

Psalm 114 as Reinterpretation of the Exodus During and After the Exile¹

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ABSTRACT

Psalm 114:1 provides a unique description of the exodus as an escape from "a people of strange language / a people of foreign tongue / עַם לִיָּגוֹן" and not from slavery. Attention is given to the skillfully composed hymn-like psalm consisting of four strophes of paired synonymous parallel verses as part of the "Egyptian Hallel." An argument is developed that the reinterpretation of the exodus as a rescue from the cultural oppression experienced by exiles and marginalised or subjugated peoples is the result of a creative combination of theological traditions related to YHWH as creator and king. In conclusion suggestions are made about the reason for considering the Judean exile in Babylonia and the subservience of Yehud during the Persian Empire as contexts within which this reinterpretation of the exodus made sense.

A INTRODUCTION

During the past few decades the exodus has become the ground metaphor to signify the escape from slavery or the rescue from different forms of political and socio-economical oppression.² Some African and other Third World theologians may have become somewhat complacent in accepting that any reference to the exodus implies a link with political and economic oppression.³ To my mind such presuppositions do not do justice to the richness of the exodus as multi-layered theological metaphor in the OT.

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² George V. Pixley, *On Exodus: A Liberation Perspective* (New York: Orbis, 1988) developed his "liberation perspective" within a Central American context and has been widely quoted and affirmed by several theologians and biblical scholars writing in other oppressive societies.

³ David Flusser, *The Jewish Sages and Their Literature* (vol. 2 of *Judaism of the Second Temple Period*; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 78 points out: "So while it is true that 'the story of the exodus from Egypt speaks of slavery but says nothing about freedom,' and the Hebrew noun 'freedom' . . . is not attested in the Bible. . ." the Jewish yearning for liberty has ancient roots. Liberationist readings of the exodus traditions will benefit from being more attentive to what concept of freedom is presupposed and what the eventual impact of Hellenistic culture and philosophy amounted to in the reception of the exodus in Greco-Roman times.

In this contribution the reference to the exodus from Egypt in Ps 114:1 as an escape from "a people of strange language" / עַם לִיָּזָא will be discussed within its immediate literary context of the psalm as a hymn-like poetic composition; then attention will be given to the exodus as motif in the Psalter; subsequently the possibility of a reinterpretation of the exodus will be entertained in dialogue with current scholarship and in conclusion a suggestion will be made how the reinterpretation of the exodus took place in Ps 114 against the backdrop of the exposure to a foreign language as part of expressions of judgment in the OT and in view of OT perceptions of places of oppression like Egypt, Babylonia and the Persian Empire.

B PSALM 114 AS A LITERARY COMPOSITION

At first, the skilful literary composition of the psalm will be discussed and several commentators during the last century have been impressed by the poetic quality of this brief but exquisite example of Hebrew poetry: Rudolf Kittel waxed lyrical about the psalm being:⁴

Ein prachtvoller Hymnus, in seinem schönen Gleichmass, seiner schlagenden Kürze, seiner frischen Anschaulichkeit und seiner dramatisch bewegten Lebendigkeit – poetisch gewertet – zu den schönsten seiner Gattung im Psalter gehörig.

Lothar Ruppert is as appreciative but more concise:⁵ "Psalm 114 gilt zu Recht als eine Perle des Psalters." More recently Richard Nelson took as point of departure for his discussion of the psalm:⁶ "Psalm 114 is concise, vivid and tightly structured."⁷

⁴ Rudolf Kittel, *Die Psalmen* (Leipzig: Deichert, 1922), 363.

⁵ Lothar Ruppert, "Zur Frage der Einheitlichkeit von Psalm 114," in *Altes Testament Forschung und Wirkung: Festschrift für Henning Graf Reventlow* (ed. Peter Mommer and Winfried Thiel; Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1994), 81.

⁶ Richard D. Nelson, "Psalm 114," *Int* 63/2 (2009):172.

⁷ It is striking that amidst the frequent references to the exceptional literary and poetic qualities of Ps 114 there still remains difference of opinion whether the psalm should be interpreted on its own or in conjunction with the preceding Ps 113 or the following Ps 115. Markus Witte, "Psalm 114: Überlegungen zu seiner Komposition im Kontext der Psalmen 113 und 115," in *"Einen Altar von Erde mache mir...": Festschrift für Diethelm Conrad zum 70. Geburtstag* (ed. Johannes F. Diehl, Reinhardt Heitzenröder and Markus Witte; Waltrop: Spenner, 2003), 297 argues, despite any direct textual evidence, that Ps 114 formed a unit with Ps 113 and concluded with Ps 115:1 in view of what he perceived to be the fragmentary character of the psalm. Gert T. M. Prinsloo, "Psalms 114 and 115: One or two poems?" *OTE* 16/3 (2003): 669-690 is impressed by the fact that the Septuagint combines Pss 114 and 115 as Ps 113; and that a similar combination is found in authoritative ancient Hebrew manuscripts like the *Codex Leningradensis* and the *Aleppo Codex*. Without disallowing the possibility of interpreting Ps 114 in close connection with Pss 113 and 115, I agree

Most scholars agree that Ps 114 consists of four strophes of two verses or bicola each.⁸ According to Uwe Bauer the four strophes have an A-B-B¹-C pattern with the first two stanzas having 12 words each while the last two stanzas have 14 words.⁹ In a skilful manner synonymous parallelisms are apparent on three levels throughout the psalm:¹⁰

- Each verse exhibit internal synonymous parallelism.¹¹
- There is also synonymous parallelism between paired verses.¹²
- On a third level, synonymous parallelism can be traced between strophes.¹³

Besides the dominance of synonymous parallelisms there is also the striking use of ellipsis in the psalm as a whole.¹⁴ With the exception of vv. 3

with Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger, *A Commentary on Psalms 101-150* (vol. 3 of *Psalms*; Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011), 189 that the "linguistic shapes and especially the systems of tenses in Psalms 113 and 114 are so different that it is highly unlikely that both of these textual units can be traced to one and the same author. . . Above all, we must dispute that Ps 114 has a fragmentary character."

⁸ Verses 1-2, 3-4, 5-6 and 7-8. Wilfred G. E. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry: A Guide to its Techniques* (JSOTSup 26; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1984), 189-190.

⁹ Uwe F. W. Bauer, "Eine literarische Analyse von Psalm CXIV," *VT* 51/3 (2001): 291-292 goes into even more detail by establishing: "Die jeweils ersten Bikola der vier Strophen beginnen mit den gleichen Buchstaben" and "Die jeweils zweiten Bikola in den Strophen 1 und 4 enden mit den gleichen Buchstaben. . ."

¹⁰ Nelson, "Psalm 114," 173.

¹¹ For example in vv. 1 and 2: Israel // house of Jacob; Egypt // house of strange language; Judah // Israel; God's sanctuary // his dominion.

¹² For example between vv. 1 and 2: Israel and house of Jacob // Judah and Israel; Egypt and people // God's sanctuary and his dominion.

