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**DAVID VANDERHOOFT (ED.),
IN CONVERSATION WITH ODED LIPSCHITS, *THE
FALL AND RISE OF JERUSALEM***

**IN CONVERSATION WITH ODED LIPSCHITS,
THE FALL AND RISE OF JERUSALEM
(WINONA LAKE, IND.: EISENBRAUNS, 2005)**

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INTRODUCTION

DAVID S. VANDERHOOFT, GUEST EDITOR
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I am very pleased to serve as guest editor for this number of the *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures*. During the November, 2005 Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature in Philadelphia, a book review panel occupied one of the sessions of the “Literature and History of the Persian Period” group. The book under review was Oded Lipschits’s *The Fall and Rise of Jerusalem: Judah under Babylonian Rule* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2005). The book represents a significant contribution to study not only of the Babylonian period, but also of the following Persian era. At the suggestion of Professor Ehud Ben Zvi (University of Alberta), the editor of the *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures*, the reviews are presented here to a wider audience, and I thank him for his willingness to publish them.

Even before the book appeared in print, five eminent scholars graciously agreed to serve as panelists for the SBL session. They are, in the order of their appearance in the session, Professor Hugh Williamson (Oxford University), Professor Daniel Master (Wheaton College, Wheaton, IL), Professor Rainer Albertz (Münster), Professor Gary Knoppers (Pennsylvania State University), and Professor Tamara Cohn Eskenazi (Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, California). The response of Prof. Lipschits (Tel Aviv University) is also included below. All of these scholars are to be thanked for their original willingness to offer their reviews to the scholarly community just as the book appeared in print, and again now in this edition of the *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures*. They are also especially to be congratulated for their collegiality, incisiveness, and determination to make the SBL session both a valuable exchange of ideas and a venue for meaningful conversation. Jim Eisenbraun also deserves thanks for his willingness to distribute electronic versions of the book to the panelists before its appearance in print.

The peril in publishing such reviews as they were delivered is twofold: the remarks themselves were crafted for oral presentation to an audience that had not yet had the opportunity to engage the book. The reviews therefore tend to be rather more informal and conversational in tone than a normal book review. Second, the oral remarks presume, in a way the written ones cannot, a lively personal setting in which the exchange of ideas is calibrated with a view to looking one’s interlocutor in the eye. Nothing can be done to recreate the latter setting. With respect to the informal aspect of the remarks, the panelists took the opportunity to reshape their remarks slightly for

print, and occasionally to add a footnote or reference. I think, in any case, that the benefits of making the results available outweigh the costs.

I would like also to thank John Wright (Point Loma Nazarene University), the previous program unit chair, for suggesting the idea of reviewing Lipschits' book and for presiding over session.

The large audience that attended the SBL session reinforced by their presence the fact of renewed interest in the period of the late Iron Age and the Persian Period. Lipschits's book opens up new angles of research that others must follow or refine in future analyses of these periods. In his effort to range across numerous disciplinary boundaries—historical, archaeological, epigraphic, textual—he also displays a model for historical scholarship that deserves emulation. The reviews that follow, in any case, give evidence of the successes, limits, and remaining questions that Lipschits's book offers.

**A RESPONSE TO ODED LIPSCHITS, *THE FALL
AND RISE OF JERUSALEM: JUDAH UNDER
BABYLONIAN RULE*, WINONA LAKE:
EISEN BRAUNS, 2005***

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As someone who has written a book on the exilic period a few years ago (*Israel in Exile*, 2004, German ed., 2001), I recognize the enormous difficulties in reconstructing a period for which we have so little historical data. Oded Lipschits is extremely well trained for this difficult task. He is one of the few scholars who is not only a distinguished expert of Israelite archaeology, but also a learned historian of the ancient Near East and even a well trained Biblical scholar who can deal with the biblical text in a sophisticated manner. Therefore, he is able to offer the reader three different approaches. The book consists of two historical chapters (pp. 1-133), two archaeological chapters (pp. 134-271) and one exegetical chapter (pp. 272-359), each of them showing a high academic standard. With regard to the notes, which often cover half or even more of the page, Lipschits's book even tops many German academic studies, sometimes ridiculed for being too sophisticated.

How happy I would have been if I had received this book 10 years earlier, when I wrote the historical chapters of my study! As a Biblical scholar, I looked longingly for archaeological surveys and demographic calculations for Judah in the 6th century, but I was not very successful. In most archaeological reports I read, the Babylonian period was left out. And I am happy to hear now from Lipschits: “Archaeologists generally have not focused their attention on the period when Babylon ruled Israel” (p. 185). So it was not only my fault. It is now Lipschits who is able to present to us the material culture along with detailed demographic calculations for Judah in the 6th century and beyond. I think, therefore, that the main merit of this book is to draw a much more well-founded, a much more detailed, and a much more realistic picture of Judah during the exilic period than it has ever been possible to present before.

* Editor's Note: These remarks also formed the basis for his review of Oded Lipschits, *The Fall and Rise of Jerusalem: Judah under Babylonian Rule* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2005) that was published online in the *Review of Biblical Literature* (2006). http://bookreviews.org/pdf/5066_5512.pdf.

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When I wrote my book, I was confronted with two extremely divergent opinions: On the one hand, one suggested a total destruction of Judah and a high number of deportees, which significantly reduced the population of Judah (W.F. Albright, D.L. Smith); on the other hand, others minimized the extent and impact of the deportations and stressed the continuity of life for the great majority in Judah (M. Noth, H. Barstad). Lipschits can now demonstrate that both opinions were accurate, but with regard to different parts of the country: Compared with the Judean settlements of the 7th century, there were dramatic population losses in Jerusalem and its environs (nearly 90%), large losses in the Southern Judean hills, the Shephelah, and the Negev (about 75%), a halving of the population in Benjamin, but very little reduction in the northern Judean hills. Lipschits reckons with a total loss of 60% and estimates the population of Babylonian Judah at about 40,000 inhabitants, compared with some 110,000 in the late Judaean kingdom (see table p. 269). Thus, according to him, the Babylonian invasion had a severe impact on Judah. Judah lost a lot of people through death, starvation and flight; it lost most of its elite through deportation; and, although its new administrative centre was established in Benjamin, it lost its largest urban centre, Jerusalem. I am happy that my own calculations, which I performed based on more theoretical considerations, are not too different from Lipschits's results (cf. *Israel in Exile*, 81-90).

I am also pleased that Lipschits and I agree on many other details, for example the Babylonian origin of the exilic Deuteronomistic History, the Judaean origin of the Gedaliah account and the Jeremiah biography, and the ideological conflict between these literary units. But, of course, I also differ with him over several points. I would like to name five of them.

1. ASSYRIA, EGYPT AND JOSIAH

According to Lipschits, Egypt immediately established its rule over Palestine and Syria when Assyria withdrew from the Levant (since 627 B.C.E.). Following N. Na'aman, he regards Egypt as a "Successor State" of Assyria and its legal heir (p. 27). For some scholars such a view is reason enough to deny the possibility of a reform under king Josiah (e.g., H. Niehr). Nevertheless, Lipschits assumes a "void in the political arena" (p. 361), but stresses that "the 'intermission' granted to Judah was brief indeed" (p. 362). Thus, he still reckons with a cultic and a limited national reform under Josiah, but thinks that the king was "an Egyptian vassal in his final years" (p. 362). How can we reconcile both views? Were the Egyptians only interested in the coastal plain? If this was the case, when did they interfere in the hill country? How should such Egyptian rule be imaged? Lipschits admits: "It is not clear what steps were taken by Psammetichus and Necho to solidify their rule in central and southern Syria, but it seems that, after the final disappearance of Assyria, they did not have enough time to consolidate their control all the way along the Euphrates" (pp. 362-63). After Nebuchadrezzar's victory in Karkemish "Necho was forced to withdraw inside the borders of Egypt" (p. 363). Thus, can we really

speak of an established Egyptian rule in the Levant? Not by chance, Lipschits mentions this problem among his open questions (p. 376).

2. NEO-BABYLONIAN IMPERIAL POLICY

Lipschits primarily describes the history of the Neo-Babylonians as a rivalry of powers, first with the Assyrians for freedom, then with the Egyptians for ascendancy in Hatti-land. He mentions the constant Babylonian revolts as the main reasons for Assyria's decline (p. 361), but he does not take into consideration the ideological background of Babylonian policy. In my view, the “revenge of Marduk” for the total destruction of Babylon by the Assyrian king Senacherib in the year 689 B.C.E. became a kind of “foundation myth” of the emerging Babylonian state (cf. P.-A. Beaulieu, *The Reign of Nabonidus*, 1989, p. 115) and the ideological engine behind the wars against Assyria and its last ally, Egypt (Albertz, *Israel in Exile*, pp. 47-60). For example, the Babylonians used one-way deportations in contrast to the two-way deportations of the Assyrians, as Lipschits correctly pointed out (p. 48). What was the reason? I think they used one-way deportations because it was not the first aim of the Babylonians to stabilize their empire, but to recover the severe losses and repair the destruction they had suffered in the long civil war with the Assyrians. Lipschits states something similar: “It also appears that the Babylonians used the devastation of this region to leverage the rebuilding of areas in Babylonia that had been laid waste by the Assyrians during their long years of war against Babylon” (p. 365), but he does not link this policy with the Babylonian foundation myth. Thus, I would like to know whether Lipschits thinks that my thesis is wrong or whether he deliberately avoids such religious-ideological issues in his historiography.

In this connection it is interesting that Lipschits, having noticed an economic decline of Judah and the Levant during the Babylonian rule, gives the following explanation: “In contrast to the Assyrian kings, Nabopolassar and Nebuchadrezzar did not consider themselves rulers of the world and did not develop an imperial ideology like the Assyrian kings” (referring to D.S. Vanderhooft, *The Neo-Babylonian Empire*, 1999, 9-59). The consequence was that they did not invest great resources in establishing their rule in the areas conquered. “This policy led to a drastic decline throughout the Levant in the economy and trade ...” (p. 188). Here Lipschits himself thinks of an ideological background of Babylonian policy. I think he is basically right. As “kings of Babylon,” the Babylonian rulers were only interested to win tribute and human resources for the development of Babylonia. Only Nabonidus, who took over the Assyrian title “king of the four world regions,” tried to change this Babylonian policy to develop the remote Harran province by using the resources of the centre, but he failed (cf. Albertz, *Israel in Exile*, pp. 60-70). In my view, even this unilateral economical policy of the Babylonians can be understood in view of their “foundation myth.” For me, Lipschits’s remark is very interesting that apart from some hints at some Babylonian wine and oil production in Gibeon and Mizpah (*mwšb* seals, *gb'� gdr* inscriptions) there is “no historical or archaeological evidence of any attempt by the Babylonians to develop

the region or to establish a logistical scheme to reinforce their control” (p. 366).

Apart from that, Lipschits stresses a change in Nebuchadrezzar’s policy after the anti-Babylonian coalition in 594 B.C.E. After interfering previously as little as possible in the internal political structure of the vassal states, the king now decided to make “them provinces under direct Babylonian control On the border between the Babylonian and the Egyptian empires, a buffer zone consisting of impaired and weakened provinces was created” (p. 365). I think Lipschits is right, but I do not see much between this and the imperial Assyrian policy of the three stages of dependency; only the loss of interest in developing well organized and flourishing provinces is new.

3. THE DEPORTATIONS

Lipschits accepts the information of 2 Kgs 24:14 that the deportees of the year 597 numbered “approximately 10,000 people” (p. 59). Later, he regards this verse as a literary intrusion from the early post-exilic period, but he thinks that it gives a generalized total of all other figures named in the texts (7,000+1,000 in 2 Kgs 25:16; and 3,032 in Jer 52:28). Compared with a loss of 60,000 people, which Lipschits estimated on the basis of the archaeological evidence, the number of 10,000 deportees is very small. Is it possibly that such a large number—50,000 people—were killed or lost as refugees? As far as I have seen, Lipschits, following the Books of Kings, gives no numbers for the deportation of 586. I regard the 10,000 people of the secondary verse 2 Kgs 24:14 as the number of the second deportation, but it was deliberately displaced lest it interfere with the impression given by 2 Kgs 25:21 that “all Judah was exiled” (cf. *Israel in Exile*, p. 90). In this case, we would have to add the numbers and would have approximately 20,000 deportees. It remains unclear to me why Lipschits has chosen the minimalistic solution concerning the extent of deportations.

I think Lipschits is right to state: “Among them (the exiles) were many of the nation’s elite, some of the top military units, and craftsmen with technical skills” (p. 364). If he concludes, however, that with the deportation of the elite “for the first time, the nation was split along social and class lines” (p. 367), then in my opinion he overstates the social effect of the deportations. He admits that a smaller part of the elite, like the Shaphanides, Jeremiah and several military leaders remained in Judah (pp. 102-107). There are clear indications that the Babylonians drew a distinction between those Judaeans who supported the revolt against them, and those who did not. So they probably deported mainly those elite who were members of the nationalistic party, and apart from them all others whom they did need for economic reasons. In my opinion, the elite was affected more by the deportations than other groups in society precisely because it was more involved in politics than the lower social classes.

4. THE REIGN OF GEDALIAH

I totally agree with Lipschits that the reign of Gedaliah was a very important factor for the history of Judah in the exilic period (pp. 84-

102). It constituted a real chance for a non-monarchic restoration, as the Gedaliah account in Jer 40:7-41:8 suggests. I am therefore all the more surprised to notice that Lipschits limits Gedaliah’s rule to “a bit longer than seven weeks after the destruction” (p. 101). Even if one grants that his rule could already have started in Mizpah some months before the final occupation of Jerusalem, it would have been extremely short. How could it achieve such an importance?

Of course, Jer 41:1 does not mention a particular year for the murder of Gedaliah; but Lipschits’s conclusion that the late summer of the same year must be meant, because Jer 40:12 does not mention the olive harvest—which starts in Benjamin during Tishri (Sept./Oct.)—is not very convincing, since the harvest of olives is not mentioned in any Biblical narrative. Not celebrated by a feast, it obviously stood more in the mental background.

