INDIAN THEOLOGICAL STUDIES

Vol. LIII December 2016 No. 4

INDIAN THEOLOGICAL STUDIES

A Quarterly Published by St. Peter's Pontifical Institute, Bangalore.

The *Indian Theological Studies* provides a forum for theological research either conducted in India or relevant to India.

The views expressed by the contributors are their own and do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the Editor and the Editorial Board.

Manuscripts for publication, books for review should be addressed to: **The Editor**, and business communications (subscription, back issues, change of address) and exchange copies of the periodicals to:

The Administrator
Indian Theological Studies
St. Peter's Pontifical Institute
Malleswaram West P.O.
Bangalore–560 055 (India)
E-mail: itspetersinstitute@yahoo.com

Subscription Rates

		Annual	Three Years
India	:	Rs. 200	Rs. 550
Foreign Air Mail	:	30$=25€	90$= 75€

BIBLICAL HISTORIOGRAPHY AND RECONSTRUCTION OF THE BIBLICAL HISTORY

Prof. Dr. Thomas Römer
Collège de France, Paris, Université de Lausanne, University of Pretoria

The Major Historical Compositions of the Hebrew Bible: Pentateuch, Hexateuch, Enneateuch, Deuteronomistic History

When one begins to read the Hebrew Bible, one first reds a coherent narrative starting with the book of Genesis and ending with the last chapter of the books of Kings. This is a long history ranging from the creation of the world and of man to the destruction of Jerusalem and the deportation of the Judeans to Babylon, going through the history of the Ancestors of Israel, the origins of the people in Egypt and their exodus under the leadership of Moses, their mediator and legislator. The narrative continues with the conquest of the land of Canaan, the story of the installation of the monarchy, and the two kingdoms of Israel and Judah until the end of Israel and Judah. It is only when we reach the book of Isaiah that we see a rupture. In Isa 1:1 the chronological progression is abandoned: we are back to the period of the two kingdoms. The literary genre also changes: instead of a narrative, one now finds prophetic oracles. Consequently, it is possible to consider the books of Genesis to Kings as a literary unit characterized that one might, according to an article of Bernard Gosse, describe as going from the loss of the Garden of Eden to the loss of Jerusalem.[1] All the

[1] B. Gosse, "L'inclusion de l'ensemble Genèse - II Rois, entre la perte du jardin d'Eden et celle de Jérusalem," *ZAW* 114 (2002) : 189-211. See also J. Blenkinsopp, *The Pentateuch. An Introduction to the First Five Books of the Bible* (The Anchor Bible Reference Library; New York et al.: Doubleday, 1992), 34 "a consecutive history from creation to exile."

episodes within this unit are organized according to a progressive chronology, which means that it was suggested at a certain stage of the formation and the pooling of the different traditions that the composition of the books going from Genesis to Kings constituted a great narrative composition, an "Enneateuch."

If we consider however the three part-canon of the Hebrew Bible, the first main break takes place in Deut 34. This chapter relates Moses' death and concludes the Torah, the Pentateuch. This conclusion seems to make sense, since it stops with the death of the main character of the Pentateuch. However, at the narrative level, the end of the Torah is not really a conclusion, since the promise of the country that constitutes the leitmotif of the Pentateuch is not fulfilled. The plot which is tied in the patriarchal narratives does not yet have a conclusion. The final chapter of the Pentateuch clearly indicates that the narrative has not come to its end, since Deut 34:9 mentions Moses' successor, thus indicating a continuation in the book of Joshua, where the Israelites will actually take possession of the land. It is therefore logical to regard Joshua as the necessary conclusion of the narrative of the first five books of the Bible, and to support the concept of a Hexateuch. When one looks then at the remaining books, one wonders if 1 Sam 1:1 does not constitute a beginning of a new narrative unit, relatively independent of what precedes. 1 Sam 1 would therefore be the introduction to a history of the Israelite kingship as found in the books of Samuel and Kings.[2]

Inside the Pentateuch, there is a break between the first four books and Deuteronomy, which contains a new introduction, very sophisticated and conceived to mark the beginning of another literary unit. At the end of this book, constructed as a testament of Moses, the speaker (Moses according to the fiction of the book) already refers to the conquest of the country, to the disobedience of the people vis-à-vis Yahweh, their god, to the history of kingship and to the disaster: the deportation and dispersion of addressees among