¹³ Between the first and fourth strophe (vv. 1-2 and 7-8): both strophes focus on the actions of God – at first covertly and in the end overtly. In the first strophe, without mentioning God by name, a brief description is given of the exodus from Egypt and the establishment of Judah and Israel as divine sanctuary and dominion after the entry into the Promised Land (vv. 1-2), and in the concluding strophe divine action becomes dramatically clear when the earth tremble in the presence of the Lord and the God of Jacob, who is not only the Rescuer of Israel but who is indeed also the Creator who transforms rock and flint into pools and springs of water (vv. 7 and 8). Despite some obvious differences between the second and third strophe, like the change from third person statements to second person questions, there are also several repeated parallelisms when the third strophe repeats the second strophe almost word-for-word in question format (vv. 3-4 and 5-6): the journey through the Re(e)d Sea stands parallel to the crossing of the Jordan as elements of the exodus tradition, and is also in close combination with the skipping of mountains and hills that represent the transformation of elements of creation. The powerful use of questions in the third strophe challenges existing perceptions of the exodus and creation by asking why events described in the second strophe took place.

and 5 the verb in the first line of the remaining verses in Ps 114 is implied but not repeated in the second line of these verses.¹⁵ The consistent use of ellipsis in a hymn-like poem is all the more remarkable if one is reminded that it usually occurred in laments and dirges.¹⁶

In the following discussion of Ps 114 special attention will be given to v. 1b due to its unusual depiction of the exodus.

Verses 1 and 2 as the first strophe provide a summary of "the history of Israel's origins from the exodus to the royal period and the building of the temple."¹⁷ The opening words of the psalm do not include a "Hallelujah" but echo the exodus from Egypt by means of a fixed expression also found in Exod 13:3; 19:1 and Deut 16:3, "When Israel went out of Egypt."¹⁸ This reference played an important role in depicting the collection consisting of Pss 113-118 as the "Egyptian Hallel" and its subsequent recitation during the meal of the Passover *seder*.¹⁹

The reference to "Israel" in the first verse can be interpreted in different ways: does the parallelism with "Judah" suggest that it refers to the northern kingdom while the latter is related to the southern kingdom; or does it simply imply that after the fall of Samaria in 722 B.C.E. "Judah" became equivalent to "Israel"?²⁰

¹⁴ Robert G. Bratcher, *A Translators Handbook on The Book of Psalms* (HT; New York: United Bible Societies, 1991), 968 considers Ps 114 to "the only psalm in which ellipsis is so consistently employed."

¹⁵ Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 101-150*, 191 consider this remarkable use of ellipsis as a strong argument for "the unity of the psalm" and that this distinguishes Ps 114 from Pss 113 and 115.

¹⁶ James L. Kugel, *The Idea of Biblical Poetry: Parallelism and its History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 54.

¹⁷ Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 101-150*, 191.

¹⁸ MT: בְּצֵאת יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמִּצְרַיִם

¹⁹ Yair Zakovitch, "The Interpretative Significance of the Sequence of Psalms 111 – 112.113 – 118.119," in *The Composition of the Book Psalms* (ed. Erich Zenger; BETL 238; Leuven: Peeters, 2010), 223-227 considers Ps 114 as "a foreign transplant in its context, interrupting the continuity between Psalms 113 and 115" and concludes that "Psalm 114 was incorporated into the Hallel. . . in order to lend to the Hallel an 'Egyptian' element."

²⁰ Leslie C. Allen, *Psalms 101 – 150* (WBC 21; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2002), 141 concludes "the fall of the northern kingdom is presupposed and Judah is now the sole heir of the religious designation. . . 'Israel.'"

The infinitive construct with preposition, תֵּצֵא, echoes descriptions of YHWH leading his people by "going out" like a king on a victory parade.²¹ Although it is clear in v. 1 that it refers to Israel "going out" of Egypt,²² a subtle allusion to who is behind this "exodus" might be alluded to by means of intertextual similarities, despite no direct reference to God.²³

It is important to note that "Jacob" is used in Isa 40 to 55 as a reference to the early Jewish community in exile that "went out" of Babylon.²⁴

As inferred by the discussion on synonymous parallelisms in Ps 114 the "Egypt" of v. 1a is defined in more detail in v. 1b as "a people of strange language" by means of a *hapax legomenon*, עַם לִיָּזָה that has led to a vigorous debate amongst scholars during the past century.²⁵ The exodus is depicted as an exit "from a land with foreign speech, the mark of strange nation" and the Egyptians are "described pejoratively as a people of a strange tongue," seemingly presupposing that "foreign languages are generally considered evil" in the Ancient Near East.²⁶ Just by mentioning the strange or incomprehensible language as the only feature of their sojourn in Egypt, "the poet conjures up a place of discomfort and hostility – simply a place that is not home."²⁷

²¹ Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 101-150*, 194 suggest that this formula "evokes Judg 5:5 and Ps 68:8, where, while YHWH is the subject of the going out, the subject is, as in Psalm 114, the victorious going forth of YHWH at the head of his people."

²² The reference to "Egypt" as a place of oppression and judgement will be discussed later in section "D" of this essay.

²³ It will be argued that this lack of direct reference to divine agency creates tension in the psalm and that the final strophe (vv. 7-8) provides a dramatic answer that it is the Lord and the God of Jacob who is responsible.

²⁴ Isa 48:20, "Go out from Babylon, flee from Chaldea, declare this with a shout of joy, proclaim it, send it forth to the end of the earth; say, "The LORD has redeemed his servant Jacob!"

²⁵ Hans Strauss, "Psalm 114," in "... eine kleine Biblia": *Exegesen von dreizehn ausgewählten Psalmen Israels* (ed. Hans Strauss; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2003), 97 provides a concise summary of scholarship's interpretation of the *hapax legomenon* in v. 1b: "es handelt sich weniger um 'stammeln, stottern' (so häufig ohne Erklärung in den älteren Kommentaren) als um einen – wahrscheinlich unter den Persern – gewonnen Ausdruck für die 'fremde, böse, dunkle' Sprache von Besatzern, nun kühn auf Ägypten 'zurückprojiziert' . . ."

²⁶ Samuel Terrien, *The Psalms: Strophic and Theological Commentary* (ECC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 767-768.

²⁷ John Eaton, *The Psalms: A Historical and Spiritual Commentary with an Introduction and New Translation* (London: T&T Clark, 2003), 394. Gottfried Glassner, "Aufbruch als Heimat: Zur Theologie des 114. Psalms," *ZKT* 116 (1994): 473 summarises: "der Ausdruck `am lo`ez 'stammelndes Volk' signalisiert Distanz, Entfremdung, Heimatlosigkeit. . ."

The enigmatic expression עַם לְעִזִּים has been interpreted in diverging but also complementary ways. On the one hand, there are several references in the OT that the exposure to the foreign tongues of political enemies formed a discernible part of covenantal curses and oracles of judgment against Israel and that Assyria and Babylonia feature prominently in them as probably referent of the expression "people of strange language." On the other hand, it is also possible that existing separate traditions about the exodus and creation were combined to depict YHWH as king whose transformative and "creative" presence was enabled by the establishment of a sanctuary that formed part of divine dominion at the conclusion of the exodus.²⁸

It is interesting that לְעִזִּים was translated in the Aramaic Targum of Psalms with *brbry(n)* which is probably a Greek loan word because it resembles the Greek translation in the Septuagint βαρβάρου (in LXX = Ps 113:1).²⁹ One could now ask what precipitated the change from לְעִזִּים / "strange / foreign" in the Hebrew Bible to βαρβάρου / "barbarous" in the Targum and the Septuagint? Amelie Kuhrt has identified two divergent depictions of the Persian Empire in the Hebrew Bible.³⁰ Initially a positive attitude was generated by the decision that the exiles could return to their country of origin and for allowing the temple to be rebuilt, an attitude prevalent in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. A more negative approach to the Persian Empire can be discerned in the book of Esther that most probably was written in the Hellenistic period. Similar to Greek authors of the Hellenistic era, Esther describes the Persian court in a very unflattering manner with an abundance of banquets and a king that is easily manipulated by beautiful women and conniving members of the royal court. From Greek times the Persian Empire was transformed into "a powerful 'other' . . . contrasted with western ideals of bravery and masculinity."³¹

It is interesting that several modern translations of קִדְשׁוֹ opt for "God's sanctuary" although there is no direct reference to the divine.³² Meir Weiss has drawn the attention to some linguistic features that Ps 114 has in common with Exod 19: not only do both passages start with references to the "going out" of Egypt, but there is also a similar parallel use of "Israel" and the "house of Jacob" in Ps 114:1 and Exod 19:3. By means of "exegetical triangulation" the

²⁸ Although Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 101-150*, 194 seem to favour the interpretation focused on the supposed transformative effect of divine presence, I would like to maintain a creative tension between the allusions to judgment and to transformative (re)creation and this betwixt and between position will be argued in the rest of this essay.

