The Hebrew Canon and Politics

This paper was prepared for a seminar held at the Centre for Advanced Research in Oslo on April 29th 2015, convened by Prof. Terje Stordalen. I am grateful to the scholars present for their comments. The arguments should be seen as a development of those formulated in my Scribes and Schools. The Canonization of the Hebrew Scriptures, Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998.

By Philip R Davies
Chair, Palestine Exploration Fund
Emeritus, University of Sheffield, England
February 2016

I

Canons are a natural feature of a literary culture—and indeed, as the origin of the word in ancient Greece illustrates, it does not apply only to literary works but any artistic accomplishments that are judged to set a kind of standard or norm. It is important to recognize and understand the broader phenomenon of canon creation in the ancient world when dealing with the literary canon(s) now referred to as the 'Hebrew Bible' or 'Old Testament' (both somewhat inaccurate designations), because a closed, religious canon has, in scholarly as well as popular discussion, sometimes been taken as an archetype of canon instead of another example of a common cultural product—though an unusual one in having been definitively closed and then adopted as a kind of religious index with a divinely inspired status.

In seeking an explanation for the existence of this canon, we can aim to identify three distinct moments. The first is the creation of a literary tradition, requiring a literate community producing, reading and transmitting a certain body of writings, some of which will come to be preserved as that community's canon (I would rather, in fact, speak of 'canons', such as Law, Prophets, Davidic and Solomonic writings). These are the writings regarded as worth preserving, imitating and updating for their

value, whether for their content, language, style, attributed authorship, relevance or any other criteria.

The second moment is the adoption and dissemination, in this particular case, of the canonical writings of the scribal class in the form of an official, national body of literature whose function is to define the culture of the society in which it is propagated. The third moment, perhaps rather an extended process, is when this canon, with the addition of other literary collections that accumulate around it, becomes a basis for three major religions, all of which found roots in Western Europe and its derivative societies. There is nothing inevitable about this sequences, however, and so in each case it is necessary to ask why each one occurred.

In asking these questions about the life of the Hebrew canon, we adopt a deliberately non-theological and non-religious posture. This approach could normally be taken for granted to what is a scholarly enquiry, but it is obvious that a great deal of scholarship on this canon is itself entailed in a history of reception determined by the canonical status of the subject itself, and hence the ability to operate with critical independence has been restricted. The theological answer to the existence of the canonical writings has often been that they were divinely prompted in some way or another. Our scholarly academic discourse does not accept such an approach with respect to any other canons, including religious ones, and quite correctly. The assumption of divine participation in the creation of a canon is something outside the competence of critical scholarship. We can only address its contents are human products, and seek human motivations. So we begin by asking how an ancient society in Judah that as far as we know left remarkably few inscriptional traces compared with their neighbours nevertheless developed a literary culture of considerable size and, even more remarkably, considerable variety of content and genre. Moreover, many of the writings can be shown to have undergone several processes of redaction, suggesting an intense investment in their format and ongoing relevance. What kind of literate body occupied itself so profoundly with such activity, and what induced its members to keep picking away at these compositions over and over again?

We are somewhat hampered in pursuing this question by a scholarly tradition in which the contents—even where the matter of divine revelation or inspiration is excluded—are assumed to have been generated by essentially theological or religious motives. Perhaps this is because this perception is embodied in their reception over two millennia. Year after year, numerous commentaries on the books of this canon

address its meaning in terms of a 'message' that, among the more evangelical forms of this genre, is believed to remain uniquely relevant to today's world. Contemporary scholarship may allow that what are essentially exercises in clarifying the nature of the god and his relationship to humanity and to the people called 'Israel' were often informed by political and social events, such as warfare or social injustice, but we are still overwhelmingly inclined to see their writers and rewriters as interested in drawing theological lessons from these events. But in construing these writings as 'theology' in however broad a sense, we do not, I think, provide an adequate explanation of the contents, and especially a plausible explanation for their creation. They may, indeed, be 'God-talk', but their interaction with their authors' social and political location should not for this reason be undervalued or, as often, even ignored.

