

Introduction

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I

Water is the foundation for all life on earth. That is why a sufficient supply of water is one of the great themes for humanity today. What is now becoming an urgent problem because of ecological changes and the rapid growth of the world's population, was already one of the most important subjects of concern in the civilizations of the ancient world. This was particularly true in the semi-arid climate of the biblical lands. The Bible reflects this situation extensively, and in many different ways.

In the book of Genesis, the creation of the world begins with water, and in contrary ways. In the second, older creation account, the world before creation is described as completely dry (Gen 2:5). The first, later creation account, on the other hand, imagines the status quo before creation as being a watery chaos (Gen 1:2). In both cases water is the fundamental theme.

The Bible's double beginning shows that the experience of water is ambivalent from the very outset. On the one hand, enough available and controllable water for the lives of human beings and beasts is the precondition for an ordered world. The cosmos is characterized by a secure provision of water. On the other hand, water can become an extremely threatening enemy. Water is also the epitome of chaos.

The following collection of studies gives an impression of the variety which is associated with the theme of water. It is a topic which enduringly influenced the biblical literature of the Persian and Hellenistic periods. And here very varying viewpoints are important. The title *Thinking of Water* shows that it is not primarily a question of water as such, but rather of the effect of water in its manifold forms and appearances on the *awareness* of men and women, and of the degree to which it determined not only real living conditions but the intellectual and spiritual culture as well.

The restriction to the Persian and Hellenistic period is guided by practical considerations. These are the eras in which biblical literature took on the form in which it has come down to us today, and in which

a great part of the extant text also came into being. In the biblical writings this era offers us the best foundational sources – even though the dating of these sources individually and their numerous stages of development are uncertain and will remain so. Since at this time the limits of the canon were not yet defined, it is also useful to draw on the extra-canonical literature as well, in this case the Enochic literature and the Qumran writings.

We encounter water in the biblical and parabiblical literature both as a reality and as a metaphor. It appears in widely varied forms. There are the springs, such as the Gihon, which did not only guarantee Jerusalem's water supply but where Solomon is said to have been elevated as king (1 Kgs 1:38), and the famous source that waters paradise (Gen 2:6). There are cisterns, such as the ones into which Joseph (Gen 37:24) and Jeremiah (Jer 38:6) were thrown. There are brooks, such as the brook Cherith, on whose banks Elijah was fed by ravens (1 Kgs 17:5), or the Kishon, in which the opponents of Barak and Elijah found their end (Judg 5:21; 1 Kgs 18:40), and the Jabbok, at whose ford Jacob wrestled with God (Gen 32:23). There are the rivers, such as the Jordan, the Euphrates, the Nile and the rivers of paradise (Gen 2:10–14). There are the seas: the Mediterranean (Jonah 1 and frequently), the Reed Sea (Exod 14 and frequently) and the mythical primal ocean, which breaks in over the world of the living in the form of the Flood, and brings back chaos (Gen 6–8).

As a matter of course, the the powerful symbolic value of water found expression in the system of religious symbols, to the point when water itself was ascribed divine attributes. Just as the sea and the rivers took on mythical form in the person of the sea god (cf. Ps 93 and frequently), the God YHWH too can be experienced as “the fountain of life” (Ps 36:10). And here Israel was not alone but was linked with its cultural and religious environment in manifold ways.

II

Ehud Ben Zvi, “Thinking of Water in Late Persian/Early Hellenistic Judah: An Exploration,” gives a survey of the symbolic value which water took on in the discourse of the Jewish community. The examples of this from the authoritative repertoire are extremely numerous. They include cases in which symbolic value is associated with particular “waters,” as the occasion for historical reminiscence: rivers such as the Jordan, the rivers in Eden, the Euphrates and the Nile, seas such as the Reed Sea, or the Mediterranean, as well as the Flood in primeval times.

