–12; 23:4–26; 24:6–22; and 25:11–19.

The legal parts of the Old Testament rules of conduct are predominantly dedicated to the compensation for damage and the reclamation of internal

90. The oft-used term "right to die" is inherently impossible; see Erhard S. Gerstenberger, "‘Apodiktisches’ Recht, ‘Todes’ Recht?" in *Gottes Recht als Lebensraum* (ed. Peter Mommer et al.; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1993), 7–20; idem, "‘He/They Shall Be Put to Death’: Life-Preserving Divine Threats in Old Testament Law," *Ex Auditu* 11 (1995): 43–61.

91. See the handling of the "legal codes" in *TUAT* 1.1:17–95 by W. H. P. Römer, H. Lutzmann, and R. Borger.

92. See especially Fritz Rudolf Kraus, *Ein Edikt des Königs Ammi-šaduqa of Babylon* (SDIO 5; Leiden: Brill, 1958).

peace of the group, as is also mostly the case with comparable ancient Near Eastern texts. Their ethos has a neighborly orientation. In the case of contracts and disputes, the partner or opponent originally is the *rēa* “neighbor”; in postexilic texts he becomes the “brother” (especially in Deuteronomy) and the *āmīt* “fellow-believer” (Lev 5:21; 18:20; 19:11, 15, 17; 24:19; 25:14–15, 17). The justice to strive for in housing and work settlements, among different clans, is to be clearly distinct from the solidarity within the bounds of the family. While the commitment for one another within the family occurs unconditionally, the mutual obligation with descending levels of relationship decreases. This needs to be recognized in the case of stipulations regarding blood feud or the levirate. The sense of justice requires that more distant relatives than those of the first level, in other words, all who live under the same roof, as well as those only associated in a neighborly way, are increasingly measured with legal and economic yardsticks. This is where the principles of *do ut des*, commercial exchange, and the stronger one become visible. For the first time, the broad outlines of righteous behavior among them are formulated and passed on orally or in written form. Local courts made up of clan elders administer justice; generally the public opinion in the settlement is sufficient in carrying through and keeping verdicts and contracts agreed upon in their presence. The emerging Jewish community is now determined to create brotherly conditions in the domestic sphere. Yet they cannot do without the judicial regulations of the distribution of property, questions of adultery and inheritance, and handling criminal cases. To this extent the local community of Yahweh resembles the villages and towns in Israel or is identical with them. The judicial consciousness also produces institutions and rules in the brotherly community of faith. Common property existed only occasionally, for instance, in Jewish sects (Qumran; early Christian groups). Marital relationships were protected with all their might (Lev 18). It is nevertheless true that the theologians of the postexilic period want to put “righteousness” in the service of “brotherly love.” Hence the exceptions of the tough application of the law (cf. Lev 25:25–55 with various examples: the formulation “You shall not rule over them with harshness,” 25:43, 46, 53, can also be read as “not according to the prevailing law of slavery”). The strong social component in the rules of life constantly points to equal status, like the togetherness prefigured in the family. They also keep on striving to shape the regulations of the Torah more humanely by linking them with Yahweh. Central ideas and texts serve as markers of the special considerate relationship within the community of Yahweh. Thus Lev 19:2 contains a motto for the entire chapter: “You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.” Twice the Decalogue is a signal for the following collections. Deuteronomy 6:4 contains a summary of the Torah: “Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone.” In the personal

suffix of the first-person plural, the community is represented; though unexpressed, the double commandment of love is already announced here with regard to Yahweh and the fellow-believers. The idea of the covenant wants to provide help for the formation of the community (see Ps 50:5: "Gather to me my faithful ones, who made a covenant with me by sacrifice!").

All in all, the community establishes the standard for the ethical conduct of the members by means of their experts in Scripture and religious functionaries. Some narratives describe how the process of finding the truth took place in practice: Exod 18 narrates that the Midianite priest Jethro gave Moses, who lacked understanding (!), the practical advice to decentralize the administration of justice. In the case of a religious offense, Lev 24:12 and Num 15:34 leave the decision to an oracle from God, whereas Deut 17:8–13 mentions a "judge" and a high court in (the temple of?) Jerusalem as the ultimate legal authority. In the Pentateuch, however, Moses remains the central figure, and Aaron, who is assigned and subordinate to him, is the mediator between Yahweh and the community. In plain language, this means that the office of the interpreter of the Torah, the teacher and prophet, is decisive for establishing and continuing the education in the divinely willed ethos of the community of Yahweh. In the postexilic period, hence from the beginning, this office was not undisputed. The people complain against Moses (Exod 16:2–8; Num 14:2–35; 17:6–15), and competing office-bearers contest his role as leader (Num 12:1–15; 16:1–19). For the postexilic community, this means that in the leadership of the community there were factions or schools who argued over the claim of leadership. According to the tradition, Moses asserted himself against all critics; in the serious crisis of the uprising of Korah and his collaborators, he even had to plead for the life of the rebellious people so as to rescue them from Yahweh's punishment. On the announcement of Moses, the earth swallowed the rebels (Num 16:20–32). This is how one imagined the legitimation of the true representative of God.

The foundation for the community's life and ethics is thus formed by the teaching and preaching office, which is symbolized in the figure of Moses. Especially the expressions and contents of the book of Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy reveal that in the communal and worship-related process of interpreting the Torah the core values of love (solidarity) and justice were communicated. They form the foundation of Jewish and then also of Christian ethics. In interpreting Old Testament norms and models, it must be noted as a basic hermeneutical principle, however, that the social and intellectual conditions today are different from those of biblical times. The individual is the elementary part of today's society, no longer the primary, autochthonous small group. Further, the "we-groups" today often have assumed other forms and functions, as the many social-scientific analyses of

the present indicate. Nevertheless, the dialogue with the biblical forebears is urgently needed, in order that we might evaluate the positions of individuals and groups afresh and arrive at theologically responsible concepts and rules for our reality of life.

IV.4.2. SANCTIFICATION AND SEPARATION

Ethical and legal norms are responsible only in part for ethical behavior. In antiquity, but also in modernity, religious and magic taboo rules are added, which elude rational interpretation to a large extent.⁹³ The Old Testament writings are particularly concerned with the complex of imagination regarding the holiness of Yahweh and his community (see Exod 19:3–6; Lev 11:44–45; 19:2; Deut 7:6; Isa 6:3; Ps 99:3–9). That God and the places of his presence are surrounded by the aura of holiness (= center of power, of danger), is a commonly known phenomenon in the history of religions. The transference of holiness to an entire community of faith is not a matter of course. Generally it is only select individuals or professional groups who are raised to this special category. The declaration “You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy” (Lev 19:2) has far-reaching implications for the ethical conduct of those concerned. “Holiness” is probably best understood as the believed and experienced sphere of numinous power.⁹⁴ It is always profiled as the “Other” or as “wholly Other” over against the profane; both realities are mutually irreconcilable. An unprepared individual must not encounter the holy. Only by means of a special way of life and keeping specific precautionary measures may the human qualify for the holy.

In the Old Testament, as in the entire ancient Near East, the presence of God radiates holiness or highly concentrated, highly dangerous power. The temple as Yahweh’s dwelling place is the center of this phenomenon. All of the places where the divine “glory,” the Shekinah, can be seen are equally full of it. The human is allowed to approach the holy only after corresponding ritual purification, so that he may not be killed as a result of inadmissible contact, as in the case of Uzzah touching the ark of God (2 Sam 6:6–7). Priests must wear special vestments when serving at the altar; by means of fasting and sexual abstinence, they must prepare for each encounter with the holy and

93. Anthropologists such as Mary Douglas have freed us from the illusion that modern Western ethics manages to do without irrational values; see her *Purity and Danger* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966).

94. See Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy* (2nd ed.; New York: Oxford University Press, 1956).

bring along utensils that are ritually pure, as well as conduct themselves in a ritually appropriate way. The holiness of Yahweh, however, is not restricted to places and times where the God of Israel dwells. It overflows to the community of faith; in other words, the members of the community of Yahweh are to live constantly, in their everyday affairs, in the presence of God. "You shall be holy" (Lev 19:2) denotes the permanent requirement for all of life. At pivotal points, therefore, where the incompatibility of the holy with the profane shows, the Scriptures demand special behavior shunning impurity. It begins with eating food. In the case of plants, there are no problems arising, other than if they are poisonous; in the case of animate food, obtained from sacrificial killing, utmost caution is imperative. "Every animal that has divided hoofs but is not cleft-footed or does not chew the cud is unclean" (Lev 11:26a); in addition, crawling animals and cadavers are generally taboo (Lev 11; cf. Deut 14). Taboos of contact also apply to blood, certain illnesses, especially diseases of the skin and leprosy, as well as in the sphere of sexuality and hygiene (Lev 12–14). Bodily discharges have an extremely polluting effect. They call for immediate washing rituals in order to reintegrate the affected in the community (Lev 15). Ritual impurity⁹⁵ is communicable from person to person and via concrete intermediaries (in the Mishnah, even via casting a shadow), whereas purity is not. This was decided by an interpretative discussion (Hag 2:1–13). For this reason impurity impairs interpersonal conduct to a significant extent. Sexual contact, for instance, is strictly regulated. According to ancient understanding, sexual intimacy with a menstruating woman (Lev 15:19; 18:19; 20:18) is most dangerous and is subject to the threat of death.⁹⁶ Precautionary measures that are intended to prevent taboo violations and touching the impure obstruct human contact with one another. In extreme instances they lead to the exclusion of someone "impure" from the community, as in the case of psoriasis or similar skin diseases. If, after involved assessments of the symptoms by an expert priest, the diagnosis of an "infectious, divinely caused sickness" is established, there is no further possibility of healing, neither medically nor socially.

