# ARCHAEOLOGY, POLITICS AND RELIGION: THE PERSIAN PERIOD*

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The prospect of the appearance this year of the English version of Ephraim Stern's study of the archaeological evidence for the Persian period, makes it appropriate to offer here, not a review of that volume, but some comment on ways in which in recent years various attempts have been made at clarifying the life and thought of that still so obscure episode in the life of the biblical community. Stern's volume is devoted, as its title indicates, to Palestine: he writes on *The Material Culture of the Land of the Bible in the Persian Period.* The special concern of this volume is to draw together, and to attempt a synthetic treatment of, the significant range of evidence for that period, deriving from archaeological work within the Palestinian area. The questions on which I propose to comment will, naturally enough, concern that area primarily; but we cannot expect to understand the Jewish community in Palestine, its development and its thought, without taking some account of two facts. (1) Jewish life in this period, even more clearly than in the immediately preceding Babylonian period and in the pre-exilic age, belongs to a wider stage than that limited area. Here, for the first time, with rather minimal exceptions, we become aware of Jews in Egypt and Babylonia. We are also aware of relationships within Palestine outside the narrow administrative unit of Judah (Yehud). Jewry is larger than Judah. (2) The control of political life by an alien power—in this case the empire of the Persians, successors to Assyrians and Babylonians and predecessors of Greeks and Romans—inevitably means that domestic concerns, however central to the lives of the majority of the community, are in some measure overruled by international power politics; for the majority most obviously expressed in imperial military activity and taxation. The importance of this last is clear, but its intangibility is underlined when we recognize that we have little direct information about such matters in relation to the Jewish community. We have to infer what kind of effects were produced by Persian fiscal policies from our broader understanding of what Persian rulers were doing, and endeavoring to apply that to the interpretation of the particular problems of Jewish life (Stern 1982, 234f.).

The inclusion of the word 'archaeology' in the title of this lecture is an indication of the importance of interpreting the biblical text in relation to all the

*It is a pleasure to be able, by the giving of this lecture, to pay my own tribute to one who has contributed so much to this School and whose career and writings show that admirable mix of scholarship, education on a very broad base, archaeological activity and pastoral concern—a mix which must always be a proper mark of genuine academic life. Scholarship remote from life is often described as an 'ivory tower'; such a place does not sound very comfortable for living. Or should we perhaps understand the expression as we are bound to interpret the reference to Ahab's 'ivory palace' (1 Kings 22:39): it is not the palace but its decoration which is of ivory. It is certainly a proper concern that scholarship should be a thing of beauty and never narrowly utilitarian.

evidence which may appropriately be adduced for its understanding. One area in relation to the Persian period is our knowledge, extensive but with its own problems of understanding, of the classical world. The conflicts between Greece and Persia, and the involvement of Egypt in these conflicts, are an important background element to the understanding of Jewish life. The term 'archaeology' might not normally be applied to such evidence, yet it is important not to separate textual from archaeological evidence, especially since there are so many points at which the elucidation of Greek and Egyptian history, as well as Persian, depends on the right assessment of more narrowly 'dirt' archaeology (for references cf. Widengren 1977, 495-99; Sancisi-Weerdenburg 1980).

But while this broader background is clearly important, we have to recognize the extreme difficulty of correlating the external information with what we know from the biblical texts of the internal history of the Jewish community. Largely this is because of the nature of the texts, and this is a problem which we meet at almost every point in the assessment of biblical history. Narrative texts, such as we have for the Persian period in the two books of Ezra and Nehemiah, lack precision at the very points at which we should most expect them. While reference to Cyrus the Persian at the beginning of Ezra (Ezra 1.1; cf. 2 Chron. 36.22) gives us a precise link, subsequent references to Persian rulers are almost invariably less than clear. The most problematic of these is the reference to the 'seventh year of Artaxerxes' in Ezra 7.7, where no agreement exists as to which ruler of that name is meant. The similar allusion to a ruler Artaxerxes in Nehemiah 2.1 is generally assumed to be more precise, and reference to Artaxerxes I thought to be virtually certain, giving a date for Nehemiah's first period of activity as beginning in 445 B.C.; even this is not in fact absolutely sure, and arguments can be adduced for placing Nehemiah under Artaxerexes II (404-358). We may observe that Josephus places Nehemiah after Ezra, indeed after Ezra's death (*Ant.* XI. 158); we also now have fairly clear information which shows the existence of at least two and probably three governors of Samaria named Sanballat (Cross 1975, 5 [188] and references there), so that identification of Sanballat I as contemporary with Nehemiah, as is normally done, cannot be regarded as absolutely proved. Strong probability is not the same as certainty, and there must be caution in making clear just what is being built on the assumptions of identification or dating where the evidence is not fully assured.

Indeed, in many respects, historically and archaeologically, the Persian period represents a sort of interregnum. Knowledge both of historical sequences and of archaeological material is much more abundant for the Hellenistic and Roman periods. In part this is a question of available external witnesses in texts; in part it is the consequence of a greater interest until recent years in the archaeology of earlier and later periods. This also follows from the degree to which later building radically disturbed what may have existed from the Persian period. Recent work, and especially that of Ephraim Stern, pro-

vides the basis for advance; but it must still be observed that the total amount of evidence is relatively small and conclusions are still modest (see Stern 1982, ch. 9).

It is therefore with caution that the study of the period must be approached. The difficulties and limitations imposed on our knowledge of it must be fully recognized, but must not be allowed to discourage the attempt. And here we may observe a shift of emphasis in recent years which enables a more satisfactory approach to be made. There is today a much greater willingness to recognize the significance of a period during which so much must have happened internally to the Jewish community, and so much effect must have been produced on the formation of the biblical writings. When we emerge from its obscurities into the often better known Hellenistic period, we observe how far the biblical writings have been given a form which must be very close to what we now know. Manuscript evidence from Qumran, some of which goes back in all probability to the early Hellenistic period, and all of which belongs before the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, shows the degree of textual fixation which has been reached. The writings of Jesus ben Sira (Ecclesiasticus) show the existence of something not far removed from the three part canon of Jewish tradition (Prologue and chapters 44-49). That both textual and canonical questions were still in some measure open is clear, but the situation is very different from what it must have been in the sixth century B.C. It is clear that the effect of the disasters of that period and the demand for rethinking which they occasioned in the rehabilitation under the Persians had as one of its results a much greater degree of formalizing of the already existing writings. In the years of Persian rule, much must have taken place. To understand the nature of the community in which that was happening is vital to the appreciation of the final form of the writings themselves.

