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 HOOFDARTIKELEN

**Fundamentalists of All Faiths.
Decolonization in suspense***

Colonialism, on top of being the systematic expansion of economic-political domination and exploitation by competing Western powers, has been the concerted imposition, intentionally world-wide, of the modern-Western worldview and lifestyle. To the Western actors the latter aspect represented an axiomatic motive and an active pursuit of self-vindication. Upon maturation colonialism has changed in appearance not in essence. 'Decolonization' is a matter of wishful thinking rather than of actual developments. Instead of being terminated or replaced by something radically different, the colonial relationship as an organizational device has been globalized and adapted. The effectuation of presumed Western ascendancy has changed settings (from metropolitan country versus colony to 'developed' versus 'developing') as well as modalities (from constitutional-economic domination by dint of sociocultural pre-eminence to exemplarity; from 'exploitation' to 'aid' as the signifier of an enduring relationship of inequality). The uneven distribution of power as the determinant of economic and political interaction, though perhaps less readily identifiable among a global congeries of nominally sovereign states than between sets of sovereign and dependent polities, remains structural or 'systemic'.

The postmodern/postcolonial discourse

This post-war, newly global scene is informed, since the late 'forties, by a superficially new, virtually global discourse, along with the reactions it elicits. It features in two variants: postmodern in the West, postcolonial elsewhere. In a Western setting or in addressing the Western condition, it pretends to a mainstream role and significance. When pertaining to non-Western situations it strives for dominance. The difference between mainstream position and dominance is a matter of experienced distance, of integration versus imposition. In terms of cultural dynamics, a mainstream phenomenon is at home in a given culture as process, perhaps complicated to an extent by interaction with other cultures. A dominance, on the other hand, is superimposed upon a given culture again as an ongoing process; its integration cannot be presumed. This difference has significant implications in case of reaction or dissent.

The postmodern discourse of the West bears the imprint of outlived modernity lingering on pending due replacement, maintaining meanwhile its ethnocentric claims to perpetuity and universality. It is profoundly ambiguous. On the one hand, the distressing sequence of ill-conceived and fruitless

world events and conferences, 'bread and games' brazenly served up by the United Nations and other spenders of public funds, illustrates the way this discourse marks a dead end. The disconcerting effect of the paradigm of development aid is another case in point. On the other hand the mind-boggling developments in science and technology suggest an as yet unthinkable perception of reality and cognition, potentially substituting the outgoing one. This mixed postmodern discourse is being conducted by a self-constituted élite of Westerners, whether belatedly modern or anticipatorily postmodern, along with their adepts of non-Western origin. One trait it shares in common with its predecessor, the discourse of modernity, is that although its sway over the mind effectively sets the limit to what is thinkable, the universe it informs is never fully closed. There is always the possibility of a doubt or an objection.

The postcolonial discourse in, or concerning, non-Western situations is a derivative of the postmodern one of the West. It runs parallel but for certain differences. Alike modernity in the West, colonialism as its offshoot has fallen a victim to the unforeseen and untoward implications of its apparent success. The yardstick of this success, not just in retrospect, has been the measure of immersion of the 'natives' in the emergent colonial order, presumably (in colonizer's perspective) in the role of a subordinate adjuvant. The ruse of history has been that the reconscientization emerging in response to involuntary involvement shaped up in unawareness of the colonial frame of thought and conduct and notably of its limits to tolerance. Where qualified convergence was expected or at least intended, emergent self-awareness could herald divergence: a prospect of gradually polarizing, increasingly conflictual ambiguity in the natives' perception of and attitude towards the colonizer. Given, then, colonialism in its 'enlightened', obsolescent manifestation, dissent was the natural corollary.

Dissent and its limits

One of the salient features shared in common between postmodernity and postcolonialism is, then, their inherent restlessness. A not insignificant number of those whose lives are framed by it do not fully identify with the prevailing (whether mainstream or dominant) pattern of thought and conduct. Dissent is an intrinsic part of it. Its semantic content varies, and so does its prospect. This is a matter of relative weight or scope: is dissent a match to the prevailing discourse or, if not, can it become one? At first sight the answer is no, for two closely related reasons, namely the framing effect of the prevailing order and its implicit universalism.