²⁹ David M. Stec, *The Targum of Psalms* (ArBib 16; London: T&T Clark, 2004), 206.

³⁰ Amelie Kuhrt, *The Persian Empire: A Corpus of Sources of the Achaemenid Period* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), 10.

³¹ Kuhrt, *The Persian Empire*, 10.

³² Such as the NIV and the NRSV.

eagle image in Exod 19:4 is linked to Deut 28:49 in which reference is made to an eagle image as well as to "a nation whose language you do not understand" / *לֹא תִשְׁמַע לְשׁוֹן אֲשֶׁר לְאִתְּךָ* which is similar to the expression in Ps 114:2, without using exactly the same terminology.³³ The expressions *מְשֻׁלְתָיו* and *קְדָשׁוֹ* seem to echo Exod 19:6 "you will be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." In his exhaustive study of the royal priesthood in Exod 19:6, John Davies pointed out that the synonymous use of *מְשֻׁלָּה* and *מְלֻכָּה* in Mic 4:8 suggests that "dominion" is related to "reign" as "something God exercises *through* rather than *over* Israel (?)."³⁴ A similar synonymous use of these two concepts is found in Ps 145:13 where "dominion" is closely linked with a double reference to "kingdom," most probably as an enduring and strong indication of divine presence.³⁵

When looking at the first two verses of Ps 114 one is struck that it "does not describe Israel's Exodus as a liberation from Egyptian slavery," but as the election of Judah or Israel to be the place of the presence of the Lord.³⁶ In this case it is not only a matter of an exodus "from" an oppressive "Egypt" but also an exodus "towards" the manifestation of the divine presence in the Promised Land!

In the second strophe v. 3 records the crossing of the Reed Sea with clear allusions the specific rendering of this miraculous crossing in Exod 14:21-31 and combines it with a reference to the entry into the Promised Land according to Josh 3:13-14. The following v. 4 provides a vivid description of the mountains and hills skipping like rams and lambs and this might recall the theophany at Sinai when the mountain shook or trembled in the presence of the Lord.³⁷

Verses 5 and 6 in the third strophe repeat more or less the same words as in the preceding vv. 3 to 4 but changes it from a third person description to sec-

³³ Meir Weiss, *The Bible from Within: The Method of Total Interpretation* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1984), 93-100. Deuteronomy 28:49 will be discussed in more detail later in this essay.

³⁴ John Davies, *A Royal Priesthood: Literary and Intertextual Perspectives on an Image of Israel in Exodus 19.6.* (JSOTSup 395; London: T&T Clark, 2004), 208-211 comes to the conclusion that Israel-Judah collectively "is the possessor of regal dominion" and functions as additional explanation about what the sanctuary as a centre for holiness entails: "The psalm expresses it positively in terms of. . . Jerusalem possessing the quality of a sanctuary. . . that is, to the presence of God."

³⁵ Ps 145:13.

³⁶ Erich Zenger, "A Poetical Etiology of Israel: Psalm 114 Against the Background of the Kingship-of-YHWH-Psalms 29 and 96-98," in *Shai le-Sara Japhet: Studies in the Bible, its Exegesis and its Language* (ed. Moshe-Bar Asher et al.; Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 2007), 389 "by virtue of the Exodus" Israel and Judah became "his" sanctuary and dominion.

³⁷ Exod 19:18.

ond person questions. The psalmist takes as point of departure different elements of the exodus and entry traditions in v. 5 and repeats it in v. 6 by asking why does the sea flee and the Jordan River turns its back; why do mountains and hills skip like lambs? What was taken for granted by existing exodus and entry traditions is now questioned by the psalmist as preparation for providing a new answer by means of reinterpretation resulting in the combination of previously more independent traditions.

The fourth and last strophe formulates a remarkable reason for the responses from creation and nature in vv. 7 and 8. At first glance the psalmist recalls events that are recorded in the Pentateuch concerned with the wandering in the wilderness: the striking of the rock at Horeb;³⁸ the striking of the rock at Kadesh;³⁹ as well as the provision of water in the wilderness.⁴⁰ In stark contrast to Moses being the agent who facilitated the provision of water from a rock, the most unlikely of places where one would expect water to come from; Ps 114:7-8 declares that it is the "presence of יהוה / the Lord" and the "presence of יהוה/אלהי יעקב/God of Jacob" that cause the transformation from rock to water.

While there is no explicit mentioning of God or the Lord in the first three strophes, there is the dramatic announcement of divine involvement by means of two unusual and significant divine names in the last strophe. The name "Adon" is also used in Josh 3:11 and 13 where the call is made for the earth to tremble.⁴¹ Although "Eloah" is used in older poetic texts or in poems that make use of archaic forms,⁴² it is significant that this divine name is used 37 out of 49 times in the younger poetic section of the book of Job.⁴³

After studying Ps 114 in some detail, attention must also be given to its position within the so-called "Egyptian" Hallel or Passover Hallel in Pss 113-118. According to Hossfeld and Zenger this small collection of psalms can be divided into two sections: Pss 113 to 115 and 116 to 118. Each half "constitute a compositional arc indicated by common keywords and motifs and a theological program." Psalms 113-115 "is theocentrically or monotheistically accented" while Pss 116-118 "is conceived in terms of theology of Israel and the nations, or universalistically (anthropologically)."⁴⁴

This discussion not only indicates the remarkable literary and poetic qualities of Ps 114, but also that its composition was also crucial for estab-

³⁸ Exod 17:6.

³⁹ Num 20:11.

⁴⁰ Deut 8:15.

⁴¹ Josh 3:11, 13.

⁴² Deut 32:15, 17, as well as Ps 18:32.

⁴³ Job 3-42. "Eloah" is also used in post-exilic texts like Hab 3:3; Dan 11:37-38; Prov 30:5 and 2 Chr 32:15.

⁴⁴ Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 101-150*, 178.

lishing the "Egyptian character" of the Hallel in Pss 113-118 and for its eventual recitation during the commemoration of the Passover.

C EXODUS AS MOTIF IN THE PSALTER

According to Susan Gillingham the Psalms seem to be less focused on Moses and more on David and Zion and therefore "concerns an established nation, a royal state cult which ratifies claims to land and status through a deity 'housed in a Temple.'" ⁴⁵ Against this background it is hardly surprising that the exodus is not often referred to in the Psalter, without implying that the relatively few allusions to the exodus can be ignored or neglected.