In my opinion, it is much more realistic to date the murder of Gedaliah in the year 582, when a third deportation took place (Jer 52:30). For this event, Lipschits cannot give any explanation. Likewise he overlooks the fact that Jehoiachin must have been taken into prison before he could be released from it by Amel-Marduk (2 Kgs 25:29). What could be the cause for the imprisonment? In my opinion it was the murder of Gedaliah, when at the same time several Babylonian officials were killed (cf. Albertz, *Israel in Exile*, pp. 94-95; 103-04).

5. DTRH AND THE JEREMIAH NARRATIVES

I fundamentally agree with Lipschits’s exegesis of the exilic edition of the DtrH (Dtr²), the Gedaliah narrative, and the Jeremiah biography (Jer 37:1-43:7*), apart from some minor differences. And I am glad to see that Lipschits has also discovered the controversies that were furthered through these literary works in spite of their common Deuteronomistic shape. I do not believe in a late pre-exilic edition of the DtrH (cf. *Israel in Exile*, pp. 276-78); therefore, I have my doubts whether a first exilic edition (Dtr²) can be dated in the early exilic period, as Lipschits has done (pp. 289; 304). In any case, Lipschits’s proposal that the passages on Gedaliah’s reign (2 Kgs 25:22-16) and the release of Jehoiachin (25:27-30) should be seen as later additions (pp. 297-98), because the history could well have ended with the final statement that all Judah went to exile (25:21), is a good idea. In addition, his exegesis that these additions show how the basically nationalistic exiles in Babylon became ready to accept the existence of those who remained in Judah and wanted to come to terms with the Babylonian authority (p. 298) has some basis in reality. However, I already see a similar hope for better co-operation with the Babylonians in 1 Kgs 8:50. Should we regard this verse as a later addition too? Thus, there are still some open questions.

Lipschits takes 2 Kgs 24:13-14 and 25:12, which consist of the statement that only the “poorest of the land” remained in Judah, as a late “nomistic addition” to DtrH, by which the returnees to Zion wanted “to depreciate the value of those who remained” (p. 302). Admittedly, 24:14 and perhaps also 24:13 are insertions, but not necessary that late. For 25:12, I cannot see any literary critical indication that this verse was later inserted; rather, verse 24:13 depends on 25:12.

So this last stage of redaction, which Lipschits has tried to reconstruct, is founded on a slippery slope.

With regard to the Jeremiah narratives, Lipschits reconstructs in detail how an original account of Gedaliah's rule (Jer 40:7-41:18) was redactionally inserted in the Jeremiah biography (37:11-21; 38:14-28; 39:3.13-14; 42:43:7*). Although I see the redactional process a little bit differently (*Israel in Exile*, p. 318), I agree with Lipschits's material statements: "The account of Gedaliah's time and the biography of Jeremiah reflect a tendency toward reconciliation with Babylonian authority"; they "emphasize the possibility of national rehabilitation under Babylonian rule"; and "their authors opposed all kinds of political activism" (p. 349). I would only like to ask, whether the phrase "political activism" is correct; of course, Gedaliah and Jeremiah were politically active too, but in a pro-Babylonian direction. So I would propose: "nationalistic activism."

Lipschits wants to date the combined Jeremiah-Gedaliah narrative around 550 B.C.E., where I dated my first edition of the Deuteronomistic book of Jeremiah (Jer 1-25*). On p. 335 he is bothered that I date the second edition, to which the narratives belong (Jer 1-45*), a little bit later (545-540; cf. *Israel in Exile*, p. 318). But that looks to me like a misunderstanding; I spoke of the second Dtr. Book of Jeremiah (JerD²), which contained much more than the Jeremiah-Gedaliah narratives. The composition and redaction of the latter could have happened earlier, of course, be it in 550 B.C.E. or even earlier, after the pupils of Jeremiah probably returned from Egypt during the Amasis usurpation (571-567; cf. Jer 44:28).

That leads me to a methodological problem, which I see in Lipschits's exegetical chapter: This chapter is restricted to "Perceptions and Trends in Biblical Historiography," that is, a comparative exegesis of DtrH and the Gedaliah-Jeremiah narrative. But comparing the literary historical development of both pieces of historiography through the period of exile, Lipschits is not aware of the fact that the Gedaliah-Jeremiah-narrative had already became a part of the larger book of Jeremiah, at least by 540 B.C.E., and cannot be interpreted any longer as a unit on its own. There are now Dtr. insertions into the narrative (e.g. 37:1-2; 39:4-10.15-18*; 40:1-3*; 42:6-10-16.18.22; not noticed as such by Lipschits), and there are other chapters like Jer 18 and Jer 29 belonging to the same literary level, which supplemented the view of a possible restoration and that went beyond the older historiographical material. So the restricted focus on the "Biblical Historiography" turns out to be problematic. Methodologically speaking, the later stages of DtrH should have been compared with JerD (or at least JerD²).

In any event, I am very thankful that Oded Lipschits included this important component of exilic literary production and theological discussion into his book, which is so rich in archaeological and historical data and analysis. At present, many Old Testament scholars tend to isolate literature and theological thought from political and social history. Oded Lipschits counters this tendency and combines both aspects of ancient Israel's historical reality in a sophisticated manner.

I congratulate Oded Lipschits for this wonderful book. I am sure it will become a standard for all further studies on the exilic period.

REFLECTIONS ON ODED LIPSCHITS, THE FALL AND RISE OF JERUSALEM

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I wish to thank Oded Lipschits for the rich new data and insights that his book contains and, also, for the kind of balanced and balancing synthesis that his work offers. By “his work” I do not only refer to the book which is the focus of this paper, but also the conferences he has organized over the years on the subject of Judah and the Judeans during the Persian Period. In both venues, Lipschits promotes collaborative work that is both rare and necessary.

In this excellent book, *The Fall and Rise of Jerusalem: Judah under Babylonian Rule*, Lipschits strides boldly through the minefield of politicized scholarship. He does so sensitively and sensibly, and presents a clear, cogent and constructive analysis of the Babylonian period in Judah.

By “constructive” I mean that in addition to constructing models for investigating the historical features of the period, Lipschits also models a non-positivistic use of biblical narrative in conjunction with archaeological data. The synthesis of the relevant information that he presents brings order to a chaotic time and almost equally chaotic scholarly debates. The book, therefore, is indispensable for all future studies of the topic.

Fortunately for those of us who concentrate on the Persian period, Lipschits extends his fine analysis beyond the scope of the Babylonian period to include aspects of the postexilic era. My paper is a brief reflection on how Lipschits’s book contributes to the interpretation of the postexilic era, especially to Ezra Nehemiah’s (EN) depiction of the era.

The term that Lipschits uses for the early Persian Era is “Return to Zion,” an English translation of the Hebrew designation *shivat Zion*. But there is a built-in, inevitable, irony here because Lipschits maintains that there was no real “return” (at least not in the sixth century B.C.E.). He writes:

The ‘Return to Zion’ appears to have had no demographic impact on the land of Judah: no change in population density is detectable between the end of the sixth century and the beginning of the fifth century B.C.E. Moreover, the dwindling of the total population of the province after the destruction of Jerusalem continued into the beginning of the Persian Period: the population of the province of

Judah in the middle of the fifth century B.C.E. may be estimated at approximately 30,000 people (Lipschits, 372).

The estimated number for the province immediately after the destruction of Jerusalem that Lipschits suggests is about 40,000. Lipschits supposes that at most several thousands of the nation’s elite returned to Judah at the beginning of the Persian Period, but nothing more. Jerusalem itself remained very poor.

At first glance Lipschits’s picture of the period shatters that of EN. At a second glance, however, looked at critically, his work suggests fresh ways for understanding aspects of EN in the context of the fifth century.

In this short response to the book I will focus only on the interesting light that Lipschits sheds on Ezra 1, a section that most scholars consider as the latest section of EN, ever since H. G. M. Williamson’s influential article on the subject.¹ At a time when the consensus tilts increasingly towards late (that is, Hellenistic) dating of all of EN, but especially Ezra 1-6, Lipschits’s analysis actually highlights other possibilities.

Although Lipschits himself does not say so, and may not even agree with my conclusion, his work helps make sense of otherwise puzzling details in Cyrus’s decree in Ezra 1:2-4 and in the narrator’s summary of the response to it in 1:5-6.

Let me begin with observations that Joseph Blenkinsopp made a few years ago, in two conferences organized by Lipschits (one in Tel Aviv and one in Heidelberg); the observations are now included in the papers from the conferences.² Blenkinsopp has called attention to the implicit hostilities between Judah and Benjamin that are reflected in biblical texts. He examined texts that led him to conclude that such hostility existed in the Neo-Babylonian and early Persian periods (Blenkinsopp, 2005, 624-643). According to Blenkinsopp, the assassination of Gedaliah “signaled the beginning of a period of Benjaminite-Judean hostility which continued throughout the first century of Persian rule” (Blenkinsopp, 2005, 629). The probable existence of a cult center in Bethel seems to be relevant in this connection. According to Blenkinsopp, Bethel remained a cult center – possibly *the* cult center – in the Neo-Babylonian period and into the early Persian period. Its proximity to Mizpah, the administrative center after the fall of Jerusalem, enhanced its importance (Blenkinsopp, 2003, p. 99).

The ways that Lipschits’s book highlights the reversal of fortune of these two areas – Judah and Benjamin – provide supportive evidence or reasons for this enmity. Combining literary sources and archaeological data, Lipschits concludes that Mizpah in Benjamin was established as a Babylonian administrative center even before Jerusalem fell. On the eve

¹ “The Composition of Ezra i-iv,” *JTS* (1983) 33:1-30.

² “Bethel in the Neo-Babylonian Period,” in *Judah and the Judeans in the New-Babylonian Period*, ed. O. Lipschits and J. Blenkinsopp (Eisenbrauns, 2003), 93-107, and “Benjamin Traditions Read in the Early Persian Period,” in *Judah and the Judeans in the Persian Period*, ed. O. Lipschits and M. Oeming (Eisenbrauns, 2005), 629-645.

of the destruction “Most of the inhabitants of the province gathered in the region of Benjamin and in the environs of Bethlehem” (Lipschits, 182). Lipschits notes that “Archaeological evidence from the Benjamin region covers the entire sixth century B.C.E. and reveals almost complete settlement continuity from the end of the Iron Age to the Babylonian and Persian Periods ” (182).

The continuity allows scholars to discover that Benjamin did not suffer the same dire fate at the hands of the Babylonians that Judah experienced. Benjamin most likely cooperated with the Babylonians and thus remained stable. Therefore, “Many of those who did not believe that the rebellion could succeed took advantage of the respite to ‘go to the land of Benjamin’ (Jer 37:12). They joined the residents of the Benjamin region who had from the start practiced a policy of capitulation to the Babylonians. Jeremiah of Anathoth also tried to escape from Jerusalem” (Lipschits, 366).

Lipschits’s fine exegesis of the last chapters of 2 Kings, and the comparison that he draws between that version and the Gedaliah material in Jeremiah, support a parting of the way between Judah and Benjamin. And the archaeological and demographic analysis that he provides further contributes to such an interpretation.

When destruction came, Lipschits writes,

the land was *not* left uninhabited. . . . Judah apparently registered a decline of 60% in settled area. This means that, although 110,000 people lived in Judah at the end of the kingdom, only 40,000 remained in the Babylonian province that was established in the same area.

The archaeological evidence shows that the time of the Babylonian war against Judah is a sharp cut-off point marking the termination of one of the characteristic features of Judean settlement: large, important cities were laid waste, and urban life effectively came to an end. In contrast, the majority of rural settlement had been in the Judean highlands, particularly in the area between Beth-Zur and the Benjamin region; this continued almost unchanged (Lipschits, 368).

Mizpah, however, became a prominent center and Benjamin represented the continued existence in the land, i.e., “those who remained.” The Motzah seal impressions are among the signs of Babylonian provincial administration located in Benjamin.

Things changed in the Persian period, and seals impressions are one of several archaeological data that illustrate this change. Lipschits writes: “A comparison of the distribution data of the *mwšb* and *yhwđ* seal impressions shows that during the Persian Period a sharp change took place in the settlement pattern and the location of the province’s primary center” (179).

In the Babylonian period, “approximately 80% of all the *mwšb* seal impressions were found there [in Benjamin], with only 5% of the *yhwđ* seal.” However, soon Jerusalem reverted to its former importance and “the region of Benjamin lost its importance as an administrative center” (Lipschits, 179-180).

Thus, 80% of the *yhwđ* seal impressions were discovered in Jerusalem and Ramat-Rahel (Christoph 1993: 187–89, and additional

literature there).³ This set of data was one of Na’aman’s main arguments for his theory, according to which the Persian rulers favored Ramat-Rahel as an administrative center instead of Mizpah, after Jerusalem once again became the center of the Persian province (Lipschits, 180).⁴

In due course, “Mizpah declined in importance and became the site of a small, impoverished, unwalled settlement” (Lipschits, 181).

Lipschits considers his data to be in conflict with certain material in EN, especially the lists of Ezra 2 and Nehemiah 7. Regarding these chapters, he writes: “The archaeological data show that the population of the northern Judean highland during the Persian Period remained as it had been during the sixth century (about one quarter of the total population of the province)” (Lipschits, 373).

He continues: “There is no evidence of a deportation of these dimensions at the beginning of the sixth century B.C.E., nor is there any evidence of a massive return . . . On the contrary, the archaeological data from the end of the sixth and beginning of the fifth centuries B.C.E., . . . show that there was a decrease in the population, particularly in Benjamin” (Lipschits, 160).

Lipschits suggests that the population shifted to the Shephelah, which shows an increase (Lipschits, 373). But could we not also conclude that Judah is probably revitalized at the expense of Benjamin, and that this accounts for demographic shifts?

Lipschits’s work illuminates the first chapters of EN and offers a correlation between his findings and EN. Given Blenkinsopp’s observations about what he calls the Benjaminite-Judaean hostility, which (according to Blenkinsopp) continued throughout the first century of Persian rule, we can see how Lipschits’s book supplies the data and interpretations that can account for these hostilities: EN can be understood (in part) as a response to such hostilities.