The person who has the leprosy shall wear torn clothes and let the hair of his head be disheveled, and he shall cover his upper lip and cry out, "Unclean, unclean." He shall remain unclean as long as he has the disease; he is unclean. He shall live alone; his dwelling shall be outside the camp. (Lev 13:45–46)

95. On the purity laws in Leviticus, see Gerstenberger, *Leviticus*, 147–210.

96. See Gerstenberger, "He/They Shall Be Put to Death," 43–61.

Social separations of this kind denote the breaking off of all behavior showing solidarity, the annulment of essential community obligations. At an rate, it is taken into consideration in a few cases only, for instance, in regard to particular criminal acts such as unintentional homicide (Deut 19:1–13). Generally familial and communal solidarity are the foundation of life; they are not to be touched. One can appreciate how difficult it was for ethicists of that time to question this basic value.

The taboos surrounding Yahweh's holiness seem to point back to archaic times. They are not a discovery of the exilic and postexilic period or of the Israelites in their specific community of faith. Other nations and religions know comparable fears of contact and mingling, for instance, the Hittites with regard to sexuality, the priestly disposition,⁹⁷ and the Persians concerning touching the dead, excrements, and sexual acts.⁹⁸ Occasionally the Old Testament also shows ancient magical, ritual warnings. They were probably adopted in the wake of holiness taboos and apparently originate from folk religion, despite the conscious Yahweh-orientation:

You shall keep my statutes. You shall not let your animals breed with a different kind; you shall not sow your field with two kinds of seed; nor shall you put on a garment made of two different materials. (Lev 19:19)

A woman shall not wear a man's apparel, nor shall a man put on a woman's garment; for whoever does such things is abhorrent to the LORD your God. You shall not sow your vineyard with a second kind of seed, or the whole yield will have to be forfeited, both the crop that you have sown and the yield of the vineyard itself. You shall not plow with an ox and a donkey yoked together. You shall not wear clothes made of wool and linen woven together. (Deut 22:5, 9–11)

Several other orders betraying similar primeval fear of breaching a taboo could be mentioned: "You shall not boil a kid in its mother's milk" (Exod 23:19b; 34:26b); the blood of an offering must not come in contact with anything leavened (Exod 23:18a; 34:25); and sexual acts with animals are frowned upon (Exod 22:19; Lev 18:23; 20:15–16; Deut 27:21). All of these behaviors, which were dangerous in a vague manner and even then could not be explained in a rational manner and were incompatible with faith in

97. See Hans Martin Kümmel, "Rituale in hethitischer Sprache," *TUAT* 2.2:282–92; Albrecht Goetze, "Hittite Instructions," *ANET*, 207–11; idem, *Kleinasien* (Munich: Beck, 1957), 161ff.

98. See Mary Boyce, *History of Zoroastrianism*, 1:294–324; Stausberg, *Die Religion Zarathushtras*, 1:135–41; 2:263–74.

the holy God, are strictly prohibited. They destroy the relationship with God and the community. Apparently they found their way into the Scriptures especially in association with the early Jewish community's theology of holiness and therefore also must be considered as characteristic of the respective time. Each society has its taboos, especially also its fears of interbreeding. As already mentioned, experts from the social sciences such as Mary Douglas have long verified this.⁹⁹ The emerging Yahweh community, perhaps analogously to Persian religiosity (taboo of corpses!), became particularly sensitive against many forms of cultic pollution. The theology of holiness, bearing such fear, was the focal point for many precautionary measures that, in turn, had a major effect on human conduct. Fears of taboo, for instance, with regard to certain "disgusting" small animals, can scarcely be harmonized with faith in the overall good creation of Yahweh. These are to be mentioned in passing only. As far as we know, the theologians of holiness of that time ignored or endured this tension.

Whoever must be cautious with regard to how to move in everyday life, so as not to violate religious taboos unintentionally, will think in relative terms about obligations to love and justice in social conduct. Jesus addressed this problem in the parable of the Good Samaritan. In close range, the fear of pollution at worst—as in the case of someone who caught a serious skin disease—can prevent any relationship with the other. The psalms of individual lament provide an idea of how distrust and fear among relatives also turns life in the intimate group into hell for those who are seriously ill or victims of misfortune (Pss 40:6–10; 55:13–15; 88:9, 19). A particularly impressive example for the fact that taboos influence ethical conduct to others is the relationship of the sexes to one another and the determination of "correct" sexual conduct as a whole. The decisions made at that time and recorded in the biblical writings, given a certain selectivity, have pointed the way for Jewish and Christian ideas of morality; they continue to have a powerful effect in religious as well as secular contexts.

We may mention details only in brief. Monogamous marriage probably gained a normative character beginning with the postexilic period. Previously the husband's polygamy was not problematic. In the textual correlation with the theological concept of the father, the idea emerges for the first time that the covenant with the woman married in the early years has almost a sacramental character (Mal 2:14–16). The husband is addressed; he is reminded of his obligation to loyalty. This amazes immensely in the patriarchal context. The man has entered into a covenant with her, and that

99. Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger*.

in the eyes of Yahweh (2:14). The passage uses the singular in the Hebrew Scriptures. It is possible that in the background are mystical ideas of a human being that was separated into two sexually differentiated creatures through the creative intervention of Yahweh but that they were nevertheless destined to become "one flesh" (see Gen 2:21–24). In this context, at any rate, the concept of holiness promotes the common bond between both genders. The blood taboo had a separating effect in every regard. The rooms of the house used by husbands and wives were possibly separated. In many cultures and religions, the separation of the sexes is a basic fact. Physical contact and mingling of spheres defined by gender, especially with regard to tools, places of work, clothing, hairstyle, and so forth, were considered dangerous. They could muddle the beneficial order, render it ineffective, and open the door to chaos. Especially sexual intimacy was surrounded by precautions, and this was particularly applicable to its official beginning in the bridal night of the wedding celebration. The bride had to enter marriage as a virgin, and the bridegroom became one with her in complete darkness (to avoid the glances of demons? so that the couple would remain anonymous? see Gen 29:21–28). Any sexual intercourse with a menstruating woman, as already mentioned, meant serious danger for the body and life of both. Should the woman's waiting period provide freedom over against the husband's desire? Or was the regulation intended to focus the sexual activity of both on the most fertile hours in the female cycle? In any case, it is important that it was not the personal need for affection or the sexual drive that directed the sexual intimacy, but rather irrational ideas about the danger of the female blood. In part, the discrimination against the female gender in Judaism and Christianity can be viewed as a long-term consequence of an elevated mistrust of men over against women, for apart from the natural competitive behavior of both parents in the family (see 1 Sam 25:14–25; Gen 27:6–28:5; 30:1–2), it was surely the blood taboo that contributed to men meeting women with nervousness and suspicion. The resultant accusation that women are more susceptible to alien cults and beyond that to evil than men has hardened into hostile dispositions in many instances. This is true, for instance, of the "story of the first sin," which could also be read as a narrative about the intellectual creation of man (Gen 3, esp. v. 16), or in the case of the stereotypical judgments of the Deuteronomistic tradents, according to which foreign princesses led the kings of Israel astray religiously (1 Kgs 11:1–6; 21:4–16, 23). In the postexilic prophetic writings, the breaking away from Yahweh is personified as feminine and brutally punished (Ezek 16; 23), and Zech 5:5–8 is an Old Testament highpoint of the sweeping disparagement of women:

Then the angel who talked with me came forward and said to me, "Look up and see what this is that is coming out." I said, "What is it?" He said, "This is a basket coming out." And he said, "This is their iniquity in all the land." Then a leaden cover was lifted, and there was a woman sitting in the basket! And he said, "This is Wickedness." So he thrust her back into the basket, and pressed the leaden weight down on its mouth.

Evil as a whole and the comprehensive guilt of Israel is symbolized in the figure of a woman in the lead basket. Little wonder that subsequent generations of male theologians have continued to construct the myth of the depravity of woman.¹⁰⁰

Particularly grave were the sexual practices denounced as "illegitimate" at that time, especially sexual intercourse with animals and, associated with it, the sexual relations between members of the same sex. Pedophilia is not attested, nor is anal or oral sex as such. Lesbian relationships are likewise not explicitly picked out as a central theme; however, in certain priestly spheres of the Old Testament the homophilia of men is a major problem. While some narrative cycles acknowledge the close relationship between friends very naturally in erotic terms (David-Jonathan in 1 Sam 18:20; esp. 2 Sam 1:17–27, with v. 26 as the apex; Naomi and Ruth in Ruth 1, with 1:16–17 as a formula of obligation), texts close to the priests place a heavy cultic ban on such relationships (see Lev 20:13). Calmness and goodwill over against the phenomenon of homosexuality, which is always present, and frightened repulsion exist alongside one another. Irrational taboos burden interpersonal relationships and, in the case of homophilia, have led to an unimaginable history of suffering on the part of the affected minority in the Christian tradition.¹⁰¹

Consciousness of election and taboo creates factions, classes, and castes within a community and to a high degree has an exclusionary effect on the outside. The boundaries can be sweeping over against all those who are different or focus on particular neighbors and competitors. The term *gôyim*, "nations," develops into a disparaging designation for all non-Jews; self-descriptions such as "just," "pious," "chosen," and "holy," take on the sound of absolute superiority in a countermove. In the "community law" of Deut

100. See Helen Schüngel-Straumann, *Die Frau am Anfang* (Freiburg: Herder, 1989).

101. On the sacral background of damning same-sex practices, see Erhard S. Gerstenberger, "Homosexualität im Alten Testament," in *Schwule, Lesben ... —Kirche* (ed. Klaus Bartl; Frankfurt: Spener, 1996), 124–58; on the history of excluding homosexuals, see John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

23, presumably arising from a contemporary, special event, only the Ammonites and Moabites from east of the Jordan are isolated as incompatible: 23:4–7 offer a political and moral reason, while Gen 19:30–38 mentions sexual perversion, more specifically incest between father and daughter, as the reason for incompatibility.¹⁰² The construction of separating differences makes use of many concepts, among which the reproach of sexual aberration plays an important role. Fortunately, the biblical writings also reflect starting points of building bridges between ethnic and religious groupings. In view of magic and taboo-like interpretations of reality, the hermeneutical problems only seem to be more difficult than in the realm of rational patterns of understanding. Indeed, the archaic fears of taboo have never disappeared completely, even in the modern era of scientific approach and rationality. On the contrary, then as now, they seem to destroy the achievements of enlightenment.

