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# The Hebrew Bible as Crisis Literature

THOMAS RÖMER

## 1. Introduction

If one wanted to describe the content of the Hebrew Bible with a single slogan the expression “crisis literature” would be a fitting term for a major part of the writings that constitute this collection. Many texts of different literary genres, like narratives, prophetic oracles, psalms, and lamentations construct the destruction of Jerusalem and the “Babylonian Exile” as the major caesura of the history of Israel and Judah but also as the starting point of a new beginning. On the historical level it can indeed be claimed that the events of 597 and 587 BCE were in a certain way the starting point for the rise of Judaism since they brought the traditional Judean religion to an end. And as we will see this Judaism is at the beginning above all a theological construction of members of the Babylonian Golah. They used the Babylonian exile as a new origin myth for legitimating the “true Israel”.

It has been objected from time to time that the so-called “crisis” of 597 and 587 is more an invention of biblical scholars than a historical reality and that the deportations that took place in 701 during the siege of Jerusalem by the Assyrians were more important and had greater economical consequences than the events of 597 and 587.<sup>1</sup> It may be true that the modern scholar’s focus on the fall of Jerusalem is partially the result of the Bible’s construction of history, which leads sometimes to neglect important events and changes in the North (Samaria) during the Assyrian, Babylonian and Persian periods. On the other hand the collapse of the kingdom of Judah and the destruction of the Jerusalem palace and temple, its political and religious symbol, certainly provoked a major crisis. Of course, the idea of the “empty land” and the exile of “all Judah”, which can be found at the end of the book of Kings (2 Kgs 25:21: “So Judah was carried away captive out of his land”) does not reflect historical reality, as shown already by other biblical accounts as Jer 40–42 or the book of Lamentations. Recent archaeological works on the situation of Judah after 597 sug-

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. GUILLAUME, Jerusalem 586 BC.

gest, however, that the Judean population decreased in an important way.<sup>2</sup> Contrary to earlier estimations, which allowed for a very low percentage of exiled Judeans, recent publications tend to increase this amount; those estimations vary nowadays between 20 to 60% (which, by the way, shows that the interpretations of archaeological data is as speculative as exegesis). The Babylonians apparently destroyed major parts of the Judean territory and the remaining population gathered mostly in Benjamin (Oded Lipschits estimates the remaining population about 30,000 people).<sup>3</sup> Jerusalem, largely devastated, had lost its status as a capital, Mizpa had become the administrative center and Bethel perhaps the major YHWH-sanctuary in Judah during the Babylonian period.

For the Judeans, and especially for the upper class of Jerusalem (court and temple officials – scribes, prophets, clergy –, merchants, craftsmen), the destruction of the Judean capital constituted a political, economical and also an ideological crisis. And this crisis necessitated a reflection about the reasons and the future after the collapse. But let us first say a few words about the concept of crisis.<sup>4</sup>

## 2. The Usages of the Term of “Crisis” in European Languages

The Greek word *krisis* derives from the verb *krinô*, the primary meaning of which is ‘to separate, to distinguish, to decide’. The word is mainly used in three contexts. In a juridical sense the knowledge of *krisis* guarantees the stability and the appropriate administration of the *politea* (Aristotle). The Septuagint uses the juridical connotation of the word in order to translate roots like *r-y-b* or *š-p-ṭ*. From there it takes in certain prophetic and apocalyptic texts an eschatological meaning and designates God’s final judgment in favor of his people. This eschatological meaning of *krisis* appears equally in texts of the New Testament. Since the second century (Galienus), *krisis* is also used in a medical context in order to designate the “critical” moment in the evolution of an illness, where either the process of healing starts or the definitive decline of the patient. Interestingly, as observed several times, the word “crisis” enters massively into the major European languages, English, French, and German, around the eighteenth century related to situations that precede or follow the French Revolution. The concept of crisis is used there in the three senses that the term has already in Greek.

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. especially BARSTAD, Land.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. LIPSCHITS, Changes, 363.

<sup>4</sup> For the following (and the bibliographical references of the quoted works) see RÖMER, Littérature.

The eschatological connotation appears in Jean-Jacques Rousseau's work, who believes that the ineluctable coming crisis of the established order will give birth to an ideal society in which all men will be equal. In the same sense, Thomas Paine's study, "The Crisis", claims that the French revolution is the necessary crisis whose outcome is the abolishment of despotism.

The medical or pathological usage of the concept of the term of crisis underlies the analysis of the French revolution in more conservative circles. For the British liberal Edmund Burke the astonishing crisis of the events of the Revolution in France can only be overcome by purification through fire and blood. In the Romantic Movement in Germany some intellectuals are attracted by the idea of the mythical origins in which all major religious and political institutions are founded and legitimated.

