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Publisher: Routledge

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## Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament: An International Journal of Nordic Theology

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/sold20>

### The old testament -a Hellenistic book?

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Version of record first published: 04 Jul 2008.

To cite this article: Niels Peter Lemche (1993): The old testament -a Hellenistic book? , Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament: An International Journal of Nordic Theology, 7:2, 163-193

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09018329308585016>

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# THE OLD TESTAMENT — A HELLENISTIC BOOK?\*

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## 1. *The Septuagint and the Hebrew Bible — Some Basic Issues*

It may be rather imprecise to call the Old Testament a Hellenistic book — as not all Old Testaments can be Hellenistic.

It is obvious that the Septuagint must be considered Hellenistic, since it was not translated before the Hellenistic Period. The Hebrew Bible is, on the other hand, not a Hellenistic book, for the simple reason that it — in its present shape — is a Jewish-Rabbinic collection of writings no earlier than the 2nd century CE. (although the beginning of this process of canonization can be traced further back).

Thus it is reasonable to connect the appearance of the Hebrew Bible with the historical catastrophes that drastically influenced the life of the Jewish communities, especially in Palestine, at the end of the 1st century CE, and in the first half of the 2nd century CE, and which threatened to remove the Jews from history. Also a new threat to the Jewish faith may have been important, that is the Christian religion, which — although originally part of the Jewish world — developed into a major opponent to Jewish religious society. Moreover, Christianity argued that it had simply substituted the Jewish religion as the *only legitimate faith*.

According to James Barr, R.H. Lightfoot once claimed that the origin of the New Testament should be sought in the moment the early Christians, under the impression of the first Roman persecutions, lost faith in the survival of their religion. As a result of their fear, they decided to write down their traditions and recollections, in order that these might not be lost or deliberately perverted.<sup>1</sup> The canonization of the Hebrew Bible may have been caused by motives like these, not to be separated from the fact that the Jews had seen their religious centre, the temple, defiled

\* This article represents a rewritten and greatly expanded version of my article in Danish, "Det gamle Testamente som en hellenistisk bog", *DTT* 55 (1992), 81-101. The Danish original goes back to a public lecture held in Copenhagen, March 31, 1992.

<sup>1</sup> Cf James Barr, *The Bible in the Modern World* (London 1973), 43.

and destroyed, and — probably already before the canonization process had reached its goal — had had to evacuate their traditional religious home, Jerusalem, in order to become foreigners in their own country.<sup>2</sup>

A number of differences exist between the Hellenistic Septuagint and the later Hebrew Bible. One of them consists in the fact that a number of books in the Septuagint are not included in the Hebrew Bible, although in the Septuagint they are certainly to be considered holy writ. We also find other differences in the organization of the individual books; these may be more or less extensive differences of wording or different arrangements of chapters and paragraphs. The major differences are, however, these: 1) the arrangement of the books in the Hebrew Bible in comparison to the Septuagint, and 2) the absence in the Hebrew Bible of several books already included in the Septuagint.

The first part, the different arrangements of canonical books in the Septuagint and the Hebrew Bible, is well-known to most people, as it is perpetuated in the difference of arrangement of books in the Hebrew Bible and in most modern bibles of the present age. The interesting issue is here that the modern versions generally follow the arrangement present in the Septuagint, and they disregard the organization of the Hebrew Bible. It is here a matter of discussion how, in the first place, such a difference emerged. From a chronological point of view, it is likely that the Septuagintal order of books should be considered older than the one found in the Hebrew Bible, which was hardly in existence in pre-Christian times, and it may be assumed that the different arrangement of the Hebrew Bible may have had polemical reasons. The original order in both Greek and Hebrew tradition seems, however, to be the Law followed by the Prophets, while they differed when it came to the incorporation of other writings. We may suppose (but it is only a supposition) that the decisions made by the Greek speaking Jews of Alexandria to place the writings between the Law and the Prophets may in a Palestinian Jewish environment at a later date have looked like too obviously a Christian choice (Law and Prophecy followed by the fulfilment of Prophecy).<sup>3</sup>

2 In 135 CE, after the insurrection against the Romans under Hadrian.

3 Thus the references to the *Tana(kh)* in other writings, e.g., in the Prologue to Jesus Sirach, and in the New Testament, can hardly be considered conclusive evidence of the originality of the order in the Hebrew Bible. This information is more likely an indication of a hierarchical kind of order: 1) the Law, 2) the Prophets and 3) whatever else; without reference to the actual place of the *ketubim* inside the *Tanakh*. For recent overviews of this problematic, cf J.A. Sandars, "Canon", *A(nchor) B(ible) D(ictionary)* I (1992), 837-858, and also

As far as the selection of writings is concerned, it is well-known that all books in the Hebrew Bible are also to be found in the Septuagint, while, on the other hand, several books of the Septuagint have no place in the Hebrew canon.

One principle seems to have governed the selection of writings in the Hebrew Bible: no book can officially belong to a period later than the days of Ezra the scribe. Of course, this is an ideological reason for accepting or rejecting books, as quite a few among the Old Testament writings must be considered considerably younger than Ezra, including, among others, the Song of Songs, Daniel, Ecclesiastes and Job. However, so far as these books have obtained canonical status, they have all been provided with an "author" considerably older than Ezra, such as Solomon, or they have been placed in an historical situation that clearly antedates Ezra, as happened to Daniel which was placed back in Neo-Babylonian as well as Achaemenid times. This principle may, however, be owing to a rather late development and may not have been in force when the Septuagintal selection of writings was determined. In fact, Ezra's position as the one who finally installed the Law seems to be a creation of fairly late Jewish thinking. In favour of this speaks the fact that Jesus Sirach seemingly does not know Ezra but — in his historical overview (Sir 42-50) — skips over the period from Nehemiah to the high priest Simon, the son of Onias (Sir 49,13; 50).<sup>4</sup> The persons responsible for the selection of books to be included in the Septuagint<sup>5</sup> were thus not constrained to acknowledge only books that could be attributed to figures of ancient Israelite history; they were free to include whatever kind of writing — maybe even contemporary writings — they pleased.

However, when we compare the books of the Septuagint to the ones of the Hebrew Bible, the importance of the author — that he must perforce be pre-Ezran — seems not always to have been decisive, as some books in the Septuagint, like the Psalms of Solomon, the Wisdom of Solomon, and the first book of Esdras, were not found worthy to be incorporated in the Hebrew Bible. In this case, some other principles may have governed the decisions, perhaps only the mechanical one that no Hebrew manuscript of these books was extant when the Rabbis selected the

M.K.H. Peters, "Septuagint", *ABD* 5 (1992), 1093-1104.

4 The point is well made by G. Garbini, *History & Ideology in Ancient Israel* (London 1988), 152.

5 In order not to be misunderstood this should be stressed: It is most likely that more than one selection of books was made, and that the standardization into only one canon may have been a phenomenon of a fairly late period.

books for the Hebrew Bible.<sup>6</sup> It should thus be relatively easy to isolate two such major principles: 1) the requirement that the content of a certain book not be considered to be in conflict with dominating Jewish-theological doctrines of the day, and 2) the requirement that books of special interest to religious groups like the early Church — especially apocalyptic literature — be discarded, or at least find as little representation as possible.<sup>7</sup>

Although these issues are interesting — and at the same time problematic — this is not the place to go further. Very little has been done here from an Old Testament point of view, evidently as a result of lack of interest on the part of Old Testament scholars, because the Hebrew Bible in the Christian *scholarly* tradition has obtained a position as the only relevant subject of study.<sup>8</sup>

To the extent that the already-mentioned particularities of the Septuagint and the Hebrew Bible may be considered facts (so far as we are entitled to speak about “facts” in Old Testament studies), the argument here cannot be considered controversial. It is therefore time to return to the theme of this article: whether or not the Old Testament was a Hellenistic book.

## 2. *Tanakh and Hellenism*

### a. *The Samaritan Schism*

When New Testament authors refer to writings in the Old Testament, however, seemingly according to the order of the Hebrew Bible, it is arguable that the first two parts of the *Tanakh* are in their Jewish context endowed with a special importance. The Law must be considered all-important, closely followed by the Prophets. The Writings are, on the other hand, certainly less important, if at all included.<sup>9</sup> This hierarchical subordination of the different groups of books is normally attributed to their redaction history, the Pentateuch being the oldest collection, fol-

6 Whether or not such a Hebrew “Vorlage” for these books has ever existed is irrelevant to the present argument.

7 The exception to this rule is, of course, the book of Daniel. This is not to deny that some earlier witnesses of the embryonic apocalyptic tradition were also accepted, say, Hezekiel and Zechariah.