There are reasons why we should pay attention to politics. We know that the persons responsible for creating this canon were among the 4%-5% of fully literate members of their society who were entirely or very largely in the employ of the governing institutions of palace and temple. Here they were surely not employed to engage in the theology as an end in itself, nor should we suppose that they did so in their own leisure time, such as it may have been. The authors of this literature were professional scribes, and as such comprised the administrators of the state, the diplomatic service, the envoys and political advisors of the local or the imperial king, who was the lord not only of the palace but the temple. Politics, in short, was their profession of the canon-makers. Under a native monarchy, the temple sustained the monarchy ideologically, sponsoring the important and pervasive practice of divination in informing and authorizing royal activity. Under imperial rule, when the palace was the seat of a governor, the administrator of a foreign regime enjoying much less scope for political initiative, the temple curated the cultural goods of the province, providing mechanisms for creating social identity and solidarity, while being itself an arm of the empire, and responsible for maintaining a benign attitude among the population towards the king of kings. The collection and delivery of imperial taxes was also probably within the domain of the temple administration, in the form of religious obligations (the canonical texts never mention imperial taxes directly). Thus, it is reasonable to conclude that for the canon-makers politics was the game and theology the language, as had long been the case with priestly castes throughout the ancient Near East. Approaching the canonical texts from the point of view of theology, then, is addressing the mode of argumentation but not the substance of the issue. And

theological questions do not give us satisfactory answers to the kind of hectic literary activity to which these texts point.

Nothing new, then, is being claimed. The integration of religion and politics, with formal theology as one of the mechanisms, was characteristic of the cultures of the ancient Near East. The progress of human affairs was accepted as being determined, or at least largely affected, by the gods. The interaction of heavenly and earthly politics, mediated by various formal and informal mechanisms, was fundamentally enshrined in kingship, native or imperial. From the Sumerians to early modern Europe, it was maintained that the king was chosen by, and ruled by, the authority of gods or God as a real or adopted son (sometimes daughter). Gods were the highest level of the political machinery.

I approach canon, then, with the premise that religion and politics in the world of first millennium BCE Palestine were two aspects of the one perception of reality and of the arts of politics, and that the scribal profession articulated this synergy in the form of theologies or mythologies, just as the priests did physically in their liturgy, the temple itself being the portal between the two worlds. This 'theology' must of course be distinguished from the varied religious beliefs and practices of ancient Israelite and Judahites on different social levels—domestic, personal, local, agricultural, urban, royal, and so on. The canonized writings reflect actual practice (whether cult or social custom) only partially, and description is less their purpose than prescription. Through a variety of literary forms such as prophecy, historiography, wisdom, lawcode and liturgy they support, justify and sometimes—though of course indirectly—criticize political strategies, policies or tactics. They are evidence of lively differences of opinion over how society—the society of their authors—should be understood and organized.

I doubt that this much, if any, of this literature would have been created under a native monarchy, mainly because while a literate corps, perhaps even a scribal school, may have existed, I do not see the purpose of most of the kind of literature found in the canon—beyond, that is, collections of liturgical songs or prayers and proverbs. Collections of prophetic oracles probably were archived during this period, and possibly collated in the process of archiving. But 'books' or scrolls of prophetic statements represent a quite different kind of literary creation from individual oracles, and they imply a different purpose. Materials present within the canon may well have been present in the monarchic era in oral and even in literary form, but the existence

of these materials constitutes at best only the *pre*history of the canon. The needs of native monarchy left little need for the kind of literary output such as the canon contains: in many ways what we find in these writings presupposes, as I will argue, precisely the *lack* of a native monarchic system. They conduct kinds of political discourse whose form does not suggest that they were intended to advise a monarch, nor for public recitation, even if they did in time come to be *read* outside scribal circles by those with the ability to do so.

The creators of the canonical writings of course accepted that earthly realities were determined by gods, whether high gods or national gods. Kings always consulted prophets or other diviners in matters of statecraft. But they also consulted human advisers, and the scribes knew that the successful king did not seek oracles primarily to determine policy, but to endorse with divine blessing a policy forged with the aid of counselors such as we see in the characters Ahitophel or Hushai or Joab (or Daniel, for that matter), the kinds of people with whom the authors of the canon would have closely identified.