It is also of enormous importance for the understanding of the Jewish and Christian communities which were eventually to emerge from the biblical context. Jewish tradition has always given a much greater place to the developments during the Persian period, attributing to Ezra and to his successors in the 'men of the Great Synagogue' (cf. Barth 1976 for references) both the preservation of the ancient scriptures (cf. e.g. 2 Esdras 14) and of the continuing tradition. The understanding of the past is in terms which, even if too rigid, are nevertheless significant for what they say about the importance of religious continuity. Christian scholarship has often looked more to the earlier period, partly because of an overemphasis on the prophets dictated by a too narrow view of New Testament understanding of scripture and its significance; partly because of a misunderstanding of the contrast between law and gospel which has often formed a convenient but less than satisfactory basis for distinction between Christian and Jewish thinking. A better appraisal of Christian origins and of the nature of the Christian movement follows from a clearer appreciation of the post-exilic period.

I make no apologies therefore for choosing the Persian period as the one

to which I devote my attention. It is in any case the area in which much of my own thinking has been concentrated over the past twenty years and that to which I hope to devote further time in the next few years in the hope of clarifying some of its problems. (See also my forthcoming article in "The Jewish Community in Palestine in the Persian Period" in *Cambridge History of Judaism* Vol. I, 130-61.)

I propose to consider a small group of questions in which consideration of archaeological and textual evidence offers the opportunity for making some comments on problems of interpretation.

## I

## THE POLITICAL ORGANIZATION OF JUDAH

a) *The exilic period and its consequences.* We shall need first to move a little further back into the period of the exile and ask what kind of political situation existed after the second fall of Jerusalem in 587 B.C. At this point the Babylonians appointed one Gedaliah son of Ahikam son of Shaphan, a member of a prominent Jerusalem family in this period. Identifications are always open to some question, since our records, biblical and non-biblical, show the degree to which the identical names appear in the same period. But it seems most probable that Gedaliah's father and grandfather are the same as the Ahikam and his father Shaphan who appear prominently in the reign of Josiah, the latter as 'secretary', a high office of state (2 Kings 22.8,12). Another of his sons, Gemariah, and his son Micaiah, appear in Jer. 36 as part of the royal entourage; yet another son, Elasah, in Jer. 29.3 as one of Zedekiah's envoys to Babylon.

Gedaliah was appointed by the Babylonians, but we do not know precisely to what office; no title is ever given him, and the verb denoting his appointment (*pqd* hiph.) leaves the matter open. There is a question here which we cannot answer. Is the silence deliberate and is Gedaliah's true position thus concealed? There is no hesitation in describing Zedekiah, the Davidide, as king (2 Kings 24.18), though alongside this we find that the tablets discovered in Babylon—the so called Weidner tablets (*ANET,* 308)—in indicating Jehoiachin as 'son of the king of Judah', may be understood to be stating his legitimate royal status, which could suggest that for the Babylonians he remained king, even in captivity, and Zedekiah was a substitute. Gedaliah was not of the royal family. Is it for this reason that he was not designated king? Yet evidence in the narratives in Jer. 40-41 could suggest that he had some kind of royal status, for we find that he had charge of 'the king's daughters' (Jer. 41.10) and we observe that Ishmael of the Davidic house who assassinated Gedaliah, took these royal women with him. May we see these royal women as the royal harem whose possession is part of the rights of a royal successor, or can be regarded as constituting a claim to the throne? (For indications, see the

narrative of Absalom in 2 Sam. 16.20-22 and of Adonijah in 1 Kings 2.) Was Gedaliah appointed as king by the Babylonians, thus quite skillfully reducing the claims of the Davidic house and putting in control a man whose reputation and that of his family could be regarded as pro-Babylonian, and whose standing in Judah was evidently high (cf. Jer. 41.11ff.)?

But then nothing. After the assassination of Gedaliah and the escape of the assassin to the protection of the Ammonites (and what were they up to?), we have no internal information about the Judaean community at all. Was another official appointed by the Babylonians? Was some other administrative organization imposed? (We shall return to this question.) Is the silence in our sources a result of ignorance, or of indifference, or of a deliberate passing over of the period in the interests of a later situation?

The clue may lie in the account at the end of 2 Kings (25.27-30) of the release from captivity of king Jehoiachin (he is specifically given his title 'king of Judah') and his restoration to a position of honor in the royal Babylonian household. We may note the degree of honor—'his throne exalted above the thrones of the kings who were with him in Babylon'—allow something for the writer's patriotic feelings, but still recognize that this is evidently a significant event in Jewish tradition. We may note that, as it is presented in 2 Kings, it provides a positive counter to the negative detail about Gedaliah. (The Gedaliah material in Jer. 41f. is also negative, but not in quite the same way.) We may note also that in the parallel text in Jer. 52, which follows closely, though with important differences, the final part of 2 Kings, the Gedaliah material is absent: we move from the details of the three stages of exile (Jer. 52.28-30) to the release of Jehoiachin (52.31-34).

We may, I believe, legitimately suppose that in the view of some members of the Jewish community, this event marked the restoration of the Davidic monarchy. It was to be of no lasting significance for Jehoiachin, though we do not know how long he survived. 2 Kings 25 shows him restored to favor 'for the rest of his life', which may imply a slightly more positive note than 'to the day of his death' in Jer. 52. But either expression can readily imply a restoration without reservation. His restoration to favor was a royal act in the assession year of Nebuchadrezzar's successor. Since that successor was to be murdered only two years later, we may ask—but we cannot answer—whether his downfall was accompanied by ill fortune for his protégé at the court. But this does not affect the way in which the event was evidently regarded, and the restoration thus effected, however, token, could be significant for the sequel.