8 Pace the hard-working and learned minority of Septuagint specialists, forming the body of the IOSCS.

9 Cf Mat 5,17; 7,12; 22,30; Luk 16,16; Acts 13,15; 24,14: exclusively *ὁ νόμος καὶ οἱ προφῆται*, cf, however, the enigmatic Luk 24,44: *πάντα τὰ γεγραμμένα ἐν τῷ νόμῳ Μωϋσέως καὶ τοῖς προφήταις καὶ ψαλμοῖς*. Sirach, Prologue: *“διὰ τοῦ νόμου καὶ τῶν προφητῶν καὶ τῶν ἄλλων”* (cf, however, also Sir 39,1: again only the Law and the Prophets).

lowed by the Prophets, whereas the Writings are reckoned no more than a late amalgamation of sundry types of literature. The translation of the first two groups, however, took place already before the appearance of the third group.

Scholars often refer to the existence of the Samaritan Pentateuch as an additional proof of this redactional history of the books of the Hebrew Bible. Because the Samaritan congregation only accepted the Law as holy writ, and not the Prophets and the Writings, it may be assumed that the Pentateuch was the only part of the Hebrew Bible in existence when the Samaritan schism occurred. This schism is usually dated to c. 300 BCE, which implies that at least the Law cannot be considered a work of the Hellenistic age.<sup>10</sup> When it comes to the Prophets, then the date of composition of these books may be the subject of discussion, and parts of the collection of prophetic books may certainly be very late, such as Trito-Isaiah and Malachi, and, of course, most of the Writings can be considered literature of the Hellenistic Period.

This argument, which is based on the Samaritan schism, is, on the other hand, not a very strong one.

First, it may be assumed that *ideological* as well as *political* reasons were of decisive importance when the Samaritans had to choose what was to become their "Bible". In those days there may have been plenty of reasons for the Samaritans to accept only the five books of Moses and to exclude all other parts of the present Old Testament (whether Greek or Hebrew). The religious centre of Judaism as expressed by the greater part of the Old Testament is certainly Jerusalem, and not Shechem or Mt. Garizim. Contrasting this, Jerusalem plays a very reduced role in the books of the Pentateuch, and here much more interest is invested in the homeland of the Samaritans. We should therefore simply ask the question, *Why at all should any Samaritan who found himself in outspoken opposition to Jerusalem want to include writings in his Bible that accepted Jerusalem as the one and only centre of the worship of God?* This may be the reason why the historical books were not to be part of the Samaritan Bible, but it also explains the absence of prophets from the Samaritan canonical literature, because the prophets — including Amos and Hosea — were certainly considered proponents of the worship of

10 On this recently B. Otzen, *Judaism in Antiquity: Political Development and Religious Currents from Alexander to Hadrian* (*The Biblical Seminar* 7; Sheffield 1990), 29. It is the opinion of Otzen that the Samaritans deliberately broke the relationships to mainstream Jewry, rather than being ostracized by the community of Jews in Jerusalem.

Yahweh in Jerusalem. And it goes without saying that a collection like the Book of Psalms could never become a Samaritan favourite — provided, of course, that the psalms were mostly connected with the temple of Jerusalem!

Second, The date of the Samaritan schism is in no way an established fact. It may have happened before 300 BCE, but it could just as well be considerably younger — or to cut it short: We simply do not know for sure when it happened.<sup>11</sup>

*b. Literary Matters*

The objections that can be directed against the Samaritan schism as the main witness to the existence of the Pentateuch before, say, 300 BCE, will of course not make the Old Testament a Hellenistic Book. It will therefore be necessary to broaden the perspective of the discussion by including other aspects, literary as well as historical matters. The first issue to discuss here will, accordingly, be literature.

It seems obvious to most scholars that our estimate of the age of a certain book of the Old Testament must be founded on information contained in the book itself and not on other information, and the estimate should certainly not be based on the existence of a historical background that may never have existed. Although seemingly self-evident, this method is not without fault, and it may easily become an invitation to “tail-chasing”, to quote Philip R. Davies.<sup>12</sup> By this we intend to say that the scholar may soon become entangled in a web of logically circular argumentation which is conveniently called the “hermeneutical circle” (in order to make it more acceptable among exegetes because of its supposed inevitability). Another point is that it is also supposed that the reading of a certain piece of literature will automatically persuade it to disclose its secrets — as if no other qualifications are needed.

The first point to discuss will be the chimera of circular argumentation that is based on a too close “reading” of the biblical text. Here the first example will be the books of Samuel. Some will assume that these books

11 Cf the excellent — although rather compressed discussion in J.A. Soggin, *Einführung in die Geschichte Israels und Judas* (Darmstadt 1991), 219-222. According to Soggin the schism was in the later Jewish tradition referred back to the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, although Soggin also acknowledges that the schism was not an indisputable fact before the Hellenistic Period.

12 Cf Philip R. Davies, *In Search of “Ancient Israel”* (*JSOT* 55 148; Sheffield 1992), 36, here used in connection with the reconstruction of the so-called “ancient Israel” based on information contained in much later (Old Testament) literature.

must be old simply because they say that they are old.<sup>13</sup> The exegete who claims that the books of Samuel must perforce be old will, as his point of departure, have to accept the claim of the books themselves by either rather naively assuming that Samuel could be the author (as the later Jewish tradition claimed) or by more sophisticated argumentation, for example, of the kind formerly often used to prove narratives like the "Succession Story" to be old because only an *eyewitness* would have been acquainted with the particulars of the family of David.<sup>14</sup> In order to escape from the trap created by this circular method of argumentation and the rather naive understanding of the biblical text that lies at the bottom of such claims, it will be necessary to go further and find arguments not necessarily parts of the biblical text itself but coming from other sources. Such information alone will be able to disclose to the reader that the books of Samuel were composed, not at the moment when Israel's got its first king, but at a much later date.

The case of the books of Samuel is, on the other hand, unproblematical, as Samuel cannot, of course, be the author, since he passes away already in 1 Sam 25, only to reappear as a ghost three chapters later. However, after this point anybody could be the author and the only thing that can be said for sure is that the *terminus a quo* for the composition of the books must be at a date following the death of Samuel, an event that happened — according to biblical as well as modern scholarly tradition — in the late 11th century BCE. The logical *terminus ad quem* for the composition must, however, be the moment when we possess the first complete scroll or book containing the text of the two books of Samuel as a whole and this is not the case before, at the earliest, the first half of the 4th century CE, the date of the presumably oldest Greek manuscript (the

13 The example is only one among plenty of other possibilities, although this example seems to be a particularly well chosen one. The example might, however, just as easily have been the Pentateuch or whatever part of the Deuteronomistic History we should happen to quote. We could easily go further to include also the prophetic books in the argument. As an example of what a new approach to this last-mentioned category of literature might be like, cf N.P. Lemche, "The God of Hosea", *Studies in Honor of Joseph Blenkinsopp (JSOT SS; Sheffield 1992)*, 241-255.

14 Cf A. Weiser, *Einleitung in das Alte Testament* (6. Aufl.; Göttingen 1966), 151; cf the somewhat more interesting argumentation in L. Rost, *Die Überlieferung von der Thronnachfolge Davids* (1926), reprinted in his *Das kleine Credo und andere Studien zum Alten Testament* (Heidelberg 1965), 119-253, see p 234. If so, scandals in royal families may not be the subject of only modern boulevard journalists! However, it should never be forgotten who will be best acquainted with inner thoughts of the participants in a narrative or play: of course, the author himself who invented his figures.



Vaticanus) of the Septuagint. As a consequence of this we dispose of a span of time of no less than 1300 to 1400 years and, in principle, we will have to maintain that the books of Samuel could have been written at any moment between 1000 BCE and 350 CE. Here it will certainly be very important to choose the right kind of procedure to follow! Should we start at the earliest possible date, the 11th century BCE, or at the latest possible, that is the 4th century CE? Or, to rephrase the sentence: Should we begin at the point where we are left with postulates and hypotheses, that is 1000 BCE, or is it preferable to start the procedure of finding a date for the composition of the books of Samuel at the point where we can be certain that these books existed, that is 350 CE? *The brutal fact is simply that we do not know that the books of Samuel existed around 1000 BCE, but we are certain that they were around in 350 CE!*

Although it is a standing procedure in the study of the Old Testament to begin where we know the least in order to end at the point where we have safe information, in order to explain what is certain by reasons that come from the dark past, it is obvious to almost everybody else that this procedure has no claim to be called scientific. We should, of course, start where we are best informed, and only from this vantage point should we try to penetrate into the unknown past. *The point of departure if we intend to discuss the date of the books of Samuel can only be 350 CE and not 1000 CE.* This does not, however, mean that the books of Samuel were written down — not even in their present form — between 340 and 350 CE, but it does mean that we have to provide reasons for an earlier date, as no absolute proof exists that these books must be older.