So to the essential point: with the demise of native kingship and political independence, the canonized literature takes the place of the court. The development of the Hebrew canon can be seen in large part as the conduct of a discussion about scribal politics, among those who had some control over the conduct of national affairs. This ongoing debate is characterized, inevitably, by argument and counter-argument, claim and counter-claim, expressed with a degree of commitment that explains the constant interaction and revision within the various writings. What has been called 'inner-biblical allusion' is less the key to the contours of the chronological evolution of a 'tradition' than the evidence of lively contemporary, altercation. This model, I think, best explains why we have such literature in the Hebrew canon, and indeed why it was that a canonical tradition developed at all.

II

Analyzing the canonized texts—or at least the bulk of them—as political discourse gives us an opportunity to date them a little more accurately than if we consider them only as theology. The political agendas that these texts pursue betray certain periods and situations, as well as explaining the extraordinary energy displayed in their production and reproduction. A useful starting-point for exploring this agenda is an issue central to theological discussion, but actually highly political at a certain point

in the history of Judah and Samaria: who or what constitutes 'Israel'? The concept of 'ancient Israel' has long been in scholarly circulation, but it is now a central problem in historical research. The discovery at the beginning of the Iron Age—the late 13th or the 12th century BCE—of farming villages in the central highlands now dominates our discussion of the origins of 'Israelites'. On the one hand, it is argued that here we have the 'Israel' of the famous Merneptah Stele. On the other hand, since these settlements show no distinctive ethnic features, and indeed may have been composed of different population elements, it is problematic to identify them with any of the 'Israels' of the Bible on grounds of cultural identity.

Of equal, if not more importance than the question of what precisely might constitute an 'Israelite' identity is the conclusion is that two distinct societies were formed in this settlement process, one in the northern hills, the other, later, in the southern. A continued economic, political and demographic differential between the more advanced north and less developed south suggests, moreover, that the two populations never unified into one society. In the light of this conclusion, the canonized descriptions of 'Israel' become very interesting. Some of them (Genesis–Joshua) present a 12-tribe people descended from the sons of Jacob, while others (some of the so-called 'Deuteronomistic' writings—Samuel–Kings and the Latter Prophets) use the name 'Israel' only to designate a kingdom in the northern highlands; prior to the formation of this kingdom (which they place under the reign of Rehoboam), they depict a 'house of Judah' existing alongside a 'house of Israel'. Hence there is support among the canonical texts for the archaeologically based theory of two distinct societies. In the book of Judges, lying canonically (and narratively) between one Israel in Genesis to Joshua and the another in Samuel and Kings, the transition between the two constructions has to be managed. The 'nation' is first dissolved into a loose collection of twelve tribes, but with Judah in a favoured position, alone conquering all its land at the beginning, providing the first judge, and in the end, leading the combined tribes against Benjamin. Here already we encounter the conflict of Benjaminite and Judahite monarchies that occupies the books of Samuel. In Chronicles, we find a quite different resolution. The Israelite 'people' of twelve tribes mature into a single kingdom, politically unified, but presented in the form of a religious body rather than a political one, a 'congregation' attached to a single temple and its cult, both created by its great Judahite king David. But we know the reality to have been different. For some only Judah survived (Ezra and

Nehemiah), while in Ezekiel the unification of 'Israel' remains to be reasserted in the future, with new tribal allotments and a sanctuary somewhere in the middle. There can be no doubt, then, that the identity of 'Israel' is a matter of debate and even contention through most of the canon. (We may guess that some Samarians also regarded only themselves as the real 'Israel'.)

