

Chemosh's Wrath and Yahweh's No*

Ideas of Divine Wrath in Moab and Israel

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Introduction

At a prominent place, the inscription of King Mesha of Moab from the second half of the ninth century BCE¹ contains a reference to the wrath of Chemosh, god of the Moabite kingdom, at his own land: *ky y'np kms' b'rsh* 'for Chemosh was angry at his own land' (lines 5–6). With this reference the Moabite king explains the past oppression of his land by King Omri of Israel and Omri's successors.

This passage is of special interest for two cultural spheres. First, it is one of the few inscriptions from the northwest Semitic area of the first millennium BCE to attest to the idea of the wrath of the gods, here wrath at the god's own people.² Secondly, the inscription speaks of persons and events which are also mentioned in the Old Testament, above all in 2

* English translation John Bowden (London).

¹ In what follows Mesha inscription, abbreviated MI. More recent versions of the text: DONNER, H. / RÖLLIG, W., *Kanaanäische und aramäische Inschriften (KAI) I–III*, Wiesbaden 1962–1964, I ⁵2002, II ³1973, Nr. 181 (I, 41–42; II, 168–79, 341); GIBSON, J. C. L., *Textbook of Syrian Semitic Inscriptions (TSSI) I. Hebrew and Moabite Inscriptions*, 71–84. Translations: Galling, K. (ed.), *Textbuch zur Geschichte Israels (TGI)*, Tübingen ³1979, 51–53; Kaiser, O. (ed.), *Texte aus der Umwelt des Alten Testaments (TUAT) I/6*, Gütersloh 1985, 646–650; Pritchard, J. B. (ed.), *Ancient Near Eastern Texts (ANET)*, Princeton ²1955, 320–321; HALLO, W. W., *The Context of Scripture (COS) 2*, Leiden / Boston 2003, 137–138. For the history of its discovery and publication cf. HORN, S. H., *The Discovery of the Moabite Stone*, in: *The Word of the Lord Shall Go Forth (FS D. N. Freedman)*, Meyers, C. L. / O'Connor, M. (eds), Winona Lake 1983, 497–505; GRAHAM, M. P., *The Discovery and Reconstruction of the Mesha Inscription*, in: Dearman, J. A. (ed.), *Studies in the Mesha Inscription and Moab, ASOR/SBL ABST 2*, Atlanta 1989, 41–92.

² Cf. also KAI 214, line 23 (the wrath of Hadad at a successor – who is illegitimate – on the throne of Panamuwas I of Ja'udi) and perhaps KAI 223B, line 12 (the 'day of wrath', presumably at enemies who have broken a treaty). For the Balaam inscription of Deir 'Alla see below, 3.

Kings 3. Thus in terms of geography, history and the history of religion the Mesha inscription represents the closest parallel to the notion of the wrath of Yahweh in the Old Testament. Here the notion of wrath is widely attested and has assumed a special form in the prophetic books. As far as we know, only in biblical written prophecy is the idea turned into an unconditional announcement of disaster, into a 'no' from the God Yahweh to Israel, which fundamentally and apparently irreparably terminates the relationship of the deity to his people.

In view of the common features and the differences between the inscription and the Old Testament, here as elsewhere the question arises 'why from approximately the same beginning Israelite history arrived at quite a different end result from, say, Moabite history'. According to Julius Wellhausen, from whom this formulation comes, the question cannot really be answered, 'but a series of transitions can be described in which the way from paganism to rational worship, in the spirit and in the truth, was taken'.³ Leaving aside the dated vocabulary, this formulates the question of this contribution precisely.

In what follows I shall be concentrating on the Mesha inscription and investigating the transitions by means of this example. I shall include two further witnesses from the corpus of northwest Semitic inscriptions in the comparison, one of which is important above all from a historical perspective, and the other in terms of genre: the Tell Dan inscription, which has a biblical parallel in 2 Kings 8–10, and the Balaam inscription of Deir 'Alla, which has a biblical parallel in Num. 22–24. I shall argue that the epigraphic evidence reflects the presuppositions in the history of religion – also to be assumed for Israel and Judah themselves – on which the theological transformation of the notions common in the biblical tradition, especially the prophetic books, rests.

1. The wrath of Chemosh at Moab: the Mesha inscription

The motif of the wrath of the gods occurs in many forms in the ancient Near East. Ulrich Berges distinguishes five categories: 1. The wrath of the gods at each other in the Ugaritic and Mesopotamian epics. 2. The wrath of the deity who seeks to destroy humankind with the flood in Atramhasis

³ WELLHAUSEN, J., *Israelitische und jüdische Geschichte*, Berlin ¹⁰2004, 33 ('Warum die israelitische Geschichte von einem annähernd gleichen Anfange aus zu einem ganz andern Endergebnis geführt hat als etwa die moabitische, läßt sich schließlich nicht erklären. Wohl aber läßt sich eine Reihe von Übergängen beschreiben, in denen der Weg vom Heidentum bis zum vernünftigen Gottesdienst, im Geist und in der Wahrheit, zurückgelegt wurde.').

and Gilgamesh. 3. The wrath of the deity who intervenes in the fortunes of the peoples, above all in royal inscriptions. 4. The wrath of the deity who destroys temple cities and their sanctuaries in the Mesopotamian city laments. 5. The wrath of the deity which overwhelms individuals at the point of death in hymns and prayers.⁴

With the exception of the first category, in all the other four categories the wrath of the deity (or deities) is also directed against their own worshippers: humankind created to serve the gods, the king installed by the deity and his land, the city inhabited by the deity and its sanctuary, those who call on the deity in prayer. In so far as the divine wrath is directed against the 'others', the world is in order for those who worship the deity. However, as soon as the wrath is directed against the deity's own worshippers, there is a disruption of the relationship between the deity and his people which needs to be explained and overcome. Much literary evidence which deals with the wrath of the gods has been composed not least for this purpose. It is the same in the ancient Near East as it is in the Old Testament, in which there are reminiscences and parallels in phraseology relative to all the categories.

But listing the evidence and its parallels is not enough. Rather, each individual testimony needs to be evaluated and interpreted for itself. One of these pieces of evidence is the inscription of King Mesha of Moab. It can be put in the third of the categories proposed by Berges, the historical category. As is well known, the inscription deals with the liberation of Moab from Israelite domination under Omri and his sons (Ahab, Ahaziah and Jehoram) in the course of the first half of the ninth century BCE, which at the latest was achieved by the violent deposition of the Omrid dynasty by Jehu around 840 BCE. Certainly the details of the historical event which is reported in the inscription can no longer be reconstructed completely and harmonized with the biblical information about the same (or a later) period.⁵ But beyond doubt the inscription represents a historical

⁴ BERGES, U., *Der Zorn Gottes in der Prophetie und Poesie Israels auf dem Hintergrund altorientalischer Vorstellungen*, Bib 85, 2004, 305–330: 309.

⁵ For a historical reconstruction see KAI II, 169–179 and VAN ZYL, A. H., *The Moabites*, POS 3, Leiden 1960; LIVER, J., *The Wars of Mesha, King of Moab*, PEQ 99, 1967, 14–31; RENDSBURG, G., *A Reconstruction of Moabite-Israelite History*, JNES 13, 1981, 67–73; TIMM, S., *Die Dynastie Omri*, FRLANT 124, 1982, 158–180; DEARMAN, J. A., *Historical Reconstruction and the Mesha Inscription*, in: id. (ed.), *Studies*, 155–210; SMELIK, K. A. D., *King Mesha's Inscription. Between History and Fiction*, in: id., *Converting the Past. Studies in Ancient Israelite and Moabite Historiography*, OTS 28, Leiden 1992, 59–92; PARKER, S. B., *Stories in Scripture and Inscriptions. Comparative Studies on Narratives in Northwest Semitic Inscriptions and the Hebrew Bible*, New York / Oxford 1997, 44–58; ROUTLEDGE, B., *The Politics of Mesha. Segmented Identities and State Formation in Iron Age Moab*, JESHO 43, 2000, 221–256; EMERTON, J.,

source of the first order and considerably enriches our knowledge about the phase of Moabite and Israelite, indeed even Judaeon, history in question.⁶

At the same time, however, the Mesha inscription unmistakably provides a very arbitrary account of history.⁷ Like any other account it is selective and dependent on its (Moabite) standpoint. In addition there is the specific perspective of the genre. The Mesha stele is a mixture of dedicatory inscription and building inscription, in other words a memorial inscription and not royal annals or a comparable genre.⁸ That means that the

The Value of the Moabite Stone as an Historical Source, *VT* 52, 2002, 483–492; MYKYTIUK, L. J., Identifying Biblical Persons in Northwest Semitic Inscriptions of 1200–539 B.C.E., *SBL Academia Biblica* 12, Atlanta 2004, 95–110; LEMAIRE, A., La stèle de Mésha et l'histoire de l'ancien Israël, in: *Storia e tradizioni di Israele* (FS J. A. Soggin), Garrone, D. / Israel, F. (eds), Brescia 1991, 143–169; ID., The Mesha Stele and the Omri Dynasty, in: Grabbe, L. L. (ed.), *Ahab Agonistes. The Rise and Fall of the Omri Dynasty*, *European Seminar in Historical Methodology* 6, Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies (formerly JSOT.S) 421, London / New York 2007, 135–144; ID., West Semitic Inscriptions and Ninth-Century BCE Ancient Israel, in: Williamson, H. G. M. (ed.), *Understanding the History of Ancient Israel*, *Proceedings of the British Academy* 143, Oxford 2007, 279–303; NA'AMAN, N., Royal Inscription versus Prophetic Story. Mesha's Rebellion according to Biblical and Moabite Historiography, in: Grabbe (ed.), *Ahab Agonistes*, 145–183. Justified though the critique by THOMPSON, T. L., (A Testimony of the Good King. Reading the Mesha Stele, in: Grabbe [ed.], *Ahab Agonistes*, 236–292) of a purely positivistic and uncritical evaluation of the epigraphic and biblical sources and the mixing of literary and historical arguments may be, his picture of history and historiography as a purely literary fiction also rests no less on the positivistic understanding that he criticizes, if not more so.

⁶ The 'house of David' is presumably mentioned not only in the Tell Dan inscription (KAI suppl. 310; TUAT suppl., Gütersloh 2001, 176–179; COS 2, 161–161) but also in lines 31–32 of MI. Cf. LEMAIRE, A., "House of David" Restored in Moabite Inscription, *BAR* 20, 1994, 30–37; ID., La dynastie davidique (byt dwd) dans deux inscriptions ouest-sémitiques du IXe s. av. J.-C., *Studi Epigrafici e Linguistici* 11, 1994, 17–19; E. PUECH, La stèle arméenne de Dan. Bar Hadad II et la coalition des Omrides et de la maison des David, *RB* 101, 1994, 215–241; also MYKYTIUK, *Biblical Persons*, 265–277. For the historical circumstances in the ninth century BCE see below, 2.