[2] See K. Schmid, *Erzväter und Exodus. Untersuchungen zur doppelten Begründung der Ursprünge Israels innerhalb der Geschichtsbücher des Alten Testaments* (WMANT 81; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1999), 31.

other nations. Similarly, the baroque and repetitive style, somewhat cumbersome, vocabulary and syntax that support the conditional proposals and the exhortations are also found in the books of Joshua following through to Kings. Because of these similarities, M. Noth had postulated the existence of a Deuteronomistic (Dtr) history or historiography (in German "deuteronomistisches Geschichtswerk") that would have been written after the destruction of Jerusalem around 560 with the purpose to provide an etiology of the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile of the Judeans. The reason given in the "Dtr History" is the inability of the people, and above all of most of these kings to comply with the laws stated in Deuteronomy.

These different literary compositions, Pentateuch, Hexateuch, Enneateuch and Dtr history, each construct a story in its own way. For the Pentateuch and the Hexateuch, this history is a mythical history, as it has been recognized since Spinoza and de Wette who have shown that these compositions provide little information to the historian. The Pentateuch presents itself as a sort of biography of Moses (the books of Exodus and Deuteronomy are framed by his birth and death) and attaches all the laws, which in the ANE are given by the gods to the kings and thus depend on a political institution, in some mythical origins, in the desert, in a no man's land to signify that the rites and prescriptions that are the basis of Judaism depend neither on political autonomy nor on the possession of a land. Unlike the Pentateuch which ends with the death of Moses outside the country, the literary logic of the Hexateuch focuses on the necessity of possessing the country, for it ends with the book of Joshua and the possession of the country. But this construction is also mythological because there is no doubt that the conquest recorded in this book does not reflect historical reality but is an ideological construction inspired by literary and iconographic conventions borrowed from the Assyrians and the Babylonians.

The Enneateuch, for its part, is a combination of mythical origins and the so-called Deuteronomistic History.

So what about this Dtr History? The use of the term "historiography" to describe this composition suggests in fact that its author (or rather its authors) wants to be a historian. The Deuteronomists of the Babylonian or Persian periods, descendants of the scribes and other officials of the Judean court, are obsessed with the end of the monarchy and the deportation of the elites of Judah. They therefore seek to explain exile, and to do this, they build a story from the beginnings under Moses, to the destruction of Jerusalem and the deportation of the aristocracy (Deut 1 - 2 Kings 25). They construct a coherent history, which they divide into periods (Moses, conquest, Judges, the advent of the monarchy, the two kingdoms, the history of Judah from the fall of Samaria to that of Jerusalem) and present all the negative events that occur in this history - the division of the Davidic dynasty or the Assyrian and Babylonian invasions - as "logical" consequences of the disobedience of the people and their leaders towards Yhwh's will. Yhwh himself provoked the Babylonian invasion (2 Kings 24:3 and 30) to punish Judah for the worship it renders to other deities.

The work of the Dtrs of the Babylonian period is therefore the first attempt to create a complete history of Israel and Judah. As we have already underlined, to construct this narrative the Deuteronomists divide it into different periods which they delimit with the help of the speeches of the protagonists or the comments in "voice off," and in almost all the speeches the allusion to the end, the exile, is obvious:

Deut 1-30	*Moses' Farewell Speech*		ORIGINS
	Ch. 28 (and elsewhere)	Announcement of the Exile	
Josh 1	Speech of Yhwh to Joshua	Announcement of the Conquest	CONQUEST
Josh 23	*Joshua's Farewell Speech*		
	Completion of the Conquest	Announcement of the Exile	
Judg 2:6-3:6	*Speech introducing the Time of Judges*		TIME OF JUDGES
1 Sam 12	*Samuel's Farewell Speech*		
	Summary of the Previous Events	Announcement of a Divine Sanction	THE UNITED MONARCHY
1 Kings 8	*Solomon's Inauguration of the Temple Speech*		
	Completion of the Promises made to David	Announcement of the Exile	THE TWO KINGDOMS
2 Kings 17	*Speech: Commentary on the Fall of Israel*		
	Summary of the Previous History	Announcement of Judah Exile	THE LAST DAYS OF JUDAH
2 Kings 25	["Open End"]: Exile		