IV.4.3. UNIVERSALITY AND TOLERANCE

The discovery of the one, universal creator and guide of history, for which the exilic and postexilic environment provided the impetus, forced the theologians on the subject and the leaders of the Judaic communities, but also all of their members, to think beyond their own group and to face the questions about the “others.” Whoever speaks of the one God of the entire world and is aware of his or her own minority situation would like to know in what way God acts outside his chosen flock, what relationship one’s own community has to “those outside,” and what purpose the drawing up of boundaries has in any case. In the canonical writings, numerous witnesses who faced the issue get a chance to speak. They did so with remarkable generosity and sharpness and also expressed themselves self-critically. The reflections of the biblical tradents with regard to God, humans, and the world are unique indeed, especially since they yielded a major consequence. Nevertheless, they must be viewed in the context of the world at the time, in which, among other historical and social conditions, all kinds of essentially human ideas and experiences were dealt with. The Vedic, Buddhist, Taoist, and Avestian traditions, later also the Islamic ones, have had a comparably deep effect on later cultures and

102. See also the sexual prejudices in Israel against all Canaanites, e.g., in Gen 9:20–27; Lev 18:24–29; and 20:22–26. On this issue, see also Erhard S. Gerstenberger, “Andere Sitten—andere Götter,” in *Wer ist wie du, Herr unter den Göttern?* (ed. Ingo Kottsieper et al.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1994), 127–41.

religious orientations, as was true of the Hebrew Scriptures of the emerging Jewish community.

In the history of religion it may be assumed that insights of faith were first processed within and for one's own group. They are expressed in conduct and cultic practice focused on the community. This was also the case in Israel and in the nascent Jewish community. The same probably also applies for religious groups of all times and places without exception. The main attention and by far the greatest part of spiritual power is applied to the shaping of one's own community life, including individual behavior. However, in times of national, international, and today also global integration, religiously organized people also have to conduct themselves toward other communities of faith. Between complete isolation (rarely in antiquity, today practically impossible) and boundless openness for humanity, between an urge for missions and a tendency toward syncretism, all kinds of patterns of relationship are offered. Exilic and postexilic Israel did not pursue a one-track, dogmatic path but examined various arguments in the relevant documents of faith and tested several concepts.

Already in the course of reviewing the literature (see ch. III above), we came upon some models of opening and segregating the community. These observations we want to take up and round off briefly, always from the vantage point: What meaning did the universal frame of the monotheistic theology have for the follower of Yahweh? Many theological constructions of the one world probably did not affect the individual, or only indirectly so. But where did and will the opening or the sealing off of one's own boundaries become existentially important?

Creation, primeval history, and the genealogies of the nations (Gen 1–11) may, as already mentioned, awaken or sharpen the sense of cosmopolitanism. This probably was precisely the intent of the tradents who did not want the Pentateuch to begin with either Abraham or Moses. The message is clear: with all the assurance of Yahweh's election, Israel can still only understand itself as part of a comprehensive creation and world of humanity. The tiny nation attained its believed preeminence secondarily. For this reason many passages of the Hebrew Bible, in all three parts of the canon, depict Yahweh's community in a sea of nations, assailed from many sides, victorious and abandoned to destruction, shoved around and saved through Yahweh's intervention, "as dying, and see—we are alive" (2 Cor 6:9). In ancient Israel, this had also been the personal experience of the believers in Yahweh. For this tiny nation, the history of the nations was more bedlam than a paradisiacal place of rest. Political turbulences of every kind became noticeable with frightening speed and directly in the locations of the Judeans, including those exiled and emigrated.

For you, O God, have tested us; you have tried us as silver is tried. You brought us into the net; you laid burdens on our backs; you let people ride over our heads; we went through fire and through water; yet you have brought us out to a spacious place. (Ps 66:10–12)

“Often have they attacked me from my youth”—let Israel now say—“often have they attacked me from my youth, yet they have not prevailed against me. The plowers plowed on my back; they made their furrows long.” (Ps 129:1–3)

The historical experience is often gloomy. Nevertheless, personal fate has no absolute importance. The reaction of the ravaged groups throughout history does not work out with the punishment of the oppressive states. To be sure, punishment, even condemnation of the enemy, must occur. The respective passages often capture all of our attention, as already in addresses concerning the nations in Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel or the respective psalms and the liturgical standard cry for justice (see Ps 2; 44; 79: “Return sevenfold into the bosom of our neighbor,” 79:12a). There are voices, however, that betray a broader horizon. We have already mentioned some of them, such as the remarkable statement about the future covenant between Egypt, Assyria, and Israel (Isa 29:23–25; see §§III.1.1.4 and III.2.2.2 above). Egypt was the oppressive power in the early Mosaic period; Assyria had subjected Syria and Palestine with the most brutal force and had left its dreadful traces in Israel’s collective memory. Over against this there are the announcements of a common, peaceful future for all nations under Yahweh’s direction (Isa 2:1–4) or the gift of the blessing through Abraham and his descendants (Gen 12:2–3) or the acknowledgment of all nationalities as legitimate inhabitants of Jerusalem (Ps 87).

Among those who know me I mention Rahab and Babylon; Philistia, too, and Tyre, with Ethiopia—“This one was born there,” they say. And of Zion it shall be said, “This one and that one were born in it,” for the Most High himself will establish it. The LORD records, as he registers the peoples, “This one was born there.” Singers and dancers alike say, “All my springs are in you.” (Ps 87:4–7)

Of course, these and other positive inclusions of the other nations are also mixed with particular interests. Still, they indicate the fundamental opening of their own closures and a readiness for co-existence. The central theme is the openness of faith in Yahweh for the entire world in their respective way, as, for instance, in the books of Jonah and Ruth, which have already been discussed above (§III.1.1.4). Jonah, as it were, also offers the salvation of the

God of the entire world to the violent arch-enemies in Assyria. The demand is for repentance, as was normal in the ancient Near East after wrong decisions against a deity were acknowledged. The narrator firmly reckons with the repentance of the Ninevites, while he repeats an inflexibly dogmatic disposition to Israel's representative, according to which justice has to precede mercy (Jonah 4:10–11). The enemies' willingness to pay attention to Yahweh's voice is exemplary, in his view (3:5–10; see also the proclamation of Jesus that often accords stubbornness to the orthodox but to the believer in foreign deities or the nonbeliever utmost sensitivity for God's message). Ruth is a clear warning against strict, puristic separation from the nations. Through the heroine Ruth, who feared Yahweh, Moabite blood flowed into a primary genealogical line: the family of David (Ruth 4:18–22). Without the Moabitess, there would have been no David! This is a blow to all who view "mixed marriages" as blasphemous (see Ezra 10; Neh 13:23–28).

In the postexilic period, Israelite followers of Yahweh perhaps experienced the problem of foreigners not in a major way in the encounter with foreign population groups but in individual contacts. According to legal and cultic texts especially, resident immigrants were a problem in the communities in many regards. A certain intermixture of long-established populations presumably was the consequence of centuries of warlike events in the land corridor between Mesopotamia and Egypt and the result of imperial administration of the ruled territories. How could the many foreigners who stayed on be integrated into Judaic communities? As already mentioned above (§§III.2.1 and IV.2.1), there was a range of opinions and practices in ancient Judea on this question, from attempts at a full equality all the way to classifying the "aliens" as persons with reduced rights who could also be turned into slaves (see Isa 56:6–8; Lev 25:44–46).

From the perspective of our situation today, which presents similar integration problems with immigrants, pro-foreigner statements in the Hebrew Scriptures are admirable and in any case not yet attained in Europe today. It is worthwhile to reiterate some sayings about the resident alien: "You shall love the alien as yourself" (Lev 19:34); whoever accepts being circumcised is allowed to join in celebrating the Passover and "shall be regarded as a native of the land" (Exod 12:48); "there shall be one law for the native and for the alien who resides among you" (Exod 12:49). The various groups of people are carefully differentiated in Exod 12:43–49: foreign slaves, seasonal workers, and foreigners with permanent residence. All foreigners with permanent residence in a Judaic community may be integrated ritualistically after being circumcised (in Isa 56, on the basis of keeping the Sabbath). Ultimately, belief in Yahweh plays the decisive role (Ruth 1:16–17). Ethnic and language barriers are irrelevant. It seems that major powers in the community wanted the

full integration of foreigners for theological reasons; all the same, the separatist hardliners occasionally get a chance to speak in the relevant texts (Lev 25:44–46).

There is yet another realm, far too neglected by scholarship, in which the integrative power of the universal belief in Yahweh can be clearly noticeable. I refer to certain layers of the wisdom and liturgical traditions. Here the criterion is the general expressions for God and humans found there, namely, in the language referring to Yahweh. We have mentioned this phenomenon in the context of the book of Proverbs (see §III.1.3.3 above). It cannot conceal the fact that in the core stratum of the wisdom literature and prayers the vocabulary used for deity and the interactive humans is largely generic. The levels of language juxtaposed in this way cannot be ordered consistently in chronological sequence, as if the general human use of language hinged only on the older layers. Clearly postexilic compositions, such as the group of reflective psalms (see §III.1.3.2 above), for instance, unequivocally prefer the non-Yahwist and non-Israelite language.

Here the issue is more the human and the deity than Yahweh, Jacob's sons, the righteous, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. In other words, the common human destiny and the common relationship to the "eternal" deity is in the foreground, rather than relationship to Yahweh, the Judaic God. The name Yahweh does not occur in Ps 90, except in verse 13; instead, the generic designation *ādōn* "Lord" (90:1, 17) appears and otherwise only "God" (90:2). It would also be absurd to speak of human frailty only in view of the community of Israel. No, the reflective prayers of the Psalter, which belong mainly to the postexilic period, consciously have the common welfare of all humans as their central theme. They share this inclination with the Old Avestian prayers and hymns that know of no ethnic restriction. A more extensive study of the designations for God and the anthropological terms could verify this predominant, common human perspective. Already the following statistic is insightful: "the human" (*ādām*) occurs 562 times in the Old Testament; 62 instances are found in the Psalter, 119 in the three wisdom writings, Job, Proverbs, and the Song of Solomon; a good part of the remainder is found in the clearly postexilic layers, such as the Priestly writings (39) and the postexilic prophetic book of Ezekiel (132). Similarly, the synonym *ēnōš* "person" occurs overall 42 times, 13 times in the Psalter and 18 times in the book of Job. The term *ʾiš* "man, person" is often used as an indefinite personal pronoun and hence cannot be directly evaluated statistically. However, the attainable results are significant. Alongside of and despite the particular self-designations "righteous," "pious," and "holy," which are justified in association with Yahweh, the God of Israel, the common anthropological terminology is broadly represented in wisdom and liturgical texts.