⁷ Cf. MÜLLER, H.-P., König Mēša^c von Moab und der Gott der Geschichte, *UF* 26, 1994, 373–395; PARKER, *Stories*, 44–58; KRATZ, R. G., Geschichten und Geschichte in den nordwestsemitischen Inschriften des 1. Jahrtausends v. Chr., in: Morenz, L. / Schorch, S. (eds), *Was ist ein Text? Alttestamentliche, ägyptologische und altorientalische Perspektiven*, *BZAW* 362, Berlin 2007, 284–309: 301–305; NA'AMAN, *Royal Inscription*, 149–154; THOMPSON, *Testimony*.

⁸ Cf. already DAVIS, J. D., *The Moabite Stone and the Hebrew Records*, *Hebraica* 7, 1891, 178–182; also MILLER, M., *The Moabite Stone as a Memorial Stela*, *PEQ* 106, 1974, 9–18, for the terminology *ibid.*, 10 n. 7; DRINKARD, J., *The Literary Genre of the Mesha Inscription*, in: Dearman (ed.), *Studies*, 131–154; DEARMAN, *Historical Reconstruction*, 203–204; MÜLLER, *König Mēša^c von Moab*, 374–388. For the literary structure cf. also AUFFRET, P., *Essai sur la structure littéraire de la stèle de Mésha*, *UF* 12, 1980,

inscription is not primarily an account of successful military actions against Israel, but a retrospect on Mesha's rule in honour of the god Chemosh and in praise of the king himself. In the retrospect events and deeds of the king which took place in different regions and at different times are brought together to become individual scenes of an ongoing action and focussed on the achievement of the political independence of Moab under King Mesha.⁹ The focussing serves to profile the period of Mesha's reign ('in my days'), which is marked off within the narrative pattern of the 'before' and 'after' the time of his father. Thus the genre alone does not lead us to expect an account of facts which is chronologically and geographically coherent, even if this is precisely what the inscription suggests. The stylization as a historical report is an element of the genre and is guided by the over-riding interest of the king's account of himself.

The king's account of himself includes his relationship to the god Chemosh, who watches over the kingdom and to whom the inscription and the sanctuary built by Mesha mentioned in it are dedicated (lines 3–4). It is the relationship of the king to his deity which moves history and also constitutes the historical connection between the individual scenes. All that happens is regarded as having been brought about by Chemosh, who made Mesha triumph over his enemies. Mesha's triumph is the triumph of his god Chemosh. The interplay becomes clear in the relationship between lines 4 and 7 of the inscription. But it is also expressed in the fact that after the triumph it is not Mesha but the god who again 'inhabits' or 'restores' the land in which Omri and his son previously 'dwelt' (lines 8–9). This is also the case with the occupation of the city HWRNN, if this emendation is correct (lines 31, 33).¹⁰ And if it is King Mesha himself who settles peo-

109–124; SMELIK, King Mesha's Inscription, 59–73; IRSIGLER, H., Großsatzformen im Althebräischen und die syntaktische Struktur des Inschrift des Königs Mescha von Moab, in: id. (ed.), Syntax und Text. Beiträge zur 22. Internationalen Ökumenischen Hebräisch-Dozenten-Konferenz 1993 in Bamberg, ATSAT 40, St Otilien 1993, 81–121; NICCACCI, A., The Stele of Mesha and the Bible. Verbal System and Narrativity, *Orientalia* 63, 1994, 226–248; RAINEY, A. F., Mesha and Syntax, in: *The Land that I Will Show You* (FS J. Maxwell Miller), Dearman, J. A. / Graham, M. P. (eds), JSOT.S 343, Sheffield 2001, 287–307.

⁹ PARKER, *Stories*, 53–55, 57 conjectures a lengthy process of redaction in the background which would explain not only the difference between the war account and the building account but also the differences in the individual war scenes. The closest parallel in time and form for the combination of war account and building account is the Zakkur inscription KAI 202 (TUAT I, 626–628; COS 2, 155). For this too PARKER, *Stories*, 108–109 assumes a later revision.

¹⁰ In both instances KAI II, 169, 173 und TUAT I, 647–650 both read the qal of the verb *yšb*, 'dwell'; but the hiphil of *šwb*, 'bring back, restore' (cf. line 12), is possible – and probably more correct – in the second instance in lines 8–9 and line 33. Cf. MILLER,

ple in a conquered territory which was previously inhabited (*yšb*) by others and 'restores' (*šwb* hiph.) the ³*r'l dwdh*, this also happens for Chemosh and for Moab (lines 10–14).¹¹

The interplay between king and deity emerges most clearly from the description of the military actions. What Mesha does in lines 10–14 on his own initiative but for Chemosh and Moab, in lines 14–18 and 31–33 he does on the express command of his god. Here the battles are described in accordance with the classical pattern of the holy war, which in the case of the city of Nebo is preserved completely: at the bidding of the deity the king goes to war, conquers the city in half a day and occupies it, kills all the native and alien inhabitants of the city 'consecrated' to Ashtar-Chemosh and – in accordance with the proceedings in Ataroth in lines 12–13 – also brings the vessels of Yahweh plundered there before Chemosh as a sign of divine and political superiority.¹² According to lines 18–21 the deity even intervenes directly in the fighting with Mesha being his executive organ and recompenses the king of Israel for his action.¹³

According to the wording it is only the subsequent building measures that Mesha carries out completely without any divine instigation (lines 21–31).¹⁴ But the way in which the building account is inserted into the composition of the inscription gives the impression that the building activity,

P. D., A Note on the Meša^c Inscription, *Orientalia* 38, 1969, 461–464; more recently JACKSON, K. P., The Language of the Mesha Inscription, in: Dearman (ed.), *Studies*, 96–130: 97–98, 110; SMELIK, King Mesha's Inscription, 64, 66 and *COS* 2, 137–138; PARKER, *Stories*, 44–45; for the word play cf. already SMELIK, King Mesha's Inscription, 70, 72.

¹¹ For the crux interpretum in line 12 (³*r'l dwdh*) and the proposals made about it cf. JACKSON, *Language*, 112–113; MATTINGLY, *Moabite Religion and the Mesha Inscription*, in: Dearman (ed.), *Studies*, 236–237 and the literature mentioned here. On the basis of the parallel in lines 17–18 it still seems to me most probable that this is a piece of cultic apparatus of the god (of the city of Ataroth or the land of Moab which has just been mentioned?) designated for DWD, the 'Beloved'. However, it does not seem to me to have been demonstrated whether this was an Israelite (Yahwistic) cult, as is usually assumed (cf. TUAT I, 648 n. 13a; MATTINGLY, G. L., *Moabite Religion*, 235), or a genuinely Gadite or Moabite cult. Here the difference between the verbs in lines 12–13 (*šwb* hiph.) and lines 17–18 (*lqh*) should also be noted. For the question see also NA'AMAN, *Royal Inscription*, 153–154.

¹² For the parallels from the ancient Near East and the Old Testament see WEIPPERT, M., "Heiliger Krieg" in Israel und Assyrien. Kritische Anmerkungen zu Gerhard von Rads Konzept des "Heiligen Krieges im alten Israel" (1972), in: id., *Jahwe und die anderen Götter. Studien zur Religionsgeschichte des antiken Israel in ihrem syrisch-palästinischen Kontext*, *FAT* 18, Tübingen 1997, 71–97.

¹³ Just as he has 'taken possession of' (*wyrš*) and 'settled in' (*wyšb bh*, lines 7–8, 18), so he is now 'driven out' of the settlement of Jahaz by the deity (*wygršh kmš*).

¹⁴ JACKSON, *Language*, 113, refers to the parallel – with divine instigation – in the Ammonite citadel inscription of Amman (KAI suppl. 307; *COS* 2, 139).

also described in the first-person style, was possible only after Chemosh had driven out the enemy, and to some degree is the consequence of this (lines 10–21). The building account in lines 21–31 has the same relationship to the war account in lines 10–12 which precedes it as the notices about the buildings in lines 9–10 have to lines 7–9 or the remarks about the settlement of people in lines 13–14 have to lines 10–13. The building account may only have been given its present form at a secondary stage, in a redaction of the inscription, but in this way it fits well into the overall context.

The proemium of the inscription in lines 1–4, which prepares for the mention of the wrath of Chemosh in lines 4–7, formulates a distinctive connection between the king's building project and the activity of the god Chemosh. The building of the high sanctuary of which the proemium speaks (line 3) is in gratitude for the deliverance from the hand of the enemy which has taken place. The theological dimension of the historical event depicted in what follows, in which the deity has played a key part, is brought out with the topic of the prayer of thanksgiving, to which the mention of the wrath also belongs.¹⁵ Thus history appears as the concrete realization and manifestation of the relationship with the deity practised in the cult. Conversely, the cult that is practised is the decisive factor of history, which gives it its direction and its inner cohesion.

The attached summary of the historical account, which serves as a preface of the individual war scenes and building notes (lines 4–7), is formulated on the same line. In this summary the division of epochs set out in the proemium, the transition from the rule of the father to that of the son (lines 1–3), is related to the hostile dynasty, Omri and his son Ahab.¹⁶ In the elaboration of the statement about deliverance in the proemium (lines

¹⁵ For the influence of the genre of thanksgiving cf. MÜLLER, *König Mēša*^c von Moab, 375–376; for 'wrath' in the individual prayer of petition and thanksgiving cf. Pss. 6.2; 27.9; 30.6 (*'p*) and Isa. 12.1 (*'np*). However, in the Old Testament the verb appears above all in (late) collective prayer or in Deuteronomistic and Chronistic formulations and here is usually understood as punishment for the sins of the people: Pss. 60.3; 79.5; 85.6; 90.7, 11; 1 Kings 8.46//2 Chron. 6.36; Ezra 9.14; the *hithpael* Deut. 1.37; 4.21; 9.8,20; 1 Kings 11.9; 2 Kings 17.18.

¹⁶ Thus lines 5–6, according to which Mesha and Ahab were contemporaries. But Mesha also seems to have experienced the end of Ahab, his sons Ahaziah and Jehoram, and perhaps even the end of the Omrids in Israel (and Judah?). However, this does not emerge clearly from the information in lines 6–7, 8 but depends on how we understand 'and his house' in line 7, 'and half the days of his son/sons' (or 'and for half of my days his sons') and the 40 years in line 8; the information about Madeba in line 8 does not necessarily have to agree with the general information in lines 6–7. All the information is presented in the pattern of 'before' and 'after', with the time of Mesha's rule ('in my days') as the turning point. For the problem see most recently LEMAIRE, *The Mesha Stele*, 138–139.

3–4) the change of era appears as a change from disaster to salvation. The salvation, Mesha's deliverance and the annihilation of his enemies¹⁷ are matched by the disaster, the wrath of Chemosh at Moab, in the past. Thus mention of wrath fits into the before-and-after pattern of the description of the historical shift in eras.