There are in Antiquity other examples of a link between a crisis situation and historiography. Thucidydes wrote the *History of the Peloponnesian War* in the 5th century BCE, for those "who desire an exact knowledge of the past to help them to interpret the future" (1.22). In the same way Herodotus composed his *Inquiry* in order to give the reasons for the Persian wars and their dramas (cf. the introduction of Book I). In the 3rd century BCE, the Babylonian priest Berossus wrote down a historical account of the Babylonian civilization in response to the cultural crisis induced by the spread of Hellenism. To characterize the Dtr History as historiography is questionable but, after all, it is a question of definition: it is not about historiography or history in the Greek sense (the biblical author does not speak in the first person and does not "investigate") nor in the modern sense as Ranke notes ("how did it actually happen?").[3] Marc Brettler is right to point out that "no concept of history as dependent on historicity applies profitably to the biblical corpus."[4] However the exilic edition of the Dtr History is an attempt to construct the past to explain the present.

[3] Even this famous declaration should rather be translated "as it was essentially," see R.J. Evans, *In Defence for History* (London: Granta Books, 1997), 17.

[4] M.Z. Brettler, *The Creation of History in Ancient Israel* (London - New York: Routledge, 1995), 11.

In so doing, the Deuteronomists integrated materials into their historical reconstruction, which retain useful memories for the historian who is interested in the historicity of the facts. This is particularly the case of the Book of Kings, whose chronological construction from the time of King Omri onwards is more or less compatible with the Assyrian and Babylonian annals.

I would like to illustrate this with three examples: the destruction of Samaria in 722, "Josiah's reform" in 620, and the fate of King Jehoiachin exiled to Babylon.

The Fall of Samaria in 722 BCE

From the ninth century, the influence of the Neo-Assyrian Empire grew steadily in the Levant and under the reign of Tiglath-Pileser (745-727) all the kingdoms of Syria and Palestine were *de facto* under Assyrian domination. The northern kingdom (Israel), with a more developed economy and political structure than those of Judah, therefore more interesting, was soon forced to become a vassal state, although it attempted on several occasions to oppose the Assyrian domination.

According to 2 Kings 17, King Hosea of Israel would have sought support from a man named "So, king of Egypt." The identity of this character is strongly discussed (there is no pharaoh of this name: is it the city of Saïs, or simply a transcription of the Egyptian word for king [nj-*swt*]?). The idea of soliciting help in Egypt seems plausible; such attempts are, moreover, criticized in the book of Hosea.

From 724 begins the siege of Samaria, which lasts about 3 years until the fall of the city in 722. This event is reported in the HB and in the Assyrian and Babylonian annals. According to the *Annals* of Sargon II, it was Sargon who would have captured the city, whereas according to the Hebrew Bible and the Babylonian Chronicles, the capture would still have been the work of Salmanassar V. Given the difficulties that Sargon had had to take power, it seems plausible that he attributed himself the capture of Samaria for ideological reasons. Here, the Bible is apparently right: the city was probably

taken under Salmanassar V, whereas Sargon then set up the administrative structure of Israel and incorporated it in the system of the Assyrian provinces, deporting a part of the inhabitants of Samaria and reorganizing the city:

> ... With the power of the great gods ... against them I fought. 27,280 people together with their chariots, and the gods in whom they trusted, as spoil I counted. With 200 chariots for [my] royal force from them I formed a unit. The rest of them I settled in the midst of Assyria. I repopulated Samerina more than before. People from countries, conquered by my hands, I brought in it. My commissioner I appointed as Governor over them. I counted them as Assyrians.[5]

The forced movements of the population are part of the military and political strategy of the Assyrians. Deportations are presented as a sanction to those who break the treaties, but they also had a specific political function. The deportation of some of the important people, priests, high officials, and elite craftsmen, enabled to dismantle the social structure; a part of the defeated army was enrolled into the Assyrian army (cosmopolitan character of the army of Assur). These mixtures of populations are attested in the biblical account and in Assyrian texts or iconography.

