Introduction

CHRISTOPH LEVIN

I

If we follow the Old Testament account, the Exile was the most important turning point in Israel's history. It is the watershed dividing the kingdoms of Israel and Judah from the Judaism of the Persian and Hellenistic eras. The significance of this change for the history of the Jewish religion and for the literary history of the Old Testament cannot be overemphasized.

In the Old Testament itself, the Exile constitutes a theological concept, and is hence very much more than the record of what may perhaps have taken place in the sixth century. It counts as punishment for Israel's falling away from its God. This concept is especially developed in the books of the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel. On the other hand, the Exile is interpreted as the formative phase during which the Jewish community acquired its subsequent form. It is supposed to have been a purgatory (see Hos 2:16-17) which was the presupposition for the new beginning. After seventy years (see Jer 25:8-13), the exiled community returns in order to rebuild the temple. This view of history especially determines the books of Haggai, Zechariah 1–8, Ezra, Nehemiah and Chronicles.

In the 19th century, biblical scholars already began to notice that the biblical picture of history does not simply reproduce the historical circumstances which followed the conquest of Judah by the Babylonians. For recent research this distinction has become strikingly evident. What is in question above all are the dimensions of the event. Archaeology has shown that large parts of Judah continued to be occupied, in spite of the destruction of Jerusalem and its immediate environs. Even though it can be established that in the sixth century there was a considerable decline in the population (a decline which was only made good in the Hellenistic period), there are good reasons for casting doubt on the notion of comprehensive mass deportations. The proceedings of the Babylonian conqueror probably differed from the Assyrian practice, which is well documented. Even apart from archaeology, recent exegesis also makes it seem more and more probable that the his-

torical picture according to which for seventy long years the country remained an uninhabited wasteland does not derive from contemporary sources. The idea of "the empty land" is a fiction.

So in view of this situation, the question arises: why did the concept of the Exile take on such immense importance for the self-understanding of Judaism during the period of the Second Temple? Scholars are still looking for a convincing answer to this question. Secondly, the contradiction between the concept and the actual course of historical events faces us with the urgent question of how the deviating view of history could come into being. The task of research is first to pose the question as precisely as possible and to define the relevant texts, and then to discuss the possible solutions.

The dimensions of the question extend further than would appear at first sight. The concept of the Exile does not just determine the books which, according to their own account, belong to this period. Its traces are widely disseminated in the Old Testament. Thus the story of the patriarchs in Genesis, in which they are depicted as strangers, can be read as an image of the Exile. In the traditions about the exodus from Egypt and the occupation of the land by the Israelites in Palestine, the remembrance of that exodus in olden times goes hand in hand with hope for the new exodus. The historical picture in the book of Judges, with its series of military defeats and deliverances, becomes plausible against the background of the Exile. The second part of the book of Isaiah (chapters 40–55) counts as a prophecy of the exilic period. Since the Exile never had a definitive end but gradually merged into the conditions of the world-wide Jewish diaspora, the concept remained very much alive during the era of the second temple. The Jewish community continued to hope ardently for an end to the Exile. This hope determined the ideas about Israel's eschatological future, and has continued to do so down to the present day.

II

The two symposiums, the fruits of which are documented in the present volume, have tried to shed light on the phenomenon from different sides. Their purpose was a thorough investigation of the biblical sources, but the aim was also to take into account the Ancient Near Eastern environment and the results of archaeology. An obvious focus of discussion was the fiction of the empty land, which dominates the biblical picture of the history. In recent years this has become a frequently treated subject. But the riddle is still unsolved. Why did the

fiction arise, and how could the counterfactual view of history come to be plausible for contemporaries?

The exiling of populations was a widespread practice in the Ancient Near East. The Assyrians often made use of this way of stabilizing their empire by transporting the indigenous population of conquered provinces to other regions of the realm. In his contribution "Military Threat and the Concept of Exile in the Book of Amos," *Jan Christian Gertz* discusses the Assyrian royal inscriptions, which regularly mention mass deportations. The deportations which followed the conquest of Samaria by Sargon II in 722 BCE, as well as Sennacherib's campaign against Judah in 701 BCE, are among the most comprehensive ever recorded. Since the proceedings of the Assyrians were known to the inhabitants of the Syrian kingdoms, it seems plausible to view corresponding threats from the mouths of the eighth century prophets as authentic, especially since these threats were largely speaking directed against foreign peoples—in the case of Amos, primarily against Aram-Damascus, which was subsequently conquered by Tiglath-pileser III in 732 BCE. The fact that Israel, which was also deported later, is still excluded from the threats, could be an indication of the date of these sayings. In the book of Amos there is not yet a fully developed "concept of exile." It is only in the later-added scene in Amos 7:10-17 (which casts back to 1 Kings 13 and 2 Kings 17:23) that Amos is interpreted as a prophet who threatened Israel and its king Jeroboam with exile.