Now it is quite easy to provide a reasonable argument in favour of an earlier date. It might, for example, be based on the fact that *fragments* (but so far only fragments!) of the books of Samuel have turned up among the Dead Sea scrolls. It will presumably also be possible to argue in favour of an even earlier date, and to base the argument on the fact that these books were incorporated into the Septuagint. Nor can it be ruled out that they are much older, but in this case it is difficult to find hard evidence for such an early date.

It is an established fact that a literary product must be considered a reflection of its age of origin, as nobody can escape being a child of his or her own time. This is absolutely commonplace but, on the other hand not to be forgotten by, say, narrative analysts who may claim that it is possible to understand an argument by a person in the past

without knowing in advance the specific values attached in his age to certain beliefs and concepts. The same applies to the study of biblical literature, although written by anonymous authors. It is surely extremely naive to believe that the meaning of biblical books can be properly exposed without knowledge of their date of composition, about the ideas current in that age or the beliefs common to their audience; and it is of no consequence whether the subject is a narrative as a whole or parts of it or just single concepts and phrases.<sup>15</sup>

To quote another example: Genesis 1. This should hardly be as controversial as the first one. In the account of the origin of the world, God first creates the light and the darkness, followed by the water and the earth, although it is better to say that God does not exactly *create* these elements, but he makes a kind of division between them.<sup>16</sup> Now, this description of the creation in Gen 1 may seemingly be read without further knowledge of the background of its author; although a number of misinterpretations have occurred, for example, that we here have a *creatio ex nihilo*. But if, on the other hand, we should have a look at the story of the creation of the four elements, light and darkness, water and earth, from an ancient point of view, then it is obvious that God "creates" these elements as if he wished to be in accordance with some ideas current among Greek natural philosophers from the 6th century and onwards. The creation of the light and the darkness says that God creates the hot element and the cold element. Water and earth can also be compared to two elements, respectively the dry element and the wet element. Taken together, the four basic elements of creation are simply the four elements, the hot and the cold and the dry and the wet elements. Certainly old Thales from Miletus could not have been disappointed by these acts of God!

15 Cf also the proposal by Diana Vikander Edelman, *King Saul in the Historiography of Judah* (JSOT SS 121; Sheffield 1991), 11-26, to read the story of Saul and David as an ancient reader would have done it (although this is certainly a vain hope, as Diana Edelman herself readily admits).

16 The creative activity of God in Gen 1 is usually described by the verbs ברא and עשה. However, the light (v 3) and the darkness (v 9) appear, not because they are his creation, but on his direct order, (neither ברא nor עשה is used in this connection). After the appearance of the light, God makes a division (Hebrew ברל, in the Hiph'il) between the light and the darkness (v 4). After this God personally makes the firmament (v 7: עשה), but this firmament is to be considered another division, only now between different kinds of water. The waters below the firmament are collected in one place, on God's order and the dry land appears as a consequence of this. Again it should be realized that the dry land is a creation of God; it just appears as a consequence of division between the water and the land.

As already indicated, this is hardly to be considered controversial, as most scholars would be prepared to accept that the author of Gen 1 cannot predate the Babylonian Exile. Rather, he belongs to the 6th or 5th centuries, if not later. If the author of Gen 1 knew the ideas of Thales and his colleagues or his information came from some other source (maybe the supposed oriental background of Thales' theory), then this would not be in conflict with the generally accepted date of Gen 1.

In this case Thales and the Greeks could, on the other hand, only be considered the *terminus a quo* for dating Gen 1, and they are certainly not to be identified with the *terminus ad quem*. If the dating of Genesis should follow the same procedure as the one relevant to the dating of the books of Samuel, then the result will be that this text must have been written down between the 6th century BCE and the 4th century CE. However, also now the presence of some Dead Sea fragments of the book of Genesis makes it highly likely that this book of Genesis was in existence also in the 1st century BCE. The span of years from the earliest possible to the latest possible date of Gen 1 is much shorter than the one relevant to the dating of the books of Samuel, although from a methodological point of view the problem of dating Gen 1 and the books of Samuel is very much of the same kind.

### c. *Historical Matters*

At this point a shift of emphasis from literature to history would be most appropriate to continue our discussion of the Old Testament as a Hellenistic book. By way of introduction we may ask the question, How important is the historical information provided by a biblical book for dating the book itself? We should also here proceed in very much the same way as already indicated above, although literary issues have now been replaced by historical ones. Instead of looking for the place of origin of some ideological elements that may be discerned in a certain biblical text, we are now trying to establish the time and place for whatever historical information the text in question provides. In this section, I shall use two examples; first, the book of Joshua, and, second, the books of Samuel.

The first example, i.e., the book of Joshua, is easy to handle today, since it has for a long time been evident that the historical reality referred to in the book of Joshua has disappeared. The book of Joshua has simply nothing to tell us about the historic origin of the Israelite nation. No prolonged discussion of the *Forschungsgeschichte* is necessary here,

although I may refer to the discussion in my *Early Israel*.<sup>17</sup> However, in order to introduce my subject here, it should be stressed that the often fervent discussion between the two great schools of historical studies in the past, on one hand the German school of Albrecht Alt and Martin Noth, and on the other the American one of William F. Albright, resulted in the victory of the American school, although it may at the same time be argued that it “died” in the process.

To put it short, the German school was principally interested in analysing Old Testament texts to dig out historical facts from the biblical narratives, while the Americans were mostly interested in creating harmony between archaeological artifacts and historical information that derived from the biblical text. The American school triumphed because archaeology was destined to deal a death blow to the German approach and its results; archaeology simply showed these German ideas about Israel's origin and oldest history to be wrong. The German procedure mainly consisted in creating a rationalistic paraphrase of the stories of the Old Testament and it was its intended goal to present a picture of the historical development that would not disturb our sense of what may possibly have happened (no miracles, please!). At the same time the German scholars almost slavishly followed the historical lay-out of the Old Testament itself, and they had no intention to depart from the general succession of periods and events presented by the biblical writers. We may say, to quote the German scholar Bernd Jørg Diebner of Heidelberg, that the German method should be likened to a *text-archaeological* procedure.<sup>18</sup> The most important German results were 1) that the early Israelites did not conquer Palestine but moved into the country as mostly peaceful semi-nomads; the actual Israelite subjugation of the indigenous population only followed at a later date, and 2) that following their settlement in Palestine, the Israelite tribes proceeded to create an *amphictyony* or sacred tribal league, that became the home of most of Israel's traditions about its past.<sup>19</sup>

17 Cf N.P. Lemche, *Early Israel* (VTS 37; Leiden 1985), 1-79. A much shorter resumé can be found in my *Ancient Israel: A New History of Israelite Society* (*The Biblical Seminar* 5; Sheffield 1988), 104-116.

18 Cf B.J. Diebner, “Wider die ‘Offenbarungs-Archäologie’ in der Wissenschaft vom Alten Testament. Grundsätzlicher zum Sinn alttestamentlicher Forschung im Rahmen der Theologie”, *DBAT* 18 (1984), 30-53.

19 The classical German description of this period is certainly Martin Noth, *Geschichte Israels* (Göttingen 1950). In more recent German histories of Israel, like (the probably best informed) Herbert Donner, *Geschichte des Volkes Israel und seiner Nachbarn in Grundzügen* (*ATD Ergänzungsreihe* 4/1; Göttingen 1984) the construct has begin to crumble, and the amphictyony is now not part

As already mentioned, the so-called "dirt" archaeology, that is field archaeology proper, finally contributed to the down-fall of the German position, but the idea of an Israelite conquest nourished by Albright and his students had to be discarded. Archaeology did not prove the Bible to be true; to the contrary, it has shown that the Israelites (whoever they were) never conquered Palestine but should be considered part of the ancient population of Palestine going back to the Bronze Age. Only at a much later date did the "Israelite" society develop the characteristics of the "Israel" to be found in the Old Testament.<sup>20</sup>

One historical fact cannot, of course, be denied, namely the very existence of the narratives about Israel's conquest of its land in the book of Joshua, but these tales have nothing to do with historical circumstances at the end of the Late Bronze Age and in the beginning of the Iron Age. This is certainly not a postulate, but a fact, and we are therefore in the position to ask, What do the narratives in Joshua really tell us about if they do not inform us about a conquest of Palestine in ancient times? The answer is clear and obvious, the book of Joshua informs its readers about a conquest that never happened. The next question is then, Why does this book of Joshua present information about a conquest that never happened? The answer to this last question may not be as clear as the former one, because we cannot say that it is based on hard evidence; it rather depends on scholarly theories and hypotheses. One possible answer could be that the tradition of Israel's foreign origin was invented at a later date in order to *create* a racially pure Israelite nation. An extensive number of passages in Joshua and other places in the Old Testament may be called upon in support of this answer, starting with the book of Genesis and continuing right through to the book of Ezra the Scribe. In case we prefer to continue along this line of thought, the next

of it anymore.