I propose, therefore, that the first two chapters of Ezra illustrate a response to the kind of Judah-Benjamin enmity that Blenkinsopp observes and that Lipschits’s book explains, namely the different histories of the two areas: the ascendance of Benjamin and Mizpah during Jerusalem’s demise, and the subsequent reversal of fortunes.

Lipschits’s work can account for why Cyrus’s edict in Ezra 1 repeatedly emphasizes that the authorized temple is to be restored “in Jerusalem which is in Judah.” (twice in two verses, with Jerusalem mentioned 3 times; Ezra 1:2-3); it is because there are sanctuaries elsewhere in Benjamin, especially in Bethel. Jerusalem’s competition is not the Samarian temple (as the older interpretations supposed) but rather the status of Benjamin and its cultic site or sites. This accounts also for the repeated emphasis on Benjamin in precisely these early chapters.

³ The reference is to J.R. Christoph, “The Yehud Stamped Jar Handle Corpus: Implications for the History of Postexilic Palestine,” unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Ann Arbor, 1993.

⁴ Lipschits lists cross-references to N. Na’aman, “An Assyrian Residence at Ramat Rahel?” *TA* 28/2 (2001) 260-280, as well as to the following section in his own book: §4.3.2a, esp. pp. 213–215.

In the interpretation that follows from Lipschits's study, the writer of Ezra 1:1-4 is responding to Jerusalem's co-option of the provincial center, or the reconfiguration of the center in relation to Benjamin. For this reason it is important to EN to show that the residents of Benjamin agreed to participate in re-building Jerusalem's temple (1:5).

The question of the unity and cooperation between Judah and Benjamin is, thus, an early Persian period issue. Understood in this way, the issues that Ezra 1-2 addresses can be situated in the early years of the Persian period when the need to reunite these two groups around Jerusalem (instead of Benjamin) would have been an actual challenge. Such a debate would not be as pertinent in the Hellenistic period, for example, when other conflicts occupied center stage.

Lipschits writes at one point: "It should be noted that there is no satisfactory explanation for the absence of Mizpah in the list of the returnees" (Lipschits, 167, n. 111). But Lipschits's analysis has given us the best explanation of all for such an absence: there is no "return" to Mizpah because there was no exile from Mizpah. Moreover, the concern with Benjamin accounts for the expansion in the list of returnees, in particular the lists of the men from different towns in Benjamin (Ezra 2:22-28), a point that I argue elsewhere.⁵ These men need not be considered as returnees but as Benjaminites who supported the building of Judah. In other words, they are included to emphasize that Benjaminites *also* "went up," and supported Jerusalem's restoration, that is, the building of the house of YHVH in "Jerusalem which is in Judah."

Let me make clear that I am not arguing that Cyrus's edict is an actual sixth century document, or even fifth century document, or that it is historically reliable. Rather, I am suggesting that its formulation, along with the proleptic summary in Ezra 1:5-6, grows out of an attempt to depict or to forge reunification between Judah and Benjamin.

We need to bear in mind what Ezra 1:5-6 says and what it does not say, as well as what the edict does and does not. Neither speaks of a return. They speak of supporting the building effort. We read: "And they rose up, the household heads of Judah and Benjamin and the priests and the Levites, all whose spirit God has roused, to build the house of YHVH which is in Jerusalem" (1:5). All who remain (In Babylon? In Benjamin?) are expected to support them, and, according to Ezra 1:6, they do so.

These issues about the relations between Judah and Benjamin may be still in ferment when Chronicles is written, since the particular combination of Judah and Benjamin is vocabulary that is distinctive to EN and Chronicles (and I defer to Joseph Blenkinsopp and Gary Knoppers on this subject). But to the best of my knowledge, the tension between Judah and Benjamin does not appear to be an issue in the literature of the later Hellenistic periods. This suggests that the issues that Ezra 1 and 2 address are those of the fifth century B.C.E., and we can see this possibility more clearly thanks to Lipschits's book.

⁵ See T. C. Eskenazi, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, Anchor Bible, forthcoming.

Let me conclude: On the one hand, Lipschits's masterful book *The Fall and Rise of Jerusalem: Judah under Babylonian Rule*, which does not aim specifically at explicating EN, fractures in some ways the picture that EN so carefully pieces together. On the other hand, Lipschits's excellent book nonetheless also illuminates why EN crafts the story of the Persian period as it does.

For this and for much else, Oded, thank you! *Todah rabbah*.

**THE DEMISE OF JERUSALEM, THE
DE-URBANIZATION OF JUDAH, AND THE
ASCENT OF BENJAMIN: REFLECTIONS ON
ODED LIPSCHITS' *THE FALL AND RISE OF
JERUSALEM***

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1. OVERVIEW AND GENERAL ASSESSMENT

One of the strengths of Lipschits's recently published book is its ample use of archaeology, textual criticism, source criticism, redaction criticism, historical geography, and Northwest Semitic epigraphy to shed new light on the Neo-Babylonian and early Persian periods in ancient Judah.⁶ Lipschits has performed a real service to the profession by bringing together so much data, especially material evidence from various archaeological excavations and site surveys, all of it bearing on the study of a difficult and highly contested subject. His book is well-written, clearly-organized, and carefully-developed. Methodologically, his work pursues the intricate relationships between scripture and artifact, text and tell, written remains and material remains. In this respect, I think that it is helpful that Lipschits draws upon sources as diverse as the LXX of Jeremiah, the *mmyh* seal impressions, the Zenon papyri, and 1 Maccabees to engage the nature of life in Jerusalem, Judah, and Benjamin during the Neo-Babylonian and Persian periods.

Given the nature of the written materials, both biblical and extra-biblical, the many gaps in our knowledge, and the many different interpretations of the archaeological data, this is a rather complicated enterprise requiring considerable methodological sophistication. Lipschits is aware of these difficulties, but he does not let them get in the way of pursuing his larger task of historical reconstruction. Indeed, I think that it is fair to say that even in many of those cases in which the evidence is still somewhat limited or ambiguous, Lipschits's goal is to push the discussion forward by boldly proposing new theories to bridge the gaps and clarify the ambiguities.

⁶ This text is only slightly changed from the version of the talk I gave in the Persian Period History and Literature Section of the Society of Biblical Literature in November 2005. I have added a few sentences of clarification, as well as a few footnotes for the convenience of readers.

Some might contend after reading this book that Lipschits presses the evidence too far or is too optimistic in assessing our ability to ascertain the precise function, date, and relevance of certain epigraphic, archaeological, and literary materials. Some may wonder whether the grand attempt to marshal all of the available evidence into a clear and comprehensive synthesis results in an overly-tidy reconstruction of Judaean demography and administration during this era. Whatever the case, I am grateful for the bold attempt to shed new light on this neglected era in post-monarchic Judah. Better to push the discussion forward in a daring way than to repeat old canards about this epoch being a virtual *tabula rasa* in the history of Judah.

The sustained focus on the land of Judah and on Jerusalem, as opposed to shifting attention away from Judah to the diaspora (following the storyline of the historical books), is very helpful in getting a grip on the continuities and discontinuities in the history of the southern Levant. Also quite useful are the specific comparisons Lipschits draws between the literary evidence pertaining to the borders of Judah during the late Iron Age and that pertaining to the borders of Judah during the Hellenistic Age, because these comparisons shed light on the transformations that occur during the Achaemenid era. Finally, Lipschits's command of the secondary literature pertaining to several sub-fields is impressive.

The writer's research needs to be seen against the background of two distinct trends in the study of the Neo-Babylonian period. One position, represented recently by the work of Ephraim Stern, holds that the invasions of Nebuchadnezzar resulted in a very extensive, if not complete, population gap in the southern Levant during the Neo-Babylonian period.⁷ Seen from this particular perspective, whole sections of the kingdom of Judah became a kind of wasteland in the aftermath of the Babylonian campaigns. Other scholars, most famously Robert Carroll and Hans Barstad, have reacted very strongly against the thesis typified in the work of Stern. As the titles of their works imply, "The Myth of the Empty Land" (by Carroll) and *The Myth of the Empty Land: A Study in the History and Archaeology of Judah during the "Exilic" Period* (by Barstad), these scholars have argued for major continuity in the occupation of the land in spite of the Babylonian victories against the Judaean kingdom.⁸ Asserting that only a small elite was deported from the land, these writers argue that life, for those who survived, went on pretty much as usual.

In the context of this larger debate, the research of another scholar should be mentioned, David Vanderhooft. In this substantial and well-argued book, *The Neo-Babylonian Empire and Babylon in the Latter Prophets*,

⁷ Stern's views may be found in his *Material Culture of the Land of the Bible in the Persian Period 538-332 B.C.* (Warminster: Aris and Phillips / Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1982). A recent defense and extension of his views may be found in his *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible, vol. II: The Assyrian, Babylonian, and Persian Periods 732-332 BCE* (ABRL; New York: Doubleday, 2001) 303-50.

⁸ R. Carroll, "The Myth of the Empty Land," *Semeia* 59 (1992) 79-93; H. Barstad, *The Myth of the Empty Land: A Study in the History and Archaeology of Judah During the "Exilic" Period* (Symbolae Osloenses, Fasc. Suppl. 28; Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, 1998).

Vanderhooft compares the very limited amount of inscriptional material available from the Neo-Babylonian kings with the testimony provided by the late Judahite prophets.⁹ Vanderhooft's position is much more nuanced and focused on a particular set of issues than those advocated by the aforementioned scholars, but his work overlaps with theirs in so far as he questions the extent to which one can posit a continuously active and coherent Babylonian administrative presence in the land of Judah during the exilic period.

The general background of these scholarly debates provides a suitable context for understanding the force of Lipschits' work. He presents a highly-nuanced picture of the various regions in Judah that were affected by the events of the late eighth, late seventh, and early sixth centuries BCE. Although destruction levels have been detected at many Judahite sites dating to the sixth century, there is also evidence for continuation of settlement at others, especially north of Jerusalem. As Lipschits points out, large areas of Benjamin and some areas of the northern Judahite hill country, including the area south of Jerusalem, seem to have been unaffected by the early sixth century destructions. Indeed, a Benjaminite town—Mizpah—becomes the administrative capital of Judah during Gedaliah's rule in the wake of the destruction of Jerusalem and the downfall of the Davidic dynasty (2 Kgs 25:22-24; Jer 40:5-12; Neh 3:7).

According to the author, Jerusalem and its environs remained completely empty during the Neo-Babylonian period. There is thus a certain irony in the title of Lipschits's book. According to his reconstruction, the fall of Jerusalem was swift and disastrous in all respects, but the rise of Jerusalem was very much a long and drawn-out process. If the demise of the city occurred within just a few decades time, the recovery took centuries to complete. Even at its peak during the Persian period, Jerusalem did not exceed 3,000 people. The bulk of his book is thus not about Jerusalem per se, but about the rest of the areas traditionally associated with Judah and Benjamin. In his estimation, the kingdom of Judah suffered a decline of approximately 60% in settled area and a precipitous decrease in population from about 110,000 down to approximately 40,000 in the transition from the Neo-Babylonian to the Persian era. Many of those who survived the Babylonian campaigns no longer lived in large urban centers, but rather in small villages and rural areas. Judah suffered from a marked reduction in geographic area (especially in its frontier areas, such as the Negev, the Jordan Valley, and the Shephelah), a sharp drop-off in residential population, devastation to many large towns, and a large transfer of the remaining inhabitants from urban to rural areas. This process of ruralization was never effectively reversed during Achaemenid times. Most Judaeans continued to reside on farms and in small villages and hamlets.

Nevertheless, the land was hardly empty. In fact, the above statistics are deceptive in some respects, because there was terrible damage in some areas, but hardly any damage in others. In this respect,

⁹ *The Neo-Babylonian Empire and Babylon in the Latter Prophets* (HSM 59; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999).

the area of Benjamin plays a crucial role in Lipschits’ study. Benjamin’s relative prominence during the Neo-Babylonian era diminished somewhat during the course of the Persian period as other areas and sites, such as Jerusalem, began to recover from the Babylonian onslaughts, but Benjamin retained significant importance in the larger context of the province of Judah. In sum, Lipschits argues that both the extent of the Babylonian deportations and the extent of the returns during the Achaemenid era have been greatly exaggerated in much of biblical scholarship.

2. SPECIFIC COMMENTS

In what follows, I would like to offer a series of questions and reflections on select aspects of Lipschits’s work. Some of these comments will reinforce points made by the author, while others will seek further clarification or qualification. Recognizing that others reviewing this book will focus on archeology and the relevance of certain literary texts, such as Ezra-Nehemiah, I will focus most, albeit not all, of my attention on Kings, Jeremiah, and Chronicles.

First, with respect to the archaeology of the region during the late Iron Age and early Persian period, Lipschits draws upon the results of both site surveys, which try to capture long-term demographic trends, and rural archaeology, which studies life in small towns, villages, and farmsteads. Both of these approaches promise to inform us about demographic trends and have the potential to correct some of the broader historical claims made by those focusing solely on the results of tell-centered archaeology.

In this context, I think that it would be helpful if Lipschits would engage the results of Avi Faust’s research in a more sustained way.¹⁰ Faust’s work in rural archaeology draws a contrast between the situation in rural Judah and that in rural Samaria, discussing a large number of farmsteads—as well as some hamlets and villages—that have been excavated in the Samaria highlands. Almost all of these Iron Age rural sites exhibit continuity into the Persian period. By contrast, there is a dramatic drop-off in Judah. This is an important comparison, because some have claimed that the Neo-Babylonian campaigns only involved the larger urban sites and not many of the smaller villages and

¹⁰ Among the relevant studies are Faust’s “The Rural Community in Ancient Israel during Iron Age II,” *BASOR* 317 (2000) 17-39; idem, “Jerusalem’s Countryside during the Iron Age II—Persian Period Transition,” in *New Studies on Jerusalem: Proceedings of the Seventh Conference*, ed. A. Faust and E. Baruch (Ramat-Gan: Ingeborg Rennert Center for Jewish Studies, Bar Ilan University, 2001) 83-89 (Hebrew); idem, “Judah in the Sixth Century B.C.E.: A Rural Perspective,” *PEQ* 135 (2003) 37-53; idem, “The Farmstead in the Highlands of Iron Age II Israel,” in *The Rural Landscape of Ancient Israel*, ed. A. M. Maeir, S. Dar, Z. Safrai (BAR International Series 1121; Oxford: Archaeopress, 2003) 91-103; idem, “Farmsteads in the Foothills of Western Samaria: A Reexamination;” in “*I will speak the riddles of ancient times*: Archaeological and Historical Studies in Honor of Amihai Mazar on the Occasion of his Sixtieth Birthday, eds. A.M Maeir and P. De Miroschedji (Winona Lake, Ind. : Eisenbrauns, 2006). All of these works deal with the insights afforded by rural archaeology.

hinterland of Judah. Faust's study argues for an extremely low continuity in the rural sphere. I know enough from Lipschits' footnotes that he avidly disagrees with Faust, but it would be useful to pursue this matter and explain why. The issues very much affect how one should think about the material consequences of the Babylonian campaigns in Judah.