From the perspective of the whole, the following can be emphasized: the mentality of the nascent Judaic community was unique, especially with regard to its foundational ethical figuration. On the one hand, it demonstrates a strong sense of self-worth and an extraordinarily high awareness of solidarity. Naturally, this could also agree, from a psychological perspective, with complexes and fears that likely can be demonstrated in the Hebrew literature. On the other hand, however, the Judaic communities developed a remarkable ability for self-criticism, the understanding of limitations, and the transitoriness of all human life. Furthermore, they were under the constraint of their monotheistic horizon; it was not only the chosen people but also all other beings with a human face that belonged to the one creator and sovereign of the world. Thus it was possible to cross the boundaries of one's own confession and to give time and attention to the others in complete responsibility. Tendencies of separation and opening up were situated in tension among the ancient Judeans and became prominent intermittently. In today's pluralistic world all religious communities are obligated to think through their external relationships also in view of the biblical experiences and to find ways for overcoming hatred and antagonism.

IV.5. IMPULSES FOR SHAPING THE WORLD

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Norman K. *The Bible and Liberation: Political and Social Hermeneutics* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1983). **Herlyn**, Okko. *Kirche in Zeiten des Marktes: Ein Störversuch* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2004). **Kramer**, Rolf. *Die postmoderne Gesellschaft und der religiöse Pluralismus* (Sozialwissenschaftliche Schriften 41; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2004). **Küng**, Hans. *Projekt Weltethos* (4th ed.; Munich: Piper, 1990). **Mesters**, Carlos. *Vom Leben zur Bibel—von der Bibel zum Leben* (2 vols.; Munich: Kaiser, 1983). **Mesters**. *Sechs Tage in den Kellern der Menschheit* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1982). **Mesters**. *Die Botschaft des leidenden Volkes* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1982). **Nürnberg**, Klaus. *Theology of the Biblical Witness: An Evolutionary Approach* (Münster: Lit, 2002). **Otto**, Eckart. *Krieg und Friede in der hebräischen Bibel und im Alten Orient* (Theologie und Frieden 18; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1999). **Schottroff**, Willy. *Gerechtigkeit lernen* (TB 94; Gütersloh: Kaiser, Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1999). **Schüngel-Straumann**, Helen. *Die Frau am Anfang* (Exegese in unserer Zeit 6; Freiburg: Herder, 1989). **Schwantes**, Milton. *Am Anfang war die Hoffnung* (trans. W. Schürger; Munich: Claudius, 1992). **Segbers**, Franz. *Die Hausordnung der Tora: Biblische Impulse für eine theologische Wirtschaftsethik des Eigentums* (Luzern: Ed. Exodus, 2004). **Spieß**, Christian. *Sozialethik des Eigentums* (Münster: Lit, 2004). **Tutu**, Desmond. *Versöhnung ist unteilbar: Interpretationen biblischer Texte zur Schwarzen Theologie* (Wuppertal: Hammer, 1985). **Waterman**, Anthony M. C. *Political Economy and Christian Theology since the Enlightenment* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004). See also the bibliography under §IV. 4.

Across the Western world, on the one hand, the Bible is no longer in vogue in the last decades; a growing majority expects no up-to-date orientation from biblical texts, experiences, and models. The book of books disappears in an antiquated distance. On the other hand, many readers of the Bible around the world—not only in grass-roots communities of the Third World—make the amazing discovery that biblical texts are able to speak into our present in liberating and invigorating ways. The biblical experiences and insights in dealing with the divine then become surprisingly relevant, acquire leadership functions, and cause the present reality to appear in a new light, open up hope, and mobilize new powers. The major question is how and when this happens and why in many other Christian and religious environments the Holy Scriptures apparently can be abused for stabilizing claims to power, oppression of minorities, and preaching hatred against persons of different creeds.

IV.5.1. DIALOGUE WITH TRADITION

While closely associated with the other creatures in terms of the physiology of development, in other words, with regard to the substance of the genome,

humans are peculiar creatures in their responsibility for their own actions.¹⁰³ For the decisions made today, it is at the latest the following generations that pay the price and/or earn the fruits. How do we arrive at a development of humanity that opens up fair opportunities of life, secures the qualities of life on earth for the long term, and guarantees every individual and nature an endurable livelihood (this also includes economic income), as well as the protection of liberty and human dignity? In the present world situation, some perspectives seem to be clear: humane ethics cannot be formulated by a single, dominant layer of rulers or a “leading culture” but has to count on the intercultural and interreligious dialogue that is being aspired already here and there.¹⁰⁴ The ecumenical breadth of the discussion is absolutely essential and rests on the prerequisite that particular claims of sole possession of the truth be buried.¹⁰⁵ The other fundamental prerequisite for workable ethical decisions is the inclusion of the entire dimension of time—past, present, and future. Humans are not able to substantiate their actions based on the perspective of the moment only. They are neither ninety-day wonders, nor do they have a sufficient, instinctive sensory system pretending to provide them with the necessary choice between available options. Rather, they must obtain their standards of action from both the experiences of the past and the estimations of the future. This always is a difficult task because the interests and experiences of all participants are most different. It cannot come off without a democratic culture of discussion and finding answers. The inherent risks of both the misinterpretation of the past and the miscalculation for the future are immense. Workable ethics must be developed on a global scale and in view of the history of humanity. In this context, the Old Testament as a partner in the discussion is irreplaceable; it has decisively contributed to shaping the Western civilizations and still continues to provide surprisingly relevant views on solving basic human problems.

103. See Hans Jonas, *The Imperative of Responsibility* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

104. Efforts for making a world ethos visible, such as the one by Hans Küng, are correct in principle; see also the multiple efforts of the World Council of Churches, the Catholic Church, and Muslim, Buddhist, and Hindu bodies and individuals, such as the Dalai Lama.

105. See Reinhold Bernhardt, *Zwischen Größenwahn, Fanatismus und Bekennermut: Für ein Christentum ohne Absolutheitsanspruch* (Stuttgart: Kreuz-Verlag, 1994); Hans-Martin Barth, *Dogmatik im Kontext der Weltreligionen* (3rd ed.; Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2008); and Paul F. Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions* (Mayknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2002).

It is the task of Old Testament ethics to examine the canon of the Hebrew Scriptures in its function as a moving force behind ethical decisions and to bring it into dialogue with the contemporary situation. Since we cannot adopt the traditional idea of the divine basic principles, once issued irrevocably, but very much discern the meaning of ancient decisions, we must develop a model for dialogue. The biblical traditions, like prevailing ethical concepts today, are bound to their respective contexts. This is true not only of the external image of theological and ethical statements but also of their form and content. Contextuality is not limited to trivialities; it always concerns the heart of the matter as well. Thus we must take into account that the basic convictions and values of the Hebrew tradition are tied to a particular time. Monotheism, assessments of life, personhood, society, and the focus on Holy Scriptures first of all belong to the structure of life of the world of that time and must be understood from that perspective. This is the well-known demand of historical-critical scholarship, from which we cannot excuse ourselves. Texts handed down have these ancient roots that do not vanish through centuries of tradition and through the continually new use and reinterpretation of the respective parts of Scripture.

This ongoing use of Scripture, for its part, is indeed not to be trivialized (against earlier historical-critical maxims) and valued as falsification of the original witness. On the contrary, in the constant reinterpretation of the texts, their meaning accumulates through further, always contextually bound interpretations (Croatto). The stream of situationally conditioned interpretations also reaches all readers, translators, and preachers of the Bible today, each in his or her new place. Contextuality and reinterpretation therefore also link us with the first tradents and their community of faith of that time. There is yet a further general connecting strand. Human societies, independent of religious and cultural character, are formed in keeping with analogous patterns. The social sciences have much to say to theologians on this matter. Among people of the most diverse backgrounds and orientations worldwide there are comparable structures of family, clan, tribe, village, town, and nation, regardless of how different customs and practices, institutions and distribution of power are regulated. This connecting contact also makes dialogue with the ancient world possible and necessary.

From the pragmatic perspective, dialogue with the spiritual ancestors of the biblical world can begin profitably with an analysis of the contemporary situation, as is done frequently in the Latin American context. In the theological discourse of European and "Western" molding, it is generally neglected because theology and exegesis in these parts of the world like to contemplate seriously only the manifestation of God in distant history; they want to derive all theological insight from that perspective. In frameworks of liberation

theology, the present life definitely belongs to the theological probing, as a result of an extended tradition but also in its newness inspired by the God who is present and the danger caused by humans, as a beginning point of a fruitful dialogue (Mesters).¹⁰⁶ We cannot expect, as Hugo Assmann stresses again and again, that the Bible, bound by its context, spells out our specific problems. Instead, we must raise formulations of the question and positions, relevant criteria, and erroneous opinions in our own present and introduce them into the dialogue between today and then. Without one's own positions, there cannot be any fruitful exchange. The (traditional German) work of interpretation becomes dangerous when contemporary, interest-driven positions creep in and project an image of eternal truths that the text presumably had always intended.