- 20 A kind of status questionis can be found in Diana Edelman (ed), "Toward a Consensus on the Emergence of Israel in Canaan", *SJOT* 5/2 (1991), 1-116 (including contributions by N.P. Lemche, G.W. Ahlström, I. Finkelstein and others), and in two comprehensive volumes that have just appeared, in T.L. Thompson, *The Early History of the Israelite People (Studies in the History of the Ancient Near East)*, Leiden 1992), and G.W. Ahlström, *The History of Ancient Palestine from the Palaeolithic Period to Alexander's Conquest (JSOT SS 146)*, Sheffield 1992). So far no serious reaction has come from German scholars; a book like R. Neu, *Von der Anarchie zum Staat. Entwicklungsgeschichte Israels vom Nomadentum zur Monarchie im Spiegel der Ethnosoziologie* (Neukirchen 1992), should rather, because of its total neglect of archaeology and because of its extensive retionalistic paraphrase of the biblical text, be understood as a clear step backwards.

question will probably be, When did the impetus arise that created the milieu of such an idea of racial purity of the Israelite people in contrast to other nations living in its land, as this claim cannot be supported by historical evidence? The correct answer to that question will be that such an idea arose the moment certain individuals who considered themselves to be *Israelites* saw other individuals who they did not consider to be Israelites to be occupying "their" land. Evidently — in light of what we know about Israel's origins — this claim to be pure Israelites destined to inherit the land must be a late development, and it most probably turns the book of Joshua into a post-exilic book written by an author — or a number of authors — who can scarcely have lived in the land to be conquered. This says that the book of Joshua is 1) post-exilic and 2) literature from the Jewish diaspora, or to use a Hebrew term, it originated among the Jewish *gola*.

When introducing my second example, I should like to return to the books of Samuel. Here the central figure is David, not Samuel nor Saul, and the narratives about Samuel and Saul should be considered a prolegomenon to the narratives about David. It is only right to say that David is truly the great hero of Israel's past (Joshua may be the only one to dispute that claim), and he was reckoned the creator of a great Israelite empire preceding the independent histories of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah.

Laymen as well as scholars (including the present writer<sup>21</sup>) have always thought highly of the historicity of David and considered it an established fact. They also believe the main part of the traditions about David and his son and successor, Solomon, to be trustworthy information, although none of it, whether person or event, is confirmed or supported by external evidence, especially by written sources from other parts of the ancient Near East. The only written evidence about David and Solomon are — apart from the Old Testament — sources whose information about these two kings comes from the Old Testament itself. Only a few voices of protest have arisen that may cast doubt on the historicity of the early Israelite empire, including the factuality of its two kings,<sup>22</sup> and the conclusions reached by David Jamieson-Drake can only

21 Cf my article, "David's Rise", *JSOT* 10 (1978), 2-25. Although the historical part of the argument in that article — as well as that of several other contributions by other scholars either following in its footsteps or progressing along comparable lines — may now have to be discarded, the literary argument may still be of some importance, as maintained by G.G. Nicol, in his "The Death of Joab and Accession of Solomon", *SJOT* 7 (1993), 134-151.

22 Cf the outspoken mistrust of the biblical tradition in G. Garbini, *History &*

be considered a temporary culmination of this.<sup>23</sup> It is the opinion of Jamieson-Drake that we find no evidence of a united Israelite kingdom in pre-exilic times. To the contrary, it is highly unlikely that a state called Judah came into existence before the middle of the 8th century. The Jerusalem of "David's" time was hardly anything but a small fortified village, occupying a territory of less than four hectares, and inhabited by a population of hardly more than 2000 persons, including women and children.<sup>24</sup> Although Jamieson-Drake's argument will certainly provoke other scholars to object, his case is so far a very strong one in favour of our surrender the time of the united kingdom as a historic age.

These two dubious cases, the historicity of the Israelite conquest and the United Kingdom of Israel are certainly guiding us in the same direction. When we deal with the tradition of the empire of David, we obviously have to ask, Why did this idea of a Davidic empire arise, if it was totally without historical support? The exchange of answers and question that may follow will be of the same kind as the one described in more detail above concerning Johua's conquest. The result of such a discussion would probably be that a number of possible dates for the origin of this idea of David and his empire could be proposed, either a late pre-exilic, an exilic or even a post-exilic one. The answer to the question why this story was invented at all will presumably be of this kind: in order to create an "Israelite" great king comparable to the great kings said to have ruled other nations. The biblical historians consequently turned the mythical ancestor of the Judaeen royal family into such an ideal king to be compared to the empire-builders of the ancient world. It could also be argued that since this great ancestor-king never lived, it is impossible to consider the stories about the kingdom of David historical reports concerning the past; rather, they present a program for the future, that

*Ideology in Ancient Israel*, 21-32. Recently also D.B. Redford has presented a negative view of the historicity of David and Solomon, in his *Egypt, Canaan, and Israel in Ancient Times* (Princeton 1992), 297-311.

23 Cf D.W. Jamieson-Drake, *Scribes and Schools in Monarchic Judah* (*JSOT* 55 109, Sheffield 1991).

24 The calculations of the population size is, however, not presented by Jamieson-Drake but it is my own estimate, based on a calculation of population size like the one proposed in J.M. Sasson, *Jonah* (*AB* 24B; New York 1990, 312. It should, however, be clear that this is a very generous calculation. It would also be possible to say that the area covered only one or two hectares, and included a population of a thousand persons or less.

will appear as soon as the contemporaries of the historians themselves have (re-)conquered their land. It could very well be the case that the stories about David as well as the conquest narratives in Joshua aimed at creating a program for the glorious future of Israel, rather than a report of past glory that never existed. Thus these narratives could very well derive from the Persian period, and the model for the great king may have been none other than the great founder of the Persian empire, Cyrus. In this connection it should not be forgotten that the careers of Cyrus and David reveal a number of comparable traits. It is, however, also possible that the idea of the great king David only arose in the Hellenistic period and for comparable reasons.

More than a few scholars will be prepared to think of the books of Joshua and Samuel as having propagandistic motives. Thus a number of studies have lately connected the composition of these books with the reign of King Josiah. One such example is provided by Magnus Ottosson who regards the book of Josiah to be a product of the Josianic age and a program for the Josianic restoration of the Davidic kingdom.<sup>25</sup> It should, however, be noted that while Ottosson on the one hand thinks that the conquest stories in Joshua are fictional war reports and have little if anything to do with historical facts, on the other he still considers the Davidic kingdom to be an historically established fact. Contrary to Ottosson's opinion, his analysis (probably correct) of the relationship between P-elements and the main D-narrative in Joshua proves Joshua to be not Josianic but post-exilic, and later than P — provided, of course that P should be dated in the post-exilic era.<sup>26</sup>

Another scholar who thinks highly of the Josianic age as the time of history writing is Diana Vikander Edelman who considers the Saul-David narrative to belong to the time of Josiah, although the purpose of writing this story at exactly this moment in Judah's history seems more ambiguous.<sup>27</sup> It is thus a problem for her dating of these narratives that the Israelite people in 1 Sam 8 demands to have a king like all the other

25 Cf M. Ottosson, *Josuboken. En programskrift för davidisk restauration* (Uppsala 1991).

26 Ottosson generally considers the P-elements original parts of the deuteronomistic narratives in Joshua. For that reason, they cannot, of course, be late additions to the narratives. It should at the same moment also be said that Ottosson, like so many other Scandinavian scholars of the past, reckons the P-elements to be left-overs from various sanctuaries like Shilo or Gilgal. The problem for such a theory is certainly that it is solidly based on guesswork, as no proof — except the circular variety — can be adduced in its favour.