As regards framing effect, culture as a pattern of thought and conduct encompasses those living it. It is the way man comes to terms with reality, his *Weltanschauung* (Karl Jaspers's term): his way of cognition, of perceiving and thinking. Were it conceivable that someone would consider this state of affairs from an Olympian, external viewpoint (which is not the case to those whom it concerns), then it might be realized that this cultural frame determines what is perceptible and thinkable. In the absence of such an imaginary viewpoint even the possibility of this realization is below the — unnoticeable — horizon. This does not preclude dissent in any shape or form, but it suggests limits to the latitude for its manifestation and scope. Ultimately it begs the question as to the possibility of transgressing those limits, and the price likely to be exacted for doing so.

* Review article of MARTY, Martin E. and R. SCOTT APPLEBY (eds.) — *Fundamentalisms Observed*. (The Fundamentalism Project; 1), 1991 (XVI, 872). ISBN 0-226-50877-3 cloth.
Fundamentalisms and Society: Reclaiming the Sciences, the Family, and Education. (The Fundamentalism Project; 2), 1993 (X, 592). ISBN 0-226-50880-3 cloth.
Fundamentalisms and the State: Remaking Politics, Economics, and Militancy. (The Fundamentalism Project; 3), 1993 (X, 666). ISBN 0-226-50883-8 cloth.
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considered Christian. Th. Drew-Bear, however, pointed out that the phrase was used by Christians and also Jews.⁶²⁾ The same seems to apply to inscriptions with the following formulae as the only indication for their origin: *χεῖρ θεοῦ*,⁶³⁾ *ἔσται αὐτῷ πρὸς τὴν δικαιοσύνην τοῦ θεοῦ*,⁶⁴⁾ *πρὸς τὸ μέγα δῶμα τοῦ θεοῦ and πρὸς τὸν ζῶντα θεόν*.⁶⁵⁾

The so-called Eumeneian formula *ἔσται αὐτῷ πρὸς τὸν θεόν* (cf. §3) is of special interest, because the arguments that have been used to determine the origin of this phrase betray a specific view on ancient Judaism. Calder stated that this formula "may confidently be treated as Christian".⁶⁶⁾ He admitted, though, that occasionally it might be attributed to Jews but remarked: "such exceptions should only be allowed on definite evidence or strong presumption of Jewish origin".⁶⁷⁾ Calder neither gives any hint whatsoever as to what definite evidence or strong premise is required in such a case, nor does he clarify why such conditions are required for the assumption of a Jewish origin but not for a Christian origin. A remark by Cumont on inscriptions from Asia Minor leads one to surmise that preconceived ideas on the history of Jews and Christians in Asia Minor underscore this view: "Il est indubitable que dès la période alexandrine les colonies juives étaient nombreuses dans les villes d'Asie Mineure, mais elles ont été absorbées en grande partie par les églises chrétiennes dès la fondation de celles-ci, et le chiffre des israélites devait être très réduit sous l'empire".⁶⁸⁾ In plain words this remark implies that when Christianity emerged in Asia Minor, Judaism left the stage. It explains why Cumont could think that a Jewish origin of the Eumeneian formula, which occurs on gravestones from the third century CE, was out of the question. As has already been indicated above, scholars acknowledge now that the formula was used by Christians and Jews. The idea of the Church Triumphant has greatly influenced the research of still other scholars in the field.⁶⁹⁾ The biased view of Calder, Cumont and others, which is part of what Kraabel called 'the old consensus', is clearly outdated now. Views on Jewish beliefs and practices in antiquity are changing. Awareness of the pluriformity of ancient Judaism is increasing. It has even been proposed to speak no longer of 'Judaism', but instead of 'Judaisms' in Palestine as well as in the diaspora.⁷⁰⁾

⁶²⁾ Th. Drew-Bear, *Nouvelles inscriptions de Phrygie*, Zutphen, 1978, 109-110.

⁶³⁾ MAMA 6 no. 231. A. T. Kraabel, *Judaism*, 65, notes that the expression seldom occurs in the New Testament and the Apostolic Fathers but is common in the Hebrew Bible and rabbinic literature.

⁶⁴⁾ Ramsay 1897 II, p. 562 nos. 455-457 (from Acmonia). Cf. L. Robert, *Hellenica XI-XII*, Paris, 1960, 409-410, on these texts: "rien n'atteste un caractère chrétien plutôt que juif".

⁶⁵⁾ For inscriptions with these and related formulae see A. Parrot, *Malédiction et violations de tombes*, Paris, 1939, 132-133; L. Robert, *Hellenica XI-XII*, Paris, 1960, 405-406.

⁶⁶⁾ W. M. Calder, "The Eumeneian Formula", in: W. M. Calder & J. Keil (eds.), *Anatolian Studies presented to W. H. Buckler*, Manchester 1939, 15-26.

