THE HISTORY OF PASSOVER:
CHANGES IN THE RELIGION AND CULT OF
THE JUDEANS IN 7th–5th CENTURIES BCE

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ABSTRACT
Despite the fact that Passover constitutes one of the most important Jewish feasts, its origins still remain somehow obscure. Biblical references indicate two incompatible traditions about the original character of Passover: a domestic ritual of common Israelites, or a central cultic ritual in the Jerusalem sanctuary. The article aims to present the hypothesis that the central royal sacrifice in Jerusalem in the late 7th century BCE evolved into the domestic feast of ‘common Israelites’ during the Babylonian Exile. This proposal finds support in John Van Seters’ reconstruction of the process of the composition of the Exodus-narratives during the Exile. The next changes in Passover took place in the mid-5th century BCE, linked to the process of establishing the new cultic calendar. A domestic-like feast was anchored to the fixed days of the month, and incorporated into the pilgrimage to the central sanctuary. This process is well illustrated by the testimonies from Elephantine, in the 5th century BCE. The article concludes by pointing out possible neglected political contexts of the religious reform in 5th century Jehud.

RÉSUMÉ
Malgré le fait que la Pâque constitue l’une des fêtes juives les plus importantes, ses origines restent en quelque sorte encore obscures. Les références bibliques indiquent deux traditions incompatibles quant au caractère originel de la Pâque : un rituel domestique des Israélites communs, ou un rite cultuel central dans le sanctuaire de Jérusalem. L’article se propose de présenter l’hypothèse selon laquelle le sacrifice royal central à Jérusalem, à la fin du 7ème siècle av. J.-C., a évolué en la fête domestique des « Israélites communs » durant l’Exil babylonien. Cette proposition est soutenue par la reconstruction selon John Van Seters du processus de
Among the other Judean/Jewish feasts, Passover seemed to have undergone the greatest transformations. These transformations concerned both the theological meaning of the feast and its sacrificial rituals. I am inclined to say that an explanation of the changes in the Passover’s sacrificial rituals may shed light on the important shifts in the religion of the Judeans. Why do I limit in this paper to three centuries, namely the 7th, 6th and 5th BCE? Obviously, it results from a limited number of sources that allow historical investigation. Basically, we have to start with the primary sources and from these, try to reconstruct the processes that occurred in the past. Some sources are relatively firmly dated, while the dates when the others were written are hardly agreed on by scholars. Despite the former or even classical scholarly view, some feasts described in the Hebrew Bible are not rooted in the distant past. Recent studies on the formation of the Hebrew Bible and the history of the religion of the Judeans point to the dynamic aspect of the process of creation of the rituals and beliefs recorded in the Scriptures.¹ Most scholars, however, agree that the 6th and the 5th centuries BCE played a pivotal role in this process.² On the other hand, most of the Judean religious institutions do not date farther back than the second half of the 7th century BCE.

I. PASSOVER AT ELEPHANTINE

The group of sources that constitutes the key for my reasoning dates back to the last quarter of the 5th century BCE and comes from the Judean colony at Elephantine in Egypt.³ One ostracoon from Elephantine attests to

the practice of Passover there. It is particularly interesting that Passover was not observed on any fixed date. The document TADAE 4 D7.6 establishes a letter where the author asks the addressee, “Send (word) to me when you make (= observe) the Passover.” This is an unequivocal, albeit unique source, pointing to the fact that during a certain period at Elephantine, Passover was celebrated without any firm cultic calendar. I have devoted another work to this phenomenon, so I allow myself to skip a detailed discussion of these sources.

In 419 BCE, the Judean colony at Elephantine received the so-called ‘Passover letter’ (TADAE A4.1). Although the name of the feast is not preserved in the letter, the text and its close resemblance to the biblical instruction make it clear that the letter aimed to introduce the (newly established?) liturgical calendar in the colony. The calendar implied in the letter and the presumed forms of sacrifice closely resemble the biblical descriptions of Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread in Exodus 12 and Leviticus 23 (cf. Deuteronomy 16). Therefore, the logical interpretation of this letter is to consider it an instruction, sent to the garrison and its Judean colony, indicating in detail how and when they should celebrate the feasts, Passover included.