27 Cf Diana Vikander Edelman, *King Saul in the Historiography of Judah*.



nations. But why should anybody in the age of Josiah wish to have a king, as they already had one! As a matter of fact, this demand can hardly be pre-exilic.<sup>28</sup> It is therefore more likely that the author of 1 Sam 8 wrote in a period and for a society without a king, and also in this case we better have to look for the exilic or post-exilic periods.<sup>29</sup>

This predilection for the time of Josiah as the creative period in the history of Hebrew literature is, however, problematical. It must be realized that *it is the deuteronomistic historians who say* that the period of Josiah was a splendid era, a restauration period and therefore the right time and place for writing great literature like Joshua and Samuel. If scholars should accept the picture presented by the deuteronomistic circle without scrutinizing the reasons for turning Josiah's period into such an age of "enlightenment", they would be falling into the same hermeneutical trap as did, formerly, scholars of the calibre of a Gerhard von Rad, who thought highly of the Solomonic period as the background of Israelite history writing.<sup>30</sup> Although this background for Hebrew history writing seems now to be evaporating with the demise of the Hebrew empire in the 10th century BCE, scholars are indefatigably repeating the arguments, only this time, however, connected with the era of Joiaiah, which they consider to have been almost in the same class as, formerly, the time of Solomon. But it should never be forgotten that all we know about Josiah is told by Old Testament writers, as no external source ever mentions Josiah, except such as are clearly dependent on the Old Testament narrative. Mostly because the Old Testament itself says that Josiah

28 Unless we should choose to express a view on these narratives like the one in F. Crüsemann, *Der Widerstand gegen das Königtum* (WMANT 49; Neukirchen 1978), who maintains that they are to be considered reflections of party politics in pre-monarchical times — not a bad idea at all if it was possible to claim that the deuteronomistic traditions are as old as that.

29 It may be an alternative to the idea that David became the model of the later Judaeen kings, especially Josiah, to transfer this honor from the presumably non-existent David to a person whose historicity cannot be doubted, and here the obvious candidate would probably be Omri (followed by his son Akab). The importance of the state that was governed by these kings is certain and is also reflected by Assyrian and Moabite inscriptions. It is also generally assumed that they reigned over a territory that included Jerusalem, if not all of Judah. It is at least a working hypothesis that in the period following the fall of Samaria the idea of the united kingdom which was founded on the existence in the 9th century of the kingdom of Omri was transferred to Judah, and that the greatness belonging to the old Israelite kings was at the same time bestowed on David, the mythical ancestor of the Judaeen kings.

30 Programmatically expressed in G. von Rad, "Der Anfang der Geschichtsschreibung im alten Israel" (1944), now in his *Gesammelte Studien zum Alten Testament* (*Theologische Bücherei* 8; München 1958), 148-188.

tried at the end of the 7th century BCE to unify all of Israel into one major state, biblical scholars believe this to be true.<sup>31</sup> However, the Josiah of 2 Kings *need* not be a historical figure at all (although it seems likely that shortly before the disappearance of the shortlived state of Judah there lived a king called Josiah in Jerusalem); he may be nothing more than the invention of the deuteronomistic author(s) who wrote the books of Kings. The comparison between David and Josiah is of course also a product of deuteronomistic thinking and it shows how the deuteronomists worked a rather miserable king with an inglorious end into a major historical figure of Israel's history. It can also be argued that the deuteronomists very much needed a Josiah to make their own religious program legitimate, and here it is of no consequence whether the Deuteronomistic History was a work of the exilic or the post-exilic periods.<sup>32</sup>

The discussion may stop at this point, and it may be argued that the time of Josiah, the so-called restoration period in the history of Judah, which is only known from the Old Testament, is nothing except another product of the deuteronomistic imagination, and it is not necessarily

31 This reminds me of the the verdict of Mario Liverani, in his "Storiografia politica hittita II: Telipini, ovvero: Della Solidarietà", *OA* 16 (1977), 105-131, see p 105: "The indolence of the historians is of great extent, and when they deal with a certain period and they are confronting a continuous account of the course of events, which has already been included in some sort of 'ancient' documentary source (which is perforce not contemporary with the events themselves), then they all too happily apply this account, and they limit their efforts to paraphrasing it or even rationalizing it" (transl. N.P. Lemche). Liverani is dealing with the scholarly reconstructions of the history of the ancient Hittite empire, normally based almost exclusively on the decree of Telipinus and generally accepting its views, and it is fairly easy for Liverani to deconstruct the content of the edict and to show that it is a totally propagandistic and partisan view of the history of the Hittites that is presented by the king who issued the decree.

32 It is, on the other hand, interesting to compare the description of Josiah in 2 Kings with the one in 2 Chron 34-35. The chronicler seems much less enthusiastic about this king than his deuteronomistic source, although he duly quotes the deuteronomistic narrative almost from one end to the other. However, when he comes to the death of Josiah, the chronicler clearly expresses his contempt of this king who died an ignominious death because he disobeyed a direct order from Yahweh. The chronicler also diminishes (or even ridicules: cp the wording of 2 Chron 35,18, "No Passover like it had been kept in Israel since the days of the prophet Samuel", with the slightly different version in 2 Kings 23,22!) the importance of Josiah's reform as described in 2 Kings by referring to Hezekiah as the real reformer who reinstated the Passover in its former glory (cf 2 Chron 30). According to the chronicler, the reform of Josiah was no more than a copy of the one initiated by Hezekiah (cf 2 Chron 31,1).

more historical than the age of David and Solomon.<sup>33</sup> Instead of transferring the period of Josiah into a great time for history writing in Israel (or: Judah), only to repeat former mistakes, it will be safer to apply the same procedure as advocated above in connection with the dating of biblical literature; that is, to begin where we can be certain that the literature in question really existed, and after having established that fact to proceed with our quest for a possibly earlier date. It should, however, be understood that there may be little reason to go back to the time of Josiah that may be no more than a postulate made by Old Testament writers.

#### *Other Themes*

I believe that I have presented enough practical examples here to illustrate my point. It would have been possible to discuss also other important issues and themes that may be in the focus of the scholarly debate. I have to abstain from doing this here. Instead I will only mention a couple of very important themes for discussion in this place:

1) *The religion of Israel*: In this connection I shall only mention one recent contribution that may help us to clarify the history of the religion which, according to the Old Testament, should be considered old Israelite religion. In his highly interesting study *Der höchste Gott*,<sup>34</sup> Herbert Niehr proposes not to separate the emergence of monotheism in "Israel" (we should rather think of post-exilic Jews) from a contemporary trend towards a practical monotheism in other places. It is only true to say that Niehr's investigation can be understood as a confirmation of my own view: that the so-called pre-exilic Israelite religion was some sort of Western Asiatic religion, hardly distinguishable from religious belief in places like Moab, Ammon, Phoenicia, etc.<sup>35</sup> As a result of Niehr's (and others) work we are entitled to ask whether it is not totally misleading to talk

33 It should not be overlooked that some indications offered by Jamieson-Drake point at the possibility that the decline of Judah started well before the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem, notably in the sector termed "Public Works". Cf Jamieson-Drake, *Scribes and Schools*, 104, and charts 7 and 9, although a more comprehensive study of the period of Josiah is badly needed, especially from an archaeological point of view.

34 *BZAW* 190 (Berlin 1990).

35 Cf my *Ancient Israel*, 197-257; as well as "The Development of the Israelite Religion in Light of Recent Studies on the Early History of Israel", i J.A. Emerton (ed.), *Congress Volume Leuven 1989 (VTS 43)*, 97-115. I have little to say against a verdict like this: "... there was very little distinction between Canaanite and Israelite religion, at least in practice. The rituals were virtually the same, even if one assumes that Israel's Yahwistic theology was an innovation — and that is not always evident" (W.G. Dever, *Recent Archaeological Discoveries and Biblical Research* [Seattle 1990], 166).

about an *Israelite* religion in pre-exilic times. Genuine Israelite religion as presented by the biblical tradition is no way *Israelite*, it is the religion of the post-exilic *Jewish* society, and it is more than likely that the religious conflicts between the so-called Israelite religion and the so-called Canaanite religion that emerge from the Old Testament books have little to do with conditions in Palestine between, say, 1000 and 500 BCE. Rather this information refers to the situation between, say, 500 and 200 BCE.

2) *The national identity of the Israelite people.* Just as the Israelite religion in the Old Testament turns out to represent Jewish religious thought, the Israelites of the Old Testament are Jews (it is ironical that this was anticipated by, for example, the German sociologist Max Weber, when he published his study of Israel as *Ancient Judaism*.<sup>36</sup> If this is compared to the modern view on the origin of the "Israelites" (and we now have to put this concept of "Israel" into quotation marks!), there is no longer any reason to talk about the *Israelites* as forming an ethnic unity in pre-exilic times. If anything, the so-called Israelites were Canaanites, or maybe it is better — to make this conform with the result of my study on the Canaanites — to say that the "Israelites" are left without any specific ethnic affiliation at all. They just belonged among the inhabitants of Palestine, where they formed a late branch of the population that had been present in Western Asia since the beginning of history. The idea of "Israel" in the Old Testament may be nothing except a very late ideological concept, as maintained by Philip R. Davies.<sup>37</sup>

3) *The Babylonian exile.* This is certainly an issue that is growing in importance as the greater part of the Old Testament is now being considered fairly late. The whole issue of the exile could be summarized in this fashion: We have excellent information about the beginning of the Babylonian exile, at the early half of the 6th century BCE; it is, however, far more uncertain when it stopped. The "official" date of return is, of course, 538 BCE, when the exiles were allowed to return as a consequence of Cyrus' decree, or this is what is normally assumed. However,

36 *Das antike Judentum* (Halle 1923). It should on the other hand be noted that the distinctiveness of what is "Israelite" and what "Jewish" may not always have been as obvious to Max Weber's contemporaries as it was to become afterwards.