From the analysis of the present, questions may be taken to the text of the Bible. How did the biblical ancestors think and react in analogous situations, and generally, what then are the analogous circumstances and structures of the situations in which our problems surface? For apart from anthropological and social constancies we may have to acknowledge all kinds of differences in the conceptions of the world. Modern science, technology, economy, and politics are not easily coordinated with ancient parallels. Nevertheless, if we refrain from attempting the formation of analogies and take note of biblical and modern structures only in abstraction, and thus postulate a uniform spirit and faith that are not concrete, we run the risk of missing the meaning of biblical rhetoric or to categorize it incorrectly.¹⁰⁷ For this reason every Old Testament (biblical) text is to be understood in its own, including the social, context; the reference to a comparable life setting in our own time and reality needs to be sought.¹⁰⁸ It will not do to declare insights of God and ethical ranges of value operative in small groups to be equivalent maxims for a global humanity. In any case, the

106. It is impressive with what intensity, for instance, in Latin American theological circles, the analysis of the present also and precisely in today's postconfrontation era is pushed forward. Here I mention only the theological studies critical of the economy by the Brazilian Mo Sung, *Teologia and Economia* (Petrópolis: Vizes Ltda, 1994); idem, *Desejo, Mercado e religião* (Petrópolis: Editora Vozes, 1998); and the pedagogically orientated work of Hugo Assmann and Jung Mo Sung, *Competência*.

107. A bad example of missing the meaning is the adoption of the ban against homosexuality from Lev 18 and 20 into the Christian tradition; see Gerstenberger, "Homosexualität im Alten Testament," 124–58.

108. See Gerstenberger in Gerstenberger and Schoenborn, *Hermeneutik, sozialgeschichtlich*, 3–6, 157–70; idem, "Warum und wie predigen wir das Alte Testament?" in *Evangelium Jesu Christi heute verkündigen* (ed. Bernhard Jendorff and Gerhard Schmalenberg; Gießen: Fachbereich Religionswissenschaften, 1989), 33–45.

analogous social and mental situation is regarded as the first interpretative basis. It must be examined in its comparability, and in doing so the probable differences, or those certainly to be anticipated, need to be addressed simultaneously. Today the family circle is constructed differently from that of Near Eastern antiquity. Not least the role of the individual at that time and today is choreographed differently. Because of the fundamental analogies of the small groups, conclusions can still be drawn from ancient family texts and suggestions received. Yet the modern situation is assumed and to a certain extent also normative. Exegetes must become aware of the impetus and broad outlines of the present situation. We cannot simply distill the necessary norms from (ancient) history. Fundamental values of today's world—human dignity, liberty, and democracy—are also decisive for theological argumentation. To be sure, we will not take them up uncritically, just as ancient paradigms cannot be valid automatically either today, but they are part of the theological reflection and of the theological discourse.

A basic difficulty arises from the social and intellectual shifts that have come about since antiquity, especially in the wake of the industrial and scientific-technical revolution. Whereas in biblical antiquity the world was still entirely geocentric in its construction and later was interpreted as heliocentric, today there is no longer any even roughly comprehensible center. The locus of the Big Bang is irrelevant. Whereas at that time a causal system constructed predominantly on personal decisions of will represented the basic interpretive pattern of all phenomena, today largely scientific, mechanistic connections and interpretations have taken their place. While in matters of theology and ethics the Old Testament texts focus predominantly on the more immediate area of humanity and the manageable religious community, while they contribute less that is constructive for anonymous imperial societies (logically, since the flock of followers of Yahweh was small, especially in postexilic Israel), we are increasingly challenged today to train our sight on the major social contexts, their constraints and chances. We should not project the orientations of the Bible indiscriminately into these more extensive contexts. Israel, just as the early Christian community, was a tiny minority in colossal, imperial structures. The biblical witnesses had no direct responsibility for major societies and empires. But they were contemporary witnesses, victims, and, perhaps in part, also beneficiaries of the social systems of that period. From this perspective, the reactions of the minority believing in Yahweh are welcome stimuli for today's discussion on this territory. It is superfluous to emphasize that today's theological and ethical debates, if they want to make use of the biblical impulses, need to take particularly seriously the transitions in life from small to large groups, and even more intently than in the case of small-group situations inquire

into the criteria for decisions to be made that are available, recognized, and good today.

IV.5.2. HUMAN RELATIONS

The statements of the postexilic Judaic communities about the human and his or her social relationships have become valuable for subsequent Jewish and Christian readers. They were regarded as an eternal standard of moral conduct pleasing to God and in religious and “worldly” contexts until today have accordingly remained the starting point for intensive discussion and interpretation, as well as for the search for relevant applications. We (still) live in a continuum of intellectual traditions shaped by biblical instruction and for this reason must take a good look at our own preshaping. At every appropriate point of the continuing discussion it is necessary to examine the relevant structures and parameters then and now. In the case of individual and social ethics, at least some fundamental data need to be considered, which can only be mentioned briefly here. According to the Hebrew writings of the Persian period, the human being is positioned between good and evil. Already this alone makes the human a godlike figure. Humans have to decide for what is good. On the interpersonal level, this in turn consists of the traditional virtues of truthfulness and solidarity over against neighbors, graded according to the degree of relationship and proximity of residence. Members of family are bound to each other by the strongest ties of solidarity; (blood) friendships are equal to the family unit. The obligations decrease toward the outside until they change into distrust and enmity over against competing groups. The commandment of hospitality, however, which applies with regard to individual nonrelatives seeking shelter, counteracts the phobia about the stranger. Essential is the new form of the community of Yahweh, which teaches that family solidarity is to extend to fellow-believers. Thus, a reversal of restrictions is taking place (in theory!). The self before God comes to the fore. Every person is directly before Yahweh. The rudiments of everyone’s equality are established. Deity is encountered in the “you” (Martin Buber and Emmanuel Levinas). This new anthropology, which is not conceived functionally as family, still offers niches for abuse, just as the traditional system (see Lev 25:44–46). Nevertheless, it is open to the future with regard to human dignity (19:18, 34).

For all that, there remains much to be talked about. The formula “male and female he created them” (Gen 1:27) reveals the endeavor to keep the sexes carefully (functionally!) apart. It is a basic concern of the Priestly tradents not to blur the gender distinction. Thus in matters of custom and law the relevant

standards are distinct. Full and actual justice is given to the representative of the original family, the male head of the group. In the patriarchal structure, women are subordinate to him; a woman must sacrifice her life for the welfare of the small group earlier than the man. This also applies to children and slaves. The basic equality of humans again is graded in terms of gender, age, and ethnic origin. A modification of equality like this cannot possibly be accepted today. Our society is theoretically obligated to the absolute equality of all humans, without regard for gender, education, religion, race, age, and degree of physical and intellectual development. Every human knows, of course, that this is a dream and that reality looks entirely different. Still, we must not give up on the theoretical goal. Every human being is on the same level in the prevailing declarations of dignity and individual rights. Only, how is it possible to build a society out of nothing but independent monads?

Materially, the ethics of human social life in the Old Testament is dominated by topics that continue to be relevant today, albeit with new, special accents. For the ancients, very important were the positive togetherness promoting community "without deception," good conduct sexually, and, already in dealings outside the family, economic honesty, the protection of property, and assistance showing solidarity for the socially weak. Apparently the use of force and religious differences played a rather subordinate role, despite the basic threefold prohibition against murder, adultery, and stealing (Exod 20:13–15), of the attentiveness that criminal conduct inevitably achieves, and of the occasional condemnation of mixed marriages. In the area of personal relations with one another, all of the biblical sources expect rectitude, integrity, and openness. They detest lies, and the accusation of falsehood is against those who are enemies and disloyal friends:

My enemies wonder in malice when I will die, and my name perish. And when they come to see me, they utter empty words, while their hearts gather mischief; when they go out, they tell it abroad. All who hate me whisper together about me; they imagine the worst for me. They think that a deadly thing has fastened on me, that I will not rise again from where I lie. Even my bosom friend in whom I trusted, who ate of my bread, has lifted the heel against me. (Ps 41:5–9)

The sick person praying here feels forsaken in the crisis (see also Pss 55:13–15; 88:9, 19). For whatever reason, the obligation of solidarity did not function in his environment (congregation?). Exclusion by the community of family or faith is a lethal punishment; the rehabilitation of those who have recuperated or have been acquitted is celebrated effusively with songs of thanksgiving (Pss 22:24–27, 30; 32, 40:1–11; 116; 118). The accused and suspects attempt to prove their innocence by purification oaths (Pss 7; 17; 26). Falsehood is

almost worse than theft and is penalized with death in conjunction with the latter (Josh 7). Incorruptibility in local court proceedings is a particular variant of the basic personal virtue (Exod 23:1–9). Outlawing falsehood and fraud is also integrated into the catalogue of the requirements of holiness (Lev 19:11, 17–18), as if every kind of falsehood were to render one ritually unclean. In short, in agreement with ancient Near Eastern rules of conduct—international wisdom from Egypt to Persia has handed down largely similar bodies of thought—Torah and the Old Testament prophets advise the Judaic worshiper of Yahweh in the innermost circle of the group to aspire to the qualities of the upright person who is committed to truth and the community. As far as possible, the same rights and obligations should befit the resident alien; as a rule, the focus of delimitation is outward, but the discussion of this problem takes place under the aspect of the universal work of Yahweh (Jonah and Esther; see §IV.5.4 below). The Old Testament attitudes concerning personal integrity deserve utmost consideration in the context of our own lifestyle. Especially the element of group solidarity needs to be defined afresh in contemporary thought, which is excessively committed to the individual.

In the realm of sexual conduct, stronger taboos prevailed in ancient times (often in the framework of more open discourse) than today; the subliminal continuity of archaic fears until today must not be denied. We have already referred to Lev 18 and 20 (§III.1.1.3 above). There are priestly conceptions of holiness at work here, similar to those preserved in Hittite regulations of holiness, for instance.¹⁰⁹ In general, the following may be noted: the anxiety-laden dealing with sexuality, especially in the time of the Second Temple, has had a disastrous effect especially in the Christian tradition (followed by the Islamic tradition as well). Women were discriminated against by the “purer” men, who were “better suited” for sacrificial service, and were accused of a special predisposition for evil and apostasy and largely excluded from the public life in church and society.¹¹⁰ In many places male homosexuality was and is under the verdict of perverse sin.¹¹¹ The positive relations of the sexes to one another suffer under the claims to power of their own (mainly masculine) gender and suspicions against the other. In this context, the ancient biblical perspectives, deeply shaped by outdated ideas of taboo, are not suf-

109. See Hans Martin Kümmel, “*Rituale in hethitischer Sprache*,” *TUAT* 2.2:282–92; Albrecht Goetze, “Hittite Instructions,” *ANET*, 207–11; §IV.4.2 above.