Second, Lipschits's work devotes extensive attention to exploring the import of certain texts in Jeremiah which deal with the consequences of the Babylonian campaigns. This is one of the real strengths of those sections of his book devoted to literary issues, because these texts in Jeremiah make no attempt to obscure the fact that only a portion of the people were deported (e.g., Jer 37:12; 40:7-12).¹¹ The compositional history of the relevant section within the book of Jeremiah (37:1-43:13) is a major topic in its own right, one that goes beyond any possible discussion here. Nevertheless, my question focuses on whether the points made by Lipschits about the Gedaliah narrative (embedded within Jer 40:7-41:18) and the larger biography of Jeremiah (embedded within Jer 37:11-12; 38:14-28; 39:3, 12 and 42:1-43:7) could be sharpened and extended?¹²

The Gedaliah narrative, concentrating on the people who remained in the land and those who had gone down into Egypt, depicts the process that led to Gedaliah's assassination and intimates the negative consequences of this murder for any possibility of (continuing) reconstruction. The latter work, the so-called biography of Jeremiah, depicts the prophet's activities from the time of the first destruction, including his repeated warnings to Zedekiah and his officials, until the time of the prophet's forced-exile into Egypt. As Lipschits points out, these sources blame Zedekiah, Ishmael, Johanan, and their associates for missing a crucial series of opportunities to enhance the condition of the people in the land. The biography also casts special aspersions on Johanan, the army officers, and their supporters, because they adamantly refuse Jeremiah's counsel to stay put in the land and not to run away to Egypt.

I wonder whether one function of these reconstructed literary narratives is to focus more attention on the culpability of the officials, army officers, and all their supporters than in the short treatment in Kings (2 Kgs 25:22-26). Zedekiah is, after all, also cast in a negative light in the Deuteronomistic redaction of Kings. There, he receives a blanket negative evaluation (2 Kgs 24:20a) and his reign is inevitably associated with the highly destructive consequences of Nebuchadnezzar's invasion (2 Kgs 24:20b-25:21*).¹³ The placement of

¹¹ Note also the story of how the prophet purchases real estate (Jer 32:6-15) and wishes to remain in the land despite the deportation of many Judahites and the assassination of Gedaliah (Jer 39:14; 40:1-6; 42:10; cf. 2 Kgs 25:25-26).

¹² In Lipschits's reconstruction, a series of stories (38:1-13; parts of 40:1-6; 39:15-18) and scattered comments were later added to round off the work. Like many scholars, Lipschits views the shorter version of Jeremiah found in LXX Jeremiah as older (and more historically reliable) than the longer version found in MT Jeremiah.

¹³ This is despite the fact that the exilic Deuteronomist singles out an earlier monarch, Manasseh, as responsible for Judah's captivity (2 Kgs 21:9-15; 23:26-

the later appendix of 2 Kgs 25:22-26 near the end of the book underscores the folly of those who oppose Gedaliah (so Lipschits); it may present the Egyptian *gôlâ* community in a negative light by creating an *inclusio* marking the violation of the Deuteronomic warning against the people’s return to Egypt.¹⁴ In any case, Kings does not mention any officials, high or otherwise, who influence Zedekiah’s insurrection.¹⁵ Nor does Kings contain any reassurances to the survivors in the land, following the time of Gedaliah’s murder, informing such survivors that things may still go well for them if they properly accommodate themselves to Babylonian rule.

The Gedaliah story and the Jeremiah biography thus highlight the stubborn refusal by royal courtiers, army officers, and certain other Judahites to accept the possible benefits of Babylonian hegemony as these are spelled out by the weeping prophet. If such texts point out the folly of those who eventually depart the land for other lands, principally Babylon and Egypt, one has to ask a question about the function of this literature—*cui bono*, “to whose benefit?” It would seem that these literary narratives favor the position of the remnant of Judah, those who remained in the land and thus adhered to the counsel of Jeremiah. To be sure, the portrait of royal indecision in Jeremiah casts Zedekiah in a bad light (inasmuch as he is convinced to act against his own inclinations by rebelling against his Babylonian overlord), but the same material seems to cast the anti-Babylonian groups in an even worse light. The attention given to the officials, officers, and their followers makes them culpable for their own fate. By broadening the range of responsibility from the king himself to encompass a number of anti-Babylonian factions, the writers indict many of those who left the land, because these people chose to abandon their own estates. One function of such literature may be to justify the loss of land holdings to those who remained in Judah. By implication, the survivors left in the land are the ones left to deal with the mess left by those who exited the land.

My third comment about Lipschits’s book is really a question about the historiographic focus of the last chapters of Kings. This question was inspired by the detailed and highly nuanced archaeological discussions found in several of Lipschits’s chapters dealing with the material evidence for destruction in some areas of Judah, but not so much in others. These data led me to return to the portrait of the Babylonian invasions found in Kings as it relates to the reigns of Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah. It is striking how much the Deuteronomistic treatment focuses on Jerusalem and its institutions—

27; 24:3-4).

¹⁴ Hence, the title of R. E. Friedman’s treatment, “From Egypt to Egypt: Dtr¹ and Dtr²,” *Traditions in Transformation: Turning Points in Biblical Faith. Essays Presented to Frank Moore Cross, Jr.*, ed. B. Halpern and J. Levenson (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1981) 167-92. The repeated warnings against going down into Egypt in Jer 42:13-22 are also noteworthy in this context.

¹⁵ The situation is, however, different in Chronicles. The Chronicler underscores the culpability of a variety of subjects, including Zedekiah (who refused to humble himself before Jeremiah), “all of the leaders of Judah (*kol-šârê yêhûdâ*; so the LXX; the MT’s reading of *kol-šârê hak-kohânim* evinces a haplography), the priests, and the people” (2 Chr 36:12-14).

the royal family (2 Kgs 23:36-37; 24:5-6, 8-9, 12, 15, 17; 18-19, 20b; 25:4-7), the royal palace (25:9), the temple (25:9, 13), the temple furnishings (25:14-17), the temple priests (25:18), the temple and palace treasures (24:13), the siege(s) (24:10-11; 25:25:1-3), the city walls (25:4), the domiciles of the city (25:9), and the execution of various governmental officials (25:19-21).¹⁶ In contrast to the copious attention they pay to Jerusalem, the writers pay no attention whatsoever to the fate of other specific towns in the kingdom, whether large or small. Mention is made of the international activities of Egyptian and Babylonian kings (2 Kgs 23:29-35; 24:1, 10-11, 17, 20; 25:1, 21), including the extent to which the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar seized lands west of the Euphrates from the control of the Egyptian king (24:7). There is a notice about Yhwh sending bands of Chaldeans, Aramaeans, Moabites, and Ammonites against Jehoiakim and Judah to destroy Judah (24:2-3). There are sweeping statements made about the exile of Jerusalem and of Judah (23:27; 24:3, 14, 20; 25:21), as well as about the forced deportation of thousands of people (24:14, 16).

For the sake of comparison, one can point to the Deuteronomistic narration of the process that led to the dissolution of the northern kingdom and to the Deuteronomistic narration of Sennacherib's invasion of Judah. The account of the northern kingdom mentions the loss of specific towns and regions to the Assyrians (2 Kgs 15:29; cf. 2 Kgs 14:25-27), while the account of Sennacherib's campaign mentions the capture of all the fortified towns of Judah (2 Kgs 18:13). To be sure, in each case, the focus is on the main centers of Samaria and Jerusalem, but at least some coverage is given to the hinterland. My question is what Lipschits makes of the lack of attention to the specific regions of Judah and to towns outside of Jerusalem in the Deuteronomistic narration of the fall of Judah?

I should add that the situation is even more acute in the Chronicler's work. There, the focus is almost entirely on Jerusalem. Even though the Chronicler uses the Deuteronomistic History heavily in composing his own work, the Chronicler sometimes departs radically from the presentation of his *Vorlage*.¹⁷ The Chronicistic depiction of Judah's last four kings is much briefer and less gruesome than that of the Deuteronomistic work. Whereas the authors of 2 Kings 24-25 detail massive destruction to Jerusalem and upheaval for the people in three separate deportations (598/7, 587/6, 582 BCE), the Chronicler depicts

¹⁶ One function of this detailed Deuteronomistic coverage of the repeated plundering of the Jerusalem temple is typologically to establish an *inclusio*, calling attention to the inverted parallel between the construction and outfitting of the temple by Solomon and the destruction and looting of the temple by the Babylonians.

¹⁷ Other clear examples of this difference in historiography is the description of David's rise: tortuous and prolonged (1 and 2 Samuel) as opposed to smooth and immediate (1 Chronicles); the description of Solomon's rise: contested and bloody (2 Samuel 9-20; 1 Kings 1-2) as opposed to unanimous and graceful (1 Chronicles 22-29); and the description of the division: the culpability of Solomon and the promotion of Jeroboam (1 Kgs 11:1-12:24) as opposed to the relative innocence of Solomon and the treachery of Jeroboam (2 Chr 13:4-12).

only one major deportation (587/6 BCE). The exile in the time of Jehoiachin is limited solely to him and to some of the temple furnishings (2 Chr 36:6-7). The description of destruction in the second Babylonian conquest of 587/6 BCE is mostly limited to Jerusalem and to its temple (2 Chr 36:16-20). To be sure, the Chronicistic democratization of guilt to include king, leaders, priests, and people (36:13-14), the Chronicistic reference to Nebuchadnezzar’s deportation of “all” those who survived (36:20), and the Chronicistic reference to the empty land observing its Sabbaths (36:21) imply a larger exile of the people.¹⁸ Nevertheless, it is striking that Chronicles, even more so than Kings, narrows its coverage to Jerusalem.

Fourth (and finally), I would like to underscore one of the points that Lipschits makes in his book, but to do so from a different vantage point. Lipschits points to recent archaeological surveys of the Benjaminite region that indicate the extent to which various areas associated with the tribe of Benjamin, excepting Jerusalem and its environs, did not undergo any significant population decrease until the late sixth century BCE. This is one of the factors that leads him to suggest that the Babylonians must have established a province in Judah and maintained an official presence in the area until the ascent of Achaemenid rule. He acknowledges, however, that there “is no historical or archaeological evidence of any attempt by the Babylonians to develop the region or to establish a logistical scheme to reinforce their control.”¹⁹

Lipschits points out that the continuing importance of Benjamin is suggested by Persian period texts, such as the list of Ezra 2 (//Nehemiah 7), which mentions many Benjaminite names and toponyms (e.g., 2:20, 24, 25, 26, 28, 33, 34). Some fourteen out of a total of twenty-two names in Ezra 2:20-35 are Benjaminite in character. To be sure, Lipschits also notes the apparent demographic decline of certain sectors of the Benjaminite region during the course of the Persian era. Nevertheless, within the larger context of the province of Judah, Benjamin retained an important place throughout the post-monarchic era.

These insightful observations can be expanded to include the book of Chronicles. Allow me to give three examples. First, by virtue of position, content, and length of coverage, the critical role played by Benjamin within Israel is underlined in the Chronicistic genealogies. Judah, which appears as the first sodality, and Benjamin, which appears as the last, establish the larger context in which the other tribes are considered. Of all the Israelite tribes, Judah, Levi, and Benjamin receive the vast majority of coverage (approximately 74%) and the critical positions in the overall presentation (2:3-9:1). In coverage, Benjamin

¹⁸ In this respect, I would disagree with the important and provocative treatments of W. Rudolph (*Chronikbücher* [HAT; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1955] 337) and S. Japhet (*The Ideology of the Book of Chronicles and Its Place in Biblical Thought* [BEATAJ 9; Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1989] 368-69), which contend that the majority of the people (mentioned in Chronicles) actually remain in the land. In the words of Japhet: “Foreign armies may come and go, but the people’s presence in the land continues uninterrupted” (*Ideology*, 373).

¹⁹ *Fall and Rise*, 366.

receives approximately 15% of the total coverage devoted to all the Israelite tribes (7:6-11; 8:1-40; 9:35-44).²⁰

Geographically, Benjamin's clans occupy towns that are not assigned to them in Joshua (18:21- 28), including sites such as Ono and Lud/Lod (1 Chr 8:12), which only appear in late biblical writings (Ezra 2:33//Neh 7:37; Neh 6:2; 11:35).²¹ When seen against the backdrop of late Babylonian and early Persian developments, the keen attention paid to Benjamin in the genealogies makes eminent sense. In Chronicles a conscious effort has been made to contest earlier claims of Benjamin's relatively minor role in Israelite history.²²

Another indication of Benjamin's importance is the prominence given to Gibeon during the united monarchy. Taking as his cue the Deuteronomistic notice of Solomon's pilgrimage to the great high place of Gibeon (1 Kgs 3:4; cf. 2 Chr 1:4), the Chronicler has David honor the Gibeon sanctuary by stationing a complement of priests, including Zadok, and Levites there (1 Chr 16:39-42). The tabernacle remains stationed at Gibeon until it is moved to the temple during the reign of Solomon (2 Chr 1:4; 5:1-14). Just as the ark in the City of David has its own Levitical choir, musical instruments, and set of gatekeepers (1 Chr 16:4,7), so the tabernacle in Gibeon has its own Levitical choir, musical instruments, and set of gatekeepers (16:38, 41-42). It is the high place at Gibeon, however, and not the ark cultus in the City of David that has its own regular litany of sacrifices (16:40; 21:26). Indeed, the narrator comments that the sacrifices performed there accorded with "all that was written in the Torah of Yhwh" (16:40). Eventually, both the ark and the tent of meeting will be brought together in Jerusalem, but in the meantime the Chronicler bestows a special privilege upon one of Benjamin's traditional centers. Hence, both Judah and Benjamin are privileged with major, pan-Israelite cultic centers in the critical time of the united monarchy.²³

In line with importance assigned to Benjamin in the genealogies and the early reign of David, Benjamin plays a sustained role in the Judahite monarchy.²⁴ Over against some earlier biblical texts in which Benjamin is associated with the northern tribes, the Chronicler emphasizes close ties between Judah and Benjamin. Given that Benjamin occupied an area between Samaria and Yehud in the Persian period, the Chronicler's insistence that Judah and Benjamin were closely

²⁰ These texts do not appear, however, to stem from a single hand, G. N. Knoppers, *I Chronicles 1-9* (AB 12; New York: Doubleday, 2004) 459-60, 474-92; idem, *I Chronicles 10-29* (AB 12A; New York: Doubleday, 2004) 515-21.