37 On the Canaanites, cf. N.P. Lemche, *The Canaanites* (*JSOT* 55 110; Sheffield 1991). The consequences of this are more sharply drawn up by P.R. Davies, *In Search of "Ancient Israel"* (*JSOT* 55 148; Sheffield 1992). Most of this development was, however, foreseen by the late Gösta W. Ahlström, in his *Who Were the Israelites?* (Winona Lake, IN 1986).

if such a decree was ever issued, with the particular intention to send the Jewish people home again, it could be maintained that this time the Jews of Babylonia were offered something which they could easily refuse. Most of them preferred to stay in Babylonia and to die there as did also their descendants for many generations. They found little reason to leave the centre of the Persian empire in order to move to its fringe to one of its poorest and most desolate provinces. It is quite ironical that the end of the Jewish communities of Mesopotamia only came in 1948 CE, when the majority of the Jews of Mesopotamia were forced to leave and to return to Palestine as a consequence of the establishment of the modern Jewish state.

I wish to stress this point, as most scholars who are prone to date the major part of the Old Testament to the Babylonian exile may after all be right: This literature is really *exilic*. It should at the same time also be stressed that few of the said scholars have realized that the exile continued — almost forever — although it was from now on a self-inflicted one. The sons and daughters of the deportees happily continued to live in Mesopotamia as long as the Persian empire existed, but also under the following empires of the Seleucids, the Sassanides, and the Parthians. It may even be maintained that the idea of an exile became a kind of obsession to the Jews of the Diaspora because it provided them with a legitimate excuse for keeping away from that barren place called Palestine.

#### *The Old Testament — a Hellenistic Book?*

The following points may speak in favour of a hellenistic date of the Old Testament:

1) It is a fact that the history of Israel as told by the Old Testament has little if anything to do with the real historical developments in Palestine until at least the later part of the Hebrew monarchy. It cannot be excluded (and there is, as a matter of fact, no reason to exclude it) that we here and there may possess genuine historical recollections, but it should at the same time be argued that from a historian's point of view we have to consider the historical literature in the Old Testament a poor source of historical information.

2) An extensive part of this literature should be considered the creation of the Jewish diaspora, first and foremost the patriarchal narratives, the story in Exodus about the Israelites in Egypt and their escape from Egypt, but also the conquest narratives in Joshua. All of these aim at one

and the same issue, at the more or less utopian idea that a major Jewish kingdom — even empire — should be (re-)established in Palestine, an idea that emerged in spite of the fact that it had no background in an ancient Israelite empire.

3) The writers who invented the “history of Israel” seem to have modelled their history on a Greek pattern. The first in modern times to stress this point is presumably John Van Seters,<sup>38</sup> although his reference to Hecataeus of Miletus may seem gratuitous, as we no longer possess Hecataeus’ history, except in the form of rather diminutive fragments. It would be preferable to propose the history of Herodotus as the earliest point of comparison and to indicate that there are a number of similarities between the histories of Herodotus and the Old Testament. Both histories have as their beginning a perspective that encompasses the world as such, and this perspective only at a later point narrows down to include but a single nation, respectively the Greek and the Hebrew. I should like to stress this point without ignoring the many significant differences between Herodotus’s history and the Old Testament historical literature.<sup>39</sup> It is only my intention to indicate that the biblical historians display a knowledge of the Greek tradition, and that this could hardly have been the case before Greek historians were to become known and

38 Cf J. Van Seters, *In Search of History* (New Haven 1983), and now his *Prologue to History: The Yahwist as Historian in Genesis* (Louisville 1992). In his new book, Van Seters argues that two currents are presented in the Yahwistic parts of Genesis, one of them displaying an interest in history proper, while the other is more of an “antiquarian kind”. The first current can be traced back to the Greek historical tradition while the second is genuinely oriental, and has its roots in Mesopotamia, in the Babylonian tradition. According to Van Seters, the meeting-place of both currents cannot be pre-exilic, but must be dated to the Babylonian exile in the strict sense of the word. In favour of this, Van Seters discusses the possibility that the Phoenicians were the carriers of the Greek tradition to the Orient. This sounds like an unnecessary complication and is totally unattested. In spite of Van Seters’ splendid defence of his exilic date, a more relevant moment can and should be proposed for the confluence of Greek and Oriental tradition, that is the time of the Seleucid and Ptolemaic empires when the Greeks ruled the East. In this age, the Jews of Mesopotamia would have had easy access to the Greek as well as the Babylonian traditions.

39 Other Greek historical works should of course be consulted as relevant to the discussion, in particular Hellenistic authors, but also Livy, although Livy, being a Roman author, can only be an elaborate example of history writing in the Hellenistic world. The fact, however, remains that a number of parallels can be found between Livy and the Old Testament history, even structural ones. This may not be a coincidence but may be a testimony of a common “spiritual” (i.e., Hellenistic) background.

read in the Near East.

4) The Persian period does not seem to meet the requirements of being the time when the historical books of the Old Testament were written down. First of all it would have to be proved that Greek authors were known and extensively read in the Persian empire, and I very much doubt that this was the case. And as for the second part of the issue, we have to look for a suitable place where the biblical historical narratives may have been written down.

One of the major problems in this connection is the fact that we have very little information about the Persian age, at least as far as the Jewish population is concerned. Thus we know practically nothing about the situation in Palestine except from the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, and although these books have generally been highly regarded as first hand sources of information, some critical voices have arisen lately, arguing 1) that the mission of Ezra never took place and 2) that the authenticity of the so-called "autobiography" of Nehemiah may also be doubted — with reference to the fact that autobiographies constituted an acknowledged and wide-spread literary genre in the Greek world.<sup>40</sup>

Palestine in the Persian period hardly seems to have embraced the kind of society in which to look for the authors of literature like the one found in the historical parts of the Old Testament. From a material point of view the Persian conquest seems to have brought little positive to Palestinian society in general. The rebuilding of Jerusalem was evidently only on a miniature scale, the Jerusalem of Nehemiah being even smaller than the one that existed before the extensions to the city area made by Hezekiah.<sup>41</sup> It is certainly true that much work has to be done in order to

40 A number of interesting viewpoints relevant to this discussion can be found in P.R. Davies (ed), *Second Temple Studies 1* (JSOT SS 117; Sheffield 1991); notably Lester Grabbe, "Reconstructing History from the Book of Ezra", 98-107; and R.P. Carroll, "Textual Strategies and Ideology in the Second Temple Period", 108-124. On Nehemiah's biography, cf now also D.J.A. Clines, "The Nehemiah Memoirs: The Perils of Autography", in his *What Does Eve Do to Help? and Other Readerly Questions to the Old Testament* (JSOT SS 94; Sheffield 1990), 124-164. It is, as a matter of fact, an age-old position which hereby make its re-entrance on the scene: cf C.C. Torrey, "The Exile and the Restoration", in *Ezra Studies* (Chicago 1910), 285-340, and especially C.C. Torrey, *The Composition and Historical Value of Ezra-Nehemiah* (BZAW 2; Gießen 1896). See also the discussion in P.R. Davies, *In Search of Ancient "Israel"*, 78-87, and, of course, in G. Garbini, *History & Ideology*, 151-169.

41 It is strange to realize how non-informative even the most recent descriptions of Jerusalem in the Persian period are. Thus P.J. King, in *ABD* III, 757, has nothing to add to such old books as K.M. Kenyon's, *Digging up Jerusalem*

archaeologically clarify the conditions of the Persian period, and if we wish to create the impression that great literature may possibly have been composed here in this age.<sup>42</sup>

A utterance like the following by Philip J. King, "The Persian Period was a time of peace and prosperity, when Judah was allowed a great deal of administrative independence", should awaken suspicion. How do we know this, except that it is the convenient common opinion of many scholars? Modern examples of crumbling societies left on their own and with "a great deal of administrative independence" provide a sad picture of local incompetence, and Jamieson-Drake's demonstration of the total collapse of Judaeon society around 600 BCE points at socio-economic conditions in Palestine in the following centuries that will have demanded more than the occasional visit of a Persian emissary to settle. As a matter of fact, the often praised leniency of the Persians towards their subject nations may have been nothing more than a display of an absolute lack of responsibility from the Persian part. Maybe they did not interfere in local affairs because they did not care! A reevaluation of Persian rule and a realistic appraisal of the Achaemenid administrative system are also most needed. The possibility that the community in Jerusalem was organized as a "Tempel-Bürger" society, as maintained by some scholars following a proposal made by Joel Weinberg, for example, Joseph Blenkinsopp and David Petersen, seems to this author to be a moot question, as very little except hypotheses speaks in favour of such a theory.<sup>43</sup> I have little to offer here, except that I have severe doubts about the efficiency of Persian administration in those days, doubts

(London 1974), 172-187. Both King and Kenyon merely paraphrase the books of Nehemiah and Ezra.