In 410 BCE, after Arsames (the Persian commander of the garrison) left Elephantine, a local Egyptian group attacked the Judeans and demolished their temple. At first glance, it is unclear what provoked the Egyptians’ hostile actions. However, examining the whole documentation of these events, I can hypothesise the sequence of causes and effects. In the letter dated 408 BCE, the Judeans again asked for the Persian authorities’ consent to rebuild their temple at Elephantine:

Moreover, from the month of Tammuz, year 14 of King Darius [408 BCE] and until this day we are wearing sackcloth and fasting; our wives are made as widow(s); (we) do not anoint (ourselves) with oil and do not drink wine. Moreover, from that (time) and until (this) day, year 17 of King Darius they did not make meal-offering and incense and holocaust in the Temple. (TADAE 1 A4.7,19–22)


Let a letter be sent from you to them about the Temple of YHW the God to (re)build it in Elephantine the fortress just as it was formerly built. And they will offer the meal-offering and the incense, and the holocaust on the altar of YHW the God in your name and we shall pray for you at all times… (TADAE 1 A 4.7,24–26)

The authors of these requests pointed to the hostile relations with the Egyptians. The tension dated back to the visit of a certain Hananiah in the Judean colony. By the way, Hananiah is the name of the author of the above-mentioned ‘Passover letter’. One of the letters from Elephantine states:

‘It is known to you that Khnum is against us since Hananiah has been in Egypt until now.’ (TADAE 1 A4.3,7)

The tension was therefore not eternal but started at a precise moment, associated with a change introduced by Hananiah. An important change must have happened, which influenced such a radical shift in the native population’s attitude towards the worshipers of YHW. It is perfectly clear that fixing the Passover date in the cultic calendar would not have sufficed to provoke aggression. The documents dated 407 BCE clarify the very nature of this change. In these documents, the authorities state the conditions under which the sanctuary of YHW at Elephantine would be rebuilt:

Memorandum of what Bagohi and Delaiah said to me, saying: Memorandum: You may say in Egypt before Arsames about the Altar-house of the God of Heaven which in Elephantine the fortress built was formerly before Cambyses (and) which that wicked Vidranga demolished in year 14 of King Darius: to (re)build it on its site as it was formerly and they shall offer the meal-offering and the incense upon that altar just as formerly was done. (TADAE 1 A4.9)

If our lord […] and our Temple of YHW the God be rebuilt in Elephantine the fortress as it was formerly built – and sheep, ox, and goat are not made there as burnt-offering but [they offer there] (only) incense (and) meal-offering – and should our lord mak[e] a statement [about this, then] we shall give to the house of our lord si[ver .. and] a thousa[nd] ardabs of barley. (TADAE 1 A4.10,7–14)

In the rebuilt sanctuary, “sheep, ox, and goat are not made there as burnt-offering but [they offer there] (only) incense (and) meal-offering”. I am convinced that it was the nature of the recently changed sacrifice and its location inside the sanctuary that provoked the confusion. Otherwise, it would be difficult, if not impossible, to explain the shift in the previously peaceful relations (which lasted approximately a century) to hostility.

This tension between the Egyptians and the Judeans was attributed to the attitude of the Egyptian god Khnum. “Khnum is against us.” This god played a prominent role in the Egyptian religion at Elephantine. Let us
imagine that the Judeans, after being instructed by Hananiah regarding when and how to sacrifice Passover, started slaughtering lambs in front of their sanctuary once a year. The sanctuary of YHW was located beside the holy district dedicated to Khnum. The bloody sacrifices with the lambs and their cultic preparation for the Passover meal, held in front of the Egyptians devoted to the ram-god Khnum, must have created a strong reaction. An observer might even say that the fact that the Egyptians waited until the moment when the Persian officer left the garrison proved their tolerance.