Thus what occurs in Old Testament prayers of lament and thanksgiving as a typical situation of the individual (or collective) suppliant – namely the change from lament in the deepest distress, usually the distress of death, to thanksgiving for the saving of life which is expected or has taken place – has assumed historical form in the Mesha inscription. In that the distress is explained by the wrath of the deity, it is attributed to the only authority which – usually through cultic or prophetic mediation – can be asked and in principle is also able to change it again. Therefore the distress is understood not least as the absence or wrath of the people's own deity, regardless of who or what is responsible for it, the enemy or the people's own bad behaviour. The inscription does not speak of the despair of an inaccessible god but on the contrary expresses the certainty that the people's own deity fundamentally means well with the king and the confidence that he will again prove to be gracious.

We do not learn from the inscription what has provoked the wrath of Chemosh on Moab and how King Mesha has again made his god gracious. Nor are we told anything about the way in which the king has experienced the will of Chemosh to support him in battle against his enemies and the statements of the deity quoted literally in the inscription. On the basis of the influence of the genre of the prayers of lament and thanksgiving, it is natural to think in terms of cultic practices to assuage the deity; the divine communications could even have been given by relevant professionals (seers, prophets, priests).¹⁸ At any rate the victories over Israel and the successful building projects could be evaluated as a clear sign that the wrath of Chemosh has been assuaged. But the inscription presents things as if Mesha had already been informed in advance of the divine support. After the raging wrath, god and king are again in harmony with each other. Thus the mention of the divine wrath in the Mesha inscription indirectly

¹⁷ This too is a theme of the prayer of petition and thanksgiving; cf. Pss. 6.11; 27.6; with the aspect of 'eternal' duration Pss. 41.12; 138.7–8. Taking the pattern into account, the idea that the complete annihilation of Israel (MI line 7) is a reference to the situation depicted in 2 Kings 13.7, 20, 22 and the time of the composition of the inscription around 810 BCE (LEMAIRE, *The Mesha Stele*, 136–137; *id.*, *West Semitic Inscriptions*, 288) seems to me to be a very bold combination.

¹⁸ The Zakkur inscription KAI 202 (TUAT I, 626–628; COS 2, 155) is again the closest parallel to MI; here in a similar situation a 'seer' is enquired of and an oracle of salvation is received.

confirms the prevailing political situation and makes its contribution to the consolidation and propaganda of the ideology of the Moabite kingdom.

2. The wrath at Israel: II Kings 3

Wrath also plays the decisive role in the biblical variant of the Mesha story in 2 Kings 3. However, here it does not strike Moab but the other side, Israel and Judah. When Mesha is at his wits' end in the war with Israel, he offers his firstborn son as a burnt offering on the wall of Qir-Hareset.¹⁹ 'Then great wrath came upon Israel' (*wyhy qšp gdwl 'l yšr'l*) and forced the Israelites to retreat (2 Kings 3.27).

The episode in 2 Kings 3 presents many riddles. First is the relationship between the biblical and the Moabite versions of the story. The question is whether we have two versions of the same story or descriptions of different events which have nothing to do with each other. The latter is improbable. Both the occasion of the narrative, the detachment of Moab from Israel described in 2 Kings 3.5 and, independently of it, in 2 Kings 1.1 as 'apostasy' (*pš'c*) and also the identification of the king of Moab with Mesha – who is mentioned only here in the Old Testament – in 2 Kings 3.4 agree. And the dates of Moab's regaining of independence from Israel – under the son of Omri (Ahab) and his house in the inscription, after the death of Ahab in 2 Kings 1 and 3 – can be combined. The connection is there even if, as is often conjectured, the identification of the kings of Moab and Israel in action in 2 Kings 3.4–5 is secondary.

However, what is not possible is to correlate in precise chronological and geographical terms the campaign of the Israelite-Judahite coalition against Moab related in 2 Kings 3 with the events depicted in the inscription.²⁰ That is not at all surprising because the detachment of Moab from Israel's domination was presumably not a single event which can be dated precisely, but a bundle of events which must have extended over a lengthy period. The critical evaluation of all the relevant sources makes it possible to recognize only a particular overall situation in the second half of the ninth century BCE in which the scattered events can be placed.²¹

¹⁹ For the problem of identification, usually with Kerak, cf. NA'AMAN, Royal Inscription, 161–162 and the literature mentioned here.

²⁰ TIMM, *Dynastie Omri*, 171–180 discusses various attempts; cf. most recently NA'AMAN, Royal Inscription, 145–83. DAVIS, *The Moabite Stone*, who takes into account the Moabite perspective, and STERN, P. D., *Of Kings and Moabites. History and Theology in 2 Kings 3 and the Mesha Inscription*, HUCA 64, 1993, 1–14, who takes into account the biblical perspective, are pioneers.

²¹ The sources are MI, 2 Kings 3, Tell Dan inscription, 2 Kings 8–13, Zakkur inscription and Assyrian inscriptions. See the literature n. 5 above, esp. Williamson (ed.), *Un-*

As is well known, the background is the campaigns of Shalmaneser III, which began with the battle of Qarqar (853 BCE). There seem already to have been disagreements and internal military clashes among the members of the one-time anti-Assyrian coalition in the time of the Omrids (2 Kings 8.28–29; 9.14–15; Tell Dan inscription).²² The coalition finally broke apart with the end of the Omrids. Hazael of Damascus advanced to become the most prominent enemy of the Assyrians, whereas Jehu disposed of the Omrids in Israel and Judah (Ahaziah) and voluntarily submitted to Shalmaneser III.²³ On the whole this paid off for Israel and Jehu's dynasty. Certainly soon after 838 BCE the war with Damascus began again when the pressure of Assyria on Damascus eased for a while (2 Kings 10.32–33; 12.18–19; 13.3, 7, 22), but this did not last long (2 Kings 13–14, 24–25); after the campaigns of Adadnirari III around 800 BCE, who must have supported both Zakkur of Hamath (directly or indirectly) and also could have been the anonymous 'helper' of 2 Kings 13.5, the situation remained stable for Israel until the next wave of Assyrian expansion under Tiglath-pileser III.

It was evidently from this political situation, which lasted for quite a long time, that Mesha of Moab also profited. The Omrids and for a time also the kings of the dynasty of Jehu were tied up with the clashes with Damascus and in any case since Jehu they will not have undertaken anything without the agreement of the Assyrians. In this situation Mesha, perhaps likewise with the support of Assyria, could free himself from Israel and once even risk an expedition into foreign territory (2 Kings 13.20). And this is the situation which is dealt with both by the Mesha inscription and by 2 Kings 3, though it is not possible to reconstruct the course of events in detail.

What makes the reconstruction difficult is not least the arbitrary historical account of the inscription mentioned above. Likewise we must also take into account the fact that the narrative in 2 Kings 3 follows its own

derstanding and Grabbe (ed.), *Ahab Agonistes*, for the ninth century in general, ROUTLEDGE, *The Politics of Mesha*, for the political and social differentiation in Moabite history.

²² Thus also 1 Kings 20 and 22, but these narratives are usually rejected for the time of the Omrids because they do not seem to fit the anti-Assyrian coalition. However, the participation in a coalition by no means excludes internal rivalries for influence and territory, like those waged above.

²³ For the interpretation of the 'black obelisk' cf. KEEL, O. / UEHLINGER, C., *Der Assyrenkönig Salmanassar III. und Jehu von Israel auf dem Schwarzen Obelisk aus Nimrud*, ZKTh 116, 1994, 391–420; UEHLINGER, C., *Neither Eyewitnesses, Nor Windows to the Past, but Valuable Testimony in its Own Right. Remarks on Iconography, Source Criticism and Ancient Data-processing*, in: Williamson (ed.), *Understanding*, 173–228: 201–210.

laws.²⁴ The most obvious solution to the riddle of the relationship between the two versions is in the end the conjecture that while in both sources the same historical event is reflected in the result, namely the detachment of Moab from Israel, this process is depicted with reference to different details which in turn have been handed down only in the refraction of a specifically Moabite or Israelite (and biblical) interpretation.

The literary composition of the narrative in 2 Kings 3 presents further riddles. As in the case of the Mesha inscription, here too different elements of genre and levels of narrative need to be distinguished. But it is not as easy as in the inscription to mark out the individual units and to recognize the principles of composition and an overriding idea.

As so often in the biblical stories, the narrative framework is very brief and recalls the individual war scenes which are brought together in the Mesha inscription. It deals with the apostasy of Moab under Mesha which leads Jehoram, the son and successor of Ahab, who has just died, to undertake a campaign against Moab (vv. 4–6). When the king of Moab saw that he was not up to the war (or to the king Jehoram?) he sacrificed his son and thus brought about the departure of the Israelites (vv. 26–27).²⁵ The episode subsequently attributes the ‘apostasy’ of Moab to higher forces, the ‘great wrath upon Israel’, and seems self-contained.²⁶

But the narrative also pursues other aims alongside this. As possibly in the Mesha inscription (lines 31–32), so here too the ‘house of David’ (Jehoshaphat) is involved; it is invited by the king of Israel to a joint military campaign (vv. 7–9). The outcome of the narrative in vv. 26–27 is accordingly prepared for by a scene which takes both kings into account and

²⁴ See STERN, *Of Kings and Moabites*, 2–11, who comes to the conclusion: ‘2 Kgs 3 is a theological response to the traumatic events that led to Moabite independence under Mesha’ (ibid., 11); further NA’AMAN, *Royal Inscription*, 162–166.

²⁵ For the extensive characterization of the child destined for the sacrifice in v. 27 cf. Gen. 22.2 and Judg. 11.34; for the formulation of Israel’s withdrawal 2 Kings 19.36.

²⁶ The original beginning of the narrative could have been in v. 5 (‘And after the death of Ahab...’), but this would mean that the identification of the Moabite king with Mesha in v. 4 was secondary. V. 26b and probably also v. 6b (the mustering of all Israel as a transition to the enquiry to Judah after Jehoram has already ‘gone forth’) are later additions. Verse 26a poses a difficulty which is often overlooked or given only a scant explanation. Here ‘the battle’ (*hmlh^hmh*) is usually regarded as the subject of the *ky*-clause, but – unlike 2 Sam. 11.5 – the gender of the verb *h^zq* does not agree with this. Cf. GRAY, J., *I & II Kings*, OTL, ³1977, 484; SCHWEIZER, H., *Elischa in den Kriegen*. *Literaturwissenschaftliche Untersuchung von 2Kön 3*; 6,8–23; 6,24–7,20, *StANT* 37, 1974, 45 n. 69. Is this a indication of an original link between v. 26a and v. 6a? The subject of the *ky*-clause could thus have been ‘King Jehoram’, who proved to be stronger in battle than the king of Moab.

reports an optical illusion (vv. 21–25).²⁷ The illusion rests on the word play with *'dwm* 'Edom' or 'red' and provokes the misunderstanding of the Moabites that both members of the coalition are in dispute with each other – a view perhaps even dominant in Israel and Judah which was to be refuted by the course of action.