42 In spite of the existence of a work like E. Stern, *Material Culture of the Land of the Bible in the Persian Period* (Warminster 1982), a study like D. Jamieson-Drake, *Scribes and Schools*, is most needed for this period and the available material should be statistically analysed. The deplorable lack of material is also reflected by the rather short description of the age — from an archaeological point of view — in Helga Weippert, *Palästina in Vorhellenistischer Zeit (Handbuch der Archäologie II/1; München 1988)*, 687-718. Her remarks on p 697 ("Forschungsstand") are most revealing. It is also the case that most of the material from this period is found in sites north of present day Haifa, an area that can hardly be considered part of the Persian province of *Jehud!*

43 On this J. Blenkinsopp, "Temple and Society in Achaemenid Judah", in P.R. Davies, *Second Temple Studies*, 22-53, and D. Petersen, "Israelite Prophecy: Change Versus Continuity", in J.A. Emerton, *Congress Volume Leuven 1989 (VTS 45; Leiden 1991)*, 190-203, see 195-203. The original formulation of this hypothesis can be found in Joel Weinberg, "Demographische Notizen zur Geschichte der nachexilischen Gemeinde in Juda", *Klio* 59 (1972), 45-59, and



caused by a report like Xenophon's *Anabasis*. Here, in the heyday of the Persian empire (at the end of the 5th century BCE), Xenophon together with a small army of Greek mercenaries (c. 5000 men) participated in an expedition that brought them to the very heart of the Persian Empire. The expedition was, however, not to end here when their Persian warlord was killed in a battle. Now the Greeks simply turned around and walked home. In spite of having lost their commanding officers, they were able not only to get rid of their Persian persecutors but to proceed their journey right through — at the beginning — the richest provinces of the Persian empire. They were only met by really serious opposition when they crossed the borders of Anatolia, although their opponents were not the Persians proper but local mountain tribes, seemingly the subjects of the Persian king. The report by Xenophon thus hardly indicates that the adversaries of the Greeks were citizens in an efficiently governed state or empire! It would certainly also be ironical — in case a view on the appearance of the Old Testament like the one promoted by, for example, Philipp Davies should be vindicated — if most of the archaeological material of the formative period of the Old Testament literature should belong to the much neglected Persian Period, as this material has often been thrown away or placed in dumps — in order that the archaeologist may quickly get down to the truly "Israelite" layers.<sup>44</sup>

It should never be forgotten that the revitalization of the ancient Near East only became a fact after the Greek take-over. It is an established fact that city life vastly expanded after the conquest of Alexander. Here we must realize what happened in Jerusalem and in Palestine, innovations that were comparable — although on a smaller scale — to the cultural developments in Syria, Mesopotamia and Egypt. I hardly have to develop this theme any further. It is my impression that we now, finally, get a glimpse of a society in which great literature may have been composed, kept and loved. Scholars may nurse very romantic ideas about what may have happened in the nooks and corners of pre-Hellenistic Palestine, in a society considerably poorer than the one found there, for example, during the Late Bronze Age (a society that was not the home of any great

"Das *bēit 'āhōt* im 6.-4. Jh. v.u.Z.", *VT* 23 (1973), 400-414.

44 An outspoken example of the lack of interest (contempt for), especially among Israeli archaeologists, for the Persian period is the recent "standard" archaeology by A. Mazar, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible 10,000—586 B.C.E.* (New York 1990). His case is certainly not exceptional!

literature, as becomes clear when we turn to the Amarna letters, which by no means can claim to be "great literature"). A more worldly and realistic assessment of facts may, however, disclose that this was not the time when the Old Testament could have been written down. Hardly any parallel exists to such a development, but a lot of evidence that says that the Hellenistic Age was the formative period of early Jewish thought and literature as witnessed by the Old Testament itself.<sup>45</sup>

There is no reason to gloss over the fact that the majority of Old Testament scholars of the present day will not readily accept new ideas like these concerning the date and ideological background of the Old Testament. A number of reasons may be found, not all of them based on the irrational, if understandable, disbelief and reluctance to accept what goes against the *communis opinionis* of several generations of scholars. I hereby intend to say that exclamations like "This is nonsense!", "This cannot be true!", or "This is impossible!", are often heard, although the argument in favour of such "criticism" will usually be of the circular kind: It cannot be true, because it goes against the once generally accepted view, which is, on the other hand, based on the assumption that such things cannot be correct. There is really no need to dwell on this.

However, some objections of a more serious kind will evidently be launched against a position like the one held in this article:

- 1) How is it possible that a period that must be considered the time of production of "literature" like Chronicles, could also produce a Yahwist or the book of Joshua, and not least the engaging stories of the books of Samuel?
- 2) We are acquainted with the linguistic evidence in certain parts of the

45 So far, the theme of discussion has been the historical literature. That the writings are mostly Hellenistic literature seems self-evident in the light of the present discussion, and there is no need to elaborate further on this here. The prophetic literature, however, poses a special problem, because this collection is normally understood to be younger than the Pentateuch and the Deuteronomistic History, which is — according to the Jewish tradition also prophetic books. There will be no time to go further here, except that Julius Wellhausen's verdict should be remembered, that the Prophets predate the Law. The possibility that the historical literature may be late does not preclude that the prophetic literature is even later (the collection may be, but that is another case). The analysis in my *Early Israel*, 306-336, showed that the historical tradition was unknown to the pre-exilic prophets. My estimation of the time of composition of the so-called pre-exilic prophetic collections may be wrong, after all, but the conclusion could still be valid, that these prophetic collections predate the appearance of a larger historical narrative of the kind found in the Pentateuch and in the Deuteronomistic History.

Old Testament that are acknowledgeable Hellenistic, like Ecclesiastes or the Song of Songs. When this evidence is known and compared to, for example, the language of the Deuteronomistic literature, how could anybody be prepared to accept the deuteronomistic literature as being of about the same age as Ecclesiastes or the Song of Songs?

3) Where should we look for the home of the Old Testament in such a late period? And is the Old Testament in its Hebrew shape not so far removed from the Septuagint in spirit and language that these Hebrew writings must be much older than their Greek translations?

It should be possible to answer all three questions at one and the same time, by introducing ethno-linguistic as well as socio-economic arguments, although these need not be very sophisticated, as the issues are, in fact, quite plain. The remarkable qualitative distance between Chronicles and the Deuteronomistic History is not only a distance in time (the Chronicler is generally citing the Deuteronomistic History, so this history must therefore predate Chronicles), which may be short or long; it may just as easily bear witness to the fact that the two histories were composed in very different environments, and it is quite safe to assume that the persons responsible for publishing the books of Chronicles were less able narrators than the deuteronomistic historians.

This discussion sounds like a new version of the debate concerning the respective date of J, E and P that has lasted for more than a century. It is well-known that much of this discussion was based on arguments like differences of religious or political outlook, on linguistic matters, etc. It was also assumed that the Yahwist was a more simple-minded fellow (although by all means a great narrator) than his Elohist colleague, and that the persons behind P display a view of religion (if not theology) that is very different from the one found in J and E. Such differences were a long time ago explained by Johannes Pedersen as not necessarily the consequence of a difference in time; they could just as well be the outcome of different milieus and/or abilities and preferences of their authors.<sup>46</sup> To deny that Pedersen's argument is valid would be the same as maintaining that Plato could not be a contemporary of Xenophon!

When we turn to linguistic matters, then it is true that the language of Ecclesiastes is much nearer to the Middle Hebrew of the Mishna, and it is far removed from the classical Hebrew which is the idiom of the Pentateuch and Deuteronomistic History. It should nevertheless be realized

<sup>46</sup> Cf J. Pedersen, "Die Auffassung vom Alten Testament", ZAW 49 (1931), 161-181.

that it is impossible to say whether such differences should be explained as the result of differences of time or of milieu (or place). Where should we look for the author of Ecclesiastes, and who wrote the deuteronomic books? Although I will not deny that such differences may reflect different times of composition, I will at the same time stress the fact that Hebrew was known (if not spoken) in post-exilic times among Jews living in places as different as Mesopotamia, Egypt and Palestine. So far dialectal differences that must have existed between any of these places have been poorly studied. It may also be impossible to find evidence of these differences as linguistic differences have to a large extent been harmonized although certainly not totally eradicated.