²¹ The mention of these toponyms reflects Benjaminite movements during the Persian and early Hellenistic periods; see Lipschits, "The Origins of the Jewish Population in Modi'in and Its Vicinity," *Cathedra* 85 (1997) 7-32 (Hebrew); Idem, *Fall and Rise*, 148-49, 155-58, 248-49.

²² Knoppers, *I Chronicles 1-9*, 260-65.

²³ In this respect, the elevation of the ark and the Davidic investiture of the Gibeon tabernacle cultus are penultimate events to the construction and dedication of the Jerusalem temple; see G. N. Knoppers, *I Chronicles 10-29* (AB 12A; New York: Doubleday, 2004) 633-61.

²⁴ Benjaminites, including relatives of Saul, are also among those who support David's rise to kingship (1 Chr 12:1-6,17-19; cf. 21:6).

allied throughout the monarchy is important. The Chronicler has clearly made an attempt to align Benjamin with Judah in contradistinction from the traditional association of Benjamin with the northern tribes, as found in many of the earlier biblical sources. For instance, in his depiction of the crisis brought on by the northern secession, the Chronicler has Benjamin, together with Judah and Levi, remain loyal, at least initially, to the normative institutions established during the united kingdom (2 Chr 11:1-4,13-17; 13:4-12). In the continuing portrayal of the Judaean monarchy, it is a consistent practice of Chronicles, over against the uneven presentation of Kings (1 Kgs 12:21), to mention Benjamin's involvement with Judah (2 Chr 11:12, 23; 14:7; 15:2, 8-9; 17:17; 31:1; 34:9).

In this manner, the Chronicler links two tribes throughout his narration. Because the past is related to the present, his work provides a sense of Judaean-Benjaminitite solidarity to those who associated themselves with the sodalities of Benjamin and Judah in Yehud. The attention given to Benjamin in the past ratifies the prominence of this group in the present. The close ties between Judah and Benjamin in the Persian period are validated by recourse to their shared past.

In conclusion, the achievement of Lipschits's book is to bring a multi-disciplinary approach to a very difficult and controversial subject. His copiously-researched, sophisticated, and nuanced treatment of the Neo-Babylonian and Persian periods successfully moves the scholarly discussion forward.²⁵ I congratulate him for writing a comprehensive, stimulating, and insightful book.

²⁵ In this connection, see also the collection of essays that Oded Lipschits and Joseph Blenkinsopp assembled in *Judah and the Judeans in the Neo-Babylonian Period* (Winona Lake, Ind: Eisenbrauns, 2003), as well as the more recent collection of essays that Lipschits co-edited with Manfred Oeming, *Judah and the Judeans in the Persian Period* (Winona Lake, Ind: Eisenbrauns, 2006).

COMMENTS ON ODED LIPSCHITS, *THE FALL AND RISE OF JERUSALEM*

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It has been my pleasure to read Oded Lipschits's recent work on the sixth century. It is rare to read a synthesis of ancient Levantine history that is so well versed in geography, ceramics, stratigraphy, demography and text criticism. Lipschits has ably filled a "Babylonian gap" in scholarship even if he would decry the use of this term for the history of the sixth century B.C.E. Now the gauntlet has been laid down for others to provide studies of the seventh, eighth, or ninth centuries which live up to this high standard.

When attempting a synthesis of such breadth, it is important to think through the nature of various forms of evidence. What are the limits of site surveys or pottery analysis? What are the limits of texts such as Jeremiah or Ezekiel or Ezra/Nehemiah? Our author decides, in the end, that the archaeological information is primary and that all of the biblical data should be sorted through a matrix derived from demographic reconstructions. In his discussion of demography he writes, "The possibility of formulating an independent historical picture that does not depend on the Bible and is as unfettered as possible by prior historiographical and theological perceptions is a privilege of modern research and is of prime importance even for an examination of the biblical descriptions themselves" (258). Footnotes make it clear that the modern research on which he relies is supplied by archaeological investigation (n. 247).

As an archaeologist, I am flattered by this pride of place in history and biblical studies. At the same time, however, I worry that archaeology may not be able to sustain the weight of this expectation. Archaeologists are hard-pressed to evaluate most of the biblical claims from this period, much less to avoid the difficulty of doing so with without prior "historiographical and theological perceptions." Typically, the results of archaeology are both too broad and too individual to evaluate the events portrayed in biblical texts. Archaeology is quite good at portraying "big picture" trends like changes in technology and the environment or the way in which these changes shaped civilizational possibilities. But the events described by the biblical writers in the sixth and fifth century have no discernable influence on these grand movements. Archaeology is equally good at recording snapshots at the level of the individual: a specific street, or tomb, or house. Unfortunately, these snapshots rarely catch the specific individuals described in the biblical text. Archaeological pictures frequently miss,

either by location or time, the individual political and social relationships described in the Bible.

A discernable convergence between archaeological finds and the specific events of the biblical text is most likely in periods of sudden dramatic change. In this sense, the destruction of Lachish in 701 B.C.E., the complete destruction of Ashkelon in 604 B.C.E. or the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.E. are cases in which the political events described in the biblical or Babylonian texts have such an overwhelming material reflex that archaeologists have been able to correlate the text with a large body of material culture. But most of the time, it is quite difficult to talk about, for instance, political alliances which shifted on a yearly basis, or religious reforms that may have only lasted a decade, or an exile and return which took place within a single century. Does a religious artifact from a “seventh century” tomb, for instance, show us something about life in the time of Josiah or Manasseh or both? From the Deuteronomistic perspective these would be radically different eras; archaeologically, they are indistinguishable. Simply stated, it is important to realize the limits of archaeology for evaluating the claims of the biblical text. Because of the foundational way in which this book uses archaeology to reconstruct political history, it becomes particularly important to revisit the archaeological evidence and examine what type of synthetic superstructure it might be able to support.

1. POTTERY

Lipschits argues that the pottery of the sixth century documents “an unbroken material culture tradition in Judah from the end of the seventh century B.C.E. to the fifth or fourth century B.C.E. This means that the population of Benjamin and the northern highland of Judah at the end of the Iron Age survived, even after the destruction of Jerusalem, and continued to produce the same pottery vessels” (192). To demonstrate this, Lipschits turns to Ephraim Stern’s classic work on Persian pottery (1982) and highlights instances where Stern mentions forms limited to the southern half of the country that have affinity for earlier and later periods.

In several cases, while similarity exists between forms from the seventh and fifth centuries, that similarity has nothing to do with continuous potting traditions in the highlands. For instance, the well-known mortarium is an oft-imitated North Syrian import with a history unrelated to anything occurring in the highlands. In addition, Stern’s comment (1982:93; 2001:514) that potting fabrics remained constant in the highlands may merely reflect a common geology rather than continuity in pottery production.

Other forms, including cooking pots, four handled storage jars, and certain types of jugs show continuity with local Iron Age potting traditions into the sixth century. Still others, including large pilgrim flasks and the sack shape of certain storage jars appear at some point in the sixth century and continue into the Persian period.

Like Stern, Lapp, and Barkay before him, Lipschits is able to outline some components of a transitional sixth century ceramic assemblage. In the case of pottery that comes from sites in the Benjamin region, the presence of mid-sixth century assemblages in

association with some architecture shows that some sites were occupied in the period following the fall of Jerusalem. But moving beyond rough epochal observations is difficult. The conclusion that a substantial percentage of the early sixth century population survived overlooks a host of social processes, including a dramatic decrease in production, which could also account for these ceramic continuities. And the conclusion that this unbroken tradition was centered in the northern highlands of Judah cannot be sustained from this ceramic presentation. Ephraim Stern is rightly cautious about any attempt to move from this broadly dated assemblage to conclusions about demography, social organization, or the details of sixth century history (2001: 342-44).

2. ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEYS AND EXCAVATION

In most cases, the presentation of the survey data in this book parallels that described by many others and summarized by Stern in 2001. Most of the country was destroyed by the Babylonian army. Even Jerusalem did not recover from its thorough destruction (*contra* Barkay 1994:105-106). By the second quarter of the sixth century, most regions of Judah were virtually empty. Our author reiterates the consensus opinion that this population collapse was either the direct work of the Babylonians or related to the economic disintegration which followed their conquest. In three regions, the Negev, Benjamin, and the Judahite highlands, different processes were at work.

In the Negev, a “wave of devastation” overtook the thriving Beersheba valley in the sixth century to the extent that the population declined by 75%. This destruction has typically been connected in some way to biblical accounts of Edomite treachery during the fall of Jerusalem. In addition, some scholars point to an increasing volume of epigraphic evidence for Edomite presence, whether in the form of an ostraca from Arad warning of Edomite advances or in the form of names with Qaus as the theophoric element (Beit-Arieh 1995: 311-314). Lipschits, by and large, discounts the inferences commonly drawn from these records and prefers to begin his reconstruction in the relative silence of II Kings. Our author argues that the loss of central authority disrupted the balance between the settled and more transient groups and that the region gradually declined. It is not clear who these transient groups were, except that they were not related to Edom. In this section, our author adopts a much more cautious stance regarding the implications of ceramics. In particular, “Edomite” pottery forms might not be directly linked to “Edomite” people. While these cautions are wise, it is not clear what positive evidence exists for placing the destructions of the Negev settlements later in the sixth century. It seems that this perspective of gradual decline is merely an elaboration of Finkelstein’s skepticism (1992) about connections between sites like Qitmit and Horvat Uza and the rise of Edom.

Turning to Benjamin, scholars agree that there is evidence of continued occupation following the events of 586. The Babylonians did not devastate this region. At Tell en Nasbeh, biblical Mizpah, Jeff Zorn has heroically reconstructed plans of the sixth century city from McCown’s severely flawed excavations. But given the records available to Zorn, it is impossible to be too precise. For instance, were the sixth

century structures which Zorn isolated inhabited through the entirety of the sixth century or were most abandoned within a few decades after the fall of Jerusalem? It is extremely difficult to know. Another important site, el-Gib, biblical Gibeon, was also so poorly excavated that it is very difficult to say anything other than that the site was active in wine production for some time in the middle of the sixth century. We are on somewhat firmer ground at Beitîn, biblical Bethel, which also continued later into mid-sixth century until it was destroyed. Again, the destruction at Beitîn is later than the destructions of Jerusalem, but it is not clear how much later. After this later destruction, Bethel was abandoned until sometime in the middle of the fifth century. At Tell el-Ful, likely ancient Gibeah, stratigraphic excavation has provided secure evidence of both a partial destruction early in the sixth century and continued occupation for some time through the middle of the sixth century (judged by Lapp [1981] to last until approximately 538). The site was then abandoned.

In his reading of the Benjamin evidence, Lipschits contends that occupation at these sites was “uninterrupted” (241, n. 210; 244) and that these sites only “gradually declined” (259) over the fifth and fourth century. He argues that the survey information for the later Persian period, from the mid-fifth century, reflects a “low point” in a gradual process of decline. In this gradual process, he feels it unnecessary to argue for the abandonment and restoration that he sees the biblical authors envisioning. All would agree that these excavations show occupation in Benjamin after the destruction of Jerusalem. The nature, boundaries, and density of this occupation, however, are poorly understood. It is not clear how long these sites flourished or when they began to decline. The best excavated sites of the region in this period, Tell el-Ful and Beitîn, do not support Lipschits’s contention of demographic continuity through the middle of the fifth century. Rather their abandonment or even destruction points to a rather precipitous decline as early as the second half of the sixth century.

While most of the demographic contentions of our author revise the consensus understanding of Benjamin or the Negev in the sixth century, his reconstruction of the northern Judean Hills is much more radical. He sketches out a region roughly from Beth-Zur in the South to Bethlehem in the North. In this area, Avi Ofer’s survey (1993) proposed that the population was the same size at the end of the Iron Age as at the height of the Persian period. While there are, at the local level, a fair number of sites which were only occupied in either the Iron Age or the Persian period and site size and distribution was rather substantially changed, the aggregate population was virtually identical. Lipschits argues, based upon these population estimates, “that most settlements persisted unchanged from the Iron Age to the Persian Period.” Further, he argues that this region “did not suffer destruction during the Babylonian campaign against Judah.” Or again, “there was not dramatic change in the demographic profile of the region.”

In some ways, this conclusion reminds me of a photograph of City of David taken from the Mt. of Olives. From the photograph alone one might be misled into believing that the walk between Silwan and the City of David is a gentle downhill slope. But to anyone who has walked

that path, it is clear that between the two ridges is a deep gorge of the Kidron valley. In a similar sense, Avi Ofer's survey provides us with a glimpse of two population ridges: one on the eve of Babylonian conquest, another in the fifth century (actually a 5th-4th century amalgam). The details of the mid-sixth century must be inferred. Is there a gorge, an occupational gap in this region, or complete continuity between the two populations, or something in between? The surveys are inconclusive. Archaeological survey and the politics of the sixth century are calibrated on very different time scales.