Moreover, the rivalry between Israel and Judah is the theme which suddenly appears on the way to Moab because of the water shortage. The way leads through the wilderness of Edom (v. 8), which entails the building of the coalition around the king of Edom (v. 9), who once again plays a subsidiary role in what follows (v. 26b).²⁸ But above all the motive of the water shortage is associated with the wilderness. This motif serves – in connection with 1 Kings 17–18 – to introduce the prophet Elisha, Elijah's successor (2 Kings 3.9b–20), who both helps to find the water needed (vv. 15, 17, 20) and also announces the (partial) victory over Moab achieved in v. 25a (vv. 18–19).

There are two aims in this introduction of the prophet. First, the event – as in the Mesha inscription – is derived expressly from divine instigation and the collaboration of Yahweh, the national god of Israel and Judah. Here – in contrast to the inscription – the 'word' of the god has especial importance (v. 12). The formula of delivery in vv. 18–19 recalls the topic of the holy war, which also shapes the account of the war in the Mesha inscription.²⁹ Secondly, with the appearance of the prophet Elisha a sharp

²⁷ The text in vv. 24–25 is partially disturbed and does not seem to be original in terms of literary history either. V. 25a fulfils the announcement of vv. 18–19 and stands precisely between the disruptions in v. 24b and v. 25aβ. SCHWEIZER, H., *Elischa in den Kriegen*, 39–40 proposes as the original text: 'When they came to the camp of Israel the Israelites arose ... and "pressed ever forward" (*wyb'w bw'*) by defeating Moab ... until "only the city Qir-Hareset" was left.' However, if we attempt to connect the textual disruptions to the literary history another possibility seems to me more likely. The mistakes can have come about with the secondary addition of v. 25a, as a result of which the original transition from v. 24a ('... and they smote Moab' or 'and they fled before them') to v. 25β (in/to Qir-Hareset) was damaged. Cf. KLOSTERMANN, A., *Die Bücher Samuelis und der Könige*, KK A/III, Nördlingen 1887, 400.

²⁸ The phrase 'and the king of Edom' in v. 9 is presumably secondary and must have found its way into the text with the addition v. 26b. Often a scribal error for 'Aram' is assumed in v. 26b (cf. GRAY, I & II Kings, 484), but this conjecture, like many attempts at an explanation for v. 26b (cf. KLOSTERMANN, *Die Bücher Samuelis und der Könige*, 400), rests on a mixing of literary and historical questions. As far as I can see from looking through all the editions (including Brooke / McLean and the collation volumes of the Göttingen Septuagint), the conjecture has no support in the Septuagint tradition (NA'AMAN, Royal Inscription, 161).

²⁹ The announcement of the destruction of cities, water systems and fields which is fulfilled in v. 25 acts as an anti-history to the buildings and the resettlement of the land by Mesha in the inscription. For this 'common theology' cf. STERN, *Of Kings and Moabites*, 14.

opposition becomes evident between the kings of Israel and Judah. It is the king of Judah (Jehoshaphat) who asks for the prophet, whereas the king of Israel makes Yahweh responsible for the bad outcome of the event – which is not reprehensible in itself (vv. 10–11, 13). And it is the king of Judah for whose sake the prophet gives any information at all about Yahweh's true plans (v. 14).

Thus the introduction of the prophet puts the whole event in a different light. Accordingly the detachment of Moab from Israel is planned and staged by Yahweh in order to punish the king of Israel for the sins of his parents, Ahab and Jezebel (v. 13).³⁰ The wrath which comes upon Israel (v. 27) therefore extends far beyond the one historical moment. The only exception to this is the king of Judah, who asks about Yahweh's word and thus brings it about that this time once more Israel is preserved and achieves a partial victory over Moab. In other words, there is victory for the king of Judah and wrath for the king of Israel, for whom the fear that he has previously expressed (vv. 10, 13) thus proves to be true.³¹

The literary complexity of the narrative and the different aims which it pursues cannot easily be harmonized. For this reason scholars have often conjectured that the narrative is not a literary unity but has come into being in a lengthy process of redaction.³² So the idea is as natural as in the case of the Mesha inscription.³³ But the changes in content which have taken place in the course of the revisions of 2 Kings 3 can hardly be compared with the possible redactional processes in the inscription.

³⁰ The prophets of the Asherah and the Baals in 1 Kings 18.19–40; 2 Kings 10.19 are in view and with them the 'sins of Jeroboam' which in the judgment of the Deuteronomists Ahab and Jezebel have brought to a head (1 Kings 16.30–33). STERN, *Of Kings and Moabites*, 13, thinks in terms of the distribution of the land and the prohibition against waging war with Moab in Deut. 2.9 as the cause of the divine wrath which forces Israel to retreat. However, this is contradicted by the divine oracle in 2 Kings 3.18–19, and moreover it would be difficult to understand why Israel was reminded by Yahweh of the precept in Deut. 2.9 only by the pagan sacrifice. Cf. PARKER, *Stories*, 169 n. 50. Taking Gen. 13.11; 19.37 into account, rather Deut. 2.9 could be a subsequent explanation of the enigmatic wrath and the outcome of the story in 2 Kings 3. Cf. also Deut. 23.4–7 and the oracle against Moab in Isa. 15–16 (esp. 15.2; 16.12); Jer. 38 (esp. v. 35); Ezek. 25.8–11.

³¹ Cf. PARKER, *Stories*, 127.

³² Cf. SCHMITT, H.-C., *Elisa. Traditions-geschichtliche Untersuchungen zur vorklassischen nordisraelitischen Prophetie*, Gütersloh 1972, 32–27; WÜRTHWEIN, E., *Die Bücher der Könige*. 1. Kön. 17–2. Kön. 25, ATD 11,2, Göttingen 1984, 279–287; PARKER, *Stories*, 126–127. STIPP, H.-J., *Elischa – Propheten – Gottesmänner. Die Kompositionsgeschichte des Elischa zyklus und verwandter Texte, rekonstruiert auf der Basis von Text- und Literarkritik zu 1 Kön 20.22 und 2 Kön 2–7*, ATSAT 24, St Ottilien 1987 and HENTSCHEL, G., *2 Könige*, NEB 11, Würzburg 1985 go their own ways (see nn. 34–35 below).

³³ See n. 9 above.

The usual stratification of the text in 2 Kings does not correspond to the differentiation in narrative levels made above in every detail, but does so by and large. It distinguishes between an earlier report of the war (2 Kings 3.4–9a, 20–27) and a later prophetic revision (2 Kings 3.9b–19).³⁴ In addition we must perhaps reckon with a first version of the report of the war which originally dealt only with the king of Israel and did not yet contain the coalition of the three or – without the king of Edom (vv. 8–9a, 26b) – even two ‘kings’ in vv. 6b, 7, 8–9a, 21–25, 26b. Thus the original text would contain only vv. (4) 5–6a, 26a, 27.³⁵ This further differentiation is supported not least by the verbal parallel between v. 7 and 1 Kings 22.24 which is on a line with the parallels in the prophetic parts of the two narratives (1 Kings 22.5–28 and 2 Kings 3.9b–20).³⁶

Should the reconstruction of this gradual origin be correct, it would be only at the latest stage, in the prophetic revision and here indeed only in an addition to the addition (vv. 18–19), inserted with the theme of the holy war, that the style comes closest to the Moabite inscription. Here as elsewhere this would prove premature if one wanted to make the Near Eastern

³⁴ Thus SCHMITT, Elisa and others (see n. 32). The main difference from the differentiation according to the narrative levels consists in the position of v. 20, which syntactically still belongs to the previous section and not the one that follows; cf. NICCACCI, *The Stele of Mesha*, 247. As there is a difference in the function of the water motif between vv. 9b, 20 and vv. 22–23, I tend also to reckon v. 20 with the prophetic revision – which in turn is not a unity but has presumably been expanded in vv. 18–19 (WÜRTHEIN, *Die Bücher der Könige*, 281, 287). It seems to me doubtful whether an older tradition (STIPP, *Elischa*, 150) or an older revision (HENTSCHEL, *2 Könige*, 24) can be isolated in the prophetic revision with vv. 9b, (15), 16–17, 19. Furthermore, the participation of the king of Edom in vv. 8–9a, 26b is most likely a secondary addition (see nn. 26, 28 above and in what follows).

³⁵ The imbalance between the corpus of the narrative about the successful campaign of the Israelite-Judahite coalition (vv. 7–25) and the historical framework in vv. 4–6, 26–27 has already been noted often. COGAN, M. / TADMOR, H., *II Kings*, AB 11, 1988, 51 speak of a ‘clash between the prophetic tradition (vv. 6–25) and the historical tradition behind vv. 26–27’; cf. PARKER, *Stories*, 126; NA’AMAN, *Royal Inscription*, 160, 165–166. This is matched by the literary criticism of STIPP, *Elischa*, 93–151 and HENTSCHEL, *2 Könige*, 13–15, though they reckon that vv. 24–25* still belong to the older narrative (Stipp without and Hentschel with vv. 4–6 as a beginning), since they mention only ‘Israel’ and not the coalition. But vv. 24–25 are syntactically dependent on v. 23 and vv. 4–6 speak not of Israel but of the ‘king of Israel’, as perhaps also does v. 26a (see n. 26). Conversely DE VRIES, S. J., *Prophet Against Prophet. The Role of the Micah Narrative (I Kings 22) in the Development of Early Tradition*, Grand Rapids 1978, 978, 88 nn. 47–48 finds later additions to the earlier prophetic narrative in vv. 4–5a and vv. 25b–27; BARTLETT, J. R., *The “United” Campaign against Moab in 2 Kings 3:4–27*, in: Sawyer, J. F. A. / Clines, D. J. A. (eds), *Midian, Moab and Edom*, JSOT.S 24, Sheffield 1983, 135–146: 145 finds such an addition in vv. 26–27.

³⁶ Cf. SCHMITT, Elisa, 42–45.

parallels the sole criterion for literary judgments or datings of biblical texts. This would not of course mean that the comparison with the Near Eastern analogies and the history-of-religions analysis could be dispensed with. For even the assumed basic stratum of a biblical text must prove itself in the Near Eastern context.

However, in the case of 2 Kings 3 the test is particularly difficult. For the basic narrative in 2 Kings 3, and especially the wrath which plays the decisive role in it, are enigmatic.³⁷ The question is, whose wrath is it? Is it Chemosh's wrath, which we know from the Mesha inscription and which here is directed against the enemies of Moab because of the sacrifice? Or is it Yahweh's wrath, either that Yahweh allows himself to be compelled by the sacrifice or because he finds it so abhorrent that he makes Israel withdraw? Or is it a numinous power whose origin is deliberately concealed? Scholars put forward all the possibilities, but the question cannot be decided by the text itself.³⁸

The semantics of the formula 'then great wrath came upon Israel' (*wyhy qsp gdwl 'l ysrl*) is of only limited help. In distinction from the Mesha inscription, in which the root *'np* is used, here we have the noun *qsp*, which in the Old Testament occurs exclusively in late exilic-postexilic literature.³⁹ However, the text in 2 Kings 3 need not in itself be late. The late use does not mean that the word only appeared at this time or was used

³⁷ Either vv. 4–7, (8–9a), 21–27 or even just vv. (4), 5–6a, 26a, 27, are to be regarded as the basic narrative. See above.