Finally, in order to counter the argumentation that refers to differences between the Septuagint and the Hebrew books of the Old Testament, it should be remembered that it is a safe assumption that the Septuagint came into being in Egypt. There is, on the other hand, no safe indication that the Hebrew writings also originated in this place. It is not unreasonable to think of a mixture in the Hebrew Bible of writings which came from Mesopotamia (especially the major part of the historical literature) and from Palestine (maybe Ecclesiastes, certainly Daniel, and others). Neither can we totally exclude the possibility that Hebrew — as represented by Hebrew Scripture — was no longer a living language. Hebrew may in this period be what Ernst Axel Knauf has termed an artificial language, a kind of “Latin” which was perhaps “invented” as the idiom of sacred literature.<sup>47</sup> It is likely that the original Hebrew manuscripts which in their Greek disguise were incorporated into the Septuagint were simply translated after having been transferred to Egypt, because of the less than inadequate knowledge among ordinary Jews living in a city like Alexandria, and there is really no reason to believe that the Hebrew versions must perforce have been much older than their translations into Greek. To discuss an interval of, say, a hundred years, or a decade, or just one year, is simply a hopeless affair, as no hard evidence of the correct interval between the appearance of the Hebrew original and the Greek translation can be found in favour of any of these positions.

### *Theses*

It is my intention at the end of this article to present some “theses” in order to show that the view of the Old Testament presented here may lead to a renewed appraisal of its status as sacred literature to both Jews

<sup>47</sup> E.A. Knauf, “War Biblisch-Hebräisch eine Sprache?”, *Zeitschrift für Althebraistik* 3 (1990), 11-23.

and Christians in ancient times. These theses are all to be considered themes for future discussion. Here they will only be listed.

First we will have four theses concerning the relationship between the Septuagint and the Hebrew Bible:<sup>48</sup>

1) The position of the Septuagint in the Christian Church: It is often stressed, especially by specialists in Septuagint studies, that the Septuagint was the bible of the first non-Jewish Christians. However, so far as it was still in use in the Jewish diaspora, the Septuagint was also the bible of these communities. The Septuagint was thus clearly a *Jewish* bible. The reaction to the Christian use of the septuagint, on the other hand, led to the appearance of Jewish revisions of the Septuagint as well as the canonization of the Hebrew Bible.

2) The Hebrew Bible is a Jewish canon, selected by Jews for Jews, perhaps created in direct opposition to the Bible of the Christian Church, now the Septuagint, but certainly also under the impression of the catastrophes of the late 1st century and the early 2nd century CE.

3) The reason why the Hebrew Bible and not the Septuagint should be part of the Bible of the Church is to be found in a criterion which says *originality*, which is certainly a mythical concept, in this case attached to the question of the original language of Old Testament books. Also ancient man was able to understand that there is a qualitative difference between an original text and its translations. Because of this it is still reasonable to continue in the footsteps of the European Bible humanism, and the reformers, and mainly read the Old Testament in Hebrew.

4) It is, on the other hand, from a specifically Christian point of view questionable to continue in the footsteps of the Western Church — in contrast to the Greek Orthodox Church — thereby disregarding the books of the Septuagint which are not included in the Hebrew Bible. The Western Church made a strange decision when it departed from the usage among fellow Christians to the east and accepted the choice of writings made by Jewish scholars for their fellow Jews. The western concept of “apocryphical writings” should therefore from a theological angle be considered suspect, and there may be reasons to re-include the parts of the Septuagint not included in the Hebrew Bible, among the

48 Some preparatory work on this has already been published by my colleague Mogens Müller; see his “*Graeca sive Hebraica veritas? The defence of the Septuagint in the Early Church*”, *SJOT* 3/1 (1989), 103-124, “*Hebraica sive graeca veritas. The Jewish Bible at the Time of the New Testament and the Christian Bible*”, *SJOT* 3/2 (1989), 55-71.

scriptures of the Western Church (although this will probably awaken little discussion today — the importance of the bible to modern Christians is, after all, diminishing).

Finally four theses concerning the relationship between the two Testaments:

1) The time lapse between the composition of the major part of the Old Testament and the New Testament writings must, in light of the discussion above, be considered minimal. The Old Testament was no creation of a distant and foreign *Israelite* world, but it came into being in post-exilic Jewish society, presumably during the Hellenistic Age. From an historical point of view the continuity between the Old Testament and the New Testament therefore consists in the continuity between the Jewish society that created and transmitted the writings of the Old Testament and the Jewish society that became the cradle of Christianity.

2) It is important that we realize that the Septuagint was originally a Jewish bible, only at a later date to become accepted as holy writ by the early Christians. From a specifically Christian point of view this says that the Old Testament cannot be considered an isolated entity, but it is theologically an integral part of the Christian heritage.

3) A theology of the Old Testament is, accordingly, not an issue for Christian believers. The idea that Old Testament theologies should be founded on the Old Testament alone cannot be supported by the allegation that the early Christians inherited old writings from the ancient Israelites — not from the Jews — and turned these old Israelite books into their own sacred literature. The Christian acceptance of the Old Testament cannot therefore be likened to its acceptance by the ancient Jews (who wrote it). It should accordingly be a job for Jewish theologians to write Old Testament (or rather: Hebrew Bible) theologies in the strict sense of the word.<sup>49</sup>

4) A theology that also acknowledges the Old Testament as part of the Christian canon, will in a Christian environment look to the New Testa-

<sup>49</sup> This is not to deny that extraordinary intellectual achievements have been accomplished in this field, as, for example, the probably most important Old Testament theology of this century, Gerhard von Rad's *Theologie des Alten Testaments I-II* (München 1957-60). It should, however, at the same time be realized that because of his definite historical and redaction historical approach, von Rad wrote, not a proper theology of the Old Testament, but a mental history of the ancient Jews ("Israelites"), which in a Christian environment is an absolutely legitimate issue. A fine dissection of the problems involved in writing Old Testament theologies in the present century has been published by

ment for guidance, according to the scheme: "promise and fulfillment". As a result of this, a Christian theological discussion that also involves Old Testament matters will have to be an issue of interest for biblical theology; it is not a specifically Old Testament theme.<sup>50</sup>

These theses may eventually lead to a renewed interest in the Old Testament and save it from becoming theologically and intellectually a *cul de sac* among Christian believers. Traditional historical-critical research has, in spite of its many merits, made the Old Testament a book that "only" provides information about the past, and which has little to say to modern (Christian) man. In connection with the New Testament, the Old Testament must be considered a main topic of interest for all Christians, laypersons and theologians alike. This approach should certainly not be considered an attack on the integrity of the Old Testament in a Christian environment, and does not prevent historical studies from continuing to be based on the Old Testament. To the contrary, the Old Testament should be acknowledged as part of the Christian canon and as such important to Christian believers *on line* with the New Testament. Nor should it be forgotten that the New Testament is such a small book with a comparable narrow theme only because of the presence of the Old Testament in the Christian canon.<sup>51</sup>

#### *Abstract*

New trends and discoveries have made a general reorientation of Old Testament scholarship necessary. Thus the old notion of an Israelite immigration into Palestine at the beginning of its history has now been substituted by a new explanation according to which Israel originated among the local population of Palestine. Another change, forced upon the historian is the demise of the kingdom of David and Solomon, which nowadays may be considered a fairy kingdom rather than a historical fact. In fact, the state of Judah may only have arisen c. 850 BCE. As a consequence of these and other discoveries, the OT cannot be dated to the pre-exilic period; it is more likely a post-exilic and to a large extent a hellenistic book written by Jews for Jews. The consequence for theological studies are conspicuous as they move the OT nearer to the New Testament world and thus make it a precarious subject on a Christian foundation to pursue with OT theology without acknowledging its being part of the

J. Høgenhaven, *Problems and prospects of Old Testament Theology* (Sheffield 1988).

- 50 The same could — viceversa — be said of specialized theologies of the New Testament, as it was never intended to be an independent part of the Bible, but certainly presupposes the existence of the Old Testament.
- 51 It is not my case to judge whether a change of approach to Old Testament studies will bring any benefit to modern Jewry. I imagine that the majority of the modern Jews will consider these to be irrelevant, but it is my hope that they will at the same time appreciate their importance for the relationship

Christian canon. A theology of the Old Testament alone will be no more no less than a description of Jewish theological thinking in the post-exilic period.

between Christians and Jews, if the Christian communities will understand that the origin of the Old Testament as well as the cradle of Christianity should be sought, not among ancient Israelites, but in the Jewish society of the Hellenistic and Roman periods.