The Passover sacrifice should be perceived as an unintended provocation. The destruction of the sanctuary and the long interval between this event and the permission to rebuild the temple point to the guilt of the Judeans. Provocation, even if not a deliberately malicious act, explains the Egyptians’ hostile reaction. Furthermore, it explains the statement in the memorandum, allowing the rebuilding of the temple: “(only) incense (and) meal-offering”. In previous scholarship, one may find an interpretation of this limitation by pointing to the dominant or unique role of Jerusalem as the religious centre for the Jews. I think that it was not the case. The sacrificial practice’s limitation to the incense and meal offerings must have been linked to the Passover rituals that were offensive to Khnum, which were consequently banned. In such a strategic place as the garrison at Elephantine, the Persian authorities could not allow the existence of the ritual practice, which might have caused the next Egyptian rebellion. Anyway, the Egyptian uprising against the Persian rule was already in the air.

To sum up the Aramaic documentation originating in 5th-century Egypt and attesting to the existence of Passover, one can say the following. In the early 5th century, Passover was celebrated as a family feast with no fixed date. Families offered the Passover sacrifices privately in their houses. In a certain period, probably after the mid-5th century, an attempt was made to place Passover, along with other feasts, within the frames of the newly established liturgical calendar. This process can be observed in the so-called ‘Passover letter’ from the Elephantine archive. I will return to this document momentarily. The fixed date of Passover, on the 14th–15th day of Nisan, was established simultaneously with the placement of the Passover sacrifice in the sanctuary. The shift in the Passover location – that is, the removal of the sacrifice from the domestic sphere and the introduction of the ritual in the central sanctuary – is the key factor for understanding the events that occurred at Elephantine in the late 5th century. I have to emphasise that in the history of the Judean settlement at Elephantine, the Egyptians’ hostile reaction towards the Judean worshipers of YHW must be regarded as an exceptional and unparalleled event.
All these circumstances lead me to hypothesise that in the 5th century BCE, the cultic calendar with a new ritual setting of the Passover was introduced in Judah. It would not be inappropriate to associate this new cultic calendar and the codification of sacral laws with the activity of Nehemiah, the Judean governor in Jerusalem, in ca. 440 BCE (after the 20th year of Artaxerxes, i.e., 445–444). The time span between the cultic reform in Jerusalem and its introduction to the Judean colony in Egypt ca. 420 BCE would not be impossible to accept. This cultic reform apparently also included Passover, its date and the form of the sacrificial rituals. The final version is plausibly preserved in Deuteronomy. Interestingly enough, it would seem that the worshipers of YHW in Egypt originally neither celebrated Passover according to any fixed calendar nor held it in the public sanctuary. Their peaceful coexistence with the Egyptians for a century strongly indicated that Passover was celebrated there as a domestic ritual, far from the sight of the Khnum devotees. If so, Passover was originally observed there, close to the description preserved in Exodus.

How shall one explain the situation in which two groups of YHW worshipers celebrated the same Passover feast in two different ways? At first glance, it seems easy to explain. This originally domestic ritual, rooted in the context of the family religion, was changed as the result of the cult centralisation in Jerusalem. It would fit well with the 5th-century establishment of the province of Jehud, where Deuteronomy might have served as the law book. This law book introduced changes in rituals and the calendar, aiming to concentrate the religious life of the small province in the capital. The original Passover attested at Elephantine would then represent the older ritual form, from the time before the religious centralisation reform. If such was the case, I would not bother the reader with all these speculations, but the issue is more complicated.

II. The Royal Context of Passover

We have to ask the question about the first attestation of Passover as a domestic family ritual. In other words, when was the Exodus-like Passover introduced or attested for the first time? Old-fashioned biblical scholars, based on Robertson-Smith and others, would answer this question by pointing to the nomadic pre- or proto-Israelite society.7 However, it is not that

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7 Roland De VAUX, Ancient Israel. Its Life and Institutions, London, Darton-Longman-Todd, 1961, 484-490. De Vaux states: “One fact, however, is certain: the Passover was a most ancient feast. It dates back to the time when the Israelites were still semi-nomads. It dates back even before the Exodus, if the feast which the Israelites wanted to celebrate in the desert (Ex. 5:1) was itself a Passover. It was the Israelite version of the spring-time
easy to settle this matter at present. The historical reconstruction of the early Israelite society leaves very little (if any) space for their nomadic ancestors. Recent scholarship points to the local, that is, Canaanite origin of the so-called “proto-Israelites”, the group that evolved during the late Bronze Age as socially and economically different from their neighbours, without any clear-cut ethnic markers.8