⁶⁷⁾ Calder, "Eumeneian Formula" 25.

⁶⁸⁾ F. Cumont, "Les inscriptions chrétiennes de l'Asie Mineure". *Mélanges d'archéologie et d'histoire* 15 (1895), 253 n. 2.

⁶⁹⁾ See the conclusion on A. Harnack's *Die Mission und Ausbreitung des Christentums in den ersten drei Jahrhunderten* (Leipzig 1902¹; 1924²) by S. J. D. Cohen, "Adolph Harnack's 'The Mission and Expansion of Judaism: Christianity Succeeds where Judaism Fails'", in: B. A. Pearson (ed.), *The Future of Early Christianity, Essays in Honor of Helmut Koester*, Minneapolis, 1991, 163-169.

⁷⁰⁾ Cf. J. A. Overman, "The Diaspora in the Modern Study of Ancient Judaism", in: Overman & MacLennan, *Diaspora Jews*, 63-78, building especially on the work of A. T. Kraabel.

Scholars have now begun to notice the diversity of Jewish life in the diaspora during the Hellenistic and Roman period, and to realize that the interaction between Jews and non-Jews must have assumed various forms and degrees of intensity. The borderline between Jews and non-Jews seems to have been far less demarcated than was commonly assumed only a few decades ago. These observations seem to lead to an unavoidable conclusion: the origin of all inscriptions from Asia Minor has to be re-evaluated in accordance with recent insights in order to compile a new corpus of Jewish inscriptions from Asia Minor. And if such a project will be taken up, it would be prudent to take into account that the origin of a number of inscriptions cannot be determined with certainty and that these inscriptions best be characterized 'Jewish or non-Jewish'.

University of Amsterdam
April 1995

Alice J. BIJ DE VAATE &
Jan Willem VAN HENTEN

* *
*

The Story of Genesis 11:1-9 and the Culture of Ancient Mesopotamia¹⁾

The Hebrew text of Gen. 11:1-9 contains the so-called story of the Tower of Babel which is the last part of the primeval history of mankind to be found in the first eleven chapters of Genesis. The story of Gen. 11:1-9, which is not a lengthy one, makes the impression of a well-balanced piece of literature, displaying also an intriguing interplay of several motifs. As a story about the land of Sinear, and about the city of Babel it clearly refers to the culture of (Ancient) Mesopotamia. So the (old) question arises how to evaluate the relationship between Gen. 11:1-9 and the culture of Ancient Mesopotamia (as far as we know it).

It is in particular this question which is the main interest of the recent, and up to now the most comprehensive study of Gen. 11:1-9, written by Christoph Uehlinger from Fribourg Switzerland. This study, accepted as a thesis on the 20th of June 1989 at the University of Fribourg, is an impressive piece of work, not only because of the number of its pages, but also for its rich and most interesting contents. The book dealing with the story of a tower is built up like a tower itself: the new interpretation of the story of Gen. 11:1-9 (pp. 291-584; Part B) can be regarded as the top which is based on several floors of the history of interpretation of this text (pp. 7-290; Part A). I will, first, give a description of its contents.

Part A: History of Interpretation

Having dealt with the translation of Gen. 11:1-9, including the critical aspects of the text, the author starts his history of interpretation with a discussion of the most important

¹⁾ Review article of Christoph Uehlinger, *Weltreich und 'eine Rede'. Eine neue Deutung der sogenannten Turmbauerzählung (Gen 11,1-9)* (OBO 101), Universitätsverlag, Freiburg Schweiz/Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen 1990. xvi + 629 pp., DM 155,-; ISBN 3-7278-0697-4 (Universitätsverlag), 3-525-53733-6 (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht).