Unlike the situation in Benjamin, where one might appeal to a series of excavations, there is not a single stratified sequence in the highlands of Judah that demonstrates Lipschits's claim of demographic continuity.²⁶ At Beth-Zur, on the southern fringe of this region, excavators argued for a gap in the sixth century, and Lipschits concurs. At Khirbet Abu Tuwein, the sixth century was limited to a poor re-occupation of one small part of the destroyed Iron Age site.

3. SUMMARY

In the end, the archaeological evidence does not demonstrate that the highlands of Judah and the cities of Benjamin were relatively "unaffected" by the Babylonian conquest and exhibit substantial population continuity between the seventh and fifth century.

The archaeological evidence does show destruction in most regions of Judah at the hands of Babylon. It further indicates that several cities in Benjamin survived this onslaught for an indeterminate period. Accepting our author's population estimates, the evidence does show a population of just a few tens of thousands in the middle of the fifth century. But this is all. This is not to say that there is some key bit of archaeological evidence that our author has missed. On the contrary, this book shows a comprehensive awareness of the archaeological work that has taken place in this region over the last century. It is merely that the pottery analysis, survey work, and excavation in the sixth century in Judah and Benjamin are not specific enough to answer the question of population continuity. More than this, at Beitîn, Tel el-Ful, or Khirbet Abu Tuwein, the few places in Benjamin or Judah where reliable city excavations have been conducted, the sequences do not, at this time, support the contention that substantial portions of the Iron Age population continued unchanged into the fifth century.

Some may say this is merely a skeptical unwillingness to allow Lipschits's synthetic connections across the disciplines. However, with the current state of archaeological research into sixth century Judah, this is more than just seeing the archaeological glass half-empty. Rather, the archaeologist is left to cry for a mere drop of water from any well in the region of Bethlehem.

In such a richly synthetic book such as this, much is related to the weighing of different forms of evidence. Textual evidence should be weighed against the archaeological. Biblical texts should be analyzed in

²⁶ It is more difficult to accept Lipschits's thesis when it is realized that salvage expeditions in this same region show marked discontinuity in this region rather than the continuity that Lipschits proposes (Faust 2003).

light of the finds of surveys and excavations. But we must be careful not to overextend either sphere. In the end, I would argue that the historical synthesis in this book is perched on an uncertain archaeological foundation. In this book, tentative archaeological conclusions are often treated as assured results with which to reconstruct the history behind the biblical text. It may be that the textual and historical conclusions found here can be established through an examination of biblical and ancient texts without reference to archaeology. Perhaps Oded Lipschits's reconstruction of the sixth century still holds; however, many of his central archaeological and demographic assertions lie beyond the reach of current archaeological evidence.

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COMMENTS ON ODED LIPSCHITS, *THE FALL AND RISE OF JERUSALEM*

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As I have the privilege of speaking first in this session, and as most of you will not yet have had the opportunity to study this brand new book by Oded Lipschits, I should perhaps begin by just saying a word or two about what is in it, so that you know what my colleagues and I are talking about for the rest of the afternoon.

Despite its title, *The Fall and Rise of Jerusalem*, the book goes further afield than solely the history of the city during the Neo-Babylonian period both geographically and chronologically. Geographically, it is really a history of the whole region of Judah during the Babylonian and Persian eras. Admittedly, the post-exilic province of Yehud was considerably smaller than the pre-exilic kingdom, but still there is more to it, as Oded shows so well, than just Jerusalem. Indeed, if he is right in one of his contentions, that the city was pretty well deserted through the exilic period, then it is a history of everything *except* Jerusalem!

Chronologically too, though the focus is on the period of the exile, Lipschits trawls much more widely for evidence, encompassing detailed historical and geographical surveys of the preceding period as a way into this dark age. He also makes intelligent use of what may be culled from the later books of Ezra and Nehemiah, in particular, to reflect on what must have happened in the intervening decades.

In terms of source material, we find a wide range exploited, mostly with enviable skill and clarity. The biblical texts are naturally treated critically, but they are mined for what they reveal about topics which they may not on the surface have been appearing to address. The lists in Ezra-Nehemiah, for instance, tell us much of the geographical extent and the political divisions of the Persian-period province; the several editorial layers that may be hypothesized in Jeremiah and in the closing chapters of the books of Kings reveal differing ideologies of the Judean, Babylonian and perhaps even Egyptian communities during the exilic period, and so on. Archaeological evidence from tel, survey and epigraphy are exploited with particular expertise, as we shall see in a moment, and extra-Biblical sources (such as the Babylonian chronicles) are naturally drawn into the discussion as appropriate.

The result is a more detailed and, I venture to suggest, more authoritative collection of relevant data than we have enjoyed before, and for that we should be most grateful. There are, of course, particular points of contention, and we may hope that ongoing discovery will add new data to refine the presentation here and there, but to me Oded has

succeeded in bringing clarity to what was in danger of becoming a sterile dialogue, with protagonists largely talking across one another. I refer, of course, to what has become known in shorthand as “the myth of the empty land.”

Taking its title from Hans Barstad’s well-known little book, there are those who have suddenly caught on to the fact that life at some level continued in Judah throughout the Neo-Babylonian period. As I pointed out in a review of Barstad’s book at the time, this was really not at all a new discovery either by literary-based scholars or by archaeologists, though it was useful to have the data collected again and re-presented. On the other hand, there continued to be others who emphasized the devastation suffered by, and massively attested at, such major sites as Jerusalem and Lachish. Thus, even if the description in a few (but please note by no means all) Biblical sources of Judah being deserted was hyperbolic, nevertheless it contained more than a grain of truth. And in some publications, which shall remain nameless, the debate between the two sides got quite heated.

For me, one of the most helpful aspects of Oded’s book, reiterated in several places as the evidence is accumulated from different sources, is to bring sense and clarity to this debate, which in principle is the sort of argument that it ought to be able to settle with reasonable certainty from the archaeological record. The solution is elegant and simple—the sort of thing that is obvious as soon as it is said, but is not said often enough in the first place.

On the one hand, the evidence not just for destruction but also for abandonment of sites like Lachish and Jerusalem, which I have just mentioned, is clear. But here for the first time to my knowledge (but of course this may simply be ignorance on my part) this pattern of destruction is clearly linked to Babylonian military and political strategy. Lachish and the Shephelah were destroyed as a deliberate means of securing safe entry into the interior of the country, and from that secure base there is a wedge to be traced up to Jerusalem the capital, which was then systematically destroyed. The Babylonians probably prohibited its restoration, rather like Hadrian in much later times, and no doubt for similar reasons.

This being so, we find a natural explanation for the movement of the political centre from Jerusalem to Mizpah, and to a lesser extent Ramat Rahel. That Mizpah and the surrounding traditional Benjaminite territory continued to flourish has been well known and universally accepted for decades now. It is probable that already before the fall of Jerusalem the Babylonians established their headquarters there, and it was natural that it should have continued thereafter as the administrative centre, of which an echo remains as late as the time of Nehemiah (Neh. 3:7). The decline in that region is found to have occurred only much later (5th-4th centuries), possibly under the reverse influence of the re-emergence of Jerusalem later in the Persian period. Similarly, the decline (rather than the destruction) of a region like the Jordan Valley or the southern Judean hill country is to be explained more by the shift in economic activity following the fall of Jerusalem than to a deliberate policy of destruction or abandonment by the Babylonians.

I find all this helpful and clarifying. Justice is done to the undoubtedly evidence for destruction, but it is limited to what may be seen as making strategic sense from the Babylonian perspective. Similarly, the continuity, decline or re-emergence of this region or that is shown to be causally linked to this strategy rather than to some policy of wilful and purposeless destruction. To me it is also demonstrated that once ideology is removed from the agenda of historical research an intelligible picture emerges which seems to do justice to both sides of the previous debate without either being able to lay claim to Oded's research as a full vindication of their stated position.

Let me move on, then, from an appreciation of what I found most helpful to a question which has been in my mind for some time and which has been sharpened by some of Oded's discussion. Right in his introduction, Oded repeats what is to be found in virtually all the textbooks of the period, namely that when the time came for some of those in Babylon to return to Judah early in the Persian period they met with hostility from those who had remained in the land. The latter were displeased, to say the least, that the old elite were seeking to restore their hegemony. Although the argument is not advanced in this particular book, this is often linked with such things as the change in meaning of the phrase '*am ba'arets*, "the people of the land," from its honourable connotations in the late monarchical period to its pejorative overtones later on, and so on.

I want at least to raise the question whether this widely accepted view is justified. The most secure first-hand evidence that we have for the situation immediately consequent upon the first returns, so far as I am aware, is to be found in Haggai and Zechariah 1-8. I see here no trace of an inner-community division along the lines commonly suggested. Indeed, it is not even clear whether these two prophets should be included among the returning exiles or whether they were rather among those who had remained in the land. Haggai addresses the community as one without distinction, and although he has criticisms to raise they are not, apparently, determined by this sort of consideration at all. He is clearly supportive of the returning leadership as represented by Zerubbabel and Joshua, but the implication of his address to the people is that they have been settled in the land for some considerable time. It is only surmise on our part that this relates exclusively to the seventeen or eighteen years since the earliest possible return; in principle, it could equally well stretch back further. Similarly, while Zechariah is also supportive of the returning leadership and at least shows awareness of the Babylonian community (e.g. 6:9), his focus is very much Jerusalem-centred and the difficult passage at the start of chapter 7 seems to address concerns of the Judean community quite as much, if not more, than those of the exiles. At any rate, there is certainly no hint of any tension here between the two communities.

The same, I maintain, is true of Trito-Isaiah, although here, I am aware, the question of date is less secure. Many scholars regard the central chapters 60-62 as the earliest material, and with good reason. Here once again, however, the community shows no sign of division. In the surrounding chapters, the divisions begin to open up quite sharply, but on the one hand this is probably a reflection of a more developed

stage in the history of the community and on the other the division is determined quite self-evidently along lines other than geographical. Whatever we make of Hanson’s theory of disenfranchised Levites, the fact that he sees them carrying a torch for Deutero-Isaiah suggests that they were not originally out of sorts with the Babylonian community, since part, at least, of Isaiah 40-55 must still be understood as addressed to that community whether or not the prophet was physically present there or in Judah (as Barstad has argued).

Contemporary evidence, I would therefore maintain, presents a very different picture from the normal view. Where, then, does the latter come from? Oded does not tell us where he gets it from, but for most it is, of course, the early chapters of Ezra. Closer examination suggests that things are not so simple, however.

First, the only explicit evidence for tension with the Judean community comes from Ezra 3:1-4:5, a passage which differs from all others in Ezra 1-6 in not even purporting to be based on archival documents. In 3:3 we are told that those engaged in the rebuilding of the temple “set the altar in its place, for fear was upon them because of *the peoples of the lands*” and this seems to be resumed in 4:4 where “*the people of the land* discouraged the people of Judah and made them afraid to build.” While it is more usual for the plural form of 3:3 to refer to foreigners, the familiar singular form of 4:4 suggests that this is meant to refer to those in the land who were not part of the so-called *golah* community. Whichever way it is interpreted in detail, however, the fact remains perfectly clear that it differs from the usage in the genuinely contemporary writings of Haggai and Zechariah. At Hag. 2:4 the phrase refers without any doubt to the very community that the prophet is encouraging to engage in the rebuilding: “Yet now take courage, O Zerubbabel, says the Lord; take courage O Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest; take courage all you *people of the land*, says the Lord; work, for I am with you” This is the very opposite of the usage in Ezra 3 and 4. Somewhat similarly, in Zech. 7:5 we find, “Say to all *the people of the land* and the priests, When you fasted and mourned in the fifth month, etc.” Admittedly, it is not clear (as in principle it is not clear in Haggai) whether the reference is to the returned exiles or to those who had remained in the land, or to the two combined without distinction. What is clear, however, is that here too it is the community focussed on the temple that is addressed, not some alternative hostile element in the population. The conclusion is obvious. The language of Ezra 3:3 and 4:4 reflects the usage of a much later editor, by whose time the phrase had come to have negative overtones. It cannot be used to analyse the state of relations between the various people groups at the time of the return itself, and it does not provide evidence of tension between the two communities.

Similarly, the section at the start of Ezra 4 about the “adversaries of Judah and Benjamin” whose offer of help is rebuffed by the Judeans is difficult to evaluate historically. My own view is that there is some sound tradition behind this, and that it relates to inhabitants from the north (Samaria), not to the exilic Judean community at all. Certainly that is how it seems to have been understood by the later editor who inserted the “dischronologized” account in the remainder of chapter 4

about accusations being sent to the Persian court regarding the work of the Judeans; I have elsewhere suggested that the editor may have extracted whatever is historical in these verses from the letter which is mentioned, but not cited, in 4:6. But that goes beyond our concern here.

Finally, if my remarks on Ezra 1-6 so far have been negative, that is to say, to suggest that they do not give us reliable information about a supposed conflict at the time of the early returns, then I should now want to pick up an attractive suggestion advanced long ago by Sara Japhet about the long list in Ezra 2. It purports to be of those who returned, but may in fact reflect a combination of those who returned and of those who remained in the land who were working together on the temple rebuilding. This suggestion builds on Galling's proposal that behind the list lies a record of the response of the elders of the Jews to Tattenai's request (Ezra 5:3-4, 9-10) for a list of names of those engaged in the rebuilding. Certainly, there are several elements in the list which seem to presuppose the conditions in the early post-exilic period, not the later period of Ezra, as some have suggested. But Japhet then observes that the variations in the way that the families are listed can be explained by her hypothesis, namely that those listed by family will have been those who returned from Babylon while those listed by place of domicile will be those who had remained in the land throughout the exile. This analysis differs in detail from Oded's, since he is inclined rather to see this list as an amalgamation of a number of censuses stretching over fifty years or more, largely based on the numbers involved (which always strikes me as a bit hazardous), but as regards the main point that I am making he does not disagree with the conclusions reached.

Now, the reason I have gone into all this at some length is not just to suggest that a detail of Oded's Introduction might have been worded differently, but to lay the basis for raising a further question which it seems is never addressed, but which arises in part out of what I have been saying and even more out of complementary considerations of a literary nature that Oded discusses later on in the book.