Let us return to the Hebrew Bible. The Passover in the Scriptures may be described as follows. The legal texts (Exodus 12; Numbers 9) indicate Passover as a domestic family cult, celebrated according to the fixed liturgical calendar.9 The context of these law texts is placed in the mythical, ideal reality of the Sinai epos. The next appearance of Passover – in the biblical chronological account – is also placed in a mythical if not fantastic reality in Joshua 5:10-11:

While the Israelites were encamped in Gilgal they kept the passover in the evening on the fourteenth day of the month in the plains of Jericho. On the day after the passover, on that very day, they ate the produce of the land, unleavened cakes and parched grain.

2 Kings 23:21-23 state:

The king commanded all the people, ‘Keep the passover to the Lord your God as prescribed in this book of the covenant.’ No such passover had been kept since the days of the judges who judged Israel, even during all the days of the kings of Israel and of the kings of Judah; but in the eighteenth year of King Josiah this passover was kept to the Lord in Jerusalem.

In Chronicles, besides the detailed description of Passover in King Josiah’s time (2 Chronicles 35), another Passover feast is referred to in King Hezekiah’s reign (2 Chronicles 30). In the reigns of both Josiah (ca. 620 BCE) and Hezekiah (ca. 700 BCE), the feast was held in the Jerusalem temple and celebrated on a fixed day of the month. It would

feast which all the Semitic nomads kept…” (p. 490); Eckart Otto, “pāsaḥ; pesah” in: G.J. Botterweck, H. Ringgren (eds), Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament, vol. XII, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans Publishing, 2003, 12-13: “This ritual originated neither within the high-god religions of Israel’s Syrian-Canaanite surroundings, which do not attest such blood rituals in any case, nor within Israel’s own religion of Yahweh. As an apotropaic family ritual, the pesah ritual derives from the locally bound (stationary nomads), family-structured, proto-Israelite livestock culture.”


hardly be possible that the Hezekiah tradition represented anything more than mere literary exaggeration. It would serve to underline how pious the good king was. In any case, the Passover in Josiah’s time must be considered seriously.

2 Kings (22–23) describes the supposed religious reforms credited to King Josiah. There is little doubt that this biblical text recalls aspects of reality. Overall, even if one keeps in mind the unrealistic and sometimes unhistorical bases of the Book of Kings, some elements cannot easily be ruled out as possibly historically reliable. In this regard, we cannot exclude that in Josiah’s time, certain changes in the religion took place. It is difficult to establish the nature of these changes, which in the Bible are referred to as the large-scale centralisation reform with a clear monolatristic aspect. Biblical tradition clearly links Josiah with Passover. The Passover celebrated in Jerusalem by Josiah opens up the apocryphal 1 Esdras:10

And Josias held the feast of the passover in Jerusalem unto his Lord, and offered the passover the fourteenth day of the first month; Having set the priests according to their daily courses, being arrayed in long garments, in the temple of the Lord. And he spake unto the Levites, the holy ministers of Israel, that they should hallow themselves unto the Lord, to set the holy ark of the Lord in the house that king Solomon the son of David had built: And said, Ye shall no more bear the ark upon your shoulders: now therefore serve the Lord your God, and minister unto his people Israel, and prepare you after your families and kindreds, According as David the king of Israel prescribed, and according to the magnificence of Solomon his son: and standing in the temple according to the several dignity of the families of you the Levites, who minister in the presence of your brethren the children of Israel, Offer the passover in order, and make ready the sacrifices for your brethren, and keep the passover according to the commandment of the Lord, which was given unto Moses. And unto the people that was found there Josias gave thirty thousand lambs and kids, and three thousand calves: these things were given of the king’s allowance, according as he promised, to the people, to the priests, and to the Levites (1 Esdras 1:1-7)

Not only this quotation, but all other biblical references to Passover in the era of the kings, make a clear connection between the feast and the royal sanctuary. It is obviously the most natural way to reconstruct the royal sacrifice during their reigns. Undoubtedly, Judah had many local temples, small sanctuaries and places of worship. Near Eastern religions, and above all, the royal aspects of the cult, assigned a very important role to the central sanctuaries and the rituals performed there by the kings. The wellbeing of the people, the New Year feast and other important sacrifices were

10 See e.g. Lisbeth S. FRIED (ed.), Was 1 Esdras First? An Investigation into the Priority and Nature of 1 Esdras, Atlanta, Society of Biblical Literature, 2011.
commonly held in the central sanctuaries, where the ruling king played a central role as the God’s agent and the indispensable intermediary in establishing the human–divine relation.