110. See Schüngel-Straumann, *Die Frau am Anfang*; Marie Theres Wacker, *Der Gott der Männer und die Frauen* (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1987); Ida Raming, *The Exclusion of Women from the Priesthood* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow, 1976); see §IV.2.3 above.

111. See Gerstenberger, “Homosexualität im Alten Testament”; Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality*; §IV.4.2 above.

ficiently considered as decisively sharing responsibility for today's battle of the sexes. The continuing discrimination against femininity can only be overcome if the roots of the evil in biblical antiquity are exposed. This has to take place in modernity by taking into consideration the changed social structure. It is no longer appropriate to structure sexual ethics on the foundation of nothing more than a fictitious, basically rural, and familial structure. The new long-term relationships that emerged and the actual familial organizational forms are partners in dialogue. The nuclear family, single parents, same-sex partnerships, and different people sharing an apartment have rendered the patriarchal, rural extended family outdated. This does not mean, however, that all modern forms of living together per se are ideal. In the debate about new parameters, the ancient structures and roles are also able to provide pointers to weaknesses and desiderata in modern group life. However, the spirit of equal cooperation of women and men, children and elderly, which is already discernible furtively in the biblical texts, does indeed have to be considered more prudently in the present.

Finally, in the Old Testament the socioeconomic conduct is shaped especially by the internal and external perspective. "On loans to a foreigner you may charge interest, but on loans to another Israelite you may not charge interest" (Deut 24:20; see also Exod 22:24; Lev 25:36). Safeguarding the physical livelihood and protecting a standard of living fit for human beings are of paramount importance in the Judaic community and have significantly shaped subsequent generations of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim communities. Whether the concern is the livelihood or the preservation of the family heritage, fair remuneration, or human dignity, the ancient law-givers and preachers passionately fought for not losing sight of the poor, lending support to the dispossessed and those ending up in debt servitude, opening up opportunities of life to the handicapped and orphaned, and to be open-handed to the widows and low-paid seasonal workers. The appeals are addressed to all members of the Judaic community of faith, often by means of reference to the distant historical experience of their own oppression and exploitation in Egypt (Lev 19:34; Deut 24:18, 22). Brotherly responsibility in the community also presses for understanding property as common possession, as in the family context. Private ownership is not questioned (e.g., the prohibition of theft), but the social obligation of one's own possession carries a lot of weight; in the subsequent Christian tradition, it also came to fruition time and again, all the way to the lapidary observation of the German Constitution, observed rarely today: "Property obligates."¹¹² In any case, a strong, theological, his-

112. Article 14, paragraph 2, of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Germany

torical, and morally well-founded motivation for social behavior within one's own community of faith emanates from the Hebrew Scriptures. It includes economic goals. The community is to live together closely and share part of what one earned with the weak. The "social net" is a creation of the postexilic community of Yahweh.

For good reasons it can be maintained, therefore, that today's basic ethical values and the dignity and liberty of the individual have their roots in the Judaic tradition. Naturally, there are contextually different accentuations of these values. In the biblical pattern of freedom and dignity there are patriarchal, ethnic, magical, and theological factors that play a part that we are not ready to acknowledge consciously and publicly. Subliminally they may still be alive. But our "rational" portrait of the autonomous individual, enjoying all of the freedoms of self-development and not being elevated above others by any special privileges,¹¹³ no longer permits the previous natural differentiations and grading of human dignity. What many biblical witnesses also had in view applies to us in principle: "One law shall apply to the foreigner and the native" (see Exod 12:49; Lev 18:26; 19:34; Num 9:14). Thus our endeavors for the equality of all people move in the same direction as those of our spiritual forebears, despite the different social structures then and now. In the essential dialogue with the biblical witnesses we will also perceive the same basic intentions as well as the contextual peculiarities, process them theologically, and learn from the ancient insights and experiences at the same time. This is particularly true of the position and valuation of the individual in the make-up of diverse primary groups.

IV.5.3. IDEAS OF GOD

Behind all ethical reflections and systems are ideas of deities and world structures, superhuman powers and evil influences that determine the doctrinal system for appropriate human behavior in a significant way. For this reason it is necessary once more to deal with ideas of God, especially with regard to their effect upon the biblical ethos and their implications for the present.

states: "Property obligates. Its use is meant to serve the well-being of the general public at the same time" (version of 23 May 1949; formally unchanged to this day).

113. Cf. the fundamental rights of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Germany, especially article 3: "(1) All humans are equal in the eyes of the law. (2) Men and women have equal rights. (3) No one is to be disadvantaged or advantaged on account of his gender, descent, race, language, home and origin, faith, one's religious or political views."

The image of God of the postexilic communities of Yahweh vacillates between a deity personally close and one distant universally in terms of world dominion; the latter to a large extent is lacking the autocratic traits of an immediately experienced monarchy of divine mercy. Slavish obedience, known from such absolutist condition (see Klaus Mann, *Der Untertan*), is largely foreign to the Hebrew Scriptures. God is seen as the leader equipped with high authority, as patron saint, or as counselor of the small group, but one argues with God, possibly admits transgressions, yet insists on one's right. The lament psalms demonstrate this sufficiently (see esp. Pss 7; 17; 26). The book of Job offers a particular argument against the God who seemingly makes decisions arbitrarily. The universal Lord of the world, on the other hand, wisely guides the destinies of the nations. He sees to fair balance after periods of suffering, calls perpetrators to account, and brings about new welfare for those who have suffered severely. Members of the community increasingly think about an eschatological (apocalyptic) compensation, because the historical accounts cannot work out otherwise, according to human judgment. In the universal way of looking at the situation, the welfare of the individual is embedded in the overall event. Neither position can be reconciled with the other. They are separated by intermediate stages of human socialization, for their part calling for humanly fair justice.

On this middle level the discussion is about the God who justly judges individuals and their families, helps them attain their rights, and holds them accountable. In the Hebrew Scriptures, governmental justice is next to unknown. Where should it even be found in the mass of exilic and postexilic literature that has come about under the pressure of the collapse of the monarchy and severe accusations against the by-gone kingdom? In any case, the Deuteronomistic king no longer is lord of the manor but instead a student of the Torah (Deut 17:14–20). The genuine legal regulations (see esp. Exod 21–23; Deut 22–25) originated, as already noted, predominantly in the local residential communities. Others, especially the sacral norms (Lev 11–15; 18–20), from the start belonged to the sacred gatherings of the postexilic period. What manifestations of God appear in these differently conceived social structures? How do they determine the material ethics?

The humane values of the period, from honesty to helpfulness, with their specific order of importance of social roles, are decisive for the divinely sanctioned ethical orientation, especially of the young generation. It should not be difficult to construct the deity understood as personal and an analogous ethical system aimed at the respective personal structure of society with regard to contemporary patterns of behavior. Modern adaptations with regard to general, nonnegotiable individual human rights are obvious. It is more difficult to grasp the ideas of God and codes of conduct in the realm of the numinous

holy and to recognize, that is to say, to put in place afresh or reject, its analogies in today's structure. The holy has largely been rationally crowded out, if not removed from our tangible world. The basic question is whether it retains a right to exist as a fundamental theological category in the midst of the Western, scientifically shaped world. For us, all ethical maxims substantiated by statements of holiness are suspect from the start. They lack a rationally comprehensible reason, as in the case of the (im)purity laws and taboos. The ban on using certain animals for food or even touching them (Lev 11), the graded fear of sexual acts or bodily discharges (Lev 12–15; 18; 20), and the fear of evil demons and bad omens (Ps 91) are suspicious for us, because we actually live in a world that is “liberated” from magic. The ancient understanding of such correlations, however, assumes personally acting and supernatural powers wherever one goes and calls for fitting behavior; no one is allowed to come too close to the deity, otherwise one is struck by divine destruction automatically and without extenuating circumstances (see 2 Sam 6:6–7; Lev 16:2; Exod 33:20). Thus the ethics of holiness is established on an entirely different basis than the personality ethos of interpersonal relationships.

Now it has to be appropriate to ask the question whether this very different ethical perspective (which we generally ignore completely), preserved in the exilic and postexilic community, can obtain an undreamt-of meaning under the changed conditions of modernity. After all, God does not work only in personal contexts and within a world constructed by personality values. God is also present in the impersonal currents of power in nature and history, which have an extensive influence on life. Should the scientifically discernable yet incomprehensible dimensions of being not deserve reverence? In our own experience as well, it is quite clear that it is not only the individual will that shapes reality. One does indeed assume without thinking that almost all the processes in which we find ourselves are feasible or controllable. This belief give srise to strong confidence in the future but at the same time to an equally strong sense of fear and responsibility that, in turn, may lead to deep depression due to the failure of the most noble plans for improving life. People with deep insight into research and the planning of the future normally learn how extraordinarily precarious the hypothesis of feasibility is. Weather and economic forecasts, processes of illness and convalescence, and political and religious developments always hide unforeseeable constellations that direct human anticipation *ad absurdum*. The proud hypotheses of the feasibility of the state of affairs are constantly outdated by changing realities.

Biblically substantiated theology, especially in view of the postexilic Judaic community and its explanation of the world, will need to be aware afresh of the large realm of God's impersonal presence (holiness and wisdom theology). It will not do, of course, simply wanting to copy the magical-

numinous features and fundamental philosophies of the ancient tradition. But the careful differentiation of personal and dynamistic understanding of the world provides us with ways of recognizing God's presence also for the impersonal realm of anonymous powers in our world that can be experienced today, regardless of whether they are scientific, technological, economic, political, or religious, and to outline suitable ethical rules of conduct in association with those powers. Already the outlining of particulars of the question makes clear that the different ways of interpreting reality have many points of contact with one another. At the same time they also are, because we necessarily think in fragmentary ways and have the unity of the world with us only as a hunch, irreconcilably juxtaposed. Personal and dynamistic demands on human society cannot simply be balanced. Here and there they surely collide sharply, just as was also the case in the Old Testament examples. This is still to be addressed briefly.