³⁸ For the first possibility cf. e.g. GRAY, I & II Kings, 490; PARKER, Stories, 125, for the second COGAN / TADMOR, II Kings, 47–48, 51–52; STERN, Of Kings and Moabites, 11–14, for the third WÜRTHWEIN, Die Bücher der Könige, 284; for a discussion BURNS, J. B., Why Did the Besieging Army Withdraw?, ZAW 102, 1990, 187–194, who decides for the first possibility. Others relate the 'wrath' to the Israelites and see it as a human reaction. Thus MARGALIT, B., Why King Mesha of Moab Sacrificed His Oldest Son, BAR 12/6, 1986, 62–63 and 76 speaks of a 'psychological breakdown or trauma that affected the Israelite forces', a 'reaction of mass hysteria' (ibid., 63). After a most thorough investigation of all the evidence SCHWEIZER, Elischa in den Kriegen, 168–169 attributes the formula to the religious sensibility of the Israelites, who abhor the pagan sacrifice, though neither the text nor the formula itself give 'the slightest indication' of this. The verb (2 Kings 5.11; 13.19) and occasionally also the noun (Koh.5.16; Esther 1.18) can have this meaning, but it is nowhere attested for the formula in question; cf. STIPP, Elischa, 134–137. NELSON, R. D., First and Second Kings, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching, Louisville 1987, 169–170 leaves it for the reader to decide.

³⁹ The same goes for the verb with God as subject. Cf. already SCHMITT, Elisa, 34 n. 8 and the extended discussion of the relevant instances of the formula in SCHWEIZER, Elischa in den Kriegen, 148–169. Reference should be made once again in this connection to the parallels to the formulation of v. 27 (see n. 25 above), which do not belong to the earliest texts in the Old Testament.

then for the first time.⁴⁰ Moreover the linguistic evidence, taken by itself, is no more telling than the comparison with the parallels from the ancient Near East. Nevertheless it is not easy to infer a possible earlier terminology from the later.

As in 2 Kings 3, the word 'wrath' and especially the formula '(great) wrath came upon' is often used absolutely in the late instances, but it is everywhere clear that Yahweh is the one who causes it.⁴¹ The wrath (*qšp*) is always understood as punishment, past or announced, for sins committed, and this does not relate to 2 Kings 3.27. Is this an indication that here we have an earlier vocabulary? Harald Schweizer points to the priestly milieu, in which the term mostly appears, and draws attention to Num. 17.11, which says that the priest Aaron turns away by atoning means the wrath of Yahweh that is already raging.⁴² This is significant because here possibly we have a semantic nuance which could be helpful in explaining 2 Kings 3.27. For the priestly dealing with *qšp* indicates proximity to a magical way of thinking which is older than the priestly texts and perhaps lies behind the use of the term in 2 Kings 3.⁴³ But certainty cannot be attained in this way either.

Thus everything depends on the religious and historical context in which we interpret the passage in question.⁴⁴ If we take the present biblical tradition as a basis, we have to start from the fact that human sacrifice is an abomination to Yahweh and the Israelites and is forbidden in the Torah.⁴⁵ And it has to be added that simply for that reason Chemosh does not

⁴⁰ It should be recalled that the verb 'np, which is used in the MI, also occurs for the most part in late texts, see n. 15 above. At any rate in substance there is no difference between 'np or 'p respectively and *qšp*; cf. Pss. 6.2; 38.2.

⁴¹ Cf. 2 Chron. 32.25–26; Zech. 7.12. The closest parallels to 2 Kings 3.27 are 1 Chron. 27.24 and Num. 18.5, which clearly show that 'l yšr'l cannot be related to the feelings of the Israelites but denotes the victim of the wrath. Cf. also Josh. 22.20; of Judah and Jerusalem 2 Chron. 24.18; 29.8; 'great wrath' in Deut. 29.27; Jer 21.5; 32.37; Zech 1.15; 7.12. 2 Chron. 19.2 belongs in the aftermath of 2 Kings 3 and the prophetic revision here and in 1 Kings 22. Jehoshaphat's coalition with the king of Israel in the campaign against the Aramaeans (1 Kings 22) is condemned by the prophet Jehu and Jehoshaphat is told that therefore the wrath rests on him (cf. also 2 Chron. 20.25–27); the campaign against Moab seems have found its way into 2 Chron. 20. According to 2 Chron. 19.10 the central judgment established by Jehoshaphat has the task of warding off the wrath from the people. For the house of Omri in Chronicles cf. BEN ZVI, E., The House of Omri/Ahab in Chronicles, in: Grabbe (ed.), Ahab Agonistes, 41–53.

⁴² Schweizer, *Elischa in den Kriegen*, 164–165, 167–168.

⁴³ Thus rightly SCHMITT, *Elisa*, 34.

⁴⁴ Cf. PARKER, *Stories*, 169 n.50.

⁴⁵ SCHWEIZER, *Elischa in den Kriegen*, 168–169; WÜRTHWEIN, *Die Bücher der Könige*, 284. The relevant passages in the Law are Lev. 18.21; 20.1–5; Deut. 18.10. Jer. 32.31–35, 37 indirectly attests that the forbidden human sacrifice provokes the wrath (*qšp*).

come into question as the author of the wrath because according to the biblical tradition, at least for Israel, if not for the whole world, there are no other gods than Yahweh. But this would not explain why the wrath is directed not against the king of Moab, who offers the sacrifice, but against Israel, which had had the opportunity – granted by Yahweh himself – to put an end to the evil practice.⁴⁶

Now we know that the First Commandment, the idea of monotheism and the repudiation of pagan sacrificial customs which has grown out of these theological doctrines are not among the earliest notions of the Old Testament and appeared only with Deuteronomy, i.e. at the earliest under Josiah in the late 7th century BCE, if not later. If we leave aside these late notions, things look different. It then seems quite possible that, as in Moab, the power of Yahweh – though broken by Chemosh – was respected (MI line 17), just as in Israel and Judah the power of Chemosh was recognized and respected (cf. Judg. 11.24).

On this presupposition it is conceivable both that Chemosh allowed himself to be moved by the sacrifice to give up his wrath at Moab, which had left the field to Israel and Judah, and to turn it against Israel, and that Yahweh allowed himself to be moved by the human sacrifice and turned in wrath against his own people. As 2 Kings 3 is a description from the Israelite perspective, we should most likely think of the second possibility, i.e. of Yahweh.⁴⁷ Just as in the Mesha inscription, the supremacy of Israel and Yahweh is attributed to the wrath, i.e. the will, of Chemosh, so in 2 Kings 3 the inferiority of Israel is explained by the wrath of its own god, who was horrified by Mesha's sacrifice, doubtless to Chemosh. But the author could also have deliberately left open the question from whom the wrath went out against Israel, since for him Moab was sacrosanct through the offering of human sacrifice. A magical way of thinking may have played a part here, according to which the human sacrifice is in itself capable of evoking 'wrath' – without personal involvement – against which gods and man are powerless, regardless of which side they stand on.

So while no certainty can be arrived at, the meaning of 'wrath' in 2 Kings 3.27 can at any rate be limited to more or less well founded possibilities. If we follow the approach of understanding the narrative in the context of the earlier, to some extent pre-biblical (or pre-Deuteronomistic), circumstances, it proves to be the attempt to work out theologically Israel's

⁴⁶ For Deut.2.9 see n. 30 above. In v. 27 neither the law nor a transgression but human sacrifice provokes the wrath.

⁴⁷ In the case of success there is of course the other possibility, that the deity of its opponent is made responsible for a people's own fortunes in war. Cf. 2 Kings 18.25/Isa. 36.10 alongside 2 Kings 18.33–35/Isa. 36.18–20 und on this SPIECKERMANN, H., *Juda unter Assur in der Sargonidenzeit*, FRLANT 129, Göttingen 1982, 344–347.

loss of lordship over Moab under the conditions of that time and from its own standpoint. Unlike the Mesha inscription, the narrative attributes the loss, not to the superiority of Chemosh and the Moabite king over Israel and Yahweh, but to a higher power which harms both monarchies, Moab and Israel, and at the same time leaves intact the two main gods of the two dynasties and their claim to rule in their territories. Like the Mesha inscription for Moab, so too the basic narrative in 2 Kings 3 for Israel indirectly contributes towards confirming its own political system and stabilizing its ideology.

It is the later prophetic revision of the narrative which first brings clarity. Without this revision the narrative – which at one time was probably independent – presumably would not have found its way into the biblical tradition. As we have already seen, the revision makes two contributions. First of all it subsequently assimilates the enigmatic narrative to the usual pattern that is the rule in the Mesha inscription and also in the Deuteronomistic and Chronistic works. According to this pattern the people's own deity, often mediated through a prophet, stands on the side of his own people and is responsible for the victory. Moreover it presents a differentiation within the Israelite-Judahite collation and thus introduces a religious conflict into the narrative which is to be regarded as the reason for the failure of the campaign.

That the victory is not complete, and that the outcome is left as it is, is connected with the second concern of the revision. The conflict between Elisha and the king of Israel or the prophets of his parents (2 Kings 3.13) stands for the opposition between Yahweh and the other gods (cf. 1 Kings 16.29–34; 17–18; 2 Kings 9–10). In accord with the – presumably already existing – Deuteronomistic framework in 2 Kings 3.1–3 the king of Israel is thus depicted as a sinner who has to bear the guilt of his predecessors and who is therefore smitten by the 'great wrath' (*qsp gdwl*) of 2 Kings 3.27 – in the line of the covenant in the land of Moab (Deut 29.27) and the late prophetic and Chronistic literature.⁴⁸

In this reading it can only be Yahweh who is wrathful. But it is not just abhorrence at the sacrifice which prompts Yahweh to wrath. Certainly no direct connection is made in the text between the sins of the kings of Israel and Mesha's desperate action, but the revision suggests this connection. Accordingly Yahweh is already punishing the Israelites here for the pagan custom the imitation of which is criticized elsewhere (2 Kings 16.3; 17.17;

⁴⁸ For the Deuteronomistic historiography, which except for Deut. 29.27 uses a different terminology cf. LOHFINK, N., *Der Zorn Gottes und das Exil. Beobachtungen am deuteronomistischen Geschichtswerk*, in: *Liebe und Gebot. Studien zum Deuteronomium* (FS L. Perliitt), Kratz, R. G. / Spieckermann, H. (eds), FRLANT 190, Göttingen 2000, 137–155.

21.3; cf. Jer. 32.35, 37). Presumably the lack of faith expressed by the king of Israel also plays a role (2 Kings 3.10, 13), as does the fact that he has not taken the advice of any prophet. Jehoshaphat, the son of David, is distinguished from the king of Israel here as in 1 Kings 22 as the embodiment of piety, who enquires of Yahweh's word in every situation of life. In contrast to 2 Chron. 19.2, the coalition does not yet seem to have been felt to be a problem.