In "The Exiled Gods of Babylon in Neo-Assyrian Prophecy" *Martti Nissinen* describes a special aspect of the Assyrian deportation practice, taking the Assyrian policy towards Babylon as an example. When Sennacherib defeated his southern rival in battle in the years 694–689, he carried off their local gods into "exile" in Assyria. The city of Babylon was cruelly destroyed, but in Assyria its gods continued to be worshipped. The Assyrian kings used them in order to legitimate their actions against Babylon. Assyrian prophecy also made use of the Babylonian gods. The emigration of the gods was interpreted as a punishment, just as it is in the book of Ezekiel. However, Esarhaddon took the gods back to Babylon in order to restore the cosmic order. The absence of the gods remained a temporary matter—in fact, only an "exile."

The sixth century counts as the real exilic period. With regard to the question as to what really took place at that time in Judah, archaeology has a word to say which is important in view of the scarcity of sources. *Kirsi Valkama* offers a useful survey in "What Do Archaeological Remains Reveal of the Settlement in Judah during the Mid-Sixth Century BCE?" The state of research is not primarily determined by spectacular new findings. It is rather that in the past twenty years the already

known findings have been interpreted in a new way. What has thereby emerged is that both are incorrect: (a) the biblical picture that implies that in the sixth century the land was largely depopulated and (b) the recently maintained position that life in the country went on—largely speaking—as before, with the exception of Jerusalem and its immediate environs. It is impossible to overlook a marked decline in settlement, which did not remain confined to the sixth century but lasted for the greatest part of the Persian period. Signs of new building activity are as sparse, as is evidence of a new administration, except perhaps for the building on *Tell en-Naṣbeh* (Mizpah). Excluded from the cultural decline are the tomb findings. Here it is possible to talk with Avraham Faust about a "post collapse society." That does not necessarily mean that there would have been no cultural achievements, such as literary activities.

Apart from archaeology, our knowledge of the actual events rests on the "official" written sources. Insofar as these originated in Judah, they are to be found in the last two chapters of the books of Kings. In "The Empty Land in Kings," *Christoph Levin* undertakes an analysis of the existing texts in order to distinguish the pre-redactional sources from the later additions. The Deuteronomistic redaction supplements the excerpt from the annals of the kings of Judah, which as usual forms the framework, by a second excerpt from the temple records, which reports the fate of the temple property. A third source from which two fragments are quoted are the records of the Babylonian branch of the Davidic dynasty. It can be deduced from these records that after the conquest the Jerusalem and the Babylonian Davidic branches were at rivalry. This political contention may have provided an essential reason for the later dominating opposition between the Babylonian *golah* and the Judeans who had remained in the country. The bias in favor of the Babylonian branch was subsequently underlined through a revision which may be called the "Jehoiachin edition." A series of very late revisions, which already anticipates features of Chronistic theology, finally maintains that Jerusalem had been completely destroyed and the land largely depopulated. In this way the existence of Judean Judaism was denied in the books of Kings too, and the theory of the empty land was introduced in the interests of the Babylonian *golah*.

The book of Ezra has also undergone revisions where the *golah* are concerned, as *Juha Pakkala* is able to show in "The Exile and the Exiles in the Ezra Tradition." These revisions introduce the assertion that the Jewish community as a whole had returned from Babylon before the temple could be rebuilt. The Ezra source, which provides the basis for the book, still shows no trace of this. There, the community is living in

Jerusalem, and the only one to return is Ezra himself. However, Ezra brings the Torah from Babylon to Judah, so that the religious precedence of the *golah* is presupposed from the beginning. It is only later revisions which fall in with the theory of the empty land, and equate the Jewish community with the returning exiles.