There are remembrances which are bound up with sources, wells, and pools as the stage for events. Whereas all these motifs do not necessarily involve the water itself, water can itself be a metaphor. "YHWH is water" embraces the blessing but also the threatening features of the experience of God in an impressive way. Fire and light are comparable metaphors. Jerusalem can be described as "fountain of water" towards which the nations for their part "stream" in order to acquire water, i.e., wisdom. In Isa 55:10–11 YHWH's word as the subject of teaching is equated with the rain and snow that make the earth fertile. In Isa 11:9 knowledge of YHWH is compared with the water of the sea. According to Amos 5:24, justice and righteousness are to "flow." In sum, Ben Zvi shows that "water" served as a central semantic playground that allowed the community to explore, express, formulate, reformulate and communicate in intelligible ways, concepts that would have been difficult for them to express or even explore in other manners. Thinking of (and through the concept of) water facilitated thinking about a plethora of various matters that were central to the community

Martti Nissinen, "Sacred Springs and Liminal Rivers: Water and Prophecy in the Ancient Eastern Mediterranean," discusses the significance of water for prophecy. In the literary testimonies of prophecy which have been preserved, water is mentioned as an entity with a significance of its own. It also plays a part in the outward circumstances in which prophetic predictions were made and passed on. Prophets underwent ritual purifications. In the sphere of Greek civilization, oracles were for preference situated at springs. Mesopotamian Mari is evidence that water was important in mantic praxis. In Assyrian prophecies, the river plays a part as a site for the ordeal, and prophets could promise divine protection at the crossing of the river (cf. Isa 43:2). In Israel, God himself can be termed the source of living water (Jer 17:13; Ps 36:10).

In Mesopotamian sources, the generous gift of water as the foundation for the country's wellbeing is associated with the monarchy, as *Stéphanie Anthonioz* shows in "Water(s) of Abundance in the Ancient Near East and in Hebrew Bible Texts: A Sign of Kingship." In the same way that in the creation myths the gods established life through the gift of water, it is the king's task to guarantee a constant water supply. He is responsible to the gods for the country's irrigation. This idea, which originates in the Mesopotamian irrigation culture, came from there to the west, as we see from the Bible and other sources from Israel's neighbouring cultures. In Judah the idea certainly changed in a remarkable way towards the end of the monarchy: since there was no longer a king, it was YHWH himself who as divine king saw to the irri-

gation of the country. The concepts of order which in the earlier period were associated with the king, are now bound up with the Torah.

In "The Nile in Biblical Memory," *Diana Edelman* takes the Nile as an example showing that an individual body of water could acquire remarkable significance, and one that was, in addition, outside the country of Israel. For the ancient world, the Nile, together with the Euphrates and the Tigris, was the most impressive river of all, a natural wonder without parallel. Here what is in question is not the biblical information as such; Edelman asks rather about the associations which came to the fore when Jewish readers read the texts during the Hellenistic period (332–146 BCE) and understood it as a part of a past which determined their own group identity. In the sense of political history, the Nile (like the Pharaoh) stands for Egypt *per se*, generally as a hostile power (Jeremiah 46; Ezekiel 29; and frequently). Topographically, for the Jewish communist in the Persian era the Nile constituted an external frontier that was both real and symbolic. This has an individual dimension, when it is the Nile into which the little Israelite boys are to supposed to be thrown according to Exodus 1, and from which Moses is saved according to Exodus 2. It has a cosmic dimension, when the rise of the Nile is associated with the floods of chaos which threaten the cultivated land (Amos 9:5). It has a topographical dimension, which is shown particularly clearly through the promise in Gen 15:18, where the borders of the promised land are determined by the Nile and the Euphrates. At the same time, this border can still include the land along the banks of the Nile and hence the Egyptian diaspora.

Kåre Berge, in "Polluted, Bitter, and Sweet Water as a Matter of Ethnic Identity-Formation in Persian Yehud," considers the tradition about the exodus from Egypt and the wanderings through the wilderness, showing how in the Persian era these texts helped to develop a Jewish identity. He takes up Mary K. Wakeman's interpretation of the story about the miracle at the sea, which stresses that the motif of the fight against chaos also underlies the rescue at the Reed Sea. The dividing of the water in Exod 14:21 corresponds to the splitting of the chaotic Sea Monster at the beginning of creation. The Israelites are rescued because chaos is defeated and remains subdued by *קָן* "limit, law, regulation, allotted portion" – that is to say, limits are set to chaos through morality and law. Consequently the rescue at the sea leads on to the gift of the Torah on Zion. The two acts provide the foundation for Israel's identity. The gift of the Torah also means that God imposes a limitation on himself through law. The fact that this constellation is repeated in the Mara episode (Exod 15:22–26) shows how fundamental it is. The miracle of the transformation of bitter water into sweet shows God in the

role of the one who heals his people. On the one hand he defeats chaos in the form of the bitter water; on the other the miracle is directly linked with the setting up of חֹק וּמִשְׁפָּט , law and judgment, and with the admonition to keep the commandments and statutes of the Torah. In his way God determines Israel's identity.