In the industrial Western world today there are primarily constraints and laws in force that can no longer be reconciled with a world construed personally. What we call God, however, just as in the ancient partial view of the world dominated by ideas of holiness, is also present within all impersonal processes. If cancer cells become autonomous in a human body and destroy the affected person, we who think in terms of personal categories are helpless. The same applies to natural disasters claiming human lives and causing destruction but also to man-made suicidal conflicts. It further applies to long-term developments within humanity that lead to the collapse of good living conditions on planet earth. Explanations based on individual decision-making options and personal responsibility fall short. Sadly, Christian ethics until now also are identified as merely categories from the interpersonal network of contacts that originally arose in the small and medium-sized communities, as well as the respective personal ideas of God in the Bible. By contrast, the deity of the impersonal powers and conditions, which we indeed encounter in biblical texts, too, has been largely ignored in the midst of a modern, predominantly impersonally constructed world.

But how are we able to grasp deity in the manifold processes that we often label as "laws of nature"? We are not able to avoid attributing a certain right to exist to the various "laws" that we recognize on the basis of the current status of knowledge, over against the interests of single persons and small social structures. The legitimate rules of a community as a whole cannot show consideration to every individual wish, to say nothing about the elements of a climatic or tectonic kind. Individual interests must be subordinated to the overall powers to a certain extent. Nevertheless, from the theological perspective there must be a critical examination of anonymous sequences of events. After all, they are to serve the preservation of the world, according to the

biblical understanding, or to allow being measured by this positive core intention. Deity in the large construct of the correlation of the world is that which serves the promotion of life, at least from the minute perspective of planet earth at the fringe of the galactic systems and in the middle of a universal time estimated to be between twenty and thirty billion years. The seemingly very schematic processes that we observe and to which we are exposed, then, can very well be classified theologically as good, bad, and mixed. We may lay down standards for it and speak of God's work in and with them, while God is conceived as a mysterious power of blessing within, not as an extraterrestrial director. Starting points on this understanding in the Bible are, for instance, the theologies of holiness and wisdom; others, for instance, Asian religions, possibly have a greater affinity to the God of impersonal powers and forces.

If one begins with these differing ideas of God, the biblical problem of theodicy appears in a different light. On the personal levels of decision-making, justice, solidarity, and love become ever more frustrated by extensive irruptions of power that are incomprehensible from the personal perspective. Job's charges that God is acting arbitrarily, without considering the integrity of the victim, are justified from the personal perspective but come to naught beyond it. The wisdom-oriented responses of God to the rebel fighting for his personal justification are unable to satisfy the charge; they merely point to the irreconcilability of the positions. In principle, personal suffering has nothing to do with the coherence of the world and its laws. Both aspects are mutually irreconcilable. At the end of the book of Job, we find the balancing out of losses and the renewed blessing of the afflicted, without resolving the theological problem. The Judaic theology of the postexilic period recognized the divided reality of God; conversely, the Christian tradition has largely ignored it. Questions about the God who acts impersonally are raised at best among mystical thinkers and those who are sensitive to the natural sciences.

Two modern areas of life and topics are especially pressing for a clarification of the conceptions of God. In both of them, personal concepts do not suffice for a proper theological language about God. For one, the issue is the preservation of the creation and thus the survival of humankind on planet earth; for another, the issue is the presently all-powerful economic and technical forces that transform life and question the future. Both areas are causally linked to one another and can only be considered together. Most observers of the world scene are aware of the terrible dangers to life. For this reason it is more meaningful to speak about the chances that are discernible theologically. How can economy and ecology be reconciled? What role do the life-preserving divine powers play? We must indeed be on the lookout for them. The exploding possibilities of humanity in reshaping the earth cause enormous risks (who does not think of Gen 11:1–9 in this context?).

All the same, the paradisiacal, good opportunities for constructing a peaceful, harmonious, and just world are foreseeable (see Isa 11:1–9). Further, a small part of humanity already fully enjoys the achievements of human creativity, in which the divine goodness is reflected (though plagued by fear because so many have-nots are excluded from the blessings of productivity). The number of undertakings in favor of a sustained conservation is legion; many are very successful. Even if all of them together amount to only a drop in the ocean, they are concrete examples of the possibilities of preserving life lastingly, in other words, in spans of time that we can see fairly: decades or centuries. The beneficial technologies and behaviors are well known; they only need to be carried through universally. This means that the issue is avoiding mistakes, the correct balance of personal interest and public welfare, and the recognition of the common global responsibility for the whole.¹¹⁴ But this is the foundational theological mark with regard to all efforts at a world order with a promising future: in the great course of natural and historical processes, everything that promotes and sustains life is divine. Human responsibility is to promote the sustainable development of planet earth by putting aside excessive self-interests.

The differentiation of person-oriented and dynamistic theology in the Judaic writings is only one issue of theological language. Once again I refer to another current problem: biblical statements about the power and powerlessness of God. Above we highlighted the discovery of God's universality and responsibility during the Persian period. It agrees with the communal experiences within a universal empire. It was opposed by the numerous experiences of helplessness that have also shaped the tradition considerably. There is plenty of extant Judaic testimony of suffering, oppression, and exploitation by the imperial rulers. The corporate laments (Pss 44; 74; 79; 80; 83; 137; Lamentations) provide a vivid impression of these, as well as many texts from the prophetic books, especially those handed down in the so-called songs of the servant of Yahweh (Isa 41:8–16; 42:1–9; 44:1–5; 49:7–13; 50:4–11; 52:13–53:12). The experiences of humiliation yielded to the theological insight that the personal God not only permits such suffering or ordains it for his/her people but that God suffers under it and even divests himself/herself of power and in solidarity descends into the depth with those who are ravaged. The motif of divine relinquishing of power is not unknown in the ancient Near East. Innana begins the descent into hell and has to relinquish her divine insignia piece by piece, as well as the ME, the divine powers symbolized by them. In the end, the body hangs on a hook in the throneroom of the goddess

114. Cf. Hugo Assmann and J. M. Sung, *Competência*.

of the underworld.¹¹⁵ In the context of the Judaic traditions, this motif is not mythologically imagined, but the theme of it is present. This means that the community of the Persian period also saw God in a special relationship to suffering and with a special liking for those suffering. Early Christian theology has taken up this theological conception. Jesus became the exemplary servant of God who lends his support for the condemned of this earth to the point of offering up himself. Major currents within the Christian churches have continued to maintain similar ideas and experiences, especially in situations of persecution. In recent times many churches of the so-called “third” and “fourth” world have followed this theological example. God’s “option for the poor” quite legitimately has been actualized from the biblical sources into current situations of exploitation and violations of human rights. In short, we also owe the Judaic theologians of the Persian period the theological concept of lowliness, willingness to suffer, and God’s help in solidarity. Given the social stratification of humanity and the increasing worldwide impoverishment by increasing segments of the populations, a theology such as this is indispensable. It arises from the reading of the Bible within the affected strata and from their experiences and interpretations develops a legitimate, contextually responsible theology. In a similar way in recent decades, theological outlines have emerged from a feminist perspective and from the vantage point of oppressed minorities. They represent partial views of an eschatologically distant comprehensive theology.

IV.5.4. GLOBAL SOCIETY

The biblical, theological end result of the Persian period amounts to incorporating the numerous impulses from the Judaic communities of that time into our situations today and to understand them as aids in orientation to be consulted critically for our own theological and ethical outlines. A careful analysis of one’s own present is a prerequisite for any workable theological agenda. For one, the analysis will focus on the main facts that must be considered relevant in the light of the Jewish-Christian tradition, such as being human, creation, justice, peace, transgression, healing. For another, we will have to take seriously the core values of our time, which overlap in part with the parameters of the Bible: human dignity, tolerance, liberty, justice,

115. In the course of the annual seasons, Baal also loses his life-giving abilities and is raised again; see Manfred Dietrich and Oswald Loretz, “Ugaritische Mythen und Epen,” *TUAT* 3.6:1091–1198, esp. 1185–98; and vol. 1 of Mark S. Smith, *The Ugaritic Baal Cycle* (VTSup 55; Leiden: Brill, 1994).

peace, and nature. The fundamental level of the analysis is the social one. The complex cultural and religious patterns of thought and feeling with which theology has to deal grow in the entangled interrelationship of social structures.

It is no secret that human society, diachronically seen, gradually underwent an “upward” development, based on the analysis of archaeological data of early inhabitants in the Near East, Egypt, Africa, and Asia. Still, we must not succumb to the illusion to which Christian theology has tended to yield too quickly since the Constantinian turning point, as if the social-historical “higher” organization, because of its promise of greater power, is more worthwhile and ethically better. By contrast, in postmodernity the conviction has gained momentum according to which human life is fulfilled primarily in small groups. The social-scientific analysis of today’s global society should therefore be free from value judgments if at all possible and grant human dignity in microcosmic, everyday conditions its appropriate place. Thus dreams of power are relativized or even converted to solidarity and responsibility.

For thousands of years, people have been working on the construction of their social reality.¹¹⁶ The building patterns have basically remained the same: kinship groups form the age-old grass-roots network of every subsequent formation of a community. Medium-sized social structures in which personal relationships are still possible (face-to-face relationships) coordinate the interests of affiliated families, clans, and close friendships. A deep breach develops as a result of transitioning to anonymous extended societies. Bureaucratic and statistical procedures now have to eclipse the personal togetherness. The human global society with its incalculable variety of languages, cultures, religious orientations, and behaviors can only be experienced as a vision (see Acts 2:1–13; Ps 87) or suspected in abstract constructs of ideas. The Judaic communities of the Persian period and subsequently Jewish and Christian confessional communities until today actually existed in the interface of personal and anonymous organizational forms. In this way, as it were, the precarious borderline situation allowed its knowledge of God and experience of the world to remain relevant.