The theory of the empty land is also the subject of *Hermann-Josef Stipp*'s contribution "The Concept of the Empty Land in Jeremiah 37–43." The narratives in Jeremiah 37–43 about the circumstances during and immediately after the Babylonian conquest report emphatically that after the murder of Gedaliah the country was completely divested of Judeans. The whole remaining population, including the people who had temporally fled to the neighbouring countries, moves to Egypt, out of fear of the Babylonians. But the Judeans who had escaped to Egypt are threatened with complete annihilation. The conclusion to be drawn is that it is the Babylonian exiles alone who survive as Yahweh's people. The prevailing view among scholars is that a notion which runs so radically counter to the real events could only come into being after a considerable gap in time. Stipp, on the other hand, points out that the loss of population in Judah which archaeologists have observed was so immense that seen from afar — for example from Babylon — the assertion that the land had been stripped of people must not have seemed entirely and wholly absurd, even if it was not in fact true. In the main thrust of the narratives, this one-sided presentation serves a clearly detectable purpose. The author, who must have belonged to the Babylonian Jews, is campaigning in Yahweh's name for trust in the Babylonian overlord, from whom he expects the new beginning and also the repatriation to Judah.

In view of the archaeological evidence, which supports continuity in the settlement history (evidence which is also borne out by the preredactional sources of the Old Testament), we are faced with the question of how it was in any way possible for the counterfactual picture of the empty land to prevail in the historiography. Had the real conditions been forgotten, or was the knowledge of them deliberately replaced by a different picture? In exegesis the prevailing view—supported in part by the sequence of the literary strata—is that the fiction of the empty land arose late, and was from the outset at the service of a strong bias against the country population (see Jeremiah 24). In his essay "Total Exile, Empty Land and the General Intellectual Discourse in Yehud," *Ehud Ben Zvi* points out that the biblical presentation, at least in the books Haggai-Zechariah 1–8 and Ezra-Nehemiah, does not give the impression that severe conflicts arose between the small group of returnees, who with Persian support took over the temple, and the major-

ity of the people who had remained in the country. On the contrary, the Jewish population is presented as a unity. The assertion that all Jews returned from exile therefore seems to rest on a positive identification. The notion that after the catastrophe the country was for a certain time without inhabitants must have been of essential importance for the self-understanding of the Jewish population and for the form it was to take in the future. Ben Zvi names a few possible motives. One is that after the catastrophe the land required purification, see Lev 26:43. Another is that the relationship to God was understood in the image of marriage. After the relationship had broken down, Israel was driven out like a divorced wife. This idea had to be true of God's people as a whole if it was to hold good. After a period of repentance the marital reconciliation took place, see Hos 2:16-25. In addition, Ben Zvi stresses that the community developed a sense of shared self-identity in terms of continuity from monarchic Judah to provincial Yehud (not, provincial "Benjamin"), from a monarchic to Persian-period temple. Narratives of continuity between two different periods and their related social memories tend to strongly de-emphasize the component and period of discontinuity and thus they bring about an element of memory forgetfulness.

The account which alleges that the land was completely forsaken by Judeans is an excellent example of counterfactual history. This is a frequently used way of coming to terms with the actual historical circumstances, and was so no less in the ancient world than it is today. "What would have happened if certain events and decisions had taken a different course?" The speculative outline of an alternative course of events serves to relativize what has in fact taken place, and thus to explain it. It helps people to come to terms with the tragic experience that something came about which should not have been allowed to happen. However, in "The Voice and Role of a Counterfactual Memory in the Construction of Exile and Return: Considering Jeremiah 40:7-12," *Ehud Ben Zvi* suggests that instead of counterfactual history it would be better to talk about counterfactual memory. For it is memory in which the picture of history makes its impact on the present. The description of a brief period of peace which in Jer 40:7-12 is made to precede the murder of the governor Gedaliah, is an example of such counterfactual memory. The people of Benjamin and Judah live together in great harmony, and under the protection of the Babylonians an undisturbed prosperity spreads throughout the country. That is an ideal picture of what might have happened if Gedaliah had survived—although it presupposes at the same time that Gedaliah's tragic end, which put a stop to this brief period of peace, was in accordance with divine providence, and was thus inescapable. What is depicted is a hypothetical surmount-

ing of the Exile in the form of a thought game. The agreement described between Gedaliah and the foreign king and his representative provides a model for the author's own present existence in the Persian period.