The next information we have about a Davidide concerns Zerubbabel, grandson of Jehoiachin, whose position under the Persian authorities in the early years of Persian rule is also unclear. He is described as 'governor' (*pehah*) in Haggai, though not in Ezra 3 nor in the Aramaic material in Ezra 5.2. He is claimed as 'my servant' (*'abdî*) and as appointed 'like a seal' or 'signet ring' (*ḥātōm*) and as 'chosen' (*bāḥar*) in Hag. 2.23; if, though not named, he is

intended in Zech. 3.8-10, he is there designated as 'my servant "branch" ' (*'abdî ṣemaḥ*). These are royal titles; they are perhaps echoed in the problematic passage Zech. 4.6b-10a where he is named (the passage is intrusive and perhaps does not even belong to Zechariah); and in the equally problematic Zech. 6.9-15, where, however, he is again not named. What kind of claim is being made for Zerubbabel? How far should we link that claim to the Jehoiachin material? Is the stress on the status of Jehoiachin and the silence about the status of Gedaliah and about any successors directed to the complex political situation in the early years of Persian rule? (A fuller discussion of some of these issues and their sequels is in preparation and to appear in 1983.)

b) *The Judaean restoration under Persian rule.* We have already stepped over the boundary between the Babylonian and Persian periods with these comments on Zerubbabel. Now we must put him in context so far as we may.

The literary evidence is complex. Ezra 1-6 is closely linked, as it now stands, with the final verses of 2 Chronicles. Whatever may be said about unity or diversity of authorship for the two works, Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah—and the issue is a very difficult one to resolve—we certainly encounter in Ezra 1-6 problems of historical reconstruction as great or greater than those we should face if we only had 2 Chronicles as an account of the period of the Israelite and Judaean monarchies. The narrative is disjointed; characters appear and disappear; chronology is piecemeal or nonexistent. The narratives are interrupted by chapter 2 which consists largely of lists. The narratives of 1, 3 and 5-6, which belong to the period of the first Persian rulers, Cyrus and Darius, are interrupted in parts of chapter 4 by material which is set in the reigns of Xerxes I (486-465 B.C.) and Artaxerxes I (465-424 B.C., if we assume the first ruler of that name), without any explanation.

If we concentrate on what appears to belong to the immediate restoration period, we find a prominent personage Sheshbazzar in chapter 1. He is 'prince' or 'leader' (*nāśî'*); he has no genealogy, and his title is certainly not necessarily suggestive of the royal house. The supposition that he is to be identified with a Davidide is without foundation (Ackroyd 1979, 331). He reappears in 5.14 in the Aramaic text as governor (*peḥāh*); the sequel in the text describes Sheshbazzar as beginning the temple rebuilding and indicates that the rebuilding is not yet complete. The absence of Sheshbazzar's name earlier in this Aramaic narrative implies that he himself was no longer active, and when a further reference to a governor appears in 6.7, no name is given. We may assume that this is not Sheshbazzar. Zerubbabel appears in 5.2, but not described as a governor; he does not reappear, and neither does Joshua the priest named with him. I suspect that both names are here intrusive, and belong to an editor who was attempting to integrate the apparently conflicting material of the whole section. According to this Aramaic narrative, then, Sheshbazzar was governor under Cyrus; a further governor, direct successor or not, was operating under Darius.

The intervening narrative of chapter 3—with which we may associate the final Hebrew section in 6.19-22—refers in its first part to Zerubbabel and Joshua; the latter is indicated as priest, the former by his father's name and with reference to his brothers, to be understood more broadly as his kinsmen. But, as we have noted, Zerubbabel is not here given a title.

It is not possible to resolve the administrative questions here. Sheshbazzar is not described as governor in one passage, but as prince or leader; in another and clearly separate section, he is described as governor. Zerubbabel is not described as governor in Ezra; he is so described in Haggai, but not in the only passage in Zechariah which names him. He is given implied royal status in Haggai, and possibly also, without being named, in Zech. 3 and 6; but nowhere else. It has been argued that both Sheshbazzar and Zerubbabel were special commissioners rather than governors. The title *peḥāh*, governor, is used very broadly, for different levels of officials. Nehemiah, we are told, was appointed governor (though the title is used only in Neh. 5.14, 18 and 12.26), and this was for a fixed term. Perhaps we are making unreal distinctions if we talk of 'special commissioners' and 'governors' as if they were quite different. We do not know whether the Persians appointed such officers regularly for specific periods. In the case of Samaria, the office appears to have remained in a family, perhaps over as many as five generations.

The gap between the period of restoration and that of Nehemiah, the next named governor in the biblical text, is bridged only by the allusion in Neh. 5.15 to governors who have preceded Nehemiah. It is a somewhat intangible comment, since it belongs within the whole context of the Nehemiah presentation which is quite evidently a glorification of him. To contrast him favorably with his predecessors could be a device directed towards such praise, rather than necessarily a piece of valid historical information. This is possibly underlined by what seems to be the clear intention of the opening verses of the Nehemiah narrative which in effect presents him as the rebuilder of Jerusalem, ruined at the exile: Nehemiah is already here on the way to becoming the complete restorer of city and cult as which he is presented in the opening chapters of 2 Maccabees (Ackroyd 1970a, 32f.; 1973, 266). We have to be cautious how much history we endeavor to reconstruct from this kind of evidence.

Another possible bridge is in Malachi where 1.8 refers to a governor. The natural inference is that this is a governor of Judah, though it is not so stated. Its usefulness as evidence depends on the dating of Malachi, for which there is very little clear information: the conventional date in the period before Nehemiah is little more than a guess, partly at least based on the evidence of the Nehemiah material. Such a writing can hardly be used in reconstructing the historical sequence: its date must first be established independently.