A third "analytical" usage of the term "crisis" occurs in works that try to understand the reasons that provoke crises. Saint Simon and August Comte are among the firsts to elaborate a theory about the apparition of major crises in the history of humanity. This attitude leads to a historiography of crises, as can be found a century later in the work of the Swiss Jacob Burckhardt who elaborates a phenomenology of crisis, showing that a crisis is *a priori* neither positive nor negative. He also claims that most crises can only be understood and analyzed *a posteriori*. The concept of crisis has become a tool for the historian and sociologist. Armin Steil, in his book "Krisensemantik", summarizes these three attitudes towards a "crisis" in the following way,<sup>5</sup> by using a terminology that is inspired by the work of Max Weber:

	<i>Prophet</i>	<i>Priest</i>	<i>Mandarin</i>
<i>Situation</i>	Marginal	Representative of the former power	High Officials
<i>Legitimization</i>	Personal inspiration	Tradition	Intellectual instruction
<i>Crisis Management</i>	Hope for a better future	Construction of mythical origins	Historiography
<i>Reference</i>	Utopia	Myth	"History"

The attitude of the "Prophet" considers the crisis as the beginning of a new era. The representatives of this view are people who stand somewhat at the margins of society, but who are nevertheless able to communicate their views. They legitimate their discourse by appealing to personal inspiration. The "priestly attitude" reflects the position of representatives of the collapsed social, political, and religious structures. Their way to overcome the crisis is to valorize the time of the "origins" and the God-given institutions

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. STEIL, Krisensemantik, *passim*.

that reflect the divine will. The so-called “mandarin position” sums up the attitude of high officials who try to construct a discourse in order to understand the irruption of the crisis. They also try to maintain their former privileges by the construction of a historiography, which provides the reasons for the breakdown of the former structures and which makes them appear as the experts of “history”.

Interestingly, Steil did invent this terminology without any allusion to the Bible. His model seems to me a very helpful model for discerning the biblical semantics about the crisis of 587 and its management in different intellectual groups.

### 3. Why Does the Fall of Jerusalem Constitute a (Theological) “Crisis”?

The destruction of Jerusalem was not the first “crisis” in the history of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. The fall of Samaria in 722 was certainly a national catastrophe, but since the Hebrew Bible is a Judean product we do not know the Northern reactions to this crisis. The end of Israel was perhaps understood in Judah as a sign that Judah was in fact the “real” people of YHWH. The seventh century edition of 2 Kgs 17 possibly ended with the affirmation:

Therefore Yhwh was very angry with Israel and removed them out of his sight; none was left but the tribe of Judah alone (v. 18).<sup>6</sup>

The Assyrian campaign to Judah during the last years of the eighth century provoked massive destructions and also deportations, maybe even more important than those of 597 and 587, and the kingdom of Judah shrunk drastically.<sup>7</sup> But in the historical memory as transmitted by the biblical account these events were not understood as a crisis. The reason was the unsuccessful siege of Jerusalem in 701 from which the Assyrians under Sennacherib had to withdraw. The crisis management consisted in a transformation of a military and economical disaster into a victory and the celebration of the national god YHWH defending his holy mountain of Zion, as formulated in Ps 46 and others. This view of a national God protecting his sanctuary and his people apparently prevailed during the seventh century. Manasseh, who is detested by the exilic and postexilic redactors of the book of Kings, succeeded to behave towards the Assyrians in such a way

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<sup>6</sup> GRAY, *Kings*, 591; there are however also arguments that this verse belongs to the exilic edition of the DtrH, cf., for instance, WÜRTHWEIN, *Könige*, 395–397.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. BERLEJUNG, *Geschichte*, 136f.

that they did not interfere in religious matters.<sup>8</sup> Under the rule of Josiah the political situation changed and the Assyrian presence and domination in the Levant weakened. The temporary vacuum created in the Levant at the end of the seventh century gives credit to some political and cultic reform of Josiah and his court, even if the date and the historical value of 2 Kgs 22f are under heavy discussion.<sup>9</sup> I think it is plausible that Josiah and/or his counselors attempted to centralize the cult, power, and taxes in Jerusalem. The idea of centralization can also be understood as a reaction to the demographic and territorial changes after 701. According to 2 Kgs 23, Josiah suppressed elements linked to an astral cult, which was an important part of the Neo-Assyrian religion. The reference to the horses and chariots of Shamash, the sun-god (2 Kgs 23:11) and to the *Kemarim*-priests (this rare word in the Hebrew Bible, which designates foreign priests may be linked to the Assyrian word *kumru*), serving “the Sun, the Moon, the stars, and the whole army of the heavens” (2 Kgs 23:5) is historically possible in that same period. Their abolition is not necessarily a sign of an anti-Assyrian insurrection; it might simply reflect the loss of Assyrian power in Syria and Palestine in the late seventh century. Even if the so-called Josianic reform introduced some kind of monolatry (perhaps Asherah was banned from the Temple) the Judean religion did not differ much from the traditional religious ideology of the Ancient Near East. It was centered on a national god who had priority over other gods and whose temple (and perhaps statue) constituted the visible sign of his presence amongst his people. The mediator of this presence were the king and by delegation the priests. Even if there was an attempt to introduce some religious changes in the Yahwistic religion, all of which perhaps did not survive after Josiah’s death in 609 (see the debate about the worship of the Queen of the Heavens in Jer 44), these changes did not affect the traditional pillars that supported the ideological and political coherence of a monarchic state in the Ancient Near East: the temple, the king, and the territory. These pillars however collapsed after the events of 597 and 587. The king and the high court officials were deported, the palace and the temple were destroyed and the geographical unity of Judah had come to an end because of deportations, refugees and voluntary emigrations. As far as we can see in Ancient Near Eastern texts, there are mainly two ways to manage military disasters: The national god has become angry with his people and abandons it (*Mesha stela; Poem of Erra*) or the national deity has been defeated by the more powerful gods of the invaders (Assyrian propaganda, cf. 2 Kgs 18). The first model is taken over in the “prophetic” crisis management,