To establish some comprehension for the obvious but unique reference to the exodus in Ps 114, attention is warranted for other Psalms engaging with the exodus tradition. For the purpose of this investigation the exodus tradition is defined as being a cluster of collective memories comprising of the divine rescue of Israel from Egypt; as well as the role Moses and God played in leading Israel out of Egypt and crossing the Re(e)d Sea. ⁴⁶

There is no general scholarly consensus about what is meant by the expression "exodus psalm" other than a psalm in which elements of the exodus tradition play an important role. Recently David Emanuel defined an "exodus psalm" as being one in which clear reference is made how YHWH "actively" brings Israel out of Egypt and into the land of promise. He is correct in identifying a cluster of related exodus motifs and not privileging one or two aspects, presupposing what he quaintly refers to as a "monolithic whale." ⁴⁷

The psalms that focus on what has been identified as characteristic elements of the exodus tradition seem to be grouped in pairs: Pss 77 and 78; 80 and 81; 105 and 106; 135 and 136. In the following discussion of these paired exodus psalms, a dialogue with the perceptive studies by Gillingham and Emanuel of these psalms will be obvious. ⁴⁸

The lament in **Ps 77** ends with a hymn about God as Creator with elements suggesting some orientation towards the northern tribes of Israel. ⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Susan Gillingham, "The Exodus Tradition and Israelite Psalmody," *SJT* 52 (1999): 19.

⁴⁶ Besides the two major focal points one should also take note of references to the so-called "plagues" or "signs," the death of the firstborn, the wandering in the wilderness, the theophany at Sinai / Horeb and the entry into the Promised Land.

⁴⁷ David Emmanuel, *From Bards to Biblical Exegetes: A Close Reading and Intertextual Analysis of Selected Exodus Psalms* (Eugene: Pickwick, 2012) succeeds in trimming about twenty psalms with exodus motifs down to only four: Pss 105-106 and 135-136: one of the omissions is Ps 114.

⁴⁸ Gillingham, "The Exodus Tradition," 28-39.

⁴⁹ Ps 77:15.

Traces of the exodus tradition are apparent in vv. 19-20 where references are made to the passage through the Re(e)d Sea as well as the divinely appointed leadership of Moses and Aaron.⁵⁰

There is a striking combination of exodus and Zion traditions in the judgment liturgy found in **Ps 78**. After a description of how God called his people out of Egypt, the rejection of Joseph and Ephraim (representing the northern tribes of Israel?),⁵¹ is followed by the choosing or election of David and Zion.⁵² Several allusions to the exodus tradition can be found in this impressive psalm: the passing through the Re(e)d Sea;⁵³ the "signs" or "plagues" in Egypt;⁵⁴ and the divine guidance out of Egypt and in the wilderness.⁵⁵ If the exodus tradition initially functioned in the Northern Kingdom, then one might speculate whether Ps 78 can be interpreted as an attempt to appropriate a northern tradition after the fall of Samaria in 722 B.C.E. by linking it with the David and Zion traditions of the temple in Jerusalem?

Psalm 80 can be considered as a communal lament about the fall of the Northern Kingdom.⁵⁶ There is a clear reference to the Northern Kingdom in v. 2 where mention is made of Joseph, Manasseh and Ephraim. The exodus tradition is found in v. 8 in close connection with the entry or settlement tradition by linking the bringing of the vine out of Egypt to the driving out of the nations and the planting of the vine – this constitutes a remarkable figurative reference to the exodus as the replanting of a vine!⁵⁷

The exodus tradition also plays an important role in the judgment oracle found in **Ps 81**.⁵⁸ In v. 5a a reference is made of "going out against Egypt" and in the parallel v. 5b mention is made of "a language we did not understand,"⁵⁹ while in v. 6 memories about the burden of slavery are recalled.⁶⁰ An allusion to the preface of the Decalogue can probably be traced in v. 10.⁶¹

In the hymn found in **Ps 105** the references to the exodus in vv. 39-41 are preceded by a call to thank and praise YHWH in vv. 1-3; followed by a call to return to YHWH in vv. 4-7; then reminders of covenant promises made to

⁵⁰ Ps 77:19-20.

⁵¹ Ps 78:67.

⁵² Ps 78:68-71.

⁵³ Ps 78:13.

⁵⁴ Ps 78:43, 51.

⁵⁵ Ps 78:52-53.

⁵⁶ The Septuagint translation of Ps 80 makes an addition to the superscript of the psalm: "concerning the Assyrians."

⁵⁷ Ps 80:8.

⁵⁸ Other judgment oracles will be discussed in the next section of this essay.

⁵⁹ Ps 81:5.

⁶⁰ Ps 81:6.

⁶¹ Ps 81:10.

Abraham and Joseph in vv. 8-23; as well as a remarkable summary of the plagues or signs in vv. 24-38.⁶² The reference to the exodus focuses on three miraculous events that took place during the wilderness wanderings and this is used as motivation for an appeal to the psalmist's audience to obey divine commandments.⁶³ It is striking that YHWH is described as being the one who "brought them out / יצאם" of Egypt "with silver and gold," without any mention made of Moses.⁶⁴ One should also take note of the concluding remarks in vv. 42-45 according to which the exodus is based on the "holy word" or covenant with Abraham in v. 42. Those who were "brought out" are also referred to as "his chosen ones" in v. 43; with concluding comments that they were given "the lands of the nations" in v. 44 and with the clear obligation in v. 45 the "that they might keep his statutes and observe his laws." The exodus becomes the "Exodus der Erwählten, d.h. der Nachkommen Abrahams und Jacobs. . . Er vollzieht sich unter Wonne und Jubel wie die neue Exodus nach Jes 48:20f; 51:11."⁶⁵

As with several of the previous "twin psalms" the hymn in Ps 105 is followed by a lament in **Ps 106**, and in this case it reflects "the disappointed hopes of the earliest returned exiles. . ." and it "starts where 105 ends, picking up this time the Reed Sea traditions, and reversing the impact of the Exodus tradition so that, through the lament form, it admonishes the people."⁶⁶ This is the last psalm of the fourth book of the Psalter, and in this important psalm the reference to exodus events are framed by an introductory praise of God in vv. 1-5, and a concluding prayer for help in v. 47 and a climactic doxology in v. 48. In between is an extended lamenting discussion of sinful events that took place during the exodus in vv. 6-47: the initial reminder of the miracles in Egypt and at the Sea of Reeds in vv. 6-12, stands in stark contrast to the confession in v. 13. These miracles were quickly forgotten and followed in rapid succession with a catalogue of sins like the envy towards Moses in vv. 16-18,

⁶² Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger, *Psalmen 101 – 150* (vol. 3 of *Die Psalmen*; NechB; Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 2012), 603 – 605 conclude their discussion of this section with the remark that "Die Besonderheiten der Plagenerzählung von Psalm 105:28-36 weisen eine Tendenz zur Erinnerung an die Schöpfungs-erzählung von Gen 1 auf" – which is all the more significant if one is reminded that that creation plays a most important role in the preceding Ps 104!

⁶³ Emmanuel, *From Bards*, 256.

⁶⁴ Gillingham, "The Exodus Tradition," 41 suggests that "the Exodus tradition is used in this psalm in an entirely positive way" while Terrien, *Psalm*, 725 points out that "No moral judgment is offered on the Hebrew plundering of Egyptian gold and silver (v.37). . ."

⁶⁵ Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalmen 101-150*, 606 emphasise that the conclusion of Ps 105 is also significant because it "unterstreicht noch einmal den priesterschriftlich-theologischen Standort dieses hymnischen Geschichtsrückblick: Das Thema 'Gesetz' wird nicht vergessen. . ."