We shall provide an explanation of the fact that on one hand, Passover is regarded as the royal sacrifice in the central sanctuary; on the other hand, the law codes in the Hebrew Bible refer to Passover as a domestic feast. These two ways of celebrating Passover are hardly the same.

I have offered my interpretation of the possible origin of Passover in another article. My arguments are based on the notion that the interpretation of the ritual’s origin may be revealed in its name. I do not accept the etymology of Passover, offered in Exodus, as derived from the root ‘to be lame’ or ‘to limp’. It is often taken for granted in scholarly works, but this is an obviously popular etymology:

It is the Passover of the Lord. For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike down every firstborn in the land of Egypt, both human beings and animals; on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the Lord. The blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live: when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague shall destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt. (Exod. 12:11-13).

I would argue that the key factor for the proper interpretation of Passover is the meaning of the root $psḥ$. It does not necessarily or always mean ‘to pass over’; it also indicates protection. The above-mentioned passage from Exodus refers to God’s sparing or passing over of the houses of the Israelites, but the verb might also be understood as the protection of their houses. This meaning of the verb $psḥ$ is affirmed in the Hebrew Bible. For example, Isaiah 31:5 states, “Like birds hovering overhead, so the Lord of hosts will protect Jerusalem; he will protect and deliver it, he will spare ($psḥ$) and rescue.” The verb $psḥ$ is paralleled here with the verb $mlṭ$ – ‘to protect’ and ‘to escape’.

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In my previous work, I have attempted to argue that Passover evolved or was deliberately changed from the central royal sacrifice, aiming to protect the king or the whole community. In my reconstruction, the original Passover was a central royal sacrifice in Judah. The sacrifice was intended by the community as the way to guarantee the gods’/God’s protection. I think that the original Passover was performed as a *molk* blood sacrifice, including child offering. In my view, the biblical references to sacrificing a child and offering the first-born recall the real sacrifices from 7th-century Judah. Similarly, Abraham’s offering of Isaac and *mutatis mutandis*, the offering of Jesus both refer to the sacrifice of a lamb. It is Passover par excellence.\(^{15}\)

I will neither repeat my argumentation here nor deal with the possible change of the cult in Judah in the late 7th century. I intend to focus on the process, which did not receive sufficient attention, in my opinion. Let us assume that Passover in the time of the Judean monarchy evolved from the protective royal child sacrifice to the royal protective sacrifice, with the animal as the replacement for the child. In both cases, sacrifices were intended as the central rituals guaranteeing divine protection. How did such a sacrifice, always held in the central royal sanctuary, evolve into the domestic family ritual? When was the description of Passover in Exodus written? The answer is easy. The Babylonian exile played the key role.

Deported to Mesopotamia, the Judeans were deprived of their central royal sanctuary and king, who previously acted as the main protagonist in the main ritual. This situation made the people replace the royal sanctuary with their own houses, and the king with the man in each family.\(^{16}\) Such replacement points to the prominence of Passover so that even their changed circumstances and an unfriendly environment did not prevent the exiled people from continuing the ritual. It must have been still the main protective ritual for the community. The external circumstances caused the Judeans to replace the royal Passover in the sanctuary with the domestic family sacrifice as described in Exodus.\(^{17}\) The shift in the ritual space from the royal temple to the houses of the exiled was natural.\(^{18}\)