Not by chance, the theological conflict between Israel and Judah breaks out over enquiring of the prophets. In the Deuteronomistic and Chronistic works it is also one of the tasks of the prophets that they accuse and announce and give reasons for the end of the states of Israel and Judah which already lies in the past. In terms of function this task, too, moves within the framework of the usual duties of the ancient Near Eastern prophets, who alongside delivering oracles of salvation occasionally also utter warnings and admonitions to their kings.⁴⁹ But with the exception of the Old Testament, these warnings and admonitions, like the wrath of Chemosh in the Mesha inscription, are aimed at the stabilization or restoration of the prevailing system and not at its abolition.

In the sources known to us the critical potential of prophecy does not lead us to a comprehensive prophecy of disaster against the monarchy as an institution or against society as a whole.⁵⁰

However, Deuteronomistic and Chronistic historiography, and within this historiography also the prophetic revision in 2 Kings 3, goes its own way and enriches the role of the prophets in history with a new theological dimension. With his warnings and admonitions, the God in whose name

⁴⁹ Cf. NISSINEN, M., Prophecy Against the King in Neo-Assyrian Sources, in: Schunk, K.-D. / Augustin, M. (eds), "Lasset und Brücken bauen...", Collected Communications to the XVth Congress of the IOSOT Cambridge 1995, BEAT 42, Frankfurt am Main 1998, 157–170 (German original version: Falsche Prophetie in neuassyrischer und deuteronomistischer Darstellung, in: Veijola, T. [ed.], Das Deuteronomium und seine Querbeziehungen, Schriften der Finnischen Exegetischen Gesellschaft 62, 1996, 172–195); ID., References to Prophecy in Neo-Assyrian Sources, SAA Studies 7, Helsinki 1998, 35–42; ID., Das kritische Potential in der altorientalischen Prophetie, in: Köckert, M. / Nissinen, M. (eds), Propheten in Mari, Assyrien und Israel, FRLANT 201, Göttingen 2003, 1–32.

⁵⁰ NISSINEN, Potential, 29–30 ('Das kritische Potential der Prophetie führt in den uns bekannten Quellen nicht zu einer umfassenden Unheilspredigt gegen das Königtum als Institution oder gegen die eigene Gesellschaft in ihrer Gesamtheit.'). Nor does ABL 1217 = SAA 16 59 (ibid., 24–25) put 'the monarchy as an institution or society as a whole' in question; it shows prophecy at the service of a planned overthrow which aims at a change of dynasty. This moves completely within the customary framework and is comparable with the role of the prophets' discipline in Jehu's revolution (2 Kings 9), but not with the announcement of the downfall of monarchy and people resolved on by God in the Old Testament.

the prophets in biblical historiography make their announcements is aiming not to avert but to bring disaster, the end of monarchy and people in Israel and Judah, on which he has resolved. Only on this presupposition does the former symbiosis of God, king and people and the positive sides of prophecy, the oracle of salvation and the admonition to repent, (re)gain significance and turn into the hope for a new future. But God's mercy has as its necessary presupposition the divine wrath which cannot be averted.

3. Yahweh's 'no' on Israel: the prophetic books

The comparison of the two testimonies to the history of Israel and Moab in the ninth century BCE, the Mesha inscription and the narrative in 2 Kings 3, suggests that we have two versions of the same event, the detachment of Moab from Israel. Both versions relate to different episodes and depict the outcome of the event each time from a different perspective. The divine wrath plays a decisive role in both versions. In the Moabite version it is the wrath (*'np*) of their own deity, the god Chemosh, which is made responsible for the disaster to Moab in the past, but it is the same god who returns to stand at the side of King Mesha, who is now ruling. In the Israelite narrative it is likewise their own deity, the god Yahweh, who first supports the Israelite-Judahite coalition in its campaign against Moab but in the end makes it fail 'in great wrath' (*qšp gdwl*).

The present biblical version of the narrative is markedly different from its Moabite parallel – despite some common features – with the outcome of the story in 2 Kings, which is already announced in the insulting of the king of Israel by the prophet Elisha. The Moabite parallel moves within the customary framework of ancient Near Eastern retrospects on the reign of a king and his predecessors and bears witness to a relationship with God which is fundamentally intact, and only occasionally disrupted. In contrast the relationship of the kings of Israel to their God is fundamentally put to the test.

But the difference lies not only between the Moabite inscription and the biblical narrative but in the biblical narrative itself, between the basic version and the prophetic revision of 2 Kings 3. In the basic version of the biblical narrative the event is depicted in approximately the same way as in the Moabite inscription. But here it is the perspective of the conquered, who can explain the outcome only by the fact that this time the divine wrath – presumably of their own deity – has turned against them. It is first the prophetic revision of 2 Kings 3 which connects the unsuccessful outcome of the campaign with a conflict between Yahweh and Israel (or Yahweh and the other gods in Israel). This conflict is supposed to have

already existed for a long time and has an effect not only on this event but far beyond it on the course and outcome of the history of Israel and Judah.

Thus, related to the developments in literary and theological history which have been observed, the comparison leads to the question already put at the beginning, 'why from approximately the same beginning Israelite history arrived at quite different end result from, say, Moabite history.'⁵¹ It seems that one of those transitions is taking place in 2 Kings 3 which Wellhausen thought marked 'the way from paganism to rational worship'. Even if these transitions do not answer the question 'why?' they can perhaps help somewhat to illuminate the 'how' of the process.

For this reason, I shall go on to investigate a further transition which represents the theological presupposition for the Deuteronomistic interpretation of history and the prophetic revision in 2 Kings 3 dependent on it. This transition took place in the prophetic books. Here there is much talk of the wrath of Yahweh, which is directed both against enemies and alien peoples and against his own people.⁵² But in them for the first time, as far as we can see, the thought also occurs that the god's wrath against his own people cannot be averted and is constitutive of the relationship between Yahweh and Israel. Without the term 'wrath' being used, this situation is expressed most evocatively in the books of Amos and Hosea: 'The end is come upon my people Israel. I will no longer pass over them (and spare them)' (Amos 8.2) or 'Name his name Lo-'Ammi, for you are not my people and I will not be your God' (Hos.1.9). The 'no' categorically denies the symbiosis of Yahweh and Israel.⁵³ In contrast to the admonitions and warnings that we know from the ancient Near East, this 'no' in fact represents the unconditional repudiation of all that was sacred in ancient societies: monarchy, cult and social bond.

As this mere 'no' cannot be the last word and probably was also never meant to be, the negation provokes the question of the positive basis on which the damaged relationship should have been shaped, i.e. should be shaped in the future. The prophetic books, the Deuteronomistic and Chronistic historiography, gradually each give their own answers to this ques-

⁵¹ See n. 3 above.

⁵² WESTERMANN, C., *Boten des Zorns. Der Begriff des Zornes Gottes in der Prophetie*, in: *Die Botschaft und die Boten* (FS H. W. Wolff), Jeremias, J. / Perlit, L. (eds), Neukirchen-Vluyn 1981, 147–156 gives a synchronic survey; with a historical differentiation SPIECKERMANN, H., *Dies irae. Der alttestamentliche Befund und seine Vorgeschichte* (1989), in: id., *Gottes Liebe zu Israel. Studien zur Theologie des Alten Testaments*, FAT 2001, 34–46; POHLMANN, K.-F., *Beobachtungen und Erwägungen zur Rede vom "Zorn Jahwes" im Alten Testament*, in: *Gott und Mensch im Dialog* (FS O. Kaiser), Witte, M. (ed.), BZAW 345/II, New York / Berlin 2004, 1015–1035.

⁵³ Cf. SMEND, R., *Das Nein des Amos* (1963), in: id., *Die Mitte des Alten Testaments. Exegetische Aufsätze*, Tübingen 2002, 219–237.

tion. These answers also include the theology of the 'word of God' which some find in the word of the prophets, others in the Torah of Moses and yet others in both. In this way the guidelines for the future are formulated in the form of admonitions and warnings from the past. This also applies to the revision in 2 Kings 3, which picks up an episode in the history of Israel and Judah in the ninth century BCE and makes use of the traditional pattern of enquiring of the prophet in times of war, in order to point with it already to the end of the states of Israel and Judah. The revision finds the reason for this end in the theological conflict between the prophet of Yahweh and the prophets of the other gods and thus commends the criterion of the First Commandment for shaping the future.

Scholars are not agreed how the move was made from the traditional understanding of God which underlies both the Moabite inscription and the basic version of 2 Kings 3 to Yahweh's 'no' and the new conception of the relationship between god, king and people based on this 'no', a conception which has found its record in the prophetic revision and the present version of 2 Kings 3. There is general agreement only that the unconditional announcement of doom on king, cult and social community – stated in books and continued from the eighth to the third century BCE, being continually modified in the process – represents a singular phenomenon of prophecy which is without analogy in the ancient Near East.

In order to put the special phenomenon in a historical context some follow the titles of the books which make the historical prophets responsible for this. Chronologically the title of the book of Amos (Amos 1.1) is generally regarded as the oldest. Here plenty of time is found for the prophet and his preaching in the time of Uzziah of Judah and Jeroboam (II) of Israel, i.e. in the first half of the eighth century, before the attack on Samaria begins under Tiglath-pileser III.⁵⁴ At the same time, however, scholars think that the datings are not original but were added at a much later time.⁵⁵ That does not exactly increase the historical reliability of the headings of the prophetic books. Nor is easy to find an occasion for the 'no' of Amos and the other prophets in the period in question under Jero-

⁵⁴ Cf. JEREMIAS, J., *Der Prophet Amos*, ATD 24,2, Göttingen 1995, XV. Hos. 1.1 and Isa. 1.1 (6.1; 14.28; 36.1) likewise begin at this time but extend further, until the time of Hezekiah around 700 BCE, and thus cover a period of around 80 years for the activity of the two prophets.

⁵⁵ According to JEREMIAS, *Der Prophet Amos*, 1–2 the original title of the book of Amos was: 'The words of Amos from Tekoa, which he saw about Israel, two years before the earthquake' and is composed of two originally independent part-titles: 'The words of Amos from Tekoa' and 'The word that Amos saw about Israel'. None of these reconstructed variants contains a date, which according to Jeremias was added only in the exilic period.

boam II, a phase of external stability and economic and probably also religious flourishing.