⁶⁶ Gillingham, "The Exodus Tradition," 40-41.

the idolatry with the golden calf in vv. 19-27, followed by the syncretistic worship at Baal-Peor and the lack of discipline and obedience at Meriba in vv. 28-33. This catalogue is concluded by sins not related to specific (named) persons or localities in vv. 34-39 and reaches a horrific climax with fathers sacrificing their own sons and daughters to Canaanite gods, an abominable deed that inevitably causes the anger and scorn from the Lord in vv. 40-46.⁶⁷ It is as if the memories of the exodus now become an extended recollection of sin and rebellion that stand in vivid contrast to the miraculous manifestations of the divine benevolence experienced in Egypt and thereafter.

Lament is singularly absent in the last set of Exodus psalms, the hymns 135 and 136, that forms part of the growing doxological crescendo in fifth book of the Psalter.⁶⁸ The reference to the exodus tradition is somewhat muted in **Ps 135**, a hymn that comprises of four strophes and that is clearly demarcated by beginning and ending with a "Hallelujah."⁶⁹ In the first strophe all the "servants of the Lord" are called to praise the "Name of the Lord" in vv. 1-5; while in the next strophe the references to exodus events like the death of the firstborn and the signs and wonders in Egypt, are seamlessly connected to a dramatic description of the Lord as Creator who is involved with heaven and earth, as well as the sea and the clouds in vv. 6-9. The following third strophe in vv. 10-15 provides a description of the wilderness wandering and the settlement in the land of Canaan as if the land was inherited as a gift from the Lord.⁷⁰ In the closing fourth strophe the exhortation of cultic or temple officials found in the first strophe is continued with the invitation to bless the Lord in vv. 16-21.⁷¹ Despite the muted reference to exodus traditions, Ps 135 provides an important example of the merging of theological traditions in postexilic early Judaism: "that the God of Egypt is also the God of Zion. . ."⁷²

Psalm 136 starts with a threefold praise of YHWH "as the God of gods" in vv. 1-3; this praise becomes more specific when YHWH is lauded as the Cre-

⁶⁷ Terrien, *Psalms*, 730-31; Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalmen 101-150*, 614-18.

⁶⁸ Gillingham, "The Exodus Tradition," 42 depicted Ps 135 as "a mosaic of other psalms, both regarding language and traditions, with clear correspondences with Pss 115 and 136."

⁶⁹ Terrien, *Psalms*, 857 describes the first strophe as a declaration "that Yahweh's rule over nature is marvellous. . ."

⁷⁰ Gillingham, "The Exodus Tradition," 42 argues that the combination of the creation and exodus traditions is exemplified by "the escape from Egypt" demonstrating "God's action in history," while "the crossing of the Reed Sea" is an illustration of "God's providence through creation."

⁷¹ Terrien, *Psalms*, 858 considers Ps 135 to be addressed to "the official classes of cultic functionaries who became preeminent in postexilic Judaism" and that these functionaries were called to bless the Lord "as a ritual of adoration to God. . ."

⁷² Gillingham, "The Exodus Tradition," 43 added that this merging of theological traditions provided "Zion theology" with "roots in antiquity. . ."

ator of the heavens in vv. 4-9; as part of the praise of God in Israel's past reference is made of the departure from slavery in Egypt followed in quick succession by a description of the splitting of the Re(e)d Sea in vv. 10-15. In vv. 16-22 a description is given of the slaying of the same kings as in Ps 135 being part of the depiction of how YHWH led Israel from Sinai through the wilderness to Canaan.⁷³ While Ps 135 seems to be more interested in the identity of Israel as the people of God, Ps 136 is "primarily concerned with praise of God" due to his role as Creator and as Rescuer.⁷⁴ In this hymn the exodus events are used as extensive motivation for God's "merciful disposition towards his people and for motivation of the psalmist's generation to praise God for what he has done."⁷⁵

According to Gillingham the reinterpretation of the exodus tradition that took place during the exile changed from the first exodus out of Egypt that had as main goal "the protection of a wandering, landless people," to a second exodus out of a Babylonian exile with an emphasis "on the ratifying and legitimizing of a settled, established people. . ."⁷⁶ In this regard it is important to keep in mind that Isa 40 to 55 used the exodus as a metaphor for the description of the return from the exile in Babylonia. Adele Berlin is correct in pointing out several similarities between Ps 114 and so-called Second Isaiah that combine exodus and creation motifs: the provision of water in the wilderness in Isa 43:16-21 and 48:20-21, and the splitting of the sea in Isa 51:9-11.⁷⁷ The combination of elements of the exodus and creation traditions in both Isa 40 to 55 and Ps 114 enabled the emergence of new metaphors that rejuvenated the theological traditions in question and generated new expectations of the future.⁷⁸

⁷³ Terrien, *Psalms*, 862 – 863 provides an honest appraisal of Ps 136: "Yet the killing of the Egyptian firstborn, answered at once by the antiphonal refrain, 'For his mercy is forever!' jars the best comprehension. . ."

⁷⁴ Gillingham, "The Exodus Tradition," 44.

⁷⁵ Emmanuel, *From Bards*, 256 - 257

⁷⁶ Gillingham, "The Exodus Tradition," 45.

⁷⁷ Adele Berlin, "Myth and Meaning in Psalm 114," in *Diachronic and Synchronic Reading the Psalms in Real Time* (ed. Joel S. Burnett, W. H. Bellinger, Jr. and W. Dennis Tucker, Jr.; LHBOTS 488; New York: T&T Clark, 2007), 71-72.

⁷⁸ Hendrik Bosman, "Myth, Metaphor or Memory? The Allusions to Creation and Exodus in Isaiah 51:9-11 as a Theological Response to Suffering During the Exile," in *Exile and Suffering* (ed. Bob Becking and Dirk Human; OtSt 50; Leiden: Brill, 2009), 80-81: "The memories of creation and exodus are much more than inert mythological fossils embedded in the religious traditions of Israel; they are dynamic recollections of the Lord's interventions in the past that can be hoped for in future."

Emanuel identified three "aspects of the exodus motif" that were expressed in the "exodus psalms" studied by him:⁷⁹ the exodus as "a miraculous event in which YHWH intervened directly into the lives of men" (sic); it is typical of the exodus motif that "the benefits of the intervention were exclusively bestowed to Israel"; in all these examples there is agreement that "the interventions on Israel's behalf were undeserved." Although one can debate the usefulness of these generalisations it is important to remember that it provides possible elements within the backdrop of the portrayal of other nations, such as Egypt and the Canaanites, as enemies of Israel and YHWH. Each of these generalised depictions of the so-called "exodus motif" must be verified by a study of its individual literary and historical contexts.

I am therefore reluctant to use an expression like "the exodus motif" because it might create the impression that "there was a single core exodus story that emphasized enslavement in Exodus followed by movement out of Egypt to the promised land."⁸⁰ Psalm 114 seems like a good example of an exodus memory or tradition of suffering not directly due to economic or political oppression but the result of the exposure to a foreign language. This aspect of exodus traditions was combined with traditions of YHWH as Creator and King that enabled a reinterpretation of existing exodus traditions by relating it to a future transformation when all nations will be of one voice praising the Lord.⁸¹

D EXPOSURE TO FOREIGN LANGUAGE AS JUDGEMENT: EGYPT, BABYLONIA OR PERSIAN EMPIRE?