Josiah's Reform

Contrary to the previous case which allows comparing Biblical documentation with texts from the Ancient Near East, the case of Josiah's reform is more complicated because there is no extra-biblical evidence of such an event. The beginning of the reign of Josiah coincides more or less with the decline of the Assyrian empire. Around 627 BCE Babylon regains its independence and the Assyrians relax their presence in the Levant which quickly returns under Egyptian control. The biblical account deals almost exclusively with the "reform" (rather, the political, economic and religious changes) that king Josiah would have undertaken.

[5] Translation of the Nimrud Prism according to B. Becking, *The Fall of Samaria: an Historical and Archaeological Study* (Studies in the History of the Ancient Near East 2; Leiden et al.: Brill, 1992), 29-30.

2 Kings 22-23 narrate the discovery of a scroll during the eighteenth year of the reign of Josiah, in the Temple of Jerusalem, during renovation works. This discovery by the priest Hilkiah and the reading of the scroll to the king by the high official Shaphan provoked a very strong reaction. Josiah seems seriously affected by the curses contained in the book. He sends Hilkiah, Shaphan and other officials to consult the prophetess Hulda on the meaning of the scroll. She confirms the divine judgment that Yhwh will exercise against Jerusalem and Judah. Concerning King Josiah, she conveys a more positive message: since he was attentive to the words of the book, he will be buried in peace (2 Kings 22: 18-20). After his officials had conveyed the message, Josiah himself read the book to "all the people" and concludes a treaty with Yhwh (2 Kings 23: 1-3). Josiah then undertakes important cultural changes in Jerusalem and Judah. He eliminates the religious symbols and the priests of the divinities Baal and Asherah, as of the celestial army, implying the abandonment of representations of the Sun, the Moon and the Stars. He profanes and destroys the *bamot,* open-air sanctuaries (the "high places") devoted to Yhwh, as well as the *tophet,* apparently a site of human sacrifices. According to 2 Kings 23:15, he even demolishes the altar of Bethel, the former main Yahwistic sanctuary of Israel. The acts of destruction have their positive counterpart in the conclusion of a (new) treaty between Yahweh and the people, and in the celebration of a Passover (verses 21-23). The two rites are celebrated by Josiah and presented as prescriptions of the unrolled sroll. It is easy to identify on the level of narration and intertextuality the book found with the book of Deuteronomy, since the acts of Josiah and the centralization ideology implemented in his "reform" correspond to the prescriptions of the Deuteronomic Law.

As it presents itself, the narrative in 2 Kings 22-23 reflects the ideology of the Dtr history according to which the book of Deuteronomy is the grid of conduct and of reading for the whole subsequent history. As the story of 2 Kings 22-23 is the "founding myth" of the Deuteronomists it cannot be used naively as it would be an eyewitness report of the so-called reform. The *topos* of the

discovery of the book is very common in ancient literature,[6] and is generally used to legitimize changes in the religious, economic and political order.

The question then arises as to whether this reform of Josiah reflects a historical event or whether it is a pure fiction of the Dtr editors, as argued by a significant number of exegetes?

It is true that we have no first-hand evidence of any "Josiah reform"[7] (no clearly datable document of the reign of Josiah, and proving the existence of a political or religious reorganization). There are, however, some indications of political and religious changes in Judah at the end of the 7th BCE.

According to 2 Kings 23, Josiah suppresses many elements relating to an astral cult, an important aspect of the Neo-Assyrian religious ideology. The reference to the horses and chariots of Shamash, the God of the Sun (23:11) is historically plausible in the Assyrian period.

> He removed the horses that the kings of Judah had dedicated to the sun, at the entrance to the house of the Lord, by the chamber of the eunuch Nathan-melech, which was in the precincts; then he burned the chariots of the Sun with fire. (2 Kings 23:11)

Such cult objects related to the cult of Shamash were very popular in the Neo-Assyrian time as indicated by many iconographic attestations of representations of horses and horsemen and other images of the Sun god related to horses.

A comparable element is the destruction of an altar situated on a terrace:

> The king demolishes the altars on the roof of the upper chamber of Ahaz, which the kings of Judah had made. (2 Kings 23:12)

[6] See the convincing article of B.J. Diebner and C. Nauerth, "Die Inventio des *sepher hattorah* in 2 Kön 22: Struktur, Intention und Funktion von Auffindungslegenden," *DBAT* 18 (1984): 95-118.