Going beyond the biblical account which is directly related to the exilic period, the two symposiums included further examples of biblical tradition which are determined by the experience of the Exile and reflect that experience, each in its own way. If we follow their present sequence in the Bible, this reflection already begins in the book of Genesis, for example, with the account of the era of the patriarchs given by the Priestly Code. *Jakob Wöhrle* shows in "The Un-Empty Land" that here we have an image of the Exile framed on the basis of existing tradition about the patriarchs. A clear indication of this is the fact that the place of Abraham's origin is moved from Haran to Ur of the Chaldeans. Once he has reached the promised land, Abraham finds himself once again in a diaspora situation. He has to share the "land of his sojournings" with "the people of the land." The strictness of the prohibition of mixed marriage (see Gen 27:46–28:9) can be explained by this situation. As to whether the patriarchs have possessed the country, the Priestly Code gives a confusing answer. When Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and the Israelites themselves are addressed, they are promised in each case that they will be given possession *in the future* (Gen 17:8; Exod 6:8); but as soon as it looks back to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the Priestly Code maintains that Yahweh has *already given* them the land (Gen 28:4; 35:12; Exod 6:8). Wöhrle explains this ambivalence by saying that Yahweh has certainly given over the land to the Israelites but not for their sole possession. The Israelites are to share it with a foreign people.

The rest of the Torah has also been profoundly stamped by the experience of the Exile. A familiar example is the blessing and curse in Leviticus 26 which ends the Holiness Code. In "A Prophetic View of the Exile in the Holiness Code," *Reinhard Müller* reminds us of Wellhausen's assessment that this text is a piece of prophecy in the midst of the Torah, being a reflection of the prophecy of the exilic period. For the blessing in vv. 3-13, the dependence on Ezekiel 34 and other promises in the book of Ezekiel is obvious. In just the same way as in Deuteronomy 28, the curse reflects the experiences of the catastrophe. Disobedience will bring about a situation which leads step by step of the Exile as vv. 27-38 openly asserts. But that is not the end of the matter. In the chapter's final section, the threat leads over into the promise that Yahweh will not forget his covenant. The Exile is given a positive meaning. It now counts as a period of repentance in which the land will make up for the Sabbaths it has failed to keep.

The book of Judges is an outstanding example of an exilic setting. In "Images of Exile in the Book of Judges" *Reinhard Müller* shows that the redactional outline of history is nothing other than a picture of the experiences of the sixth century projected into the pre-monarchical period. Gideon's lament in Judg 6:13 sounds like a signal for this, since although in its historiographical context it is supposed to have been uttered in pre-monarchical times, it reflects the mental and spiritual condition of the Exile. In these circumstances, the cyclical sequence into which the redaction has brought the ancient traditions about wars and heroes can be seen as an image of the ever-new succession of military crises which Israel and Judah experienced between the eighth and the sixth century. In the case of "the Cushite-of-the-double-wickedness, king of Aram-of-the-two-rivers" (Judg 3:7-11), which the redaction has put in front of the ancient traditions as an example, the allusion to the victorious great powers of Mesopotamia and Egypt is quite direct. The fact that during the period of the Judges depicted in this way the Israelites still had no king reflects the loss of the monarchy in Judah and is intended to strengthen the hope for a restoration. The new beginning which is then associated with the kingship of Saul is seen as being dependent on the relationship to Yahweh.

In his two contributions "Exile in the Book of Isaiah" and "Reading, Writing, and Exile," *Francis Landy* shows that it is not Deutero-Isaiah alone which is related, or can be related, to the Exile: it is the book of Isaiah as a whole. Landy does not establish this by way of literary analysis, and even his historical "placing" of the individual parts of the book (which originated from the eighth until well into the third century) is not decisive for the interpretation. Instead, in a profound exposition, he describes the poetry of the book and its metaphors. Read in this way, it emerges that the whole book is determined by an ambivalence; it is "all about exile" and "not about exile at all." The double meaning of the Hebrew גלה "reveal" and "exile," is characteristic: what is revealed is nothing that can be revealed, but is exile. It is not by chance that the prophet's call vision leads over to the charge "to harden their hearts": "Hear and do not understand!" "All the words of the book emanate from that occluded and apophatic vision." The culminating point is the caesura between Isaiah 39 and 40: "In the centre of the book is the exile, in other words a displaced, absent centre, passed over in silence, in the gap, for instances, between chs. 39 and 40." Throughout the book we sense something like the eschatological proviso, which presupposes the surmounting of the Exile and yet does not bring it about.