Within what literary and historical contexts would a reinterpretation of the exodus, as argued for in Ps 114, make sense? Special attention will be given to judgments in the OT that incorporate the exposure to a foreign language as part

⁷⁹ Emmanuel, *From Bards*, 255 concludes "this study patently reveal that the exodus was an event benefitting Israel only, and other nations are therefore portrayed as enemies and obstructers of YHWH's plans for his people."

⁸⁰ Stephen C. Russell, *Images of Egypt in Early Biblical Literature* (BZAW 403; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009), 9. Russell applies a regional paradigm to understand the different biblical references to the exodus and distinguishes traditions emanating from the Cisjordan, Transjordan and Judah. Emmanuel, *From Bards*, 1-5 was correct in qualifying the "exodus motif" with the reminder that it consisted of a cluster of related motifs. A similar appreciation for a diversity of exodus motifs can be detected in the much neglected research done by Samuel E. Loewenstein, *The Evolution of the Exodus Tradition* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1992).

⁸¹ Richard J. Clifford, "The Exodus in the Christian Bible: The Case for 'Figural' Reading," *TS* 63 (2002): 345, 352-354 focuses on what he refers to as the "dual aspects of liberation and formation" with regards to the exodus and that this makes it advisable to regard the exodus as a cluster of motifs and not as a single paradigmatic narrative. Therefore it is possible for him to argue for a reinterpreted understanding of the exodus that implies a movement from Babylon to Zion and not from Egypt to Canaan.

of punitive suffering. Each of these exposures to a foreign language will be related to places of oppression in the OT, such as Egypt, Babylonia and Persia.

The reference to being exposed to a foreign language in **Deut 28:49**,⁸² "a nation whose language you do not understand," forms part of a collection of threats or curses that "deals with conquest by other nations and its consequences."⁸³ Chapter 28 consists of a general introduction in vv. 1-2, followed by more domestic blessings in vv. 3-6 and blessings with a national focus in vv. 7-14. This is followed by domestic curses in vv. 16-19 that seem to "mirror" the previous domestic blessings; as well as a series of national and domestic curses from vv. 20-44.⁸⁴ In vv. 45-47 the reason provided for the curses was that Israel did not obey the commandments and laws that the Lord had given to them.⁸⁵

The effect of the curses is summarised in v. 48 as hunger and thirst, combined with a demeaning nakedness and a poverty stricken lack of everything. According to McConville "the iron yoke placed on Israel's neck symbolizes subjugation by Babylon in Jer 28:14."⁸⁶ Verses 49 to 57 describe the conquest by means of several gruesome events: such as "invasion, destruction of the food supply, siege, and cannibalism."⁸⁷ This occurs against the back-

⁸² "The LORD will bring a nation against you from far away, from the ends of the earth, like an eagle swooping down, *a nation whose language you will not understand.*"

⁸³ Jeffrey H. Tigay, *Deuteronomy* (JPSTC; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1996), 267.

⁸⁴ John G. McConville, *Deuteronomy* (AOTC 5; Leicester: Apollos, 2002), 402-403 provides not only a useful short summary of the contents of ch. 28, but also makes an interesting observation that second millennium Hittite treaties contain blessings in the beginning and curses in the end; while first millennium Assyrian vassal treaties only makes use of curses. This observation runs contrary to current scholarship's acceptance of the first millennium provenance of ch. 28 (amongst others by Moshe Weinfeld and Hans Ulrich Steymans) and thus reopens the debate about the often proposed dependence of Deut 28 on the "Vassal Treaties of Essarhaddon" (ANET 205-206) – not the main focus of this contribution.

⁸⁵ Richard Clifford, *Deuteronomy: With an Excursus on Covenant and Law* (OTM; Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1982), 147 makes a distinction between the curses found in vv. 15-68: some "are portrayed as natural forces turning against violators in vv 15-19, 30-34, 38-46"; while a second group is perceived as being "directly inflicted by the Lord in vv 20-29, 36-37 and 47-68. . ." Verse 49 forms part of the latter group.

⁸⁶ "I have put upon the neck of all these nations an iron yoke to serve Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon." McConville, *Deuteronomy*, 407 continues by emphasising that the "iron yoke" is a symbol of Babylonian oppression that cannot be broken.

⁸⁷ Tigay, *Deuteronomy*, 267 provides this summary in his discussion of the second group of threats in 28:45-57.

ground of the implied breaking of the covenant curses that gave rise to the seemingly unbreakable oppression in Babylonia.⁸⁸

An unnamed enemy, that is so "utterly alien to Israel" that Israel "will be unable to communicate with them" and it might be significant that corresponding terminology "is used by the prophets to describe Assyria and an unnamed nation that turned out to be Babylonia."⁸⁹ The phrase, "like an eagle swooping down," precedes "a nation whose language you will not understand," and might be understood as being parallel to it. A similar depiction of an enemy of Israel as an "eagle" or "griffon vulture" can be found in the exilic and post-exilic texts of Jer 48:40⁹⁰ and Hab 1:8⁹¹ where it probably refers to the Chaldeans or Babylonians. Later in v. 50 this unknown nation is described as "a grim-faced nation showing no respect to the old or favor to the young" and this description correlates with the descriptions of Babylonian and Medes found in Isa 48:6⁹² and in Lam 5:12-13.⁹³

The reference to punishment or judgment by the Lord through a foreign nation with "foreign lips" and "strange tongues" in **Isa 28:11**⁹⁴ is preceded by woe-sayings against Samaria in vv. 1-4, followed by vv. 5-6 that according to Joseph Blenkinsopp "takes up the language of 1-4. . . juxtaposed with the squalid scene of drunkenness and vomit, and applies it to Yahveh in his relations with the restored Israel of the future."⁹⁵ Willem Beuken argues for a similar distinction between vv. 1-6 and 7-13, with the first section describing the fall of Samaria and allows for different scenario's to have taken place: v. 1 can refer to the time before the Syro-Ephraimite revolt in ca. 734 in the Northern Kingdom, while vv. 2-4 can refer to either the existence of Ephraim as an

⁸⁸ Patrick D. Miller, *Deuteronomy* (IBC; Louisville: John Knox, 1990), 197 suggests that a reader of these curses, including the exposure to a nation with an incomprehensible language, "would perceive that many if these things did in fact happen to the nation of Judah at the hands of the Babylonians."

⁸⁹ Tigay, *Deuteronomy*, 260.

⁹⁰ "For thus says the LORD: Look, he shall swoop down like an eagle, and spread his wings against Moab. . ."

⁹¹ "Their horses are swifter than leopards, more menacing than wolves at dusk; their horses charge. Their horsemen come from far away; they fly like an eagle swift to devour."

⁹² "I was angry with my people and desecrated my inheritance; I gave them into your hand, and you showed them no mercy. Even on the aged you laid a very heavy yoke."

⁹³ "Princes are hung up by their hands; no respect is shown to the elders. Young men are compelled to grind, and boys stagger under loads of wood."

⁹⁴ "Very well then, with foreign lips and strange tongues (God) will speak to this people. . ."

⁹⁵ Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1-39* (AB; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 387 mentions "beautiful coronet" and "splendour" as two concepts in the first four verses that is taken up in the following two verses.