There are references which use another title: tiršātāh—'excellency'—for Nehemiah in Neh. 10.2; for an unnamed personage in Ezra 2.63 = Neh. 7.65 and also Neh. 7.69; and a problematic reference to Nehemiah with this title in the Ezra material of Ezra 8.9, probably a harmonizing addition (cf. 1 Esdr.

9.49 where the name Nehemiah is not found). But this adds little that can be satisfactorily used.

When we move out of the biblical text, we find other evidence. There is reference in the Elephantine papyri (30.1) to *bgwhy* (Bigvai, Bagoas) *pḥt yhwd,* datable to 408 B.C. (Cowley 1923, 108-19). The same name appears as Bigvai in post-exilic lists (Ezra 2.14; Neh. 7.19; sons of Bigvai, Ezra 2.2; Neh. 7.7; associated with Ezra, Ezra 8.14; cf. also Neh. 10.16 [Heb. 17]).

Over recent years bullae (small lumps of clay used to seal letters or documents, pressed on the string and stamped), seals, and also jar impressions have been discovered bringing new, but still problematic, evidence. The full account of these does not belong here (see Avigad 1976; Stern 1982, ch. 6); we may simply extract the relevant evidence. This amounts to a governor named Elnathan (*'lntn*); another named Yeho 'ezer (*yhw'zr*); another named Ahazai (*'hzy*). From a coin comes another name Yehezkiya (*yḥzkyh*). All are described as *pḥw'*, i.e. *pḥh.*

The addition of four names to the meager evidence for governors is of clear importance. But unfortunately substantial problems remain. The dating proposed for the bullae and seals, which lack archaeological contexts, varies from the sixth to the fourth century (for a survey see Stern 1982, 203 and notes. Stern himself [1982, 21] promises a fuller discussion). Avigad provides a chronology (1976, 35):

Sheshbazzar, *c.* 538
Zerubbabel, *c.* 515
Elnathan, late sixth century
Yeho 'ezer, early fifth century
Aḥzai, early fifth century
Nehemiah 445-433 (to which would be added his second period of office, Neh. 13)
Bagoas, 408
Yeḥezqiyah, *c.* 330

The evidence for this is partly epigraphic, placing Elnathan ahead of the other two names, but this is very dubious; for the last name, the coin points to the end of the Persian period, and it is noted that there was a chief priest Ezekias (not, it appears, 'the high priest') in the period of Ptolemy I, from about 301 B.C. (Stern 1982, 223; cf. Josephus, *Contra Ap.* 1.187). Identifying this priest with a governor in the late Persian period appears to me very questionable; chronologically it is possible since he is said to be sixty-six years old under Ptolemy I, but too much rests on the similarity or identity of name which must be insufficient evidence unless otherwise supported.

Talmon (1976, 325) presses the evidence further. One of the seals is inscribed 'Belonging to Shelomith maidservant of Elnathan the governor'

(Avigad 1976, 11: *lšlmyt 'mt 'lntn p(ḥ..)*. Talmon interprets the word *'ammāh,* 'maidservant', as a term denoting 'wife'; 1 Chron. 3.19 names a daughter of Zerubbabel as Shelomith and he considers this to be evidence that Elnathan was successor and son-in-law to Zerubbabel; he also identifies a *ḥnnh* on a storage jar as a son of Zerubbabel, Hananiah; and a *brwk by sm'y* as a nephew of Zerubbabel, son of his brother Shimei. Such a conjunction of names looks persuasive, but is highly conjectural. Before it could be accepted, the dates of the archaeological evidence would need to be much firmer. Until such time as that is clear, deductions of this sort are not satisfying (Stern 1981, 21, n.25. Stern himself dates these governors on the bullae to the period after Nehemiah).

Thus a consideration of this evidence leaves us with a series of as yet unresolved problems. Can we arrive at a more satisfactory order for the indications we have of new governors' names? Can we develop a clearer chronology? Along with this go problems of status for the officers about whom we have some detail, Sheshbazzar, Zerubbabel and Nehemiah. Can we find clearer evidence to date the material of Malachi, so that its statements can contribute to this discussion? What literary and hence historical assessment should we accord to the Nehemiah memorial? Most of these questions are long familiar; they remain still as important as in the past, and discussion of them must, we may hope, continue to be lively.

## II

## SAMARIA AND JUDAH—ANOTHER ASPECT OF ADMINISTRATIVE STATUS

It will be clear from the preceding discussion that we still know much less about the organization of the Judaean area in the Persian period than we could wish. The new pieces of information are clearly important, but their correlation with our existing knowledge remains less than certain.

But there is another aspect to this problem which needs attention. This concerns a view which was first put forward by Albrecht Alt (1934) as part of a fuller study of the interrelationships between Samaria and the formation of post-exilic Judaism. He maintained that Judah had been placed under the control of Samaria. The proposal has been influential and has found numerous supporters. In recent years, partly as a result of a very critical appraisal by Morton Smith (1971, 193-201), and partly now with the discovery of further names of governors, it has come to be treated with more caution. I do not propose here to go over the debate in detail; much of Alt's thesis and much of Morton Smith's criticism are concerned with wider issues, and in so far as the former's views concern the origin and development of Samaritanism, they have been overtaken by more recent work. Morton Smith's comments are largely concerned with these wider issues, but quite properly he stresses that

Alt's was a hypothesis. By repeatedly italicizing the word *perhaps* and with much use of 'hypothecate' in his strictures on Alt, he underlines this point. It would be possible to go through his own comments and indeed his whole volume and introduce the same kind of emphasis to describe many of his statements. But hypothesis is an essential tool of scholarship: the reconstruction of this period invites hypothesis for the simple reason that we have so few hard facts.