The claiming of Israelite identity can only have triggered the development of the canon after the demise of the kingdom of Israel and the creation of the province of Samaria. But the idea of a single people of 12 tribes, the Israel of the Hexateuch, including Judah is unlikely to have originated while Judah remained a notionally independent monarchy, despite the suggestion of Finkelstein and others that an 'Israelite' identity was adopted in the reign of Hezekiah when a large number of Israelites swelled the population of Jerusalem. This suggestion does not explain how a political identity became a religious and ethnic one, or why Judahite identity was incorporated into an Israelite one. At best, it might have generated a certain degree of fraternity, but relations between the two societies were presumably not fraternal in the monarchic era: Judah's transfer of allegiance to Assyria in the 8th century hastened the end of Israel and heralded an economic boom in Judah. I doubt that after 722 any Judahite monarch would wish to subsume the name of his kingdom under that of 'Israel'. I thus prefer the solution that assigns the process to the era between the destruction of Jerusalem and its reinstatement, the 150 years between 586 and about 450 when Judah was ruled by the Benjaminite aristocracy. For Benjamin (as the tribal genealogy in Genesis attests) had a historical affiliation to Ephraim and Manasseh, and indeed its very name suggests an original affiliation of these tribal lands. With the end of the Jerusalem cult, the old royal deity (Yhwh Sebaoth) was merged with El Yisrael, the deity of the other major sanctuary in Judah, Bethel, now in Judah but previously a royal sanctuary of Israel. This temple and city almost certainly always lay within Benjamin (so Josh. 18:22), which remained part of the kingdom of Israel until at least 722. The syncretism of these two gods is copiously attested in the book of Jeremiah, with over 30 references to *Yhwh Sebaoth El Yisrael*. So we have positive evidence that Judahites (and their cult and their god) were absorbed into the children of Jacob/Israel (and their cult and their god). Judahites became 'children of Israel/Jacob'— a religious bond expressed ethnically, not a political designation—and this identity was inscribed in the Mosaic canon, which is a Judahite and Samaritan

canon, a common foundation myth that also includes set of cultic and social customs that define the new 'Israelite people'.

But, as already mentioned, the Hebrew canon also contains another major collection belonging only to Judah, the Former Prophets. Here Israel and Judah are unified politically but only temporarily, through David, whom the 'house of Israel' abandons. In the Minor Prophets also, whose superscriptions show a correlation with the books of Kings, antagonism between Judah and Israel recurs—for example in Amos and Hosea (to some extent also Micah), which both contrast the fates of Judah and Israel, implying and end for one and survival for the other.

This phenomenon is more than a theology of covenant disobedience and divine retribution. The issue is how the inhabitants of Samaria, and the province, are to be regarded within Judah, and how they are to be treated. No doubt the problem was exacerbated by the foundation of a temple in Gerizim somewhere between 450 and 400—this perhaps in turn prompted by the destruction of Bethel—leaving a single cult with two temples and two priesthoods. We can thus see one canon (Mosaic) endorsing Samarian-Judahite fraternity and another promoting Judahite nationalism, redefining an 'Israelite' identity that could not now be denied but could be redefined in purely Judahite terms. I shall try and explain the basis for this quite fundamental political disagreement presently.

Another reason for placing the beginning of the canonical process in the 6th century is the evidence of conflict between Judah and Benjamin. Benjamin is effectively ignored in Kings (one tribe is left to David), or, as in Judges, cast as a villain. By contrast, the Chronicler tends to include Benjamin (and Levi) when speaking of the kingdom of Judah. The destruction of Jerusalem and its reinstatement involved a transfer of power and prestige from the tribe of Judah to the tribe of Benjamin and back again, from Jerusalem to both Mizpah and probably Bethel, and back again. The rivalry depicted between Saul and David, one the Benjaminite tragic hero and the other then Judahite warrior-chief and founder of *bytdwd*, the predecessor to the kingdom of Judah, probably disguises the clash of Benjaminite and Judahite elites within the political administration of the province. The quite elaborate stories of the meetings between the two suggest an elaborate stitching together of Benjaminite and Judahite historical memories involved in this conflict). The rivalry between Jerusalem and Bethel (a Benjaminite sanctuary, at some point incorporated into Judah) is also evidenced in the negative image of the latter in the Prophets canon,

which contrasts with its importance in the Mosaic canon. When the book of Amos opens with 'Yhwh roars from Zion', when he sees the temple of Bethel collapsing and the 'booth of David being repaired, this prophet is announcing the end of the one temple and the restoration of the other. Had Amos said any such thing historically, it would have made no sense, and he would probably have been killed on the spot. Bethel had, I would guess, served as the major sanctuary of *both* Judah and Samaria, a function possibly reflected in Judges 20, 1 Sam 7 and 10. The proposal of a new sanctuary, which is not named as Jerusalem, in Ezekiel 40ff. may be an effort at reconciling all three sites of Jerusalem, Bethel and Gerizim. The placement of this city geographically would conform to such an intention.