For this reason Jan Christian Gertz thinks of the

account of the mysterious experience of the prophet from a time in which the full significance of the approach of the Assyrian danger for state, cult and social alliance was clear only to sensitive dispositions.⁵⁶

Gertz follows scholars in estimating the unconditional announcement of doom as a special feature in the ancient Near East and recognizes in it a fundamental change in the conception of God 'in which the deity is thought of completely independently of his worshippers'.⁵⁷ But as he too sees no clear indication for this change, Gertz makes the 'mysterious experience' of the historical prophet responsible. Now of course any communication by a deity to a prophet or another person has to be regarded as a 'mysterious experience', just as much in the ancient Near East as in ancient Israel. However, that does not relieve scholars in either context of the question of the content of the communication and whether this is understandable or not in the circumstances of the time. A mere reference to the 'mysterious experience' of the historical prophet merely explains the problem as the solution.⁵⁸

In the background of this and similar explanations there is evidently the irrational fear of deriving the prophets historically in the way that is customary in scholarly discussion, say, for Moses and the Law. Only in the case of the prophets does the thesis of the 'mysterious experience' take the place of the historical explanation. Andreas Scherer sums this up in a question:

Is the urge to proclaim felt by the prophets exclusively to be derived from the political and social situation? Perhaps there is also the possibility that not all the factors which

⁵⁶ GERTZ, J. C., Die unbedingte Gerichtsankündigung des Amos, in: Gottes Wege suchend. Beiträge zum Verständnis der Bibel und ihrer Botschaft (FS R. Mosis), Sedlmeier, F. (ed.), Würzburg 2003, 153–170: 167 ('Die Visionen lassen sich nicht mit einer historischen Situation erklären, die den Zeitgenossen bereits vor vollendete Tatsache gestellt hat. Die sind vielmehr der Niederschlag der geheimnisvollen Erfahrung des Propheten aus einer Zeit, in der das Herannahen der assyrischen Gefahr allenfalls sensiblen Gemütern in seiner vollen Tragweite für Staat, Kult und Sozialverband deutlich war.')

⁵⁷ Ibid. ('Der Übergang von der zweiten zur dritten Vision ist der Schritt zu einer Gotteskonzeption, in der die Gottheit völlig unabhängig von ihren Verehrern gedacht wird. Das ist eine nicht nur im Rahmen der altorientalischen Religionen aufregende Vorstellung').

⁵⁸ For the question of the historical prophet cf. KRATZ, R. G., Die Worte des Amos von Tekoa, in: Köckert / Nissinen (eds), Propheten, 54–89; ID., Die Propheten Israels, Beck'sche Reihe Wissen, Munich 2003.

prompt it can be fathomed by means of a way of thinking completely orientated on the criteria of the Enlightenment.⁵⁹

It is obvious that such assumptions escape scholarly verification.⁶⁰

We again tread the ground of historical facts with the parallels to the biblical prophets from the ancient Near East. They too are often applied as an explanation of the phenomenon of the unconditional announcement of doom in the Old Testament.⁶¹ According to Scherer the 'specific feature' does not consist in the prophecy of doom as such but merely in the 'concentration of particular elements which are not completely without analogy, into a particular unit of unique density'.⁶² Thus the biblical prophecy of doom combines

⁵⁹ SCHERER, A., *Vom Sinn prophetischer Gerichtsverkündigung bei Amos und Hosea*, Bib. 86, 2005, 1–19: 16. Scherer calls the special character of biblical prophecy 'concentrated reciprocal complexity' ('konzentrierte reziproke Komplexität') and wants to derive it 'by use of the principle of correlation' from the 'immediate context of the events... which it reflects' (ibid. 14–15: 'Läßt sich die Besonderheit alttestamentlicher Prophetie, die ich konzentrierte reziproke Komplexität nennen möchte, unter Anwendung des Korrelationsprinzips nur oder am besten aus der Katastrophe des Nordreiches ableiten? ... Die Unterstellung ... verdient jedoch nicht grundsätzlich den Vorzug vor der Annahme, daß die Auseinandersetzung mit konkreten Zuständen und Ereignissen, wie sie bei Amos und Hosea begegnet, ihren historischen Ort im unmittelbaren Kontext der Geschehnisse hat, die sie reflektiert'). This argument could not be more circular. But what is the historical context that for example the visions of Amos reflect? Scherer opts for the time before the catastrophe indicated by the redactional headings because this is 'the only historical perspective which does complete justice to its offensiveness (i.e. that of the unconditional certainty of disaster) and from which it does not seem at the same time both anachronistic and from the beginning obsolete' (ibid. 16: 'Das ist die einzige geschichtliche Perspektive, die ihrer Anstößigkeit voll gerecht wird, und aus der heraus sie nicht anachronistisch und von Anfang an obsolet wirkt.'). But would ancient readers already have shown such 'thinking orientated on the criteria of the Enlightenment' and only declared the words of the prophets not to be 'obsolete', if they were not 'anachronistic'? On these presuppositions the prophetic books and some other books inside and outside the Bible would hardly have been handed down, far less included in the canon 'from Moses to Artaxerxes'.

⁶⁰ The traditional view, which Gertz and Scherer opt for, is recently defended again at great length but without any new insights by RIEDE, P., *Vom Erbarmen zum Gericht. Die Visionen des Amosbuches (Am 7–9*) und ihr literatur- und traditionsgeschichtlicher Zusammenhang*, WMANT 120, Neukirchen-Vluyn 2008.

⁶¹ SCHERER, *Vom Sinn prophetischer Gerichtsverkündigung*, 5–14.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 14 ('Wenn man von einem Proprium alttestamentlicher Gerichtsprophetie sprechen will, dann ist es die Konzentration bestimmter Elemente, die nicht völlig analogielos sind, zu einer besonderen Einheit von einzigartiger Dichte.')

not only the certainty of the coming catastrophe with the recognition of its global extent, but the prediction of judgment at the same time implies a knowledge of the cultic-religious and political-social background of the approaching disaster.⁶³

However, in the judgment of Marti Nissinen, a proven expert in the relevant sources, 'the knowledge of the cultic-religious and political-social background' of the prophetic criticism has its parallels in ancient Near Eastern prophecy, but not the repudiation of the relevant institutions as such.⁶⁴ Even the notion of the Mesha inscription that the deity is angry with his own land is not an analogy to the 'no' of the biblical prophets, but is aimed in precisely the opposite direction. It implies the possibility of assuaging the wrath and averting the disaster. This notion is also to be found in the Deuteronomistic and Chronistic historiography and in the legends of the prophets in the prophetic books, where – on the basis of the unconditional announcement of doom – it could appear again and be applied afresh. But this notion does not represent an analogy to the unconditional character of the announcement of doom.

At first sight the Balaam inscription of Deir 'Alla from the ninth or eighth century BCE appears to be the only exception to the rule. Its interpretation is made difficult by the bad state of preservation and the different possibilities of putting the fragments together.⁶⁵ But as far as it can be read, the inscription offers a connecting point in two respects: first, slightly supplemented, in red ink it is headed *spr bl'm br b'r 'š hzh 'lhn*, 'writing/narrative of Balaam, the son of Beor, the seer of the gods', which recalls the titles of the biblical prophetic books and here as there introduces a

⁶³ Ibid. ('In der Gerichtsprophetie der hinteren Propheten verbindet sich nicht nur die Gewißheit der kommenden Katastrophe mit der Erkenntnis ihres globalen Ausmaßes, sondern die Weissagung des Gerichts impliziert zugleich ein Wissen um die kultisch-religiösen und politisch-sozialen Hintergründe des herannahenden Unheils.'). However, it does not become very clear how far the 'knowledge of the background' according to the 'principle of correlation' rests on the historical circumstances (ibid., 14–15) or on a 'mysterious experience' which evades 'the criteria of thinking orientated on the Enlightenment' (ibid., 16).

⁶⁴ See nn. 49–50 above.

⁶⁵ For the restoration of the text and questions of interpretation see HOFTIJZER, J. / VAN DER KOOIJ, G., *Aramaic Texts from Deir 'Allā*, DMOA 19, Leiden 1976; TUAT II/1, Gütersloh 1986, 138–148; COS 2, 140–145; KAI suppl. 312; also WEIPPERT, M., Die "Bileam"-Inscription von Tell Der 'Allā (1982 with H. Weippert), in: id., *Jahwe und die anderen Götter*, 131–161; ID., Die "Bileam"-Inscription von Tell Der 'Allā und das Alte Testament (1989/1991), in: ibid., 163–188; MARGALIT, B., *Studies in NWSemitic Inscriptions*, UF 26, 1994, 271–315: 282–302; HOFTIJZER, J. / VAN DER KOOIJ, G., *The Balaam Text from Deir 'Alla Re-Evaluated*. Proceedings of the International Symposium held at Leiden 21–24 August 1989, Leiden 1991; van Kooten, G. / van Ruiten, J. T. A. G. M. (eds), *Balaam: The Prestige of a Pagan Prophet in Judaism, Early Christianity and Islam*, Themes of Biblical Narrative 10, Leiden 2008.

mixture of narrative and a sayings collection. Secondly, the Balaam of the inscription announces disaster of a catastrophic and global extent with weeping and fasting. Yet this announcement too aims at the aversion of the catastrophe seen by Balaam by night. Resolved on by a goddess, the catastrophe provokes the objection of the other gods and, as Manfred Weippert has shown, is to be prevented or ended by the intervention of the seer: 'Fasting and weeping are ... varieties of self-diminution which are performed to avert the threat and danger from the person concerned or from the community which he represents.'⁶⁶

In contrast to the Amos of the visions (Amos 7–8), the seer Balaam thus does not see himself in the role of the solitary prophet who has nothing more to say to his people than that their end has come. Also neither the monarchy nor the cult as an institution nor the community which these represent is condemned as such. The relationship to the world of the gods, the majority of whom intervene on behalf of human beings, is still intact. There can be no question of an ending and reconstitution of this relationship. On the contrary, the past history of Balaam, the gathering of his statements and the preparation of the inscription itself seem to be a model of how comparable situations can be worked on or coped with in the future. Moreover the announcement of the global catastrophe is put in very general terms. It follows the pattern of the wrong world and lacks clear allusions to a concrete historical situation.⁶⁷ If we look for parallels in the biblical tradition we will find them not primarily in the early prophets but in the later parts of the prophetic books (e.g. Isa. 24–27) and in apocalyptic. Nor can it be a coincidence that the divine name used in the Balaam inscription, (El-)Shadday(n), appears outside the Balaam tradition itself (Num. 24.4, 16) in the Priestly Writing (Gen. 17.1; 28.3, etc.) and in other late passages.

Thus the old prophetic tradition attested by the Balaam inscription of Deir 'Alla may only to a limited degree illuminate the appearance of the unconditional announcement of doom in the biblical prophetic books. Certainly it offers a (further) welcome example of the notion of a global catastrophe and the contemporary possibilities of expressing this notion. To this degree it enriches our picture of west Semitic prophecy, into which the reconstructed original sayings of biblical prophets, whether these are the

⁶⁶ WEIPPERT, Die "Bileam"-Inscription von Tell Der 'Allā und das Alte Testament, 178 ('Fasten und Weinen sind ... Selbstminderungsriten, die ausgeführt werden, um Bedrohung und Gefahr von der betreffenden Person oder von der Gemeinschaft, die sie repräsentiert, abzuwenden,'); cited also by GERTZ, Die unbedingte Gerichtsankündigung, 162, without reference.

⁶⁷ But cf. MARGALIT, *Studies*, 282–283, who recognizes 'allusions to the Omrids of Samaria' in the Balaam inscription (I 13–16).

dark images and woes of Amos in Amos 3–6 or the oracle of salvation of Isaiah in Isa. 8.1–4, fit directly.⁶⁸ But the Balaam inscription, too, does not provide an explanation for the unconditional announcement of doom and the fundamental change of the conception of God in the prophetic texts and their later interpretation that goes with it.