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17 Joseph BLENKINSOOP, *Treasures Old and New. Essays in the Theology of the Pentateuch*, Grand Rapids – Cambridge, Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004, 8-12, points out to the commemorative role of Passover, as well as its function in defining community: “By defining carefully who may or may not participate in the Passover sacrifice, the ritual in effect stipulates who does or does not qualify for membership in the new commonwealth” (p. 10). Cf. B. BECKING, “Yehudite Identity in Elephantine”, 406, who states about Passover at Elephantine: “Whether it was a renewal of tradition or an invented tradition, this festival [Passover] functioned as an identity marker of the Yehudites”.
Such reconstruction underlines the external factors that influenced the Judean cult. Their lack of both a king and a royal sanctuary forced the Judeans to seek a replacement solution. Analogically, during the Babylonian exile, other religious institutions of the Judeans also changed. Babylonia became a natural place for making circumcision the holy sign of the covenant between God and his people. It would make no sense to claim that circumcision would make someone unique, where all his neighbours practised this ritual. This was the case in Palestine. However, this was perfectly logical in Mesopotamia, where circumcision was not widely practised. In this case, the changed environment made the deportees modify the institution or the value of the traditional institution.

III. PASSOVER IN HISTORY. A SYNTHESIS

Let us return to the Passover sacrifice and the reconstruction of its historical evolutions. I propose to perceive it as follows. Originally, during the 7th century in Judah, a central sacrifice was performed in the royal sanctuary in the form of the *molk* sacrifice, where children were used as the victims. The king was the one who offered the sacrifice; however, there is no indication to determine the child victim’s identity or status (the king’s son, a captive or a slave?). In a certain period, plausibly during Josiah’s reign, this sacrificial ritual was replaced with animal sacrifice, or at least, such a replacement was postulated. In both cases, the sacrifice was called Passover and understood as the central protective ritual. The nature of the *molk* sacrifice, more than that of the sacrificial victim, created the particular importance of the ritual. It was the sacrifice that guaranteed divine protection of the king. When the Jerusalem elite were exiled to Babylonia, the former central protective sacrifice was adapted to the new circumstances. This would explain moving the Passover sacrifice from the temple to the private houses. The lamb became the typical animal victim for the sacrifice. (By the way, its symbolic connotation with the human sacrifice is

19 Cf. A.W.F. BLUNT, “Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread”, in: *Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. J. Hastings, Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1902, 684: “Another theory finds the central idea of the Passover in a piacular notion. The sacrifice would be offered as a substitute for the firstborn of man, and this conception is a common constituent of primitive spring festivals”.

still recognisable in biblical imagination, e.g., Jesus – the Lamb of God in Christian tradition). The transformed sacrificial ritual continued with the same name, but the new form required the persuasive foundations that were created in the text. The ritual instruction in Exodus openly suggests that the institution should introduce a new ritual form, and the text itself plays the role of polemics by presenting the correct way of the Passover performance. This is the background of the proto-Exodus text.21

The Judeans returning to Palestine brought with them the new religion, developed in exile. One of its aspects was the new form of Passover. This version of the Passover sacrifice was introduced not only in Palestine but also in the Judean garrison at Elephantine. It provides a strong argument for dating the origin of the Judean garrison to the early times of the Persian rule over Egypt (cf. Cambyses’ conquest of Egypt in 525 BCE). The new Passover found strong support in Jerusalem, thanks to the authority of the sacred texts, which indicated the legal and authoritative aspect of the newly changed sacrifice. Exodus includes detailed instructions on how this new Passover must be observed and the reasons for its importance. The very existence of such instructions in the normative text, recalling the divine authority granted to Moses as God’s agent, reveals the recent form of the ritual, argued for in the text. The traditional cultic forms did not need authoritative instructions in normative texts in order to be performed, as they were before. Something had to be changed because Moses had to instruct the Israelites on how they should observe Passover. The Passover instructions in the biblical texts have a clear persuasive aspect, suggesting the existence of other older or traditional forms of Passover in Jerusalem/ Judah that the new elite wanted to abolish and replace.