Now to a wider geopolitics. Under the Persians and the Ptolemies a larger territorial unity emerged, one with which the scribes of Judah would be obliged to deal: first as the satrapy of Beyond the River, then in a slightly different shape as Ptolemaic Palestine. Judah and Samaria comprised a part of this geopolitical area. It is really unfortunate that we know so little of the Ptolemaic period, and especially the status of Samaria, Gerizim and Jerusalem within a Palestine where the previous provincial boundaries may have disappeared, injecting a new element into the issue of Judahite-Samarian relations. But in the absence of sufficient data, we can concentrate on what was known as 'Beyond the River'.

Genesis portrays Israel as one line of a wider family and a wider territory whose patriarch is Abraham, who is not bothered about where he offers his sacrifices. He is the ancestor not only of Samaria and Judah but also indirectly of Ammon and Moab, through Lot, and also of Ishmael, presumably Nabatea and Edom. Both are given an ancestry back to firstborn sons. Abraham's own family is clearly Aramean, based in Haran where his son and grandson seek their wives in the 'old country', Aram Naharaim. After the Assyrian conquest of Syria and northern Palestine, the area was subdivided into other provinces, but the Assyrians and Babylonians referred to the whole region as *ebernari* and this became the name of the Persian satrapy to which Judah and Samaria belonged. Ezra 4 illustrates how important the satrapy was seen to be in the political machinations of the Jerusalem administrators. According to Ezra 6:8 the temple was paid for out of satrapal taxes, while, more significantly, Ezra's commission was (7:25) 'to appoint magistrates and judges who may judge all the people in the province Beyond the River who know the laws of your God; and you shall teach those who do not know them'. This is highly reminiscent of 2 Kings 17 a

story telling how a priest from Bethel taught the immigrants in Samaria on a royal initiative aimed at creating a legal and customary uniformity that would of course make imperial administration of justice much simpler. So in Ezra the cult of Yahweh and the legal customs associated with it are applicable over all of the satrapy.

This larger Yahwistic body is represented in the canons of Judah and Samaria in the patriarchal stories of Genesis. These stories have a political agenda insofar as they imply relations between a province at the wider satrapy, within which limited political ambitions might be pursued. The land promised to him and his descendants corresponds to the satrapy, whose inhabitants, the 'families of the land' (Gen. 12:13) will be 'blessed'. Abraham's description as 'the Hebrew' also gives us the collective name of these. 'families'. We can forget *apiru* or *habiru* and concentrate on the meaning of the word in Jonah and as used by Saul of Tarsus. Both call themselves 'Hebrews': they spoke 'Hebrew', which then meant 'Aramaic'. So a 'Hebrew' is an Aramean, a Syrian, and *'ibri* derives from the name of the area, *'abar nahara*: the inhabitants were simply called *'ibrim*. In the Hebrew canon all Israelites, Samarian and Judean, are *'ibrim*, but not all *'ibrim* are Israelite. The relationship explains why it is possible for 'Hebrew' to designate an Israelite but also a non-Israelite, as for example in slavery, where an Aramean, whether Israelite or not, is treated differently.

So Genesis betrays satrapal politics, engagement with a wider region that was defined not only politically and linguistically but very probably culturally as well. The 'Hebrews' seem to have adopted a high god (various names reflected in Genesis) and of course they practised circumcision. The extension of the Mosaic canon to include Genesis, I think, points to the Persian era at the earliest. But its thrust is political, diplomatic: it defines a working relationship.