I wish only to draw out what appear to me to be the issues to which answers are still needed if we are to get an adequate explanation of the Persian period, so far as Judah and Samaria are concerned. I would suggest that there are three main areas which demand discussion; to these may be added the general point that the hypothesis that after the death of Gedaliah, Judah was placed under the administration of the governor in Samaria, is an attempt to fill a gap in our information. If in due course we are able to identify governors for that period, then the hypothesis either becomes unnecessary or would be applicable only in a rather direct form. The three main problem areas would still need elucidation.

a) We need to ask what is the basis for the opposition of Samaria to the restoration of Jerusalem. We may observe such opposition at two distinct points, though the chronological relation between them is not clear. The more precise moment is that of Nehemiah's activity. In the narratives there, we find the opposition of Sanballat, governor of Samaria. He appears in Neh. 2.10, together with Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite; and again in 2.19 with the further addition of Geshem the Arab (cf. Cross 1975, 7 [190]) for what appear to be too simple identifications). Subsequently in 4.1-6 (Heb. 3.33-38), Sanballat appears, with Tobiah in an apparently subordinate position (v.3; Heb. 3.35); and in 4.7ff. (Heb. 4.1ff.) we find Sanballat and Tobiah and the Arabs and the Ammonites and the Ashdodites. In chapter 6, Sanballat appears with Tobiah and Geshem in v.1, and with Geshem alone in v.2; then Sanballat appears separately in v. 5, with Geshem very oddly appended in v.6. In the immediately following passage, 6.10-19, Sanballat does appear, but in second place to Tobiah. This detail is needed for the discussion, since it is evident that if Nehemiah was dealing with three opponents all of equal or more or less equal status, then arguments about the reasons for opposition from Samaria become part of a general appraisal of the political situation. But a close consideration of the evidence strongly suggests that for the main narrative in chapter 4 and the first part of chapter 6, Sanballat really stands alone. The second part of chapter 6 is a Tobiah narrative, and the basis of Tobiah's conflict with Nehemiah is very differently indicated. Do we here have indications that a main opposition theme has been extended by the incorporation into it of separate and perhaps less important opposition themes? If so, we may justify the consideration of Sanballat and Samaria separately, and recognize the degree to which the Nehemiah story has been extended—as we have already

seen—in the interests of glorifying him and his status.

Why then the opposition? It could be economic, and there might be some clue to this in Neh. 13 in the action taken against foreign merchants who broke the sabbath; but nothing in the narrative really suggests that foreign trade came to an end, only that entry on the sabbath was precluded; violent action was threatened to prevent the merchants setting up their stalls outside the walls, with a view to encouraging the inhabitants to ignore the sabbath and come out to them. If economic questions were the root issue, there seems no special reason for associating this with Samaria. More generally, we can suppose that Samaria would not welcome revival in Jerusalem, and part of the reason for that could be economic, but nowhere in the text is this suggested. (See below on Ezra 4 for a possible allusion to such a motif.)

A second possibility would be religious, and this is clearly a delicate question. But we may observe that there is no indication of any religious grounds for Sanballat's opposition. What we do find, both in Neh. 6 and in Neh. 13, are indications of close relationships between Sanballat (in the latter case by marriage) and Nehemiah's opponents within Judah. This could suggest personal reasons for antagonism, which might be a contributory factor. We have clues here to internal troubles in Jerusalem and Judah, in which Sanballat was apparently involved, but religious grounds are not really adduced except in the pious comment of 13.29. Nor can we deduce any indications of fundamental religious distinction, since Sanballat's sons both bore Yahwistic names, Delaiah and Shelemaiah (so the Elephantine Papyri, 30.29); the religious schism between Jerusalem and Samaria belongs to a later date than this, though it is conceivable that there has been some influence on the narrative from subsequent events.

What does appear, in Neh. 2.20, is a refutation of claims which are evidently made by the opponents: it is clear that they—and we may perhaps deduce primarily or even solely Sanballat—are making certain precise claims to rights in Jerusalem. Nehemiah denies to the opponents three particular rights: *ḥēleq, ṣedāqāh* and *zikkārôn.* The precise meaning is not easy to determine, but we need not doubt that something quite specific is intended. *Ḥēleq* suggests 'territorial rights' in the sense of ownership of or control over some piece of land in Jerusalem: perhaps we should compare the trading rights in Samaria for Aramaeans and in Damascus for Israelites in the period of the conflicts between Aram and Israel (1 Kings 21.34). *Ṣedāqāh* perhaps implies legal rights; and *zikkārôn* closely-related traditional rights, customary rights. But even though certainty about these is not possible, it would seem clear that the three terms together effectively deny any kind of rights in Jerusalem; such a denial presupposes that there were grounds for the claim being made to possess such rights, and the nature of the relationship between Samaria and Jerusalem must presumably have included the recognition of such rights. This could suggest that Nehemiah is here being described as claiming a degree of independence not previously possessed by Jerusalem. The evidence is insuffi-

cient to build a firm case, but it points in the direction at least of some degree of external control.

The other opposition passage in Ezra 4—consisting in reality of more than one element—is much more difficult to assess. First, we have no adequate basis for fixing its date: one piece (4.6) is set early in the reign of Xerxes (486-465 B.C.); one (4.7) in the reign of Artaxerxes; the third (4.8-23) also in the reign of Artaxerxes. Which Artaxerxes is meant is not stated: it is usually assumed to be Artaxerxes I (465-424 B.C.). The latter two complaints can hardly be one and the same, though the text seems to imply that the latter is an Aramaic version of the former: the names of the people involved are quite different. It is this last and fuller passage which includes reference to Samaria, in the context of the other areas of the province Beyond the River. The fact that Samaria alone of the separate areas is mentioned by name suggests either that Samaria was the prime mover, and that we may therefore see this as evidence of opposition to Jerusalem from there; or that the passage has subsequently been modified as part of anti-Samaritan polemic (for comments see Coggins 1975, 66ff.) We again have the problem that the present form of the material in this passage is clearly designed to glorify Jerusalem and its ancient history, and historical reconstruction is made all the more difficult because of this. The chronological uncertainty too makes it difficult to use the material in any satisfactory way.