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. KNAUF, Days. See also the article by Gunnar Lehman in this volume.

<sup>9</sup> For the recent discussion cf. NA’AMAN, Legitimation; BEN ZVI, Imagining; PAKKALA, Date; UEHLINGER, Cult Reform; ALBERTZ, Reform.

the second option is denied differently by the “Priests” and the “Mandarins”.

#### 4. The Prophetic Attitude

The chapters 40–55 of the book of Isaiah were perhaps originally conceived as an independent collection of (anonymous) salvation oracles that arose at the end of the Babylonian or the beginning of the Persian era and that were later added to the scroll of Isaiah.<sup>10</sup> Like the “Deuteronomists”, Second Isaiah understands the fall of Jerusalem as a sign of divine wrath, which lead YHWH to hide himself and not to intervene in favor of his people:

I was angry with my people, I profaned my heritage (Isa 47:6).

This idea comes close to the Nabonidus Inscription where the destruction of Harran and the sanctuary of Sin is explained as follows:

Sin, the king of all gods, became angry with his city and his temple, and went up to heaven and the city and the people became desolate.<sup>11</sup>

An inscription of Esarhaddon also relates exile to divine wrath but insists that the deity changes quickly from anger to mercy:

Seeing this, the Enlil of the gods, Marduk, got angry. His mind became furious, and he made an evil plan to disperse the land and its people. [...] Though he had written 70 years [...] as the length of its abandonment, the merciful Marduk quickly relented, reversed the order of the numerical symbols, and ordered its resettlement for the 11<sup>th</sup> year.<sup>12</sup>

Similarly texts in Deutero-Isaiah claim that YHWH’s anger does not last for a long time span but that this time of wrath has definitely come to an end.<sup>13</sup> The crisis is here a turning point towards a new creation, the arrival of Cyrus being compared to a messianic era:

Thus says YHWH, who makes a way in the sea, a path in the mighty waters, who brings out chariot and horse, army and warrior; they lie down, they cannot rise, they are extinguished, quenched like a wick: “Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. The wild animals will honor

<sup>10</sup> For an overview cf. WILLIAMSON, *Book*; BERGES, *Jesaja*, 30–45.

<sup>11</sup> OPPENHEIM, *Harran Inscription*, 560–562.

<sup>12</sup> *Inscription of Esarhaddon*, translated by PARPOLA, *Prophecies*, LXXIV.

<sup>13</sup> For instance: “For a brief moment I abandoned you, but with great compassion I will gather you. In overflowing wrath for a moment I hid my face from you, but with everlasting love I will have compassion on you, says YHWH, your Redeemer” (Isa 54:7f).

me, the jackals and the ostriches; for I give water in the wilderness, rivers in the desert, to give drink to my chosen people, the people whom I formed for myself so that they might declare my praise.” (Isa 43:16–21)

According to Jean-Daniel Macchi this passage was added to the book of Isaiah in the fifth or fourth century BCE into the Isaianic corpus.<sup>14</sup> The “first things” (ראשונות) allude to the divine judgments and especially to the destruction of Jerusalem. The author claims that they are not worth any longer to being remembered since a new era has arrived and the page of remembering the past can now be turned. This is in fact an anti-deuteronomistic position, because, as we will point out later, for the Deuteronomists the fall of Jerusalem and the exile are at the very center of their theological reflection.

Contrary to Isa 40–55 where the new era that follows the crisis is seen to happen immediately, the majority of the prophetic books underwent an “eschatological” or an “salvation” oriented redaction, which often added a new positive ending to the scrolls suggesting that the oracles of doom had been realized and that the disaster can now open to a better future. This is for instance the case of the book of Amos in which the two last verses announce the restoration of YHWH’s people in their land, or equally the book of Joel, which ends with the promise that Judah and Jerusalem will be inhabited forever and that YHWH will dwell on his holy mountain.<sup>15</sup>

One may conclude that many prophetic books were revised after the crisis in an eschatological perspective; this may partially be understood as a reaction to the fact that the revolutionary announcement of a paradise-like situation in Second Isaiah did not come true.