III

So much for the politics of relationships between groups inside and outside Judah. Let me now consider the inner politics. As already suggested, under a provincial regime, political and religious authority was apportioned between a palace and a temple in a way that allowed a difference to emerge, the temple enjoying some degree of autonomy. Within the canon we can identify two competing ideologies of society that perhaps attached to the two power-bases of palace and temple. Each ideology has produced its own body of laws and its own historiographical narrative. Broadly these two literary corpuses correspond to the conventional scholarly designations D and P,

Deuteronomy and Priestly. The one ideology is represented in parts of Exodus, in Leviticus and Numbers and, in a modified form, in Chronicles and Ezekiel. The other is represented in Deuteronomy, in Joshua to Kings, in Ezra and Nehemiah and in the so-called 'Yahwistic' narratives in the Pentateuch. The social ideologies are of course expressed in terms of the relationship between people and deity, and the fundamental icons of each are on the one hand the temple and its cult, on the other hand, 'law', meaning a written body of customary behaviour. Each icon distinguishes 'Israel' from all other entities, and thus furnishes a model of self-identification. According to what I would call the temple ideology, the presence of Israel's god in the temple is what gives Israel its quasi-priestly status and the land it occupies is endowed with a heightened holiness. Sin, which is for the most part defined less in terms of morality than of 'holiness', pollutes the temple and offends the deity; uncleanness must therefore be regulated so as not to defile the holy presence. The whole behaviour of the population is directly linked to the holiness of the temple, and the control of the people's relationship to its god, and thus its identity, is vested in the priesthood, i.e. the temple authorities. This relationship is projected onto the past in the cultic laws and the wilderness cult which establish the prototype, the land being replaced by the camp, the temple by the tent.

The alternative ideology is that the cult is not central at all, but rather the social behaviour of all Israelites, expressed in the form of a treaty between the god and the people. In its main written form, Deuteronomy, this body of regulations is modelled on a political genre establishing the relationship between a superior and inferior monarch, a vassal-treaty. But this treaty is between the god and the people: the king is not a mediator but likewise subject to the law. The entire story of Kings is meant to show, among other things, that leaving the implementation of these laws to kings brings ruin. The insistence on a single sanctuary, downplaying the sacrificial the cult, and elevating the levites to administration of the law (in the other ideology the levites are closely embraced in the temple cult) undermines the power of the priests. It takes the deity from the temple, leaving his name there instead; and it makes of the great agricultural festival cycle occasions for pilgrimage at which the founding events of the nation are rehearsed. The temple cult becomes demotic. Israel's identity and survival depend on obedience to the treaty. Israelites participate in the cult by the offerings of their produce, and hence land itself is treated as divine property. And the key element of this customary social behaviour is worship of Yahweh alone, for

which reason all other worship, and social integration with non-Yahweh worshippers is strictly forbidden.

The canonical collections (I think chiefly of Torah and Prophets) demonstrate various compromises and qualifications, including degrees of accommodation between the two ideologies. But, as the differences between Sadducees and Pharisees from the second century to the end of the temple show, the two ideologies continued to be represented. Outside the canonical orbit, however, both the books of Enoch and the Qumran manuscripts show that the canonical ideologies did not define the limits of what might be defined as 'Judaism'. The Hebrew canon does not define any religious system by itself but merely provides, as canons should, the parameters by which a definition of 'Israel', or of 'Judah' should be constructed.

My final observation is that we also see in these two ideologies not simply a conflict between priestly and lay groups, for even the so-called 'Deuteronomic' ideology incorporates priesthood, though it elevates (written) prophecy to a more important role. There are wider political implications. The so-called 'Priestly' ideology might be identified with a policy of extending priestly influence more widely by maintaining close relations with the priests and the cult of Gerizim, including by intermarriage. The Deuteronomistic ideology, with its antagonist towards other identities within Palestine and its rejection of Samaria as part of 'Israel', seems to reflect a Judahite and Zionist nationalism. The difference is dramatically illustrated in the figure of David, whose profile is divided into two: on the one hand a warrior and dynastic founder of Judah, on the other a temple-builder, musician and composer of psalms. If I am correct, the Hebrew canon allows us to discern a tension between a provincial politics seeking the narrow interests of Judah against other local political entities, especially Samaria, centred on the palace, and a priestly politics seeking to build a regional power-group though extending the cult of Yahweh and its priesthood. The tension is materially represented in a set of writings, in which each side expresses, reinforces and develops its vision of what 'Israel' is, while various groups or individuals also show a willingness to compromise between the two (Chronicles, Ezekiel).