[7] For the distinction between direct and secondary evidence, see E.A. Knauf, "From History to Interpretation," in *The Fabric of History: Text, Artifact and Israel's Past,* ed. D.V. Edelmann (JSOT Sup 127; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), 26-64.

This verse may allude to a cult rendered to the army of Heaven on the roofs of Jerusalem. Ahaz was a vassal of the king of Assyria and it is possible that he erected a place of worship on a terrace to demonstrate his loyalty to the Assyrians (2 Kings 16). Isa 38:8 mentions elsewhere a staircase of Ahaz. It can therefore be a kind of large altar which is accessed via a staircase, which can give the idea of a terrace.

Jer 19:3 mentions this worship also in private houses, all of which had terraces: "all the houses upon whose roofs offerings have been made to the whole host of heaven, and libations have been poured out to other gods." The attempt to eradicate these practices can therefore very well be understood in the context of the decline of the Assyrian empire.

A supplementary argument in favor of the plausible dimension of a political and religious reform lies in the comparison which can be made with other reformist kings in the ANE[8], beginning with Akhenaton (1353-1337), who also undertakes a sort of "centralization of worship" in the new town of Akhenaton ("Amarna") decreeing the veneration of a single god. Mention may also be made of Sennacherib, who, at the capture of Babylon in 689, destroyed the temples and statues, or deported them. In place of Babylon he wants to raise "his" city Assur, the city in which is situated the temple of the god Assur who, before that moment, had no important role outside the capital. Thus, *Enuma Elish* is rewritten to replace Marduk by Assur, who becomes the "god of heaven and earth." However, his successor, Assarhaddon, who was crowned king of Babylon, restored the worship of Marduk and other Babylonian divinities. Nabonidus (556-539) came to power following a putsch. He venerated first the lunar god Sin. His long stay at Teima (553-544) remains mysterious. Did he want to create a new capital for Sin in Teima? On his return he reinforces the lunar worship, restoring many temples.

[8] See on the following Nadav Na'aman, "The King Leading Cult Reforms in His Kingdom: Josiah and Other Kings in the Ancient Near East," *ZAR* 12 (2006): 131-168.

All these reforms which aim at elevating a divinity to the rank of principal deity proceed from the initiative of a king. In some of these reforms, the political issues are evident. The fact that the reform of Josiah did not last is quite comparable with that which can be seen in the cases we have just mentioned.

In summary, the biblical presentation of Josiah and his reign cannot be understood as documenting direct testimony. Yet some indications suggest that there were attempts to introduce cultural and political changes under Josiah. His reform was certainly not based on the discovery of a book, but the first edition of Deuteronomy might well have been written under Josiah.

The Exile of Jehoiachin

The books of Kings end with a rather laconic notice of the fate of King Jehoiakim, exiled to Babylon:

> 2 Kings 25:27: In the thirty-seventh year of the exile of King Jehoiachin of Judah, in the twelfth month, on the twenty-seventh[9] day of the month, Evil-merodach[10] King of Babylon, in the year that he began to reign, released[11] King Jehoiachin of Judah from prison;
>
> 2 Kings 25:28: he spoke kindly to him, and gave him a seat above the other seats of the kings who were with him in Babylon.
>
> 2 Kings 25:29: So Jehoiachin put aside[12] his prison clothes. Every day of his life he dined regularly in the king's presence.

[9] There are differences about the exact day: Jer 52:31 has the 25th and JerLXX the 24th day, another Hebrew manuscript the 28th. "24" can easily be understood as a symbolic number, but also "27" (both appear in references of the canonical books of the Hebrew Bible).

[10] The Masoretic vocalization is an intentional and pejorative corruption of the name "Awel-Marduk."

[11] Jer 52:31 and other manuscripts of 2 Kings contain the precision: "He brought him forth"; it is probably a *lectio facilior*.

[12] The change of the *wayyiqtol* into *w-qatal* is explained by the fact that this form often replaces the narrative in recent prose texts or, and this is the option we retain, because *w-qatal* introduces an anterior action to that previously expressed (the more-than-perfect, cf P. Joüon, *Grammar of Biblical Hebrew* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1923, corrected edition 1965, 322).