Contrary to most of the Prophetic books, which reveal a future-oriented perspective, the “priestly attitude” towards the crisis of 587 is past-oriented.

## 5. The Priestly Attitude

The existence of “Priestly texts” in the Pentateuch is probably with very few exceptions the most stable theory of Pentateuchal research since Karl Heinrich Graf, Abraham Kuenen and Julius Wellhausen. Most scholars would agree to locate P either at the end of the Babylonian period, or, probably the better option, at the beginning of the Persian era,<sup>16</sup> though some scholars from Jewish backgrounds prefer a pre-exilic date for the P-

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. MACCHI, *Passé*.

<sup>15</sup> It is generally accepted that these eschatological passages were inserted during the Persian period, cf., for instance, WÖHRLE, *Sammlungen*, 119–122.423–428.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. BLENKINSOPP, *Assessment*; DE PURY, *Beginning*.

texts.<sup>17</sup> It seems to me that this view is difficult to maintain for the narrative priestly passages. This does not exclude the possibility that some material in the first part of Leviticus could reflect the rituals from the era of the First Temple. I will not take up the current discussion whether P was originally written as an independent document, a view held by the majority of scholars, or whether P was a work of redaction from the very start that was intended to supplement the older non-priestly material.<sup>18</sup> More relevant for our purpose is the question of the extension of the original P account. It makes indeed a theological difference to postulate a P-document (or redaction) that ended with the establishment in the land (somewhere in Josh 18:1 or 19:51),<sup>19</sup> or a much more limited P with a conclusion at the end of the book of Exodus<sup>20</sup> or more logically after the establishment of the cult in Lev 9 with the consecration of the priests and the first sacrifices followed by the appearance of YHWH's glory to the whole people,<sup>21</sup> or in Lev 16, where Aaron is allowed to enter the adytum and where YHWH's encounter with Israel has become a permanent feature in the cultic acts of purification and sacrifices.<sup>22</sup> The still quite popular but in my view unconvincing view that P ended in Deut 34\*<sup>23</sup> with the death of Moses cannot explain why the supposedly P text in Deut 34:8f insists on the installation of Joshua as Moses' successor. This information does not sound like a conclusion but more like a transition.

If one situates the end of P on the Sinai, then one has to explain the priestly text in Exod 6:2–8, where YHWH promises to Moses that he will bring the people into the land. This land that YHWH allotted to the ancestors is called in 6:4 *'eretz m'egurehem*, the land in which they resided as aliens (cf. also Gen 17:8 and 28:4). This implies that, according to P, the Israelites are "resident aliens" on the land, which is given to them as *'ahuzah*, an expression, which probably means that YHWH gives to the Israelites the usufruct of the land, but it remains God's exclusive possession.<sup>24</sup> P's conception of the land comes close to the idea expressed in the Holiness Code:

The land is mine; with me you are but aliens (*gerim*) and tenants (Lev 25:33).

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<sup>17</sup> Cf. especially KAUFMANN, Religion, followed by MILGROM, Leviticus, 13–35, and others.

<sup>18</sup> For an overview of the present debate about P, cf. especially SHECTMAN/BADEN, Strata.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. BLENKINSOPP, Pentateuch, 237; KNAUF, Priesterschrift.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. POLA, Priesterschrift; OTTO, Forschungen.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. ZENGER, Priesterschrift.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. KÖCKERT, Leben; NIHAN, Torah, 379–394.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. FREVEL, Blick; SCHMIDT, Deuteronomium.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. on this KÖCKERT, Leben; BAUKS, Begriffe.

One may therefore conclude that for P it makes little difference whether Israel is living in the land or in “exile”, since it effects no change in its *ger*-status. This view seems nevertheless contradicted by Exod 6:8, a verse, which states that YHWH will give the land as *morasha*, a possession. This is the only case where P employs this expression, and several scholars argue that this verse should be understood as a late interpolation,<sup>25</sup> since it is considered to be at odds with P’s ideology. But there are no clear literary critical reasons that would support this hypothesis. The use of *morasha* may be explained by a reference to the book of Ezekiel. According to Ezek 33:24 the population that remained in the land uses the expression *morasha* with reference to Abraham in order to claim their right to the land; the author of Ezek 33:23–29 rejects this view.<sup>26</sup> P, however, reinterpreted this claim in a positive sense to show, that through Abraham all his descendants come to be entitled to the land, those who are in exile and those who are in the land. For P however this possession does not alter the Israelite’s status as *gerim*, as is shown through the parallel that exist between verses 4 and 8 of Exod 6. For P there would not be an ontological difference as to live inside or outside the land.

P presents a mythological history of origins that takes up a motif from Near Eastern mythology (especially *Enuma Elish* and the Ugaritic *Baal-myth*), where the creator god is enthroned in his sanctuary as king over his creation after his victory over a sea monster representing chaos.<sup>27</sup> Gen 1; Exod 14 and Exod 35–40\* (with Lev 1–16) could therefore be understood as a triptych: creation, victory over the sea, and establishment of the creator god’s sanctuary where he is worshipped. The priestly attitude to handle the post 587-situation is to affirm a profound stability of the world order established by the creator God who is also the God of Israel. In order to foster this idea P develops an “inclusive monotheism” of a sort.