Finally I consider the politics of creating a 'Jewish' canon, a political agenda entailed in the adoption of a scribal canon—or rather, a set of scribal canons, in various stages

of growth: Mosaic, Davidic, Solomonic, prophetic—as an expression of the cultural identity and heritage of Judaism. The only political agency capable of such a move—and with the appropriate motivation—are the Hasmonean rulers. These inherited a kingdom born from a war in which the identity of Judah's culture, symbolized by its native cult and its social customs, were fought for. But they were defended even when not being entirely defined by its defenders. Existence preceded essence, we might say: that Judah survived was more important than how, and the adoption of a degree of Hellenistic culture by the rulers, along with the crystallization of differing ideologies into sectarian movements, illustrates the fluidity of Judah's self-image. Under the Hasmoneans, Judean nationalism triumphed: the Hasmonean priests assumed the kingship, and set upon political expansion, using the pretext of 'security'—much as nowadays, except that the non-political entity of 'Israel' was sidelined in favour of the identity of 'Judah'. The destruction of Gerizim and the incorporation of much of Palestine (the 'Hebrews') into Judah, and thus into 'Judaism', created a conscious conflict between those who no doubt embraced what they saw as a revival of the Davidic kingdom and those who feared, like the authors of the book of Jubilees, that an Abrahamic 'Judaism' would swamp a Mosaic one.

The adoption of Hebrew canons as 'Jewish' was surely an attempt at some kind of control: if divine authority were to be confined to scriptures, as the non-priestly scribes asserted, it was helpful to the rulers that authority be accorded to writings expressing a range of views, thus avoiding strong opposition while enhancing the likelihood of general acceptance. The rulers could allow differing groups to develop their own interpretations without lobbying the monarch. The Hasmoneans may have excluded some writings, including those in Aramaic rather in the national language which they were keen to promote, but one they in particular allowed, even though it was mainly in Aramaic: the Danielic canon, a collection of court-tales and apocalypses that had been assembled during the wars that preceded the Hasmonean victory. In order to make its inclusion less questionable, its opening chapter was translated into Hebrew. And why should the Hasmoneans want Daniel included in their canon? It expresses expectation of a fourth, Jewish kingdom after the removal of the temple sacrilege, the 'abomination of desolation', which Judas Maccabee achieved. The chronological scheme embedded in Masoretic text seems to point to this date as an endpoint. The Hasmoneans favoured the book of Daniel as a prediction of their own kingdom to follow the rule of the three empires. Of course it supported

and justified their expansionist ambitions, but it also buttressed their claim to sovereign authority, royal, priestly and with the support of the scribes whom Daniel himself prefigured. Thus, in my view, the creation of a Jewish canon out of the Hebrew scribal canons was a single definitive political act, not, as the formation of the canons had been, a gradual process.

The canonical status of Daniel raises a question (also implied by the inclusion of Chronicles in the foregoing discussion) of the status of the canonical division known as 'Writings'. The Hasmoneans, on the view argued here, certainly established a canon consisting of Law and Prophets, as most of the contemporary references refer to it. But many of these sources also refer to other writings besides, though without any unanimous agreement as to the contents. It remains an open question, therefore, whether, despite the closure of the Torah and Prophets canons, a third canonical set remained open. I am inclined to think not, though the references by Josephus and in 4 Ezra to a fixed number (22, 24) do not rule this out entirely. Moreover, the contents of canonical collections such as Psalms appear not to have been finalized under the Hasmoneans. But it is entirely possible for a Davidic canon to be officially recognized alongside a Mosaic and Prophetic without the contents being immediately frozen. The issue remaining here is how consensus was finally achieved on the contents, and perhaps such decisions belong with processes by which the Hebrew text of the canonical collections was frozen, as attested by Greek retranslations of the first century CE.