There is in this material some indication of claims made over Jerusalem by Samaria which need an explanation. One possible explanation is that at some point Judah was controlled from Samaria; that is not necessarily the only possibility.

b) The second point takes further the question of the relationship by considering how it came about that the Elephantine community appealed in 408 B.C. (Papyrus 30) to both Samaria and Jerusalem. We can appreciate that an appeal to Persian authorities could be assisted by support from other governors. Clearly such support would more readily be given by governors who had some interest or concern in the fortunes of the Jewish community in Elephantine. That it was Jewish, Judaean, is clear from the name which it uses to describe itself—the Jewish force (*hyl' yhwdy'*). Appeal to Jerusalem is therefore natural. But why appeal to Samaria unless there was some special reason for this? Is that reason religious? We have observed the Yahwistic names of Sanballat's sons, and other Yahwistic names appear in the later indications of the line of governors in Samaria (Cross 1975, 17 [203]). Or is there here a reflection of a particular kind of administrative link between Samaria and Jerusalem?

c) The third point is evidence to suggest an administrative change in Judah towards the end of the fifth century. Stern (1971; 1982, 211) points to the replacement in that period of Achaemenian motifs on seals by *yehud*

stamps; and to the granting of the right to mint coins which is revealed by the appearance of *yehud* coins from about the same period. He considers that this change could come from after or at the time of Nehemiah. Does this suggest that the administrative position before this period was different, and if so what kind of position existed? Does the appeal from Elephantine to both Samaria and Jerusalem argue for some degree of uncertainty about the position at the time of the appeal? If the change to greater independence for Judah was relatively recent, perhaps even as yet insufficiently formalized, such a double appeal would be intelligible.

To these points we may add one further reflection. As things stand at present, we have no established sequence of governors for Judah. We have a much clearer picture of a family succession in Samaria, though our precise evidence here covers only the period from the mid-fifth century towards the end of Persian rule. Why did this administrative difference exist?

It is perhaps appropriate here to make a more general comment on Persian policy. Attempts are frequently made at determining the precise nature of Persian policy at any given moment. The discussions of the Cyrus cylinder in relation to the decree of Cyrus given in two forms in Ezra 1 and 6, and the relating of this to other indications of Persian action in regard to religious establishments, have involved attempts at finding some kind of consistency in Persian policy. In the discussions of the commissioning of various officers—Sheshbazzar, Zerubbabel, Nehemiah, Ezra—attempts have been made at correlating the moments of their appointment with the broader political situation (cf. e.g. Ackroyd 1970a, 15ff.; 1970b, 174ff.; Schultz 1980, esp. 233f.).

This is entirely proper, but it must not be carried too far. Imperial policy is not necessarily always consistent. Pragmatic decisions may be at different levels, responding to different needs as they are perceived. Politicians, as we all know, can make mistakes of judgment, and they can show themselves to be inept. Often—and we may suppose this for the Persian rulers as for more modern politicians—what they do depends on the quality of the advice given to them. In addition, as we may see from the Nehemiah story, a personal act of favoritism could result in political action. It seems to me to be worth considering—since so much of our evidence is inconclusive—whether the precise administrative situation between Samaria and Jerusalem was in some degree undermined by the commissioning of Nehemiah; and that the Persian policy associated with this and the subsequent apparent emergence of a greater degree of autonomy for Judah could be partly explained by spasmodic and inconsistent action, and also by that great expedient of politicans faced with intractable problems, that of 'wait and see', in the hope that perhaps the problem will go away. We must not look for a greater coherence and intelligibility in political action in the past than we should expect to find in our own time.

## III

## RELIGIOUS LEVELS AND DIFFERENCES

The unravelling of the religious situation in the Persian period is as difficult as the recovery of historical sequences. There are obvious reasons for this. We may appreciate the concern of a later time to establish a coherent and continuous line of tradition which would show the direct link between the religion which was re-established after the Babylonian exile and what had preceded. An idealized picture of a single religious tradition traceable back to Moses and beyond him to the patriarchs was an important element in the maintaining of religion and in the stresses and pressures of the Hellenistic and Roman periods and beyond. To some extent that idealism was already present at an earlier stage. So we may see the importance for the immediate restoration period itself of showing such direct links with the past, and within the writings of the period we may detect various ways in which such a continuity was presented. (For elements in such preservation of continuity, see Ackroyd 1972; 1977; 1980.)

An emphasis on continuity with the past and on unity of tradition inevitably obscures the diversity which in fact is likely to have existed and which can be partially demonstrated by a close examination of the material. A comparable situation exists in both Jewish and Christian theological development. Thus, diversity in the New Testament, strongly emphasized in much contemporary scholarship, is observable in spite of the strong pressures in the early post-New Testament period to present a picture of uniformity. An analogy may, with suitable caution, be drawn between the sharp divisions of the Hellenistic period in the second century B.C., the period from which we may clearly trace the development of the sharply divided groups known to us from the New Testament and from Qumran, and a comparable situation in the sixth and fifth centuries B.C. The whole question of what constituted continuity is inevitably raised as a result of the political uncertainties of the preceding period of Babylonian conquest, destruction and control; we should expect differences of view on this, in addition to the survival of elements of an earlier diversity.