In his chapter 5, Oded undertakes a detailed source and redaction critical analysis of the closing chapter of 2 Kings and of Jeremiah. In both, he finds evidence of material that is most naturally understood as having been originally composed either in Babylon or in Judah (possibly Egypt in the case of Jeremiah), and he shows well how each part might have served the ideology of its respective community. My concern here is not to quibble with the detail of the analysis, but to applaud the general idea that the two communities were both producing reflective literature during the exile. Along with others I have been arguing this for years and I am totally convinced that the outlook of a prayer such as that included in Nehemiah 9, for instance, can only be that of the Judean community. What Oded has done is to expand the range of such analyses to more material.

The impression that so much intricately related, yet separately originating, material leaves me with, however, is that there may have been far more extensive communication between the two communities during the exile than we have ever previously considered. Let us

consider the probabilities. We know pretty well that, unlike the Assyrians, the Babylonians did not disperse the peoples whom they removed to Babylon but kept them together, so allowing them to retain and even strengthen their sense of national or religious identity. Smith-Christopher's work on this is clear, and the evidence seems indisputable. Furthermore, we have direct evidence that there was some communication between the two centres early in the exilic period, at least, from the letter that Jeremiah is said to have sent to those in Babylon (*Jeremiah 29*) and from accounts of news reaching Babylon from Jerusalem in the book of *Ezekiel*. In addition, apart from any other incentives, it seems to me in the highest degree probable that families were divided between the two centres. If the number of deportees was relatively limited, as generally maintained nowadays, and if they were restricted predominantly to the elite, then it is unlikely that every member of an extended family will have neatly fallen into the category that was singled out for deportation. If even in the case of the royal family an Ishmael could somehow have been left behind, how much more would this be likely in the case of lesser families?

The picture Oded paints from the literature therefore seems to me to be worthy of much more thorough research at all levels. We know a good deal about communications during the Persian period because of the Persepolis tablets and other such sources, but I am not aware that the Akkadian sources have been trawled with this question in mind; it might prove instructive, for I should be surprised if the really very sophisticated communications networks of the Achaemenids only a few years later sprang completely out of nowhere.

And of course the drift of these random speculations is that if there was closer contact than we have hitherto supposed then the notion that those returning after the exile barged their way uninvited into Judah to the dismay of those who had remained might be further undermined. Perhaps we should be thinking rather of welcome-home parties between families long divided but not necessarily, therefore, forgotten. After all, the exile did not last so long, and both *Haggai* and *Ezra* seems to imply that there would have been those still living who would have survived the whole period.

To sum up, then, I have enormously enjoyed and appreciated Oded's book, and learned much from it. I have deliberately not picked up on smaller points of disagreement (we have exchanged correspondence previously, for instance, on the interpretation of *Nehemiah 3*) but have allowed myself rather to indulge in a little broader thinking about the exilic communities and their relationship both in the Neo-Babylonian and in the early Persian periods. If these wishful musings lead to more productive research that results in a better understanding of this key period of Judean history, then let that be put down to the stimulus of this masterful publication.

THE BABYLONIAN PERIOD IN JUDAH: IN SEARCH OF THE HALF FULL CUP

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This paper was originally delivered in the Literature and History of the Persian Period Group of the Society of Biblical Literature on November 19, 2005.²⁷ I would like to thank the panel members for the good and warm words they delivered then and have now written. Even more importantly, I thank them for their critiques and for the problems they emphasized, as well as for their remarks about things that could have been done or remain to be done in the future. In our field of research, ideas that have already been written are no more than bibliography and footnotes for future ideas. There is only one direction to continue the research: forward. Any note or comment that can lead us in this direction must be welcomed with an open mind and an open heart.

The book under discussion, *The Fall and Rise of Jerusalem: Judah under Babylonian Rule* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2005), is based on my PhD thesis, which was presented to the senate of Tel Aviv University in January 1997, under the supervision of Prof. Nadav Na'aman. I submitted this thesis only because it was the time to do so. Most of my teachers were quite satisfied with it, but I was not. Even if the general picture was clear to me, I saw many problems and “holes” in this picture of Judah in the 6th century BCE and thought that many of them could and should be filled. Thus, the Hebrew version of the book only appeared in 2001, and I attempted in the meantime to ground the archaeological and geopolitical elements more securely, along with the Biblical discussion. Some of my new thoughts and conclusions were also published as papers during those years.²⁸

²⁷ I am presenting here my lecture with minor updates, changes and adaptations, and have added footnotes where needed for the convenience of readers. I would like to thank Prof. John Wright for the idea of having this SBL session. I would also like to thank Prof. David Vanderhooft for helping to arrange the session and for editing the contributions. I wish to thank the publisher of the book, Jim Eisenbraun, for sending PDF files of the book to all the participants, and the editor of *The Journal of Hebrew Studies*, Professor Ehud Ben Zvi, for his kind generosity in publishing this Panel Discussion.

²⁸ See Lipschits, O. “The History of the Benjaminite Region under Babylonian Rule,” *TA* 26 (1999), 155-190; Nebuchadrezzar’s Policy in ‘hattu-Land’ and the Fate of the Kingdom of Judah. *Ugarit-Forschungen* 30 (1999), 467-487; “The Formation of the Babylonian Province in Judah,” *Proceedings of the Twelfth World Congress of Jewish Studies, Division A: The Bible and Its World*.

I submitted the Hebrew version of the manuscript to Yad Yizhak Ben Zvi in 2001 because it was time to do so, and even if the book was accepted for publication, and actually was published in April 2003, I was not entirely satisfied. I still saw problems and “holes” in my picture of Judah in the 6th century BCE, and still thought some of them could and should be filled. Thus I waited until 2004 to submit the English manuscript of the book, trying meanwhile to solidify the biblical analyses in it, along with the historical discussions and demographic evaluations. I worked on these revisions especially during my Sabbatical year in Heidelberg as a visiting scholar in the Wissenschaftlich-Theologisches Seminar of the Ruprecht Karls Universität.²⁹ Some of my new thoughts and conclusions were also published in papers between 2001 and 2004.³⁰ The overall picture was then presented in the English edition of the book, even though I choose to end the book with a series of questions and subjects that remain open. Some of them should be the subject of further research and some of them should probably wait for future developments and future finds.

When I started to prepare my research for publication, with the main goal of presenting a synthetic overview of the history of Judah under Babylonian rule, I knew that I would have two options: to focus on the half empty cup; or to focus on the half full cup. To focus on the half empty cup would necessitate demonstrating the gaps in our knowledge, emphasizing caution in treating archaeological and historical problems and probably avoiding an overall synthesis. To focus on the half full cup would mean taking full cognizance of the gaps in our knowledge while treating in an exhaustive way each of the different fields of research: biblical, archaeological and historical. My goal was to study each of them independently, without interference from the other fields, but with a clear purpose: to get to a point where a positive summary could be offered, and then a synthesis. Of course it is possible that I misunderstood some details or that I misinterpreted others. Naturally future discoveries can change our knowledge and perspectives concerning some parts in this big puzzle, and thus how we reconstruct

Jerusalem (1999), 115-123 (Hebrew); “Judah, Jerusalem and the Temple (586-539 B.C.),” *Transeuphratène* 22 (2001), 129-142; “The Policy of the Persian Empire and the Meager Architectural Finds in the Province of Yehud,” Faust, A. and Baruch, E. (eds.). *New Studies in Jerusalem* (Proceedings of the Seventh Conference) (Ramat-Gan, 2001), 45-76 (Hebrew); “Was There a Royal Estate in Ein-Gedi by the End of the Iron Age and During the Persian Period?” Schwartz, J., Amar, Z. and Ziffer, I. (eds.) *Jerusalem and Eretz Israel (Arie Kindler Volume)*; Tel-Aviv, 2000), 31-42 (Hebrew).

²⁹ During this year I was hosted by my good friend and colleague, Prof. Manfred Oeming, and I would like to thank him for it.

³⁰ See Lipschits, O. Demographic Changes in Judah between the 7th and the 5th Centuries BCE., Lipschits, O. and Blenkinsopp, J. (eds.) *Judah and the Judeans in the Neo-Babylonian Period*. (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 323-376; “Ammon in Transition from Vassal kingdom to Babylonian Province,” *BASOR* 335 (2004), 37-52; From Geba to Beersheba – A Further Discussion. *RB* 111-3 (2004), 345-361; “Achaemenid Imperial Policy, Settlement Processes in Palestine, and the Status of Jerusalem in the Middle of the Fifth Century BCE,” Lipschits, O. and Oeming, M. (eds.). *Judah and the Judeans in the Persian Period*. Winona-Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns; 2006), 19-52.

the entire picture. However, I felt that enough information exists and that the time was ripe to try to go one step further and present a synthesis.

In some aspects I can agree with Prof. Daniel Master's observation that much of the overall synthesis depends on the way I interpret the archaeological material. He is right in the way he understood the importance I assigned to the options we have in modern research. I did argue that "formulating an independent historical picture that does not depend on the Bible and is as unfettered as possible by prior historiographical and theological perceptions is a privilege of modern research and is of prime importance even for an examination of the biblical descriptions themselves." Master was too hasty, however, in asserting my primary reliance on archaeological evidence to achieve this goal. The results of archaeological research can release us from religious, political and ideological preconceptions when researching the biblical period in general and the exilic and post-exilic periods in particular. Archaeology can thus open the way to ask new questions and provide a firm foundation for understanding this period in a neutral way. Archaeological reconstruction, however, does not control the research in each of the different fields of research that contribute to my synthesis and final historical reconstruction.

Between scholars supporting the idea of the "real empty land" and those supporting the idea of the "myth of the empty land" there is apparently a huge gap in the way they understand the history of the Babylonian period in Judah, but the actual differences between the two "camps" are not so great. Both sides in this argument have much more in common than they admit. The debate between them on how many people remained in Judah is not terribly important, nor is the debate on the form and function of the sparse administration in Judah under Babylonian rule. Just as in the case of the different emphases in 2 Kings 25: 12, 22, both sides agree that after the very harsh blow that the Babylonians dealt Judah at the beginning of the 6th century BCE—a blow that fell especially on the urban, military and administrative centers of the kingdom—at least *some* people remained in Judah, especially in the rural areas north and south of Jerusalem. We may assume that those who remained in Judah continued to cook, eat and drink; they probably had some kind of (local and/or imperial) administration, social and religious-cultic life; and from time to time some of them died and were buried. Therefore, there *must* have been a degree of continuity in the material culture. If it remains true that we cannot see a drastic change at the beginning of the Persian period, in connection with either a mass or a symbolic return, and if most scholars agree that the main characteristics of the Persian period material culture crystallized in a long and gradual process, then we have no other choice but to treat the sixth century BCE as a kind of intermediate period between the 'classical' Iron Age II and Persian Period in terms of the material culture.³¹

³¹ A very similar conclusion about the slow and graduate change from the Persian to Hellenistic periods, with an emphasis on the continuation of the local material culture, was expressed recently by O. Tal, in his *The Archaeology of*

Within this broad framework there is plenty of room for different and contrasting ideas.³² However, any attempt to drag this “middle way” reconstruction of the situation in Judah in the direction of a total “empty land” interpretation,³³ or in the direction of an argument for total continuity followed by the later creation of the “myth of the empty land,”³⁴ derives, I think, from historical preconceptions about this period.

This may also be the principle reason why the material culture of this period was not identified until now in archaeological research. The short period of time that elapsed between the Babylonian destruction and the return is not a sufficient reason for the absence of finds, and may represent an example of “structural habits of thought” in archaeological research. Historical conclusions inform the chronological divisions usually drawn in historical and archaeological research. In the case of the Babylonian destruction, it can work only if one accepts the reconstruction of a total devastation of the land and a population vacuum created because of it. Scholarly inability to assign material culture to the 6th century BCE, therefore, is a combination of two elements:

1. The fact that many of the archaeologists were never looking for material remains from this period. The historical assumption of an empty land during the 6th century BCE is a starting point for many archaeological studies, and since nearly no one was looking for remains from this period, nothing was found.
2. If indeed people continued to live in Benjamin and in other places in Judah after 586, we should expect the same material culture as before (pottery production, burial customs, building techniques etc.).

The impact of historical preconceptions on archaeological research caused most archaeologists to assign all the finds familiar to them as belonging to the late Iron Age to the period before 586 BCE. It is correct in the case of Jerusalem, Lachish and other places destroyed by

Hellenistic Palestine: Between Tradition and Renewal (Jerusalem: The Bialik Institute, 2006).

³² Cf., for example, the opposing opinions expressed by Vanderhooft on the one side and Middlemas on the other: D.S. Vanderhooft, *The Neo-Babylonian Empire and Babylon in the Latter Prophets* (HSM 59; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999); J. Middlemas, *The Troubles of Templeless Judah* (Oxford Theological Monographs; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

³³ See E. Stern's basic view in his *Material Culture of the Land of the Bible in the Persian Period 538-332 B.C.* (Warminster: Aris and Phillips / Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1982). See also Stern's 'The Babylonian Gap', *BAR* 26/6 (2000), 45-51, 76, and also in his *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible, vol. II: The Assyrian, Babylonian, and Persian Periods 732-332 BCE* (ABRL; New York: Doubleday, 2001), 303-50.

³⁴ See R. Carroll's paper, “The Myth of the Empty Land,” *Semeia* 59 [1992] 79-93, and H. Barstad's book, *The Myth of the Empty Land: A Study in the History and Archaeology of Judah During the ‘Exilic’ Period* (Symbolae Osloenses, Fasc. Suppl. 28; Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, 1998).

the Babylonians. It is not correct in places and areas where there are no signs of destruction.

The changes in this local material culture between the 7th and the 5th centuries were probably small and gradual, and there are no archaeological tools to distinguish and define those changes. The model that I am offering, as theoretical as it is, suggests that archaeologists take this continuation as a possible option, at least in some areas. I hope that future excavations will find the site that will demonstrate this continuation in a clear stratigraphical sequence, and will make this theory into an archaeological reality.