Assyrian province after 722 or it can be related to the Southern Kingdom as a exilic or postexilic promise.⁹⁶

Verse 10 is probably a mocking and critical mimicry of prophetic ecstatic behaviour by depicting it as incomprehensible speech, *עוֹ לְעוֹ עוֹ לְעוֹ קוֹ*, *לְקוֹ לְקוֹ קוֹ לְקוֹ*.⁹⁷ This is followed in v. 11 by the reference that "this people" (Samaria or Judah) will be spoken to "with foreign lips and strange tongues." Most translations add "God" to the translation, but this addition does not do justice to the ambiguity of the Hebrew text, because Samaria would soon experience the "unintelligible Akkadian they were destined to hear in due course from their Assyrian conquerors."⁹⁸ Within 150 years Judah would have the same experience of judgment when they were exposed to the incomprehensible Akkadian of their Babylonian conquerors, when they were taken away into exile.⁹⁹

Isaiah 33 anticipates a future "in which the rule of Yahveh and his human representative are finally manifested. . . in which the disastrous situation described in 33:7-9 and elsewhere in chs. 28-33 will just seem like a bad dream."¹⁰⁰ In the last section of this chapter a vision of Zion (Jerusalem) is developed that is rooted in the credo of v. 22: "YHWH is our king, He will save us."¹⁰¹ Despite a history of oppression consisting of tribute and tax, suggested

⁹⁶ Willem A. M. Beuken, *Jesaja 28-39* (HTKAT; Freiburg: Herder, 2010), 52. Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1-39*, 387 makes the further pertinent observation that the "anti-Samaritan diatribe" in vv. 1-4 might have originated in the eight century with the Syro-Ephraimite revolt, but that it "would have been reread with reference to the Samaria of the Sanballat dynasty, opponents of Judah in the Achaemenid period and, later still, in the light of Judean-Samaritan hostility in the Hasmonean period. . ."

⁹⁷ Most translations valiantly attempt to make some sense of v. 10: "For it is: Do and do, do and do, rule on rule, rule on rule; a little here, a little there" [NIV]; "For it is precept upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little, there a little." [NRSV].

⁹⁸ Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1-39*, 389. Another indication of the ambiguity in v. 11 is that subsequently in v. 13 YHWH speaks in a way that mockingly mimes the prophetic ecstatic speech *עוֹ לְעוֹ עוֹ לְעוֹ קוֹ לְקוֹ קוֹ לְקוֹ קוֹ לְקוֹ*. In v. 11 divine communication is indirect through the oppressive foreign power, but in v. 13 it is communicated as "the word of the Lord."

⁹⁹ Beuken, *Jesaja 28-39*, 52 concludes: "Hinter der endgültigen Gestalt dieser Orakel scheinen der Untergang und das Exil auf – sowohl als Bedrohung in der Vorstellung des Textes wie auch als Wirklichkeit im Erleben der Tradenten."

¹⁰⁰ Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1-39*, 445 continues, "What is therefore described in this finale is the reversal of the situation at the critical juncture of Sennacherib's campaign. Zion will be secure. . ."

¹⁰¹ Beuken, *Jesaja 28-39*, 263, 266 gives a brief but insightful description of the immediate context of v. 19: "ein guter König herrscht über das Land [V 17], die Unterdrücker sind verschwunden [V 18-19], Zion ist ein sicherer Wohnort [V 20-23], die Bevölkerung frei von Krankheit und Sünde [V 24]."

by the mentioning of "census" and "counting towers" in v. 18, v. 19 promises without qualification that in future the beautiful king in Zion (Jerusalem) will make it possible that "You will see those arrogant people no more, those people of an obscure speech/lips, with their strange, incomprehensible tongue." Despite the disconcerting memories of the threatening military campaign of Sennacherib, YHWH is king and through him the future is secured: the insolent Assyrians with their unintelligible language will no longer be seen.¹⁰² The nature of the oppression entails more than being exposed to "obscure language," because it is also described as being "eine Sprache ohne Kultur ("Verständnis") [בְּיָגָה]." ¹⁰³

The last example of a judgment in which exposure to a foreign nation with a strange language plays an important part is found in **Jer 5:15**.¹⁰⁴ Jack Lundbom identified "two judgement oracles" of which the first was addressed to the prophet Jeremiah but was intended for Israel in v. 14, while the second judgment confronted Israel directly and it takes the form of a covenantal curse that has its roots in Deut 28:49-52, that was discussed earlier in this essay.¹⁰⁵ Leslie Allen demarcates vv. 10-19 as a composition with an A B B¹ A¹ structure,¹⁰⁶ "that develops the motifs of invasion and destruction" initially introduced by v. 6.¹⁰⁷ In juxtaposition to v. 12 where Israel and Judah seem to deny the involvement of YHWH and that any calamity can befall them, v. 15 starts with the attention drawing הַגִּיּוֹן and continues with the confirmation that YHWH will send an old and well-established foreign nation (גִּיּוֹן) to be the instrument for his judgment. This judgment by a foreign nation is further elaborated in v. 17 by describing how they will "consume" (אָכַל) their harvest, children, livestock and agriculture. There is an ominous balance between the fivefold mentioning of the noun, "foreign nation" (גִּיּוֹן) in v. 15, and the fourfold repetition of the verb, "to consume" (אָכַל) in v. 17.¹⁰⁸ Although Babylonia is only mentioned by name much later in Jer 20:4-6, there are similar descriptions of the threatening advance of Babylonia in other prophetic texts like Hab 1:6-

102 Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1-39*, 445.

103 Beuken, *Jesaja 28-39*, 289 "Die Fremden stammeln nicht bloss, sie sprechen überhaupt eine Sprache ohne בְּיָגָה."

104 "O house of Israel," declares the LORD, "I am bringing a distant nation against you – an ancient and enduring nation, a people whose language you do not know, whose speech you do not understand."

105 Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20* (AB; New York: Doubleday, 1999), 392-393.

106 The destruction mentioned in vv. 10-11 (A) is elaborated in vv. 15-17 (A¹) and the theme of true and false prophecy can be detected in both vv. 12-13 (B) and v. 14 (B¹).

107 Leslie C. Allen, *Jeremiah: A Commentary* (OTL; Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 2008), 75-76 also argues for links between vv. 12-13, 14 and 15-17.

108 Allen, *Jeremiah*, 75-76; Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20*, 393-394.

11.¹⁰⁹ The reference to a threatening foreign nation with an unknown language and a speech Judah cannot understand in v. 15 forms part of an almost hyperbolic description of an intimidating foreign instrument for divine judgement.¹¹⁰ In a frank and ominous oracle against Judah a superpower of the Ancient Near East, Babylonia, is identified as being the agent for judgment used by YHWH.¹¹¹

It seems to be a frequent characteristic of judgments against Israel and Judah that it entails being confronted by a strange language they did not comprehend. The reference to being exposed to such a strange and incomprehensible language forms part of a stereotypical depiction of an oppressive and threatening foreign nation. In the four examples discussed at some length, Assyria and Babylonia, seem to be the most likely candidates for being the agents of divine judgment, with the possibility that Persia might have been implied during a process of reinterpretation after the exile.¹¹²

When one considers the Persian Empire as a possible context for the interpretation of Ps 114, one must keep recent archaeological evidence about Yehud in mind. Amidst vigorous discussions about the relative importance of postexilic Yehud, some consensus is slowly evolving: "archaeological finds from Jerusalem can only be interpreted as evidence of a meagre settlement,

¹⁰⁹ "For I am rousing the Chaldeans, that fierce and impetuous nation, who march through the breadth of the earth to seize dwellings not their own. Dread and fearsome are they. . ." (Hab 1:6-7a).