So here too we again face the riddle ‘why from approximately the same beginning Israelite history arrived at quite a different end result from, say, Moabite history’. The incalculable and inexplicable elements in history are by no means alien to a ‘thought orientated on the criteria of the Enlightenment’ which now underlies scholarly discourse. But unless we are forced to, we should not give up the attempt at least ‘to describe the series of transitions in which the way from paganism to rational worship, in the spirit and in the truth, was taken’, or, to put it differently, in which the unconditional announcement of doom by the prophets and the fundamental change in the conception of God that accompanied it arose.

In an article published shortly after the completion of the current manuscript Erhard Blum, too, has used the Balaam inscription as an analogy in order to defuse the problem of the origin of Old Testament prophecy of doom within its ancient Near Eastern prophetic framework (BLUM, E., *Israels Prophetie im altorientalischen Kontext. Anmerkungen zu neueren religionsgeschichtlichen Thesen*, in: Cornelius, I. / Jonker, L. (eds.), *From Ebla to Stellenbosch – Syro-Palestinian Religion and the Hebrew Bible*, ADPV 37, 2008, 81–115). Blum, however, has to concede, that there are decisive differences ‘that are connected mainly to the “Gattung” and the communicative place of the texts’, and he has to admit that the Balaam inscription is not an ‘exclusive prophetic tradition literature’ (*exklusiv prophetische Traditionsliteratur*) but ‘a kind of wisdom literature’ (*eine Art von Bildungsliteratur*) (96). Thus, despite several provisos ‘on the basis of the sources currently available, Israelite prophecy of doom has still to be seen as a specific phenomenon’ (*ibid.*). Therefore, Blum, too, poses Wellhausen’s question ‘why exactly the tiny and marginal Judah located in Southern Canaan became the place where a complex and productive use of one’s own historical crisis was able to develop’ (97). Here he sees the origin of such a process rightly in pre-exilic times. In the light of these insights, however, it is surprising to see the vehemence with which Blum refutes several attempts to explain this striking and difficult fact, only to arrive at the point where the problem has its origin – namely at the post-prophetic (!) literary version of the prophetic books, whose message he identifies with the message of the prophets themselves (105–108).

Thus Blum distinguishes – following Odil Hannes Steck and Jörg Jeremias – between the spoken (oral) word of the prophets and its literary version handed down by later authors (82, 105–106, 107). But he criticises – and in some ways correctly – the simple distinction between orality and literacy and disregards the insight that the differentiation between prophet and tradition does not necessarily depend on such discrepancy (82–83). The claim of universal validity of the literary version (*Anspruch auf überzeitliche Gel-*

⁶⁸ Cf. KRATZ, *Die Propheten Israels*, 54–57, 75–77, 89–90; for Amos see FRITZ, V., *Amosbuch, Amos-Schule und historischer Amos*, in: *Prophet und Prophetenbuch* (FS O. Kaiser), id. (ed.), BZAW 185, Berlin / New York 1989, 29–43; KRATZ, *Die Worte des Amos von Tekoa*.

tung) – a position harshly criticised by Blum (83) – was already connected to literacy in an article by Jörg Jeremias on Amos 3–6, a contribution evaluated very positively by Blum (106 n. 127).

Blum labels ancient Near Eastern prophecy including the Balaam inscription as ‘ingredients to actual prophecies of disaster’ (*Zutaten für aktuelle Unheilsprophetien*) that alone cannot sufficiently explain Israelite prophecy of doom. Rather one needs – as we know since Julius Wellhausen – a specific occasion. According to Blum (104–105) ‘specific historical impulses and experiences of evidence are needed for these dispositions to be taken up and utilized by the radical prophecy of doom, impulses and evidences which are related to both poles of the system of distributive justice: the doing and the faring. This means that it is an experience of a collective catastrophe interpreted as the wrath of gods or simply one god that can trigger such prophecy and/or a diagnosis of the community or institution concerned regards them as deeply corrupted so that their doings by all means have to affect them disastrously’ (*dass ihr Tun unheilvoll auf sie zurückfallen muss*).

Blum rightly stresses that the experience of the catastrophe has to be earlier than the destruction of Jerusalem in 587/6 B.C.E. (97–99). Within his argument it remains however unclear why the events of 722 and 701 B.C.E. cannot serve as such an experience (99–101). On the one hand, Blum refutes any fragmentation of the tradition in several small (sometimes even fragmentary) units – a method that derives from the classic form-critical investigations of Hans Walter Wolff up to Jörg Jeremias and that is generally accepted. Blum, however, labels these small units ‘non-texts’ (*Nicht-Text*) and he refutes any attempt to understand them as units in themselves and not as part of a larger literary context such as the prophetic book (100–101). On the other hand, in his reconstruction of the person of the prophet – which according to Blum himself is hardly comprehensible – he refers to the literary context of the prophetic book, a book which according to Jörg Jeremias, whom he generally follows elsewhere, has to be dated to the time after 722 B.C.E.

The main point that might explain the dissent of Blum with his opponents seems to me to be the “and/or” of the sentence quoted above. It is very well known and by no means disputed that in the ancient Near East a collective catastrophe can be interpreted as the wrath of gods or simply one god, as it is the case in the Mesha inscription (contra Blum 101). Also it is not disputed that in ancient Near Eastern as well as in Old Testament prophecy the announcement of disaster can be explained by the doings of the addressees of such a prophecy – in order to change their actions. What is difficult to prove, however, is the hypothesis that ‘a diagnosis of the community regards them as deeply corrupted so that their doings by all means have to affect them disastrously’ (105). This hypothesis presupposes that the ‘no’ of the prophets is not the starting point of the prophecy of doom as Jörg Jeremias and many others thought. Rather the ‘no’ of the prophets is supposed to follow on the – quite unusual – diagnosis, a full diagnosis of the political, social, religious, and ethical situation of the community that for his part deserved an explanation. This presupposition, however, does not follow from the single prophetic oracles, at least not from all of them, but from the literary context of the prophetic book and thus makes the hypothesis highly questionable.

How much one should insist on the differentiation between the (oral or written) word of the Prophet and the literary tradition of the prophetic book is maybe a question of taste. In any case the article of Blum shows very clearly that – in order to understand the riddle ‘why from approximately the same beginning Israelite history arrived at quite a different end result from, say, Moabite history’ – this question cannot be answered by simply referring to ancient Near Eastern parallels or to the ‘mysterious experience of the

prophet', by the rejection of the 'thinking orientated on the criteria of the Enlightenment', or by the reference to the historical (re-)construction of the communicative situation within the literary context of the prophetic book.

For the Moabite Mesha inscription and other northwest Semitic inscriptions (Balaam, Zakkur), the basic version and still more the present version of 2 Kings 3, the Deuteronomistic and Chronistic historiography as a whole and the prophetic legends in the prophetic books (as e.g. Amos 7), it is beyond question that the appearance and proclamation of the prophets lie in the past. Scholars agree that in all cases the description of the past, the formulation of the prophetic sayings made at one time, or other quotations⁶⁹ represent a later back projection on the basis of the events which have meanwhile taken place and their outcome. The back projection serves to derive the present from the past and has the task of influencing the future.

Against this background the thought arises that the same explanation should also be considered for the unconditional announcement of doom in the prophetic books.⁷⁰ The unconditional announcement of doom is demonstrably based on prophetic claims made at a particular historical time, for example in the situation of the attack of an Aramaean-Israelite coalition on Judah (Isa. 8.1–4; Hos. 5.8–11) or before the imminent downfall of Samaria (Amos 3.12; 4.1; 5.2, 3). Their aim was to influence the course of history, whether by promising victory or by aiming to banish the threatening catastrophe, put into words, and in this way to avert it. The sayings, about which at any rate there is no dispute among scholars, can be isolated from their literary context in the prophetic books by means of form criticism and literary criticism. This opens up the possibility of describing the transition from one to the other. This transition is shaped by the change into the unconditional announcement of doom by the god Yahweh, who transforms the promised victory into disaster for his own people (Isa. 8.1–4 + 5–7) or declares the announced catastrophe to have been resolved on and brought in by him (Amos 3.12 + 13–14; 5.1–3).⁷¹

⁶⁹ Of the king of Israel in MI line 6, of the god Chemosh in lines 14, 32, of King Mesha in lines 24–25.

⁷⁰ Cf. KRATZ, R. G., *Die Redaktion der Prophetenbücher*, in: id. / Krüger, T. (eds), *Rezeption und Auslegung im Alten Testament und in seinem Umfeld*, OBO 153, Fribourg / Göttingen 1997, 9–27; ID., *Das Neue in der Prophetie des Alten Testaments*, in: Fischer, I. et al. (eds), *Prophetie in Israel. Beiträge des Symposiums "Das Alte Testament und die Kultur der Moderne"*, *Altes Testament und Moderne* 11, Münster 2003, 1–22; ID., *Die Worte des Amos von Tekoa*.

⁷¹ The explanation of the unconditional announcement of doom against the background of the forfeited possibility of divine forgiveness in the visions of Amos (Amos 7–8) is also and in particular a way of subsequently assimilating the catastrophe that has

The earlier oracles of the prophets came into the hands of the authors of the books which bear the names of the prophets either in oral or in written form. Whether these oracles reproduce the original wording or underwent changes before they were incorporated into the prophetic books can no longer be established. At all events, most of these oracles still move completely in the framework of the world of ideas that we know from the ancient Near Eastern parallels to the prophecy of salvation or disaster, especially from the closest chronological and geographical parallels in north-west Semitic inscriptions.

The transition to the unconditional announcement of doom and all the prophecies of disaster and salvation, and the cultic, social, legal and theological explanations that it attracted, is tangible for the first time – at any rate for us – in the books of the prophets and their development. This makes it natural to conjecture that the one has to do with the other and that the prophetic books originated with the interpretation of the earlier prophetic oracles as an unconditional announcement of doom. The onset of a serious catastrophe was the occasion for both the origin of the books and the theological reinterpretation of the words of the prophets that had been handed down. This – as is customary elsewhere – was subsequently interpreted as the resolve and action of Yahweh. Accordingly, like the wrath of Chemosh in the Mesha inscription and the ‘great wrath’ in 2 Kings 3, Yahweh’s ‘no’ would arise from a historical experience in the past which was interpreted after the event in order to derive lessons for the present and the future. However, the difference is that here, as far as we know, for the first and only time the total collapse of a people’s own political system was given a positive theological twist. From this a new identity of Israel developed in the biblical literature – through the use of the name ‘Israel’ for Judah and the identification of the Israelite with the Judahite Yahweh – which made the survival of Jewish culture possible. This is the only explanation ‘why from approximately the same beginning Israelite history led to quite a different end result from, say, Moabite history’.

already taken place. Otherwise one would simply expect the petition for forgiveness, i.e. the aversion of disaster.