A support for this model can be found in the similarity in shape, form and other characteristics of some pottery types of the late Iron Age and the Persian period. If we were dealing here with other, more "neutral" transitional periods such as the beginning of the Early Bronze period, the transition to the Middle Bronze or to the Late Bronze period, the assumption of some continuity in forms would be interpreted as a common archaeological method. It is hard for me to understand the attempt of Prof. Master to explain that continuity has nothing to do with continuous potting traditions in the highlands, especially since we now have other examples for this same continuity. Such an example is the continuation in using stamp impressions on jar handles as part of the local administration. It is becoming clearer now that the early types of the *Yehud* stamp impressions, dating to the end of the 6th and to the 5th centuries BCE, preserve some of the phenomena that characterized the 'private' stamp impressions of the Late Iron Age (in form, decoration, etc.) as well as those of the *mwsb* stamp impressions, usually dated to the 6th century BCE. Bigger changes occurred at the end of the 5th or the beginning of the 4th centuries BCE, and were probably slow and gradual.³⁵

Daniel Master's cautiousness and his unwillingness to go beyond the similarities and conclude from them that there probably was continuity of life in Judah, in contrast to my attempt, is an example of concentrating on the half empty cup. The consequence of this approach, however, is much wider, since by taking this view he is supporting the historical interpretation of two different periods with a gap in between. I am not sure that this is really what he means. My archaeological view stands: If the researcher looks for signs of continuation, he might find it, but if he will ignore the possibility of such continuity, he will never have the chance to find it.

For me, the most important historical conclusion from the archaeological material is not new. Other scholars also pointed to the fact that after the destruction of Jerusalem there was a sharp decline in urban life, which is in contrast to the continuity of the rural settlements in the region of Benjamin and in the area between Bethlehem and Beth-

³⁵ See Vanderhooft, D.S. and Lipschits, O., "A New Typology of the Yehud Stamp Impressions." *TA* (forthcoming); Lipschits, O. and Vanderhooft, D. forthcoming. Yehud Stamp Impressions of the Fourth Century BCE: A Time of Administrative Consolidation? Lipschits, O., Knoppers, G., and Albertz, R. (eds.). *Judah and the Judeans in the 4th Century BCE*. (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns), forthcoming.

Zur.³⁶ This settlement pattern continued throughout the Persian Period when, despite the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the restoration of its status as the capital of the province, there was no strengthening of urban life, and the settlement in Judah remained largely based on the rural population.³⁷ The unavoidable conclusion is that the Babylonian period is the most important point of change in the characteristics of the settled areas, when the settlement center of gravity moved from the core to the close periphery, and a new pattern of settlement was created, in which the core was depleted and the nearby periphery continued to exist almost without change. This was not a homogenous process that occurred all over the land in the same way. There were differences between the different regions in Judah, and one should check carefully each one of the regions, understanding its history and fate during the periods before and after the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem. A similar archaeological situation -- the continuation of the rural settlement from the end of the Iron Age to the Persian period -- is discerned in Ammon, although there too one can discern different geopolitical and demographic processes in the different areas of the kingdom.³⁸

The change from urban to rural society and the importance of the rural society in the Babylonian and Persian periods force us to base our knowledge mainly on surveys and salvage excavations. The problems with the accuracy of surveys have been discussed exhaustively in the literature, but surveys are still a basic tool for creating regional maps for examination of the settlement and demographic changes between different periods. The data from salvage excavations are of great importance for the research of the rural settlements and supply an option for greater depth in viewing specific rural sites. The methodology of using surveys and salvage excavations is not simple, and should always be used in the broadest perspective, while

³⁶ On this subject, see C. E. Carter, *The Province of Yehud in the Post-Exilic Period: Soundings in the Site Distribution and Demography*, in *Second Temple Studies 2: Temple and Community in the Persian Period*, eds. T. C. Eskenazi and K. H. Richards (JSOTSup 175; Sheffield: JSOT, 1994), 106-45; I. Milevski, “Settlement Patterns in Northern Judah during the Achaemenid Period according to the Hill Country of Benjamin and Jerusalem Survey,” *Bulletin of the Anglo-Israel Archaeological Society* 15 (1996-1997), 7-29; O. Lipschits, “The Yehud Province under Babylonian Rule (586-539 B.C.E.): Historic Reality and Historiographic Conceptions” (Ph.D. dissertation, Tel Aviv University, 1997), 171-336 (Hebrew); 1999 (op. cit. n. 28); 2003, 326-55 (op. cit. n. 30); N. Na’aman, “Royal Vassals or Governors? On the Status of Sheshbazzar and Zerubbabel in the Persian Empire,” *Henoch* 22/1 (2000), 43. It is difficult to understand either the archaeological or historical basis for Barstad’s conclusions (1996, 47-48) regarding the difference between the area north of Jerusalem and the area south of it.

³⁷ On this subject See Lipschits, O. 2006 “Achaemenid Imperial Policy, Settlement Processes in Palestine, and the Status of Jerusalem in the Middle of the Fifth Century BCE,” Lipschits, O. and Oeming, M. (eds.) *Judah and the Judeans in the Persian (Achaemenid) Period* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2006) 19-52.

³⁸ Lipschits, O., “Ammon in Transition from Vassal kingdom to Babylonian Province,” *BASOR* 335 (2004), 37-52.

acknowledging the danger of getting problematic and erroneous results while using the data in partial or tendentious ways.

In this connection I recall Prof. Knoppers' request to explain why I can't agree with Faust's study, where he argues for an extremely low continuity in the rural settlement in Judah.³⁹ The main methodological problem with Faust's study is the discussion of all the territory of the former kingdom of Judah without any attention to the different fates of the different regions. I think it is a mistake for Faust to focus on regions in Judah known to have been destroyed at the beginning of the sixth century B.C.E. and which had no settlement continuation in the Persian period (the Jordan valley, the Negev, the southern Shephelah, etc.), combined with only a minor representation of the areas where, according to the excavations of the main sites (e.g., the region of Benjamin) and the surveys (e.g., the northern Judean hills), there is a clear continuity. Against the background of an overly general discussion of the entire territory of the kingdom of Judah, without division into different regions and without discussion of the different fate of those regions, Faust chose the Samaria foothills as a control group. This is a very limited and defined area, part of the Samaria province since the end of the 8th century BCE, and one of the most stable regions in demographic and political terms from the 7th to the 4th centuries BCE, with clear continuity between the end of the Iron Age and the Persian period. The Samaria data, thus, provide no control for assessing processes in Judah.

In the overall archaeological picture I have tried to present in the book under review, one can criticize specific details, but the general picture of significant regional differences within Judah in the sixth century is one of the strongest and best documented facts in the material culture of Judah at the end of the Iron Age. This is a point of great importance for biblical studies, and can be used in discussions about the significance of Benjamin, the Simeonite territory, the location of Beth-El, Mizpah, Gibeon, or even about the status of Jerusalem in biblical texts from the exilic and post-exilic periods. The notes made by Prof. Knoppers, using the three examples from the book of Chronicles; the way Prof. Eskenazi invoked archaeology to reassess Ezra 1-6; the way Prof. Albertz considered the history of the time of Josiah and the description of his cultic reform; or Prof. Blenkinsopp's treatment of Judahite-Benjaminitite hostility:⁴⁰ all are examples of the value of archaeological and historical observations in Biblical studies. The same is true, as emphasized by Prof. Williamson, with the attempt to explain how the pattern of the Babylonian destruction was clearly linked to the Babylonian military and political strategy near the western border of Judah and around Jerusalem, and how it was as a consequence of the collapse of the military and administrative power of the kingdom in the

³⁹ Among A. Faust's papers on the rural settlement, see especially: "Judah in the Sixth Century B.C.E.: A Rural Perspective," *PEQ* 135 (2003), 37-53, and my response: "The Rural Settlement in Judah in the Sixth Century BCE: A Rejoinder," *PEQ* 136 (2004), 99-107.

⁴⁰ J. Blenkinsopp, "Bethel in the Neo-Babylonian Period," O. Lipschits and J. Blenkinsopp (eds.), *Judah and the Judeans in the Neo-Babylonian Period* (Winona Lake, Ind: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 93-107.

border zones (the Negev, the southern Shephelah, the southern part of the Judean hills and the Jordan valley). I also have tried to connect the archaeological situation in the area around Jerusalem to the Babylonian interdiction against its restoration, like Hadrian's in a much later period and for similar reasons.

One may also compare the wider picture of regional differences between the former Assyrian provinces in the territory of the former Israelite kingdom. There is a clear continuation in the material culture and no sign for a change in the demographic or geopolitical situation between the seventh and the fifth centuries BCE, and the destiny of the conquered Babylonian small kingdoms where a destruction and change can be noticed mainly in the urban centers and in the peripheral areas. This is also a subject with great importance for understanding of the history of the region not only during the Babylonian period, but also during the Persian and up to the Hasmonean period, when things changed again in a very drastic and dramatic way. All in all, I can't accept the ideas of destruction without a plan, or of ruling without a policy. In this respect, Prof. Albertz made a very important differentiation between the policy of Nabopolassar and Nebuchadrezzar and between the ideology behind their policies. There is much more to discuss on this subject.

The similarities between the Babylonian policy in Ammon and in Judah can't be ignored.⁴¹ It was a different policy from that of the Assyrians, but not so different from the policy of the Persians. The Babylonians conquered vast territories that were organized by the Assyrians as provinces whose inhabitants had lost their national and cultural identity. Only in the periphery there remained kingdoms with distinctive national characteristics. These kingdoms were relatively small, with well-defined political and religious centers where the elite resided. Consequently, the Babylonians were able to establish their rule over those centers or alternately to destroy them, and to deport only (or mainly) the elite of such kingdoms. In doing so, they left in place large sectors of the population, particularly the rural sector, without making any effort to rehabilitate the economy and administration.⁴² The Achaemenid rule continued with the same policy towards the provinces in the hill country.⁴³ The weak urban society in the hill country was a result of the Assyrian and Babylonian destructions and deportations, as well as the outcome of the agricultural economy, so characteristic to this region.⁴⁴ We can assume that just like the Babylonians, the

⁴¹ Lipschits, “Ammon in Transition from Vassal kingdom to Babylonian Province,” *op.cit.*, note 4.

⁴² Vanderhooft, *op.cit.*, note 6.

⁴³ Lipschits, “Achaemenid Imperial Policy, Settlement Processes in Palestine, and the Status of Jerusalem in the Middle of the Fifth Century BCE.” *op.cit.*, note 4.

⁴⁴ See Briant, P., *From Cyrus to Alexander: A History of the Persian Empire* (Transl. Peter T. Daniels. Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2002; English translation of 1996 *Histoire de l'empire perse de Cyrus à Alexandre: Volumes I-II*. Achaemenid History 10. Leiden) 976. The distribution of Greek pottery, as summarized by Lehman, is one more example of the differences between the urban and commercial economy along the coast and the agricultural economy

Achaemenids were also interested in the continued existence of the rural settlement in the hill country. It was an important source for agricultural supply, which was probably collected as tax.⁴⁵

This historical – archaeological situation in post-exilic Judah is of importance for understanding the developments there during the Persian period. Prof. Williamson raised doubts and questions whether some of those who returned to Judah early in the Persian period met with hostility from those who had remained in the land. I can just agree with Williamson's thoughts, which he demonstrated it in a persuasive way based on the biblical texts from the early Persian period. This view also gains support from the above described historical, archaeological and social-demographic processes. As many biblical scholars, historians and archaeologists have observed, there is no more room for theories regarding a 'mass return' at the beginning of the Persian period.⁴⁶ It seems that beside the rebuilding of the temple and the renewed Jerusalemite cultic life in Judah after 70 years, the actual 'return' was a slow and graduate re-establishment of the power of the local social, religious and fiscal classes around the temple in Jerusalem. This process may have crystallized around the middle of the fifth century BCE. We cannot detect the details of this process with archaeological tools, since the changes were too slow and incremental. It is clear, however, that at the middle of the fifth century B.C.E. Jerusalem had arrived at a point of a change.⁴⁷ In this period, the fortifications of Jerusalem were rebuilt. Beside the scanty archaeological finds, we have a clear description of this event in the Nehemiah narrative. The list of the builders of the wall (Nehemiah 3) that was combined with Nehemiah's memoirs by a later editor is another testimony for it. Even more, the impression of this event as one of the most conspicuous and most important at that time led to enormous expectations for the renewed status of Jerusalem. This impression stands behind the composition of Nehemiah 11. The significance of such a change in Jerusalem in the middle of the fifth century B.C.E. can only be interpreted in one way: Jerusalem became the capital of the province (*Bīrābīl*) and replaced Mizpah.

In this period, one historical circle was closed. Jerusalem's status was renewed. A temple, fortifications and the status of a central political city were restored in Jerusalem. The actual situation in Jerusalem was,

in the hill country. See Lehman, East Greek or Levantine? Band-Decorated Pottery in the Levant during the Achaemenid Period, *Transeuphratène* 19 (2000), 83-113.

⁴⁵ The many 'yehud' stamp impressions found in Judah are the best proof for the role of the agricultural economy of Judah. The same situation probably existed in the area of the Negev and the Southern Shephelah, as we can learn from the many ostraca from this region, most of them dated to the 4th century B.C.E.

⁴⁶ See, for example, B. Becking, "We all returned as One": Critical Notes on The Myth of the Mass Return," O. Lipschits and M. Oeming (eds.), *Judah and the Judaeans in the Persian Period* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 3-18, with further literature.

⁴⁷ Stern worked with the same assumption, basing his view on the archaeological material, but he interpreted the cause and the results in a different way. See Stern, E., *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible, Volume II: The Assyrian, Babylonian, and Persian Periods (732-332 B.C.E.)*, 581-582.

however, probably still poor and the city was far removed from the splendid memories and descriptions of how it was in the first temple period. The combination of its poor status and the high expectations of the past fueled national hopes and aspirations in the late Persian period, and was a starting point for another process in the history of the city. This is, however, a subject quite distant from the title of the present session, and is probably the right point once again to thank the panel members, the organizers of this session and the audience that showed their interest through their presence.