A closer examination, however, in part brings considerable differences between ancient and modern global structures to light. Especially at the lower and upper ends of the organization of humanity the emphases have shifted. Whereas in the biblical period the individual was largely embedded in his family and could hardly live without it, it is the avowed goal of our

116. Darcy Ribeiro, *The Civilizational Process* (trans. Betty J. Meggers; Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1968).

time to render the individual completely independent and available. This is particularly true in the case of education and profession, and this basically "monadic" existence is safeguarded by the major emphasis on personal rights and the inviolable dignity of the individual. An elementary building block of all human socialization and the highest goal of all ambitions today is the (sexually neutral!) individual human being. This system of values has far-reaching consequences for faith and lifestyle in modernity.

The small and medium groupings of the modern period differ considerably in part from their ancient predecessors. Every observer of today's social conditions is cognizant of the lament about the functional loss of the family and the diminishment of human solidarity. Nevertheless, the social constellations in this medium realm then and now are by all means still comparable. Normally, then as now, the family is experienced as a place of security, especially during childhood; the differing communities of life and work of our time offer many people purposeful activities and encounters. The Judaic invention of confessional communities continues in the religious structures of our time as well. Worship services and community activities today apparently are not very far removed at all from their prototypes of the Persian period. Structures and confederations of states, business enterprises, and educational institutions today likewise function in keeping with ancient basic patterns, even if all kinds of modifications may have been added; the European states that came about in the nineteenth century have adopted a profile of their own, but they operate with the same claims to power as their ancient predecessors. Because of incredible scientific and technical "progress," the world economy has increased enormously; only the ancient laws of profit and loss rule as before in our allegedly very free markets. In the realm of education, an astronomical gain of knowledge and a revolution of communication technologies must be processed, yet teaching and research continue to transpire in the work of ideas and discussion.

By contrast, it seems to me that in the analysis of the current global society there are more fundamental differences that strike one again. The geographic expansion of humanity as a whole throughout the five continents is only a minor factor in this context. The ancient concept of a flat earth above the chaotic waters, under a near sky with fixed stars, was limited to a more modest Euro-Asian mass of land. More important is presumably the discernible, finely meshed interweaving of all regional and international economies and the ideological conformity of humanity as a whole with regard to the market, consumption, and ideals of fortune accompanying it. That which an intensive Christian mission of almost two thousand years has not achieved, the penetration of all heads on this earth with the mottos of a paradisiacal world of consumers, the market economy has managed within a few decades.

This unmistakably defines a common goal for all of humanity to which we must address ourselves theologically. At the same time, the dominant market ideology and its message of good fortune brings the whole world to the brink of the abyss because of its (still?) reckless consumption of resources and the marginalizing of major segments of the population.

We may have to seek to produce a global, albeit not a cosmic, theology. To be sure, the ancient witnesses fully integrated the cosmos into their speculations. They were able to do so because in their view the earth was the center of the universe (which, from our perspective, is very minuscule). The sun, the moon, and the planets revolved around the flat earth (see Ps. 19:5–7). After the earth and the solar system were pushed to the distant fringe of a galaxy and given the probability of millions of further solar systems in the universe having produced the phenomenon of life, it is preposterous to want to make theological decisions for all of those unknown worlds. Earthly theology is transitory human effort, produced on an extremely restricted speck of space and within an equally limited time of the universe and hence has to be modest. Only within the recognized boundaries are we able to dare to express sayings about God.

In the space available to us and within the time allotted to us, however, we are allowed to and should think theologically and act in faith and do so comprehensively. This does not mean that theology has only something to do with the whole and that all of its endeavors should be focused on the superordinate coherence of reality. On the contrary, the large superstructure of social organizations over individuals and their small groups has its distinguished task in protecting possibilities and liberties, responsibilities and rights in the microscopic interpersonal relations. Theologically expressed, God enables dignified life on all levels of socialization, even in the global structures of modernity. The humanization of the global market economy is especially a necessary theological program. Justice and peace for all is the fundamental demand in the name of God. Conservation, the preservation of the biotope earth, and looking after its limited resources are indispensable prerequisites of human life and thus a substantial part of every responsible theology. For us, the impulses for such insights and dispositions come from the Bible, that is to say, from the Judaic communities of the Persian period.

IV.5.5. UNITY AND PLURALITY TODAY

The experience of plurality, opposition, and struggle has always characterized people. Different cultures, religions, and societies deal differently with this imposing realization. In any case, important for survival is the link with the

good, kind, or benevolent forces that are effective in this world. Against the backdrop of the message of Zoroaster about the sole ground of being, disseminated in the Persian Empire, the God Yahweh who exclusively determines all reality was discovered in postexilic Israel. This certainly did not mean the discovery of a magic key for solving all of the problems of humanity. In the divided reality of life, Israel's faith truly struggled with the hunch of the sole creator and preserver of the world, of the monocausality of all good and evil. That everything on earth flows from one hand and one will is certainly not a convincing notion in the light of the general human disunity and the clashing earthly powers. In itself it is led most violently *ad absurdum* with the everyday dealings with human opponents whose demands and attitudes run counter to one's own. The Hebrew Scriptures provide witness to how naturally the boundaries between rivals become hardened and religiously super-valued. In the daily struggle for survival, the supposedly only God for the entire world and all nations changes very quickly into the particular deity who seems to be obligated only to one's own welfare and woe. Early Jewish covenantal and election theology is able to express sharply this very human, egotistical, basic position. Texts that conversely are convinced of the equality of all nations (the book of Jonah) and want to grant them a full share in the only ruler of the world are relatively scarce and have not been able to display much effect, showing solidarity either in the course of Christian interpretation. As already emphasized, faith in one universal deity in and of itself calls for openness toward all other humans. Judaic theologians (like their Christian descendents later on) *de facto* have frequently claimed Yahweh's universal responsibility in practical life exclusively for themselves. This inherently contradictory particular-universal disposition is encountered especially in the book of Deutero-Isaiah (see §§III.2.2.2 and IV.3.2 above).

Christians have no reason for pointing fingers at these Judaic theological inconsistencies. When belief in the only God became presentable and universal in the fourth century C.E., the seemingly much more far-sighted followers of Jesus of Nazareth defended the exclusiveness of the one theological truth with even greater energy and had it enforced by means of governmental power according to the spirit of their own particular display of power. The entire world was to be subjected to the Christian faith or Western freedom—consider the Crusades, the conquest of the Americas, the religious wars, the spread of colonial empires, or certain modern messianic Christian liberation campaigns.¹¹⁷ All such attempts can only be viewed from the perspective of

117. Periodically there appear manifestos for the liberation of the world in the American book market (and in keeping with American politics) in keeping with the pattern of

the universal, exclusive belief in God that is in the possession of a specific religion or confession. In truth, however, the supporters of such strategies do not represent the universal truth but their own limited and relative interests in power. Thus the profound notion of an only deity, a coherence of all things, and a perfect equality of all humans, races, and nations is betrayed; in other words, it is placed in the service of blatant vested interests. The unity of the world or of God is indeed difficult or impossible to realize in the reality of life.

How, then, are things in our era, in which the struggle for survival and diverse kinds of supremacy (including hegemony-like top positions) have erupted sharply on many levels? What chance do unity, justice, and peace have on an earth inflicted with wars and economic cruelties? Experiences of hostile conflicts have intensified globally to the extent that optimism hardly seems to be appropriate. The level-headed and concerned voices from the United Nations and around the world seemingly are not able to bring the conflicts, fueled by estranged parties, under control. The forces of peace have few ways to end bloodshed and exploitation on all of the continents and to secure a more just order for everyone. The power apparently belongs solely to the interests controlled by the military, those providing the capital, and the politicians blinded by power. Generally they adorn themselves with religious claims or even fight in the name of the only true God; this applies not only to Islamic ideologues but also to Christian and other counterparts. Hatred has to make sure of its deity to legitimate itself. Absolute hatred needs an absolute divine legitimation, which can only come from the only true God. Thus in our time the noble theological notion that everything available and everything that happens has to be in one hand seems definitely to be bound to fail.

A theology oriented by the Bible, however, will not give up hope that humanity will yet come to its senses before it is too late. There are indeed signs of hope in the turbulent history of our days as well. I have already mentioned that the recognition of unity in the wake of modern science, technology, as well as of the global market ideology has never been as strong as it is in fact today. Modern communication systems and every kind of media reach people in the remotest of villages. They not only bring them tempting images of the "real" Western consumption, but they also convey the feeling that all humans belong together, at least as far as their share in the foodstuffs of the earth is concerned. The knowledge that all are sitting in one boat and for better or worse have to share and manage with one another is intensifying. The awareness of the inevitable and often betrayed unity in

local yardsticks; see Fukuyama, *The End of History*; Huntington, *Clash of Civilizations* (see bibliography at §IV.3.4).

this world is increasing, and it also awakens the question about the one deity relevant for all.

The oneness of the world has become demonstrable today. That which began in antiquity, for instance, the exchange of goods, dissemination of knowledge, political inferences, and the shift in religious ideas, has increased to a resonant crescendo today. The intensified integration of many realms of life, first in that of commerce, then, of course, the Internet and the media, is beginning to homogenize the expectations of people. Standards of technology and production are brought closer together. In the longer term this will be followed by wages, fashions, and values. The individual pursuit of happiness, which earlier had been associated with the West only, is asserting itself. Societies gradually break with their old customs and traditions and provide themselves with new structures. Alongside clear attempts at dissociation over against "others," there also are countless intercultural and interreligious forums that blossom. Knowledge expands beyond one's own boundaries, and here and there, there occur experiments of living together.

That which causes especially the awareness of the common bond to grow, however, is the pressing experience that humanity as a whole is sitting in a single boat. Epidemics and pollution of the environment recognize no national boundaries. Many catastrophes have consequences entering immediately or in the longer term for many or for all the countries on earth. Wars and poverty not only devastate enclosed regions but also shake distant markets or islands of affluence. Humanity as a whole increasingly becomes the sounding board for all cacophonies taking place around the earth. This certainty, becoming increasingly stronger, that the problems of the world need to be solved jointly by all the countries, or otherwise all of them will face the same fate, is probably the strongest motivation for reasonable agreements about the common shape of economy and politics on earth. The renunciation of national power politics and of hegemony in regulating the market would be a foundation for a framework of peace from which everyone will benefit, as it emerges symbolically already in the utopias of the Old Testament.

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