P constructs his “history of revelation” in three steps characterized by three divine names: *elohim* for all humans, *el shadday* for all descendants of Abraham and *YHWH* for Moses and Israel. In Ex 6:3 YHWH states: “I appeared to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as El Shadday but by my name YHWH I did not make myself known to them” and this statement is a clear reference to Gen 17:1 (“YHWH<sup>28</sup> appeared to Abraham and said to him: I

<sup>25</sup> KOHATA, *Jahwist*, 31–34; GOSSE, *Exode*; OTTO, *Forschungen*, 10, n. 45, who holds the verses 6–8 altogether as an insertion.

<sup>26</sup> RÖMER, *Väter*, 513–517.

<sup>27</sup> WEINFELD, *Sabbath*. As pointed out by Nihan, in *Enuma Elish* the sanctuary for Marduk is completed one year after his victory over Tiamat; in Exod 40:17 YHWH’s sanctuary is achieved one year after YHWH’s victory over Pharaoh and the Sea in Exod 14; see NIHAN, *Torah*, 74.

<sup>28</sup> Some commentators have thought, that the name YHWH in Gen 17:1 does not fit with P’s theory of the divine revelation. But this is not true: The narrator uses the tetra-

am El Shadday”). This means that Israel’s singular privilege is the knowledge of the divine name and through this privilege Israel becomes the only nation capable of worshipping God by means of an adequate sacrificial cult. On the other hand, however, P<sup>g</sup> advocates – contrary to the Deuteronomists – an inclusive monotheism: all people of the earth venerate the same god, irrespective of whether they address him as *elohim*, *el*, or *el shadday*. For P, there is no need to struggle against the worship of other gods, since these gods represent only partial manifestations of YHWH. This kind of theology seems quite compatible with the Persian worldview of a sole, supreme God presiding over all the nations of the Empire. The “inclusive monotheism” expressed in Exod 6 favors a date for P<sup>g</sup> during the beginning of the Persian era. It also shows P’s disaster management through the affirmation that the Diaspora situation and the contact with other people do not represent a threat for “Israel”.<sup>29</sup>

Furthermore P also insists that all major “identity markers” for the nascent Judaism are given during the origins before entering in the land and before the creation of an Israelite or Judean state. The *Sabbath* is the result of God’s creation of the world (Gen 2:1–4) before it is discovered by Israel in the wilderness (Exod 16). The *circumcision* is given to Abraham for all his descendants and those who are closely related to him (Gen 17). The circumcision, which is quite commonly practiced in the Levant, became an identity marker in the Babylonian Golah, since the Babylonians did not observe this ritual. It may be that P innovated by changing the moment of the circumcision, transforming it from a puberty ritual into a birth ritual (as can be seen in the fact that Ishmael is circumcised at the age of thirteen and Isaac on his eighth day). The *Passover* is instituted in Egypt (Exod 12) and became a major festival also in the Egyptian Diaspora as shown by the so-called Passover letter. *Regulations about licit and illicit food* are given already in Noah’s time (prohibition of blood; Gen 9:4) and then more specifically for Israel in the time of the desert (Lev 11). And even the sanctuary is constructed already in the desert according to a model that YHWH revealed to Moses (Exod 25–31; 35–40). The idea of a mobile sanctuary may constitute an attempt to redefine the deuteronomistic cult-centralization and perhaps the acceptance of different YHWH sanctuaries (Jerusalem, Garizim, Elephantine ...).

By situating all rituals and religious institutions in a mythical past P claims that there is no need for a king or a state to enforce the cult; everything is founded in the original revelation.

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grammaton in order to inform the reader about the identity of El Shadday. In the narrative, Abraham does not get any information on this.

<sup>29</sup> DE PURY, *Beginning*, 124–128.

## 6. The “Mandarin” Attitude and the so-called Deuteronomistic History

Martin Noth’s idea that the books of Deuteronomy to Kings constitute a historiography written shortly after the catastrophe of 587 (around 560)<sup>30</sup> has known several modifications, and recently especially in German scholarship a rejection. An important number of scholars argue nowadays that a “Deuteronomistic History” never existed. It is impossible here to comment in a detailed way on the present debate.<sup>31</sup> Suffice it to say that the opponents to the theory do not present an alternative solution for the presence of deuteronomistic texts in the Former Prophets and the idea of several uncontrolled and unrelated deuteronomistic texts creates in my view not a progress but a regression of a sort back to Wellhausen. For our purpose we do not need to discuss the question of the starting point of the Deuteronomistic History, which in my view lies at the end of the seventh century BCE. Contrary to Noth, one must emphasize that the so-called Deuteronomistic History underwent several editions and that it was not the work of a single author but resulted from a school of scribes.<sup>32</sup> We will focus on the last redactions of this history that took place during the Babylonian and the early Persian periods.