James A. Linville's "Playing with Maps of Exile: Displacement, Utopia, and Disjunction" is also related to Deutero-Isaiah. He investigates the phenomenon of the Exile by means of comparative religious studies. Taking Isaiah 40–55 as example, he compares the biblical hope for restoration with the cargo cult, which desires to reacquire a lost past but in fact replaces it by something new, the "cargo" taken over from the victorious culture. In this way, in Deutero-Isaiah the Persian emperor takes the place of the Davidic king: Cyrus becomes Yahweh's anointed one. For the Judeans, the identification serves to compensate for their own powerless marginal position, but at the same time it means to a certain degree a renunciation of their own identity.

The Exile can also serve as a myth, as *James A. Linville*, following Mircea Eliade, shows in his "Myth of the Exilic Return: Myth Theory and the Exile as an Eternal Reality in the Prophets." In the Bible, the primeval history is the classic example of mythical thinking and speech. The fact that the second creation account in Genesis 2–3 ends with the expulsion is of great significance. Here Exile is a mythical category by which to interpret the human condition. It is answered on the opposite side by "the myth of the eternal return." This too is well documented in the Bible. The Old Testament's prophecy of salvation proclaims in largely mythical categories its message that in the end the ideal paradisiacal times will return. A good example is the coda to the book of Amos, with its hope of final restauration.

Finally, *John Kessler*'s "Images of Exile: Representations of the 'Exile' and 'Empty Land' in Sixth-Fourth Century BCE Yehudite Literature" offers a comprehensive survey of these two motifs, taking the vision of the basket of figs in Jeremiah 24 as programmatic text. His contribution can be read as a summing-up inventory, for he includes many texts which are treated in other contributions to this volume as well, such as Leviticus 26, Deuteronomy 28, Isaiah, Jeremiah 40–44, 2 Kings 25, and Ezra-Nehemiah; and in addition the books of Ezekiel, Micah, Haggai, and Zechariah 1–8. This great synthesis clearly shows the astonishingly variegated way in which the motif of the Exile is treated and expounded in the Bible, the more so since even the individual blocks of tradition are dominated by a great diversity of literary strata, themes, and concerns. This is all the more remarkable since the texts probably go back to a relatively small group of scribes in Judah during the Persian and the Hellenistic period. This finding can be explained by the fact that the motif of the Exile derives from real historical circumstances which were perceived and evaluated in different ways, and that this varying evaluation was bound up with hard and fast opposing interests. But the fact that the contradictions were not smoothed out in the

course of the literary transmission but remained irreconcilably side by side is due to the reverent attitude of the scribes, who saw themselves as in duty bound to preserve the religious tradition in all its variety, and to pass it on unchanged.

III

In summary, what comes to the fore is the diversity of aspects and of textual and other testimonies. The phenomenon of the Exile, which has become a fundamental motif in post-exilic Judaism, eludes a simplified, mono-causal viewpoint such as has occasionally been customary in recent times. That is true both for the historical events themselves, and for the causes and concerns which were operative in them, and it also applies to their intellectual and spiritual assimilation, which took very many different, indeed antithetical, paths, and has never reached an end—just as the historical research on this subject too can never be exhaustive.

All the more important is the scholarly exchange which leads to a broader exposition of the variety which individual scholars can always only partially elucidate. Here the transatlantic dialogue documented in this collection of essays manifests a certain division of labour. Whereas the European contributions largely concentrate on the literary history, on the Canadian side contributions dealing with the intellectual world of the texts are in the foreground. The varying emphases show that in spite of a growing international exchange biblical studies are working from different scholarly traditions. This is not something to be regretted. It is the great opportunity offered by the present day. If we succeed in bringing the diverse approaches into discussion, our mutual understanding will lead to a deepened understanding of our historical subject too, and from this we shall all profit. This fruitful cooperation demands continuation.