In "The Song of the Sea and Isaiah: Exodus 15 in Post-monarchic Prophetic Discourse," *Ian Douglas Wilson* discusses the *Wirkungsgeschichte* in the Persian and early Hellenistic periods of the foundational event of salvation history, the passage through the sea during the liberation from Egypt. Special influence here emanates from the song in Exodus 15, in which the salvation-history event is fused with the myth about YHWH's fight against the chaotic sea. From this struggle Israel in its passage through the sea emerges as newly born people of God. The starting point for the importance of the song in the formation of tradition during the Persian and Hellenistic period is provided by the textual agreements with the doxology in Isa 12:1–6 (compare especially the direct citation of Exod 15:2 in Isa 12:2). Similar allusions can be found throughout the whole book of Isaiah, Deutero- and Trito-Isaiah included, in some cases as a promise of a new exodus. Here we have both the water motif (Isa 43:1–7) and also the motif of the struggle against chaos (Isa 51:9–11). For the self-understanding and the social memory of Judaism in the era of the second temple, the tradition about the exodus and the miracle at the sea have become exceedingly formative.

Taking as example the concept of "flowing, overflowing water," *Sonya Kostamo* in "Imagining Water: The Overflowing Stream in Isa 66:12," asks about the "social memory" of the Jewish community in the late Persian-Hellenistic period. She considers all the instances of הַשֵּׁט in the whole book of Isaiah (Isa 8:8; 10:22; 28:2, 15, 17, 18; 30:28; 43:2; 66:12) in order to discover the premises under which the reader in the ancient world will have understood Isa 66:12 in particular. It is surprising that the term generally used as image for an unstoppable hostile army which overflows the country is used in Isa 66:12 in the positive sense of overflowing blessing. Since Isa 66:12 presupposes, essentially speaking, the whole book of Isaiah, we have to assume that this was a deliberate re-interpretation: the statement acquires its significance from the very fact that it runs counter to its customary use. The peoples who stream to Jerusalem become a blessing for the community.

As well as the Nile, the Euphrates has also taken on a metaphorical meaning. In his essay "'But into the Water You Must Not Dip It' (Jeremiah 13:1): Methodological Reflections on How to Identify the Work of the Deuteronomistic Redaction in the Book of Jeremiah," *Hermann Josef Stipp* proves in a detailed analysis that Jeremiah's two wanderings at

the Euphrates as they are related in Jer 13:1–11 are in every respect fictitious. The symbolic act is a redactional text in which the announcement of judgment against the deported people in Babylon is played out, and it prophesies that they will be completely annihilated. The analysis of Jeremiah 13 becomes a methodological paradigm. On the one hand it shows that for the historical evaluation of texts literary-critical analyses are indispensable, and on the other that hypotheses based essentially on linguistic criteria are not sufficient.

The negative opposite pole to the provision with water is drought, and the famine that follows it. A catastrophe of this kind is the guiding motif in the book of Joel, and its first two chapters are analysed by *Christoph Levin* in “Drought and Locust Plague in Joel 1–2.” It emerges that the basis of today’s text is a hymn on the accession to the throne of the weather god, which has been preserved in Joel 2. In a second step this was linked in Joel 1 with a lament over a drought which describes in moving images the effect of the lack of water. The description of a locust plague was added on a third level.

In his essay “Coping with Drought and Famine in some Post-Exilic texts,” *Bob Becking* looks at the catastrophic effects of drought, and the ways of coping with them. From the psychological viewpoint, there are three basic ways of reacting to great natural disasters. These are generally linked with each other: (1) acceptance; (2) a search for the reasons as far as this is possible; (3) coping with the emotions which the catastrophe evokes. There are good reasons for assuming that there were periods of extreme aridity in the Achaemenid period too (538–333 BCE). With the presuppositions of the ancient world, the mental coming to terms with catastrophes of this kind took place as a matter of course in the religious context. Becking chooses three examples which certainly or probably reflect the experience of famine: Nehemiah 5; Psalm 126 and Haggai 1. In Nehemiah 5 the catastrophe is countered through the remission of debts – that is to say, through practical measures. Psalm 126 expects that God will bring about a turn of events, while Haggai 1 on the other hand puts faith in the appeal to cast egoism aside and to devote efforts to the rebuilding of the temple.