It is convenient to begin here by going back to a point raised earlier in connection with the problems of the administration of Judah. This is the Davidic theme. We have seen evidence for the continuing emphasis on Davidic claims, expressed particularly in the figure of Zerubbabel. But we observe a number of problems which arise here. One of these concerns the precise status of Zerubbabel under Persian authority; another the uncertainty which surrounds this Davidic figure. Later legend was to be quite explicit. 1 Esdras 3.1-5.3 tells a story, set at the court of Darius, of a contest of wits between three young guardsmen concerning what is strongest (cf. also Josephus, *Ant.* XI.33-58). The third of these appears to have described women as strongest;

but an addendum mentions Truth (3.12). When he comes to speak, he is quite unexpectedly identified as Zerubbabel (4.13), and when he has won the contest, he is able to get from the king permission to carry out the king's own vow to rebuild Jerusalem and restore the temple. It is clear that here a story of quite independent origin (see Sancisi-Weerdenburg 1980, ch. 7) has been used to provide an explanation, not provided by the biblical texts, of how Zerubabbel came to be appointed and what his precise commission was. Furthermore, the narrative of his appointment in 1 Esdras leads on into the list of returned exiles which we have in Ezra 2 (= Neh. 7), but does so with a short passage (1 Esdras 5.4-6) emphasizing the Davidic descent of Zerubbabel, indicated only by means of a patronymic in Ezra 3 and Haggai. There would appear to be evidence in 1 Esdras of some development in the Davidic emphasis, though even here the Davidic theme follows the priestly: it is of interest in relation to the rather different situation which we find in the Chronicles-Ezra-Nehemiah complex.

The other aspect of uncertainty regarding Zerubbabel is one of which much has been made and it need not detain us here. It is the supposition that he was removed from office because of royal aspirations which amounted to something like claims to independence. Now we have a somewhat similar situation in the Nehemiah material, especially in Neh. 6, where accusations against Nehemiah run along these lines. We may naturally suppose that opponents of Nehemiah used such evidence as there was, or as they could concoct, to discredit him with the Persian authorities. Whatever they did, Nehemiah remained in office, apparently for the whole of the period for which he had been appointed, twelve years (Neh. 5.14). He was subsequently reappointed (13.6), and this shows that he was still acceptable to the authorities. The second period of office has no terminus, and in effect Nehemiah disappears from the narrative just as much as Zerubbabel does: at least the narrator has no interest in telling us, for example, that he served for so many years in his second term, or that he died in office, or whatever else might mark a fitting conclusion. (Equally, of course, there is no terminus to the activity of Ezra, though Josephus does mention his death.) Indeed, this is not uncharacteristic of biblical narrative; there are numerous instances of 'disappearance' which simply mark the narrative has having other concerns. The status of Zerubbabel and his activity are more important than what subsequently happened; and there is no indication in the narrative that action against him could have been taken by the Persians.

We can observe what may be three levels of estimate of Zerubbabel, in addition to the later 1 Esdras evidence. In Haggai 2.20-23, he is given titles, as we have seen, which are royal, expressive of the hope of a new and idealized Davidic ruler. In addition, we note that Zerubbabel and in Haggai always precedes Joshua the priest. In Ezra 3 he appears as a Davidide, but no emphasis rests upon his Davidic descent; it is indicated, but not drawn out. This is on a par with what we may observe elsewhere in the Ezra material, for in Ezra

8, in the list of those who accompanied Ezra, arranged according to their 'fathers' houses', we note in verse 2 that priority is given to the two priestly lines, those of Phinehas and Ithamar, in that order (cf. 1 Chron. 24 for a fuller statement of this). Following them is the mention of a Davidic descendant, Hattush. (The genealogy of 1 Chron. 3 notes Hattush as eldest of the six sons of Shemaiah [verse 22—only five are in fact listed], but continues the genealogy not from him but from the next youngest, Neariah. This does not suggest that Hattush has any continuing significance as a member of the Davidic family.) Thus the narratives in the book of Ezra could be said to play down the Davidic element, and to emphasize the priestly. (When Zerubbabel is first mentioned, in Ezra 3.2, he follows Jeshua the priest; subsequently, in 3.8, 4.3 and 5.2—this last probably intrusive—he appears first. This latter order [see above] is the one always used in Haggai.)

Thus we may draw some contrast between the Haggai emphasis and that of Ezra. The position in the Zechariah material is more complex, partly at least because of the absence of names where we might expect them. In Zech. 3, prominence is given to the rehabilitation of Joshua the High Priest, and to his function, with his associates, in relation to the coming 'messianic' figure, the Branch (3.8). Haggai 2 does not use this term. A similar absence of name in Zech. 6 has more difficult problems since the text appears to imply that two personages ought to be named; we expect Joshua and Zerubbabel, but the latter is not named. It has often seemed most probable that the text in these two Zechariah passages has been modified by the removal of the name of Zerubbabel; and on the basis of this it is supposed either that he had fallen from favor with the Persians (see above) or that, at a later date when the position of Zerubbabel was no longer relevant, the theme of the priestly line was linked with a future expectation of a Davidic figure. The Qumran material has something comparable in its two messiahs, the messiah of Aaron and the messiah of Israel (cf. 1QS.IX), where an element of subordination of the latter is perhaps also implied.

The only direct reference to Zerubbabel in Zechariah is in 4.6b-10a, which, as already indicated, is clearly intrusive. It includes an emphasis which is similar to that of 6.12 where the Branch is identified as the temple builder; but it does not use the same language, and it would seem to belong to a separate piece of tradition. We may note also that the two passages which have cryptic allusion to a Davidic figure, 3.8-10 and 6.9-15, are not actually part of the vision material, but belong with the oracular, supplementary material. If we are trying to trace the stance of Zechariah himself, we must start from the visions, recognizing the degree to which there has been extension in the present form of the text (cf. Beuken 1967). From this we get the impression that the concerns of Zechariah are really rather different from those of his contemporary, Haggai. The appearance of two mysterious figures together in the vision in ch. 4 may, as has normally been supposed, point to Joshua and Zerubbabel; but we are faced with a lack of identification which is puzzling.

Should we perhaps suppose a different theological level in Zechariah from that which we find in his contemporary?