> 2 Kings 25:30: For his allowance, a regular allowance was given him by[13] the king,[14] a portion every day, as long as he lived.[15]

This text seems at first to reflect a completely historical situation, for tablets of the time of Nebuchadnezzar II (595-570) mention deliveries of oil, barley and sometimes dates and spices for the Palace of Babylon and for the people who were there. In one of the texts[16] we find:

> A Sutu to [Ya]'ukînu, king of the country of Yahudu. Two *qû* and half to the fi[ve sons] of the king of the country of Yahudu.

In another text we find:

> A Sutu to Yakukînu, son of the king Yakudu, two *qû*, and half to the five sons of the king of Yakudu.

In this variant, Jehoiachin does not appear as king, but as his son. Is this an allusion to the fact that the Babylonians considered Jehoiachin's uncle, Zedekiah, as the only legitimate king? But since the other references present him as king, it can also be a scribe's fault[17].

The fact that the king (with different variants as to his name) is so frequently mentioned could underline the important status of which also speaks 2 Kings 25. Contrary to 2 Kings 25, the Babylonian texts speak of the sons of the king, as also the Book of Chronicles does.

---

[13] LXX reads "from the king's house"; this variant does not change the meaning.

[14] The Syriac manuscripts and Jer 52:34 contain the precision "King of Babylon." This precision does not change the meaning of the verse.

[15] Jer 52:34 LXX ends with "until the day of his death" (while JerMT adds also "all the days of his life"). This lesson, as we shall see, is secondary. It tries, among other things, to avoid the doublet that exists in the last words of verses 29 and 30.

[16] The English translation of these texts is based on the German translation of M. Weippert, *Historisches Textbuch zum Alten Testament* (Grundrisse zum Alten Testament Bd. 10; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruptecht, 2010): Weippert, 423-430.

[17] For a discussion see J. Briend and M.-J- Seux, Textes *du Proche-Orient ancien* et Histoire d'Israël (Paris : Cerf, 1977) : 145-146.

However, the last verses of the Kings construct from a historical memory an episode that involves a precise ideological aim. The author of 2 Kings 25:27-30 apparently knew that kings and notables exiled to Babylon benefited with allowances from the King of Babylon, but he gave this practice a new meaning by situating it under a king whose reign inaugurates the end of the Babylonian empire.[18] The change in the status of the king in exile described in 2 Kings 25 uses the literary conventions of the so-called "Diaspora novels": the stories of Esther and Mordecai, of Joseph (Gen 37-45) and the narratives contained in the first part of the book of Daniel (Dan 2-6). In all these stories, an exile leaves his prison and becomes in a sense second to the king (2 Kings 25: 28, Esther 10:3; Gen 41:40; Dan 2:48), his accession to this new status being marked by a change of clothing (2 Kings 25: 29; Esther 6:10-11; 8: 15; Gen 41:42; Dan 5:29). All these stories insist that the country of deportation has become one where Jews can live and even have interesting careers. Exile became a diaspora. Thus the fate of the last king of Judah can be understood as an invitation made to the Judeans of Babylon to accept the fact of living in a diaspora situation, and it is elsewhere known that many Judeans integrated themselves very well into their new homeland.

To sum up, these three examples showed that the construction of a biblical historiography obeys the ideological preoccupations of the scribes of the seventh to the fifth centuries. Nevertheless, these scribes do not invent their materials; they draw them from earlier memoirs and documents by giving them a new meaning. Thus, the biblical account is a theological construction integrating a certain number of *bruta facta*.

[18] Awel-Marduk was very quickly dethroned, and thereafter palace revolutions multiplied until the advent of Nabonide, whose religious policy in favor of Sin provoked the rallying of the Babylonian clergy to Cyrus, cf. for example R. Albertz, *Die Exilszeit. 6. Jahrhundert v. Chr.* (Biblische Enzyklopedie 7, Stuttgart-Berlin-Köln: Kohlhammer, 2001), 58-65.

Reg. No. MAG (5) PRB-Decl. 191/91-98

INDIAN THEOLOGICAL STUDIES VOL. LIII No. 4 December 2016

Indian Theological Studies
St. Peter's Pontifical Institute
Malleswaram West P.O.
Bangalore - 560 055, India
Tel: 080 - 23315172