We may start by recalling a major observation of Noth. The books Deut–Kgs are structured through speeches or discourses that mark the end or the beginning of a new period and offer interpretations of the past or coming events: Josh 23; Judg 2; 1 Sam 12; 1 Kgs 8; 2 Kgs 17.

Already at the end of his testament in the book of Deuteronomy Moses announces the exile in case of the addressees’ disobedience to YHWH’s covenant with Israel (Deut 28:58–64: “If you do not diligently observe all the words of this law that are written in this book [...] YHWH will scatter you among all peoples, from one end of the earth to the other; and there you shall serve other gods, of wood and stone [...]). Josh 23 concludes the time of the conquest by emphasizing that YHWH fulfilled all his promises, but previewing also the loss of the land: “YHWH will bring upon you all the bad things, until he has destroyed you from this good land that YHWH your God has given you, if you transgress the covenant of YHWH, your God” (v. 15f). In 1 Sam 12, Samuel’s farewell speech concludes the time of the Judges, he also proclaims YHWH’s wrath: “If you will not heed YHWH’s voice, but rebel against YHWH’s commandment, then YHWH’s hand will be against you and your fathers (LXX: your king)”.

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<sup>30</sup> NOTH, *Studien*; IDEM, *History*.

<sup>31</sup> See the presentation of the current debate in SCHERER, *Forschungen*; WITTE, *Geschichtswerke*; FREVEL, *Geschichtswerk*.

<sup>32</sup> For a presentation of my view see RÖMER, *History*.

Again Solomon, in his inauguration speech, which marks the passage from the “United Monarchy” to the history of the two kingdoms, announces the deportation: “If they sin against you [...] and you are angry with them you will give them to an enemy, so that they are carried away captive to the land of the enemy, far off or near” (1 Kgs 8:46). The deuteronomistic comment on Samaria’s fall in 2 Kgs 17 that concludes the parallel history of Israel and Judah also alludes to Judah’s end and exile: “Therefore YHWH was very angry with Israel and removed them out of his sight; none was left but the tribe of Judah alone. But Judah also did not keep the commandments of YHWH their God but walked in the customs that Israel had introduced” (v. 18f). And that is what happens at the end: “So Judah was exiled out of its land” (2 Kgs 25:21).

This overview clearly shows that Judah’s exile is the main theme of the history. In this respect Noth is still right, when he understands the Deuteronomistic History to be an “aetiology of exile”. The Deuteronomists from the Babylonian and Persian periods correspond in this respect to the “Mandarin” attitude as detected by Steil.<sup>33</sup> They belong to the class of high officials of the Judean court, who (perhaps in Babylon) tried to edit a comprehensive history in order to understand why the disaster had happened. They wanted to give a rationale for the exile by showing that the people and the kings were constantly warned, but that they disregarded those warnings. Several actors are held responsible for the catastrophe: the whole people, the (bad) kings or Manasseh alone, the worst of all kings. This diversity may be explained by the assumption of different deuteronomistic redactors.<sup>34</sup> It may also be understood as an attempt to suggest different possibilities of identifying the causes of exile. Interestingly, the high Judean court officials are never directly blamed; probably because the DtrH arose in this milieu. If the DtrH is an explanation of exile it is also a theodicy: Likewise some prophetic books (Deutero-Isaiah, Jeremiah) the Deuteronomists affirm that the exile is not due to YHWH’s weakness, but that he did provoke the Babylonian invasion in order to punish Judah (2 Kgs 24:3 and 20).

Interestingly, the Deuteronomistic History does not end with a proper conclusion, but with a short notice about Jehoiachin’s release from his Babylonian exile (2 Kgs 25:27–30). This “open end” is somewhat intriguing. For Noth it was added even if it “lacks any intrinsic historical significance” because this event “belongs into the account of the fate of the Judean kings.”<sup>35</sup> In no way it means that the Deuteronomist wants “to her-

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<sup>33</sup> See above chapter 2.

<sup>34</sup> See for instance, SCHMID, Manasse.

<sup>35</sup> NOTH, *History*, 117.

ald a new age".<sup>36</sup> This is probably a very minimalistic interpretation, but it is true that for the Deuteronomists the main attitude towards the crisis was to provide an explanation for it. One may however also find some discrete strategies for the time after the fall, by pointing out the literary parallels between the destiny of Jehoiachin and the Diaspora-novels in Gen 37–50 (Joseph), Dan 2–6 (Daniel) and Esther. In all these text an exiled person is brought out of prison becomes in a way second to the king (2 Kgs 25:28; Gen 41:40; Dan 2:48; Esth 10:3) and the accession to this new status is symbolized by changing the clothes (2 Kgs 25:29; Gen 41:42; Dan 5:29; Esth 6:10f; 8:15). All these stories insist on the fact that the land of deportation has become a land where Jews can live and even manage interesting careers. 2 Kgs 25:27–30 could be interpreted similarly: Exile is transformed into Diaspora.<sup>37</sup> It shows that the Deuteronomists accepted the new geo-political situation and probably tried to arrange themselves with the Babylonians and then with the Persians.