At all events, the nature of several members of this canonical class, comprising, as I argued in my book, canons of Davidic and Solomonic writings (Psalms, Proverbs, Qoheleth, Song of Songs), plus novellas (Ruth, Esther) do not betray any political agenda. But I do not wish to argue here that politics determined the collection of every work that came to be formally canonized. Rather, I suggest that it was politics that generated the production of the two major canonical sets of Law and Prophets, and thus the growth of a canonical process itself. Once a literary tradition was in place, the assembly of canons of other types of writing is not unexpected and not problematic.

Finally, we can approach the stage of reception. The Hasmonean rule did not last long, but Judaism flourished as a religion within the Roman empire, sponsored by Herod who, though king of Judah regarded himself as king of the Jews, most of whom came outside what was, after Herod's death, a smaller Judah and a fragmented

Palestine. But, beginning with the Hasmoneans (and perhaps even earlier) the Jerusalem temple had become a focus for followers of the cult of Yahweh beyond Judah itself, especially n Babylonian and in Egypt. Herod's temple was a temple for worldwide Judaism, a project in which he failed, but which was accomplished in a rather ambivalent manner by the religion of Christianity, which adopted the canon, in both Greek and Hebrew forms as it turned out, but tore it from its cultural setting and refashioned it as a massive Messianic oracle. Within rabbinic Judaism, the ideologies of the canon were fused into a new system. The Mosaic canon replaced the temple in liturgical reverence, the old Deuteronomic locus of family and community prevailed; but the cultic laws were, as far as possible, also revered and respected, and the language of 'holiness' was adopted to describe the status of the canon: its contents 'defiled the hands'—these were, literally 'holy books', sacred *objects*. The 'land of Israel' became an abstract holy space, the prophetic canon a supplement to Torah and the historical narratives became parables of Jewish virtues. The process of officially rabbinizing Judaism was probably lengthy and may have been finally accomplished only with the Christianizing of the Roman Empire, a process that also contributed to the definition of the Christian canon, or at least the Latin canon. This topic would require a separate study into the history of the Greek scriptural canon, which incorporates some writings excluded from the Hebrew canon. But the Greek canon was not directly influence by Judean politics and remained open; the Hasmoneans would have been unable and uninterested in controlling its contents, which in any case largely followed those of the Hebrew canon, as did its text in various translations. Indeed, but for its adoption by Christianity, the Greek canon may have become the major Jewish form of the canon too. Here we may see how even the preservation of the Hebrew canon rather than the Greek one among Jews for whom the Hebrew language was dead is explicable, whatever theological arguments may be introduced, to imperial politics. From the beginning of its history onwards, the Hebrew canon's existence, the nature of its contents, its adoption as a document of Judaism and its preservation in the Hebrew rather than Greek form are all inexplicable except through the lens of politics.

Finally: does this canon continue to have a political role in the modern world? We all know, I am sure, of the way in which religion and politics together shaped the secularized nation-states of Europe, informed the ideology of European colonization and yet continued, in a manner not unlike the Deuteronomic enterprise, to determine

the ethical codes of Western culture through the role of the Bible in education, becoming a text to be read rather than an unread text translated by ecclesiastical structures. The challenge facing us today, I think, is to find a way of using the Bible to undergird that ethical code in way that conforms to its origins rather than to its reception—not as commands of God but as argument about identity. Politicians in my country and in many others generally prefer to leave religious education to religious institutions, and fear that teaching the Bible in public institutions will be interpreted as religious instruction rather than as both part of the European literary canon and as a necessary resource for an intelligent and critical citizenship. The Bible—I mean the Hebrew Bible, to which different religious interests may attach the Talmud, New Testament or Qur'an as their own supplements or rewritings—could still function as a canon in this way, and in doing so remain true to its nature. But it has become the victim of these various supplements, all of which have constructed it in a way that separates rather than unifies. To recanonize the Bible would be the right thing for a secular society to do, since the participation of many religions within a single civil society is one of the great goals of secularism itself.