In myth, the watery chaos takes form as a fighting god. This motif, too, brings out the ambivalent experience with water. It is personified not only as the life-threatening sea god, but also as the weather god who protects life and guarantees the land’s fertility. This concept can in its turn also be transferred to the political powers. According to *Reinhard Müller* in “Adad’s Overflowing Scourge and the Weather God of Zion: Observations on Motif History in Isa 28:14–18,” the expression שוט שוט “an overflowing scourge” in Isa 28:15, 18 points both to the

scourge of the fighting weather god Adad (for which there is also iconographical evidence), as well as to the empire of Assyria, which crushed the Levantine monarchies with its mighty armies. If we presuppose that the saying goes back to the 8th century prophet Isaiah, this is as much as to say that in the face of this military flood there is no escape.

The Job dialogue shows the varied ideas which can be associated with water. In "Thinking of Water in the book of Job: An Introduction to the Job Literature," *Urmas Nõmmik* counts no fewer than 32 lexemes which are connected with water. They are distributed throughout the whole dialogue, and in all the literary strata which developed step by step from the late Persian period onwards. It is only in the frame scenes that the motif is missing. In the dialogue, water is one of the especially significant images. With its intrinsic ambivalence, water is especially suited to illustrate Job's existential situation. Water metaphors are already frequent in the earliest form of the dialogue. They illustrate Job's misery and the human being's transience, but they can also be used to describe Job's innocence or the wellbeing of the righteous. In the divine speeches YHWH's curbing of the chaotic sea is a central motif.

As an example from the Old Testament's historical books, *Juha Pakkala* in "Water in 1–2 Kings" surveys the significance of water in the books of Kings. In parts of these two books the motif occurs with striking frequency and great variety. There is almost always a link with prophecy. At the centre are the water miracles which are ascribed to Elijah and Elisha. The books of Kings bundles together the possibilities open to the water motif in the Old Testament as if through a burning glass. It is only the chaotic, threatening side of water which is not mentioned, and similarly water as a means of (cultic) purification is also missing.

The king's ordering, "cosmic" power could prove itself when he puts into effect hydraulic projects, in order to supply the people with water and so as to diminish the risk of flooding. In "Water Control and Royal Propaganda: Sennacherib's Boast in 2 Kgs 19:24 (= Isa 37:25)," *William Morrow* gives examples drawn from the whole of the ancient Near East. In a counter-move, the kings set out to destroy the water supply of their enemies. 2 Kgs 19:23–24 lets the prophet Isaiah cite an utterance of Sennacherib's in which he boasts that he has dried up "all Egypt's rivers." The study shows that this was a widespread motif which would apply to a number of kings, and in this special case would fit Esarhaddon rather than Sennacherib. The anachronism serves to emphasize the contrast between YHWH and the great king; for ac-

ording to the exodus tradition it was YHWH who dried up Egypt's water.

A sign of the king's ordering power was especially the well-watered garden, such as the one described in the Bible's creation narrative. In "Manasseh in Paradise? The Influence of ANE Palace Garden Imagery in LXX 2 Chronicles 33:20," *Louis Jonker* lists a large number of instances for the garden culture of the Assyrian, Neo-Babylonian and Persian great kings. In the Persian era particularly, the garden counted as an expression of the blossoming of royal power, as the Greek loan word *paradeisos* shows. What is remarkable is that the word *paradeisos* appears in the Greek translation of 2 Chr 33:20, in the burial note for King Manasseh, moreover without any Hebrew equivalent and in distinction from the parallel in 2 Kgs 21:18, where Manasseh is buried in Uzza's garden. The king, who is described in 2 Chronicles as repentant and righteous, is elevated to the same level as that of the Persian and Hellenistic great kings. The reading may also be influenced by the culture of Egyptian garden tombs, with which the translators were familiar from their environment in the 2nd century.

One of the forms in which water appears is dew. In "Dew in the Enochic literature," *Peter Juhás* investigates the motif in the Ethiopian book of Enoch, a collection of five originally independent writings which go back to the 3rd century BCE. At the same time he gives an example taken from the sphere of non-canonical Jewish literature. In its earliest form, the *Astronomical Book* and the *Book of the Watchers*, dew, which is normally associated with blessing, is connected in a striking way with the winds which cause destruction. The cosmological speculation behind this idea is probably Mesopotamian in origin. Magic texts from Mesopotamia say that evil dew descends from the stars. It may well be that the Babylonian diaspora passed on this tradition; for traces of the idea can also be found in the Babylonian Talmud. In the later *Similitudes*, the notion about the storehouses of the wind – an idea also familiar from the Bible – is transferred to the dew, and linked with the dwelling place of the righteous. In the *Epistle*, dew is involved in the punishment of sinners, and also seems to play a part in the resurrection.