The taking into account of an "ongoing exile" can also be detected in the revisions of the account of Josiah's reform during the Babylonian and Persian periods. The book-finding report in 2 Kgs 22 displays several parallels with royal building inscriptions, especially from the Babylonian king Nabonidus according to which the king must discover the foundation stone in order to renovate the sanctuary. The foundation stone is in 2 Kgs 22–23 replaced by the book, which becomes the real foundation for the worship of YHWH; the book is therefore a substitute for the temple. This can be explained by a time during which the temple was destroyed or more generally through a Diaspora situation where the access to the Jerusalem sanctuary was difficult for Jews living outside the land. Interestingly, Josiah's reform consists mainly in the cleansing of the temple from all kinds of cultic symbols. The temple is emptied to become a place where the book is read to the people. The replacement of the temple cult by the reading of the Torah in 2 Kgs 22f can be understood as the ideological foundation of the synagogues and the foundation of Judaism as a "book religion".<sup>38</sup>

The three attitudes towards the crisis develop quite different strategies: a future oriented rhetoric that pretends that the crisis will be (immediately) followed by a paradisiacal situation; the silencing of the crisis by a construction of a mythic past that offers rituals for the present, and a story that explains why the crisis did happen but that remains very cautious about the future. During the Persian and then the Greek periods these approaches were combined in order to create a very complex "exile identity".

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<sup>36</sup> NOTH, *History*, 143.

<sup>37</sup> See RÖMER, *Fin du Livre*, and similarly, SCHIPPER, *Resonances*, and CLEMENTS, *Privilege*. For other views: JANZEN, *Ending*; WÖHRLE, *Rehabilitierung*.

<sup>38</sup> SONNET, *Livre*; SMYTH, *Josiah*.

## 7. The Construction of an Exilic Identity during the Persian Period

The prophetic-utopian discourse that considers the crisis as a prologue of a better future is hardly compatible with the priestly and the deuteronomistic vision. In the P-texts, there is no need for prophets, and the deuteronomistic conception of prophecy does not fit well with a prophecy of salvation. Prophets play quite an important role inside the Deuteronomistic History, but they do not announce a better future. They are above all preachers of the Law, admonishing the people to respect the divine prescriptions. According to Deut 18:15–20, Moses is presented as the first of a series of prophets, in charge of the transmission of the divine will. According to 2 Kgs 17:13f the fall of Samaria happened because of the unwillingness of the kings and the people to behave according to YHWH's law: "YHWH solemnly warned Israel and Judah through all his prophets and all the seers: 'Turn back from your evil ways; obey my commandments and rules that are recorded in the law. I ordered your fathers to keep this law and sent my servants the prophets to remind you of its demands.' But they did not pay attention and were as stubborn as their fathers, who had not trusted YHWH their God." The prophets also announce the fall of Judah in reaction to Manasseh's misbehavior (2 Kgs 21:10–15: "So YHWH announced through his servants the prophets: 'King Manasseh of Judah has committed abominations.' [...] So this is what YHWH God of Israel says, 'I am about to bring disaster on Jerusalem and Judah [...] I will destroy Jerusalem the same way I did Samaria and the dynasty of Ahab. I will wipe Jerusalem clean, just as one wipes a plate on both sides. I will abandon this last remaining tribe among my people and hand them over to their enemies [...] because they have done evil in my sight and have angered me from the time their fathers left Egypt right up to this very day!'""). And when the destruction of Jerusalem happens, the Deuteronomists insert a final reminder that this was done by YHWH according to the prophetic warnings (2 Kgs 24:2: "He sent them to destroy Judah, as he had warned he would do through his servants the prophets"). The deuteronomistic view of prophets leaves no space for prophetic oracles as those of Deutero-Isaiah.

The decision to promulgate the Pentateuch in the middle of the Persian period was in a certain sense also taken in an anti-eschatological perspective. As already observed by Frank Crüsemann, the Torah does not concede much space to prophecy of salvation. It is mainly the work of a compromise between the priestly and the deuteronomistic circles.<sup>39</sup> According to the book of Ezra and Nehemiah, the promulgation of the Law was due to

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<sup>39</sup> CRÜSEMANN, *Pentateuque*, 357.

the initiative of the Babylonian Golah and the Persian authorities (Ezra 7; Neh 8). That does not necessarily mean that there was such a thing as a Persian imperial authorization, but there was a will to depict the Persian rulers as tolerant and favoring the Yahwistic cult in the province of Yehud. These books also enforce the idea that the “restoration” of Judah and Jerusalem, which was in fact the birth of Judaism, happened through the Babylonian Golah. According to the books of Ezra and Nehemiah the events of 587 did not only present the end of the Davidic dynasty and the destruction of the Temple. It was also the end of the people of YHWH in the land. And it was only through the exiles that the Temple could be rebuilt and that religious life in the land could arise anew. The long lists enumerating the names of the families of the exiles apparently suggest that the Babylonian exiles and their descendants are the true people of YHWH.<sup>40</sup> The same perspective was also integrated in some prophetic scrolls, especially those of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, which were revised in a “Golah oriented” perspective.<sup>41</sup>