The changes in the form of the Passover sacrifice during the second half of the 5th century BCE illustrate events that may be called the Nehe- miah reform. Promoted by the repatriates from Mesopotamia, the domestic family Passover was contrasted and replaced by the Passover held in the central sanctuary. It might reflect Nehemiah’s effort to centralise the small province of Jehud. If so, the political calculations might have played a decisive role in interfering with the sphere of the cult. This initiative might have been simultaneous with establishing the new cultic calendar and introducing Deuteronomy as the official law book.22 It marks the most important aspects of Jehud consolidation around its capital in Jerusalem.

21 J. van Seters, The Life of Moses.
However, it cannot be ruled out that Nehemiah’s cultic interventions were rooted in the older, that is, monarchic tradition of Passover as the temple sacrifice. This is suggested in 1 Esdras, where the Persian-period community openly links their Passover with the one introduced by King Josiah. I can only hypothesise that the mid-5th-century cultic reform, under the authority of Nehemiah and the Persian king, deliberately made use of the propagandistic themes, recalling the times of the Judean kings. It might have also been an unexpected case if only centralisation was intended, and no monarchic themes were used on purpose. I do not find it likely. In my opinion, the mid-5th-century reform used the pseudo-monarchic propaganda, and in the consequences provoking a strong anti-monarchic bias in the Bible.

It is worth asking if Nehemiah’s reform served only the pragmatic purpose of centralising the province, the cult included. Otherwise, we shall imagine the tension between the post-Exodus religion (promoted by the returnees who introduced the domestic Passover, with the Exodus text as its normative basis) and the conservative religion of the local inhabitants who neither knew nor accepted the new Passover. Was the later group identical to ‘am ha’areṣ (“the people of the land”), that is, the Judeans who survived the 6th century in Palestine? If so, how and where did they survive, and what was the vehicle for their religious tradition in their kingless situation? Were they attached to the sanctuary in Bethel, which is often referred to as the possible site of resistance during the Babylonian period?23 It is hardly possible to say anything more than mere speculation.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

The process that I have attempted to describe explains, at least partly, the hybrid aspects of Passover as described in the Hebrew Bible. Sometimes, Passover represents the sacrifice celebrated by the king in the royal sanctuary. At other times, it is rooted in the domestic sphere, and then again, it evolves toward the main pilgrimage feast held in the central sanctuary.

Tentatively, I offer some general remarks on the margins of this reconstruction. First, it might be said that the cult and its forms heavily depended on the external conditions. Even if the ancient societies were predominantly conservative regarding their religion and cult, some – also radical –

Changes in the cult were possible. Such changes might be due to external conditions (Babylonian captivity), as well as deliberate modifications (Josiah and Nehemiah). In the former case, changes in the form of cult offering might have served a political purpose (cult centralisation).

Second, if the reconstruction presented above is accepted, the shift in the form of the Passover sacrifice might serve as a useful indicator for dating biblical texts. Here, it is too complicated to start the debate about the dates when the biblical texts were written. However, it is possible to regard Exodus as the text written during the Babylonian exile, and Deuteronomy as the text written during the 5th century, under the Persian rule. The possible usage of older cultic traditions within the acts of sacrificial reforms, which took place in Judah, calls for detailed analysis. Did Nehemiah want to recall the monarchic Passover when introducing his cultic reform and performing the sacrifice in the sanctuary? Alternatively, maybe Nehemiah shall be considered the one who played with the literary motifs and used the texts, with the figure of the good king reformer as his inspiration. Something had certainly happened in the cult and calendar system during the 5th century BCE. The reform might have served as the trigger for creating the biblical traditions, which were used as the ways to provide divine authorisation. The newly composed texts served to argue that the reform was not a real one but a return to the former sacrifices and the older forms of the cult. If this was the case, it would serve as an important hint for the major conflict among the population of Jehud in the 5th century BCE. On one hand, the conservatives would be dominated by the returnees; on the other hand, the reformers would surround Nehemiah. To go a step further, we could think about Nehemiah’s struggles with the leaders of the neighbouring provinces and at the same time, the deep internal crisis in Jerusalem. It is now impossible to understand the nature of this crisis. The cult might have been only one part of it. The internal relationships among the Judean elite in the early Persian period deserve further investigation. I hope that tracing shifts in the cult may serve as suitable measures of those political struggles. It may be useful to consider this aspect as well in future studies.