There is evidence for the special importance of water among the individual Jewish groups associated with Qumran and in their literature, as *Samuel Thomas* is able to show in "Living Water by the Dead Sea: Some Water Metaphors in the Qumran Scrolls." It is easy to see why this is the case, given Qumran's desert position. But water had also a prominent significance in Qumran because of the emphasized purification rites. Literary sources are the *Community Rule*, the *Damascus Docu-*

ment, and the *Pesharim*. The key role played by water is shown by the interplay between the discourse related to the motif in the texts, the experienced dependence on water and dealings with water, and finally the ritual use of water. What emerges is a particular "mental image" of water which became characteristic for the identity of the *Yahad* both inwardly and outwardly.

In his essay "The Fluid Boundaries of Life, the Universe and Yahweh," *James R. Linville* shows how important water became as metaphor in the Bible, taking the picture of God as example. The mode of appearance in which water occurs in the Bible and which is linked in some way or another with God is of astonishing variety. It can be in extreme contrast, providing the foundation for life and also destroying it. What is characteristic of the Bible is the way it joins the fate of the individual with the collective history of God's people, and this again with the mythical ideas about the struggle against chaos. In the water metaphor, the experience of human beings in and with nature merges seamlessly into their experiences in the historical and social world. In this sense water is a metaphor which is especially well suited for God himself. Even the monotheistic concept of God is inconceivable unless that one God has many facets. "Perhaps the ever-malleable water is the most fitting symbol of the biblical deity of all."

Water can be a leading motif not only for the idea of God but on the human side as well. In "Drawing Out Moses: Water as a Personal Motif of the Biblical Character," *Peter Sabo* shows this from the picture of Moses drawn by the biblical tradition. Here there is a whole series of narratives in which water is important: the exposure of the newly born babies in the Nile, the encounter with the daughters of the Midianite priest at a well, the meeting with Pharaoh at the Nile, the crossing of the Reed Sea, and the provision of water for the people during their passage through the desert. In an extensive re-telling, Peter Sabo presents the possible symbolism which can be deduced from the individual scenes, and the way in which this links the scenes together – for example, the rescue of Moses with the help of the Nile and out of the Nile, and the rescue of the Israelites with the help of the Reed Sea, and out of the Reed Sea. "The biography of Israel" (*Ilana Pardes*) is reflected in the biography of Moses and water plays an important role in it.

Finally, *Francis Landy*, "Fluvial Fantasies," shows the wealth of multifaceted, and often seemingly contradictory associations that are bound up with rivers in the Hebrew Bible. Rivers form boundaries, but as ways for transport and communication they provide links as well. They ensure irrigation, but can also prove to be a threat through flooding. Especially impressive are the imaginary rivers of paradise in Gen

2:10–14, a “fluvial fantasy” which cannot be translated into any real concept. This links the mythical rivers Pishon and Gihon with the real rivers Tigris and Euphrates, and at the same time with history, since Solomon’s anointing takes place in Jerusalem on the Gihon (1 Kings 1). The ambivalence of the Nile in Pharaoh’s dream (Genesis 41) is striking; both the fat and the lean cows come out of the river, as do both the fat and the meagre ears of corn – life and death. Rivers in the Psalter are similarly ambivalent. On the one hand they are God’s opponents (Psalm 93) which he overcomes. On the other hand they are an image for the yearning for God (Psalm 42).

III

“Water is good to think with.” In a modification of the familiar saying “Animals are good to think with” (attributed to Claude Lévi-Strauss), the essays in this volume show with their great variety the immense scope of water as an image and metaphor to bring out graphically and mentally existential and religious circumstances and to link them with the experienced world. Water, like light, is the necessary precondition for all life and is experienced as an indispensable part of both daily life and cultic practice; and consequently both hope and fear find expression through experiences with water. The metaphors do not affect the accompanying circumstances alone; they touch their religious centre itself, the idea of God. It is an advantage here that water is ambivalent – in this respect like the experience of God itself. Both droughts and floods are experienced as existential threats. The inexhaustible variety of its modes of appearance is one reason why in religious tradition, in religious conceptuality, in religious praxis, and in the hopes for future consummation, water is one of the most important factors. The Judaism of the Second Temple period and its literary heritage are a very well suited test case. The paradigmatic importance for religious history and theology in general is considerable.