The “exilic” or better Diaspora-perspective is also perceptible in the construction of the Pentateuch. In my view the Pentateuch was due to the decision to separate the book of Deuteronomy from the books of Joshua to Kings and to make it the end of the Torah. There is some plausibility that there existed also the project of a Hexateuch, which would have the “Torah” end with the book of Joshua.<sup>42</sup> As often observed, the last chapter of Joshua (Josh 24) clearly presents itself as the conclusion of a Hexateuch, and a Hexateuch would certainly also have been acceptable by the Samaritans (see especially the location of Joshua’s final discourse in Shechem). There is however a major ideological difference between a Penta- and a Hexateuch. The theological focus of the Hexateuch is undoubtedly the land, promised by YHWH to the Patriarchs and conquered by Joshua. A Hexateuch would have constructed a post-exilic identity centered on the possession or the claim of the land. For political, sociological and theological reasons such an idea was difficult to maintain. The majority of the Judean intellectuals accepted Judah’s integration in the Persian Empire and would have been unhappy with a foundation document that ends with a narration of a military conquest of regions that did not even belong to the province of Yehud. For the members of the Babylonian – but also Egyptian – Diaspora the idea that living in the land is a constitutive part of Jewish identity was unacceptable. And finally the idea that all divine promises had been already fulfilled did not match with a post 587-situation.

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<sup>40</sup> ABADIE, Israël.

<sup>41</sup> POHLMANN, Hesekeiel, 27f, SCHMID, Buchgestalten, 253–275.

<sup>42</sup> RÖMER/BRETTLER, Hexateuch.

The central figure and concern of the Pentateuch are Moses and the Law of which he is the mediator. Theologically, the Pentateuch has an open end: Moses is allowed to contemplate the land, which he will not enter. The divine promise is repeated in Deut 34, but inside the Torah it is not fulfilled. This literary strategy opens different possibilities to understand the fulfillment of the promise, which can be read as fulfilled (with the arrival of the Achaemenids) or still to be accomplished in a more eschatological sense. The story of Moses' death outside the land clearly betrays a Diaspora perspective. It is a message to the Jews of the Diaspora, who were very concerned about a sepulcher in the land. Probably since the Persian period wealthy Jews very eager to get their bones buried in Jerusalem or in the "land of their ancestors".<sup>43</sup> Against this practice, Deut 34 claims that one may live and die outside the land, as long as one respects the Mosaic Torah. Moses becomes thus a symbol for an exilic identity, based on the reading and observance of the Law. Interestingly the book of Genesis also ends with a praise of life in exile. The Joseph story may have been written in order to legitimate the Egyptian Diaspora,<sup>44</sup> which was not much appreciated by the members of the Babylonian Golah because of its openness to intermarriage and religious contacts with the autochthonous population. Despite the hostility of the editors of the Pentateuch, who mainly came from the Babylonian Golah, they agreed to give some place to some dissenting voices in order to integrate different and competing ideologies into the Torah. Finally, in Num 11,<sup>45</sup> a discrete place was provided for ecstatic prophetic groups. In this chapter, Moses legitimates the idea of independent prophetic groups who receive directly the divine spirit (11:24–29). However, the prophetic voices are rare in the Pentateuch, and it is only much later that the prophetic scrolls were added to the Torah. Interestingly the collection of the *Nebiim* opens with the books of Joshua–Kings, in which, as we have seen, the task of the prophets is by no means eschatological, but to warn the addressees to respect the divine law.

The fixation of the prophetic books in Hellenistic times was undertaken with the idea that prophecy ended in the Persian period, as stated in the Talmud and in Rabbinic literature (*B. Bat.* 121b; see also *T. Soṭah* 13:2 and *S. 'Olam Rab.* 30). This theory tends to control or to denigrate the charismatic prophecy by arguing that only the prophets with a book are the "true" prophets. However the editors of the *Nebiim* also conceded an eschatological perspective, since the end of Mal announces the return of Elijah, who will bring with him a paradise-like situation. Therefore the "Law and the Prophets" integrate the three main attitudes towards the crisis of

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<sup>43</sup> LICHTENBERGER, *Land*, 93.

<sup>44</sup> HUSSER, *L'histoire*; RÖMER, *Narration*; UEHLINGER, *Fratrie*; KUNZ, *Ägypten*.

<sup>45</sup> RÖMER, *Nombres* 11–12.

587, attitudes that offer different ways to manage the disaster intellectually, but which converge in the idea that “exile” is from now on an integrative part of Jewish identity.

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