¹¹⁰ Allen, *Jeremiah*, 77: "Remoteness, antiquity, longevity, and unintelligibility convey an overwhelming sense of inexorable and intimidating purpose."

¹¹¹ In the call narrative of Ezekiel one finds a similar expression in 3:5 "For you are not sent to a people of obscure speech and difficult language, but to the house of Israel." Although the combination of "obscure speech" and "difficult language" is similar to some of the judgments by foreign nations, this pronouncement is applicable to Israel and it forms part of the challenging prophetic call Ezekiel had received. Walther Eichrodt, *Ezekiel: A Commentary* (OTL; London: SCM, 1970), 65 points out that "in itself the prophet's message is intelligible" and that this pronouncement expresses "the hardest possible judgment upon the stubbornness of Israel." Walther Zimmerli, *A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel Chapters 1-24* (vol. 1 of *Ezekiel*; Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 137 -138 argues that the reference to "people of obscure speech and difficult language" was derived from Isa 33:18-19 where it was used to describe "the Assyrian overlords who govern Judah and who oppress it by their collectors of tribute. . ." This forms part of Ezekiel's rebuke of his own people: "Those who speak a foreign language, with all their difficulty in understanding, would be more willing to hear than the house of Israel. . ."

¹¹² Berlin, "Myth and Meaning," 80 recapitulates her interpretation of Ps 114 by pointing out the importance of the combination of "mythemes of creation and exodus . . . that is effective in showing that the exodus is an earth shattering event of cosmic proportions." For Berlin Ps 114 is more than a commemoration of the past because it enables a postexilic audience to make "their traditional past" to "live in the present. . ."

confined to the City of David, between the late Iron Age and the Hasmonaean period (early sixth to second centuries B.C.E.)."¹¹³ The return to Zion and reestablishment of the presence of God in the Second Temple in Jerusalem was a slow and gradual process that makes it unlikely it could have made much of an impact on the Psalter before the Hellenistic period. This does not preclude later references to the Persian Empire from Hellenistic contexts, references that became more critical about the previous pervasive Persian influence – as might be reflected by the Aramaic and Greek translations of the “strange language” as “barbaric language.”

Egypt is obviously absent and indicates the extent of theological innovation in Ps 114 to combine independent memories and traditions in a remarkable new way. One of the reasons for the omission of Egypt from the list of oppressive foreign nations might be the ambiguous Jewish attitude towards Egypt that prevailed for centuries. Diana Lipton came to the unexpected conclusion that Egypt was not seen by all as “the evil empire *par excellence*. . . but rather as the apex of the seductive other.”¹¹⁴

E CONCLUSION

Psalm 114 is an exquisitely structured hymn commemorating the transformative power of God that manifests itself in both the rescue from Egypt as symbol of foreign oppression and in the recreation of different elements of nature.

The use of the verb “going out” from Egypt resembles the exodus but the parallelism with “from a people of strange language” is unique in the whole of the OT. This psalm does not describe the exodus as a form of liberation from socio-economic or political oppression. The exodus in Ps 114 is depicted as an *escape from* a foreign nation whose oppressive presence is reflected in the strange sounding language (114:1). However, the exodus in this psalm is also a *movement towards* Judah as a divine sanctuary and towards Israel as the dominion of God – probably metaphors for the presence of God (114:2).

During the continuation of the exodus the sea and the Jordan responded to the commands of God during the crossing of the Re(e)d Sea and the Jordan River, while the mountains and hills came in motion during the theophany on Sinai (114:3-4). Up to this point it seems to be the commemorative celebration

¹¹³ Oded Lipschits, “Jerusalem Between Two Periods of Greatness: The Size and Status of the City in the Babylonian, Persian and Early Hellenistic Periods,” in *Judah between East and West: The Transition from Persian to Greek Rule (ca 400 – 200 BCE)* (ed. Lester L. Grabbe and Oded Lipschits; LSTS 75; London: T&T Clark, 2011), 174-175.

¹¹⁴ Diana Lipton, *Longing for Egypt and Other Unexpected Biblical Tales* (HBM 15; Sheffield: Phoenix Press, 2008), 14 mentions in footnote 14 several examples of “polarised perceptions of Egypt”: Josephus was generally positive towards Pharaoh while Philo was extremely negative.

of different elements of the exodus. Then, quite dramatically, the response of sea and river, as well as mountains and hills are questioned: "Why?" (114:5-6).

The reason provided for the response of the elements of nature embedded in the memories of the exodus is the presence of the Lord and the God of Jacob. The impact of the transformative and authoritative presence of God as Creator and King is not only apparent in the initial exodus from Egypt but also in the lifetime of the author and in the subsequent contexts of the singers of the psalm (114:7-8).

It is likely that the metaphors employed in Ps 114 combined elements of the exodus and creation in such a manner that it opened up new possibilities for the future due to the transformative power of God. According to Zeph 3:9 a vision is formulated according to which a transformation is promised – a vision that includes the transformation of their languages that will enable all nations to call the Name of YHWH.¹¹⁵

Psalm 114 is also formulated in such a way that it transcends only one historical context. The reference to a foreign nation with a strange language resonates with several judgments in which Assyria and Babylonia feature prominently as an agent for punishing the disobedient Israel and Judah; with the distinct possibility of a process of reinterpretation after the exile in the Persian and Hellenistic periods. In this regard one should ask whether Aramaic, being the *lingua franca* of the Persian Empire would have been considered to be a "strange language"?¹¹⁶ Do the resemblance between Hebrew and Aramaic and the fact that it soon became the spoken language in post-exilic Palestine not argue for an initial exilic context for Ps 114 with New Babylonian becoming the maligned foreign tongue from which the exiles escaped when they returned to Yehud? This does not disallow the further reinterpretation of Ps 114 in subsequent translations of the Hebrew Bible and that in Hellenistic times the Persian Empire could have been depicted as an oppressive nation with a "barbarous language."

Despite the fact that the exodus tradition played a relatively minor role in the Psalter, it did perform an important theological function in the shaping of the identity and the expectation of the future for the early post-exilic Jewish communities of faith. Recent archaeological evidence makes a strong case for

¹¹⁵ Zenger, "A Poetical Etiology," 390 acknowledges that "a literary connection between Psalm 114 and Zeph 3:9 cannot be proven" but still maintains: "but both text participate in the same imagery."

¹¹⁶ Even the texts from the Jewish military settlement in Elephantine, Egypt were written during the fifth century B.C.E. in an Aramaic that showed no signs of Hebrew idiomatic speech. Edda Bresciani, "Egypt, Persian Satrapy," in *The Cambridge History of Judaism* (vol. 1; edited by William D. Davies and Louis Finkelstein; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 367-368.

presupposing an extended period of time before the Second Temple was built and Jerusalem resembled something of its pre-exilic importance. During this time of frustrated expectations the dramatic theological combination of exodus and creation kept alive the possibility that the transformative power of the Creator God, could establish a new exodus from a situation of being exposed to an oppressive foreign nation.

Psalm 114 is not only an example of the reinterpretation of the exodus but also an indication of the theological rejuvenation of identity shaping memories of the exodus by combining it with elements of creation theology in its liturgical realisation of the Jewish Passover. It ties the (first) exodus of Israel from Egypt to the (second) exodus from Babylon and opens up events to a (third) exodus of the nations out of idolatry.¹¹⁷ This "third exodus" anticipates the transformative power of God as Creator by transforming language – a future with no more speaking in strange and oppressive tongues by anyone!

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¹¹⁷ Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 101-150*, 200.

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