These differences in Davidic emphasis clearly have a religious dimension in view of the close links of the pre-exilic king with the religion of the community. They provide pointers forward to an eventual development of messianic thinking, to be so significant in the New Testament period but also present in a variety of oracular passages int he prophetic books—and particularly those in Jeremiah and Ezekiel are here relevant as being so very evidently out of step with the general lines of thought which we may attribute to those prophets (cf. Jer. 23.5f., 33.21-26; Ezek. 37.24f.). But the very modest and indeed almost negative handling of the Davidic theme in the book of Ezra suggests an area of thought in which this particular motif was not a central one at all. A counterpart to this may be seen in the very limited Davidic reference within the later parts of the book of Isaiah (Isa. 55.3); though this is in some measure to be balanced by a group of passages, particularly in chapters 9, 11 and 32, in which that theme is dominant, passages which have some similarities with those just mentioned in Jeremiah and Ezekiel. This suggests that the 'Isaiah tradition', however precisely we describe it, preserved some more positive appraisal of this theme, perhaps incorporating also a transformation of it in the use of the royal 'servant' motif in passages in Isa. 40ff.

A contrast is possible between these indications and the books of Chronicles, and it is one of the bases on which separation of Chronicles from Ezra-Nehemiah is proposed (cf. Braun 1979, 60-62 and references). The enormous concentration on David and with him on Solomon in 1-2 Chronicles, and the deep concern with the Davidic monarchy during the whole survey of the pre-exilic period suggests that for the 'Chronicler' this was a primary and positive theme. That it certainly is, but it must be observed that the primary emphasis in this presentation is much less on monarchy as such and much more on the relationship between monarchy and religious life and practice. David is repeatedly presented as the originator and organizer of temple worship, priesthood, levitical functions and the like. His successor Solomon becomes the fulfiller of the temple building part of this, providing therefore for the adequate carrying out of David's plans. Later rulers, particularly Hezekiah, Manasseh and Josiah, are concerned with the purification and preservation of this tradition. If the work ended with 2 Chronicles, then nothing appears to suggest any Davidic restoration. There is no mention of the release of Jehoiachin from captivity, and hence no pointer to hope there. Restoration, in the final verses, is of the temple at Jerusalem, not of its royal house. I find it difficult to believe that the work does really stop at that point; at least the opening of the book of Ezra is necessary for the rebuilding of the temple to be effected; and it is not entirely satisfactory to stop even then, since the links into the Ezra narrative are close, particularly the chronological link between Ezra 6 and 7, and the priestly genealogy of Ezra which links him back directly with the priest taken into exile (Ezra 7.1 where he appears as 'son of

Seraiah': cf. Koch 1974, 190). This would make it possible to view the Chronicler's own presentation as a middle position, its succession found in temple and priesthood rather than in political Davidic hope.

This Davidic concern provides a convenient pointer to the variety of thinking in the restoration period. It strongly suggests that the attempt at simplifying that period into two main lines of thought does not do justice to the evidence. Hanson (1975) with his emphasis on 'establishment' and 'visionary' parties does not take sufficient account of the variety, and indeed it may be questioned whether either of his categories is satisfactory (cf. also Plöger 1968). The establishment with which he associates Haggai and Zechariah is certainly not uniform. The attempt of Morton Smith (1971, chapters IV and V) is similarly too simple. He sees a 'Yahweh-alone' party, in contrast with syncretistic groups continuing from the pre-exilic period, and a third group consisting of priests whose interest lay in the restoration of temple and cult, but who were not 'Yahweh-alone' men in view of their foreign marriages. I suspect that the truth is much more complex than this.

There are numerous hints of differences of view, but little precision. It has been argued that Isa. 66.1f. presents a view of the temple indirect contradiction to that of Haggai (e.g. Smart 1965, 281ff.; see my comments, Ackroyd 1968, 156 n.15 and 229 n.44). It is more probable that we have both in that passage and also in Haggai an awareness of a kind also present in 1 Kings 8.27 that the deity's relationship to a shrine cannot be determined by the shrine or its builders but only by the deity himself. But these passages do indicate the presence within Judah—assuming that Isa. 66 belongs to a Palestinian context, its date being a matter of debate—of differing understandings of temple and deity.

Similarly, in the fifth century we may detect, both in the Nehemiah narratives and in those of Ezra, sharp conflicts in which, inevitably, our presentation is one-sided. The opponents of Nehemiah included Tobiah who appears in Neh. 6 to enjoy considerable support in Jerusalem; it would be naive to suppose that he is to be regarded in purely negative terms. Indeed Neh. 6.19 relates that his associates 'were relating his good deeds in my (Nehemiah's) presence'. Similarly, we observe differences of view in regard to Ezra's action on foreign marriages (Ezra 10.15 where the opposition is minimized). Without our being able to determine with precision just how and when the division between the Jerusalem and Samaritan communities took place, there are clear indications in Samaritan conservatism that a cause of the break could have been a reaction against a too liberal attitude, as it was seen, in Jerusalem. It is only in the second century—not so very much later and possibly the period in which with the destruction of the Samaritan shrine on Mount Gerizim by John Hyrcanus that division was hardened—that we find the Qumran community representing perhaps another conservative break away. But that takes us beyond our chosen period.

The Persian period is still too little known to us for entirely satisfying

judgments to be made on it. The possibility of quite different constructions is indicated by the variety of approaches in recent years; the work of Hanson, Plöger and Morton Smith among others, shows how the same evidence may be differently used in the attempt at providing coherence of presentation. The endeavor of this lecture has been to open up some of the questions, both political and religious, which confront us. The limited textual evidence in the biblical, writings, augmented in some measure by non-biblical texts and illuminated in a degree by archaeological information and by knowledge of the wider international background, still leaves us with alternative options. It is a case where repeated re-examination of the material and judicious use of analogy may help us to ask new questions and hence to penetrate a little further. We may always hope for new discoveries which will clarify the political scene and hence provide a clearer background for our interpretation of the religious thinking of the community; though new discoveries have a way of posing new problems too.

But if the results sometimes seem meager, we may console ourselves with the thought that, in spite of what appears to be a much larger range of evidence both biblical and non-biblical for the pre-exilic period, there too as many unsolved problems of history and interpretation remain. In part indeed the apparent clarity of some of the information may easily suggest a greater certainty than we really have. At least so far as the Persian period is concerned we can know our own ignorance, and in some respects a clear recognition of where we stand may provide a better basis for posing questions.

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