ancient versions: the Septuagint,²⁾ Targum Onkelos, Peshitta and Vulgate (ch. II, pp. 20-32). In chapter III (pp. 35-180) the rich variety of early Jewish and rabbinic interpretations is presented to the reader: the palestinian targumim, the rabbinic midrashim, the paraphrases of Gen. 11:1-9 in Jewish sources from Hellenistic and Roman times (Pseudo-Eupolemos; Sib. Oracles 3; Jub. 10; Pseudo-Philo; Josephus; Sib. Oracles 1; 8, and 11; Greek Baruch), and the exposition of Philo of Alexandria (mainly in his *De confusione linguarum*). Ch. IV (pp. 181-200) informs the reader *inter alia* about the rabbinic idea, to be found in the Babylonian Talmud and Midrash, that the tower of Babel should be located in Borsif (Birs Nimrud; Borsippa). The question of whether, and in which sense, Gen. 11:1-9 refers to the temple tower (*ziqqurat*) of Babel, is dealt with in chapter V (pp. 201-253). This chapter offers much information on the excavations in Babel, as carried out at the beginning as well as in the early sixties of our century. The so-called *ziqqurat*-hypothesis is critically examined (Does the Hebrew word *miḡdāl* refer to the *ziqqurat*? Does the expression 'its top in heaven' represent a *ziqqurat* metaphor? Is O. Speiser right in assuming a specific relationship between *Enuma elish* vi 47-75 and Gen. 11:1-9?), and is regarded as improbable. In the last chapter of Part A (ch. VI, pp. 254-290) theological interpretation enters the scene, i.e. the building of the tower as a project of human hubris, both as it was put forward in antiquity, in the Middle Ages, and in modern exegesis as well. In this respect particular attention is paid to the ideas of G. von Rad and C. Westermann. Von Rad is of the opinion that the so-called Jahwistic history of origins (Gen. 2-11*) conveys the picture of the breakthrough of sin, and of an ever increasing sin as well, ending up with the judgment of mankind in Gen. 11:1-9 (but followed by the action of grace in Gen. 12:1-3). Westermann, however, points out that the idea of a growing sinfulness is not present in the Jahwistic parts of Gen. 2-11; in his view, the story of Gen. 11:1-9, together with Gen. 3; 4, and 6:1-4, belongs to narratives of guilt and punishment, which are based on old traditions.

Part B: A New Interpretation

In chapter VII (pp. 293-343) the story of Gen. 11 is examined from the literary point of view (structural analysis) and by analysing its internal coherence (literary-critical approach). Further, the question of its place in the redaction history of the *Urgeschichte*, in particular its pre-priestly version, is discussed. As to the literary qualities of the text Uehlinger points to cases of alliteration, paronomasia and word-play, and for the structure of the story as a whole he informs the reader about the observations made by scholars like J.P. Fokkelman, I. Kikawada and P. Auffret. Partly on the basis of macrosyntactical observations the text is divided into three episodes: (a) vv. 1-4, (b) v. 5 (the 'axe' of the story), and (c) vv. 6-9.

On the assumption that a literary unity can be the result of a redaction process, the question of the coherence of the story is dealt with in detail. Uehlinger is of the opinion that there are clear cases of "interne Kohärenzstörungen", the result being that the following verses are considered by him as additions (viewed as cases of *relecture*): v. 1b, v. 2, v. 3 (from *hbb* on), v. 4aa (*wy'mrw*), v. 4bb (the motif of *pwš*), v. 8a (the motif of *pwš*), v. 9a (the Babel aetiology as being

secondary to confusion of language), and v. 9b (the motif of *pwš*). As to literary connections between Gen. 11 and the rest of the Jahwistic history of origins it is argued that these relations are of a secondary nature, not only those between Gen. 11 and Gen. 2-10* (the motifs of 'the east' [*qdm*] and of 'the name'; the expression *bny h'dm*; 11:6 and 3:22; the motif of *pwš*), but also the one between 11:4 and 12:2 (motif of 'the name'). This means that the small literary unit of the basic story (*Grundschrift*) of Gen. 11:1-9 was originally independent, created some time before the Jehowistic history (7th century B.C.). In the course of time, so Uehlinger further argues, this story has been reworked and expanded three times: 1. the Babel-*relecture*, 2. the redactional insertion of the story into the pre-priestly version of the history of origins, and 3. the post-exilic addition of the motif of 'dispersion' (*pwš*).

Chapter VIII (pp. 344-405) is devoted to motifs and themes from Gen. 11:1-9, and contains an extensive discussion of the meaning of significant words or expressions. It is argued that:

- (1) the Hebrew expression *šḥ 'ht* is best translated as "eine Rede", and not as "eine Sprache" (cf. *lšwn*). In the original story the emphasis is on unanimity, but the addition of *dbrym 'hdym* causes a shift towards a strictly linguistic interest (one language). Originally the subject matter is not the confusion of the language, but, as is indicated by the verb *bl*, the mixing up of speech, because the meaning of this verb is 'to mix' ("vermengen"), and not 'to confuse' ("verwirren");
- (2) v. 3, which displays a knowledge of building materials in Mesopotamia (cf. the expression *ina kupri u agurri*), is considered to be part of the Babel-*relecture*, because that knowledge seems to point to the days of Nebuchadrezzar II, "von dessen Baumassnahmen in Babylon weitaus die meisten Textbelege und archäologischen Befunde für die Bauweise *ina kupri u agurri* stammen" (p. 372);
- (3) the combination 'city and tower' (vv. 4-5) is to be taken in the sense of 'city and citadel'. Here Uehlinger refers to ancient near eastern pictures of cities (city wall, and the citadel rising high above the wall);
- (4) the expression 'and its top into heaven' is to be understood in a figurative sense, as is the case in texts from Mesopotamia;
- (5) the Hebrew clause *wn 'šh lnw šm* should be translated, with H. Gunkel, "so machen wir uns einen Namen". Uehlinger is of the opinion that this clause expresses the purpose of the whole building project: mankind strongly wishes to establish a name, i.e. to become famous (cf. the use of the 'name' in royal inscriptions of Mesopotamia). The clause introduced by *pn* in the same verse (v. 4b) is regarded by him as secondary because of the motif of *pwš* (see above). In connection with v. 4 particular attention is paid to the relationship between the expression 'to make a name' and the building of a city. It is pointed out that this element represents a well-attested tradition in ancient Mesopotamia (Excursus 4, pp. 386-395; e.g. Kar-Tukulti-Ninurta and Dur Sharrukin);
- (6) the expression 'one people' should not be interpreted in the sense of family relations, but rather in a political sense because of the notion of 'the whole earth' in the story;
- (7) (that,) finally, the text of v. 6b, "Nun aber: Nicht wird ihnen unausführbar bleiben, was alles sie zu tun planen", is not to be understood in a general sense in line with Job 42:2 (so e.g. C. Westermann), but only as part of the actual story, "als Reflexion über das Bauprojekt" (p. 404): the project has started, but has not been completed (v. 6a); "V. 6b ...

²⁾ One wonders why quotations in Greek are given without accents.

diagnostiziert, dass die Menschheit in der Tat zur Vollendung des Projekts in der Lage wäre" (p. 404).

Chapter IX (pp. 406-513) contains a very detailed discussion of the motif of 'one speech' ("eine Rede") against the background of and in the light of parallel expressions from Mesopotamia. As for the notion of 'one language' Uehlinger refers to the text called the *Incantation of Nudimmud* (pp. 409-429), in which this notion (sum.: eme.as) has to do with the submission of mankind to one authority. But, as we have seen, Uehlinger is of the opinion that the motif of 'one speech' in Gen. 11 is not so much denoting one language, but rather unanimity. The interesting thing is, so he points out, that we know of a particular expression from Mesopotamia which has a similar meaning: *pû(m) istên*. "Die Wendung 'ein Mund' signalisiert Konkordanz, Übereinstimmung der Rede, aber auch umfassende Einmütigkeit und gemeinsame Planungs- und Handlungsfähigkeit" (p. 437). He then starts with a discussion of three expressions in which *pû(m) istên* is used: (a) *pû istên šakānu*, "sich verbunden, sich verschwören"; (b) *pû(m) istên šakānu/šuskūnu*, "eine Rede führen lassen, eines Sinnes machen"; (c) *ana pû(m) istên šūšubu(m)*, "eines Sinnes wohnen lassen", or "einem Befehl gehorsam wohnen lassen".

The main part of ch. IX, however, is concerned with texts from Mesopotamia in which the motif of 'one mouth' is used in connexion with building projects of cities and with the naming of cities after the reigning king. Some texts are from the Old Babylonian period (see pp. 445-453), but a fairly large number of texts relevant to the subject date from the Middle and Neo-Assyrian periods (pp. 453-482). It appears that the motif of 'one mouth' occurs in the royal inscriptions from Tukulti-Ninurta I up to and including those of Sargon II (but none after him). Uehlinger points out that the use of this motif is part of the imperialistic ideology of some Assyrian kings ("Herrschaftstopos"). Particular attention is paid to the instances in inscriptions of Tukulti-Ninurta I and Sargon II, because the motif of 'one mouth' is related here to the building of cities which are named after its builder: Kar Tukulti-Ninurta and Dur Sharrukin.

Finally, the occurrence of the motif of 'one mouth' in the Chronicle of the Early Kings and in a Neo-Assyrian collection of omens is discussed (pp. 492-503). According to Uehlinger parts from the passages about Sargon and Naramsin of Akkad are written in later (Neo-Assyrian) times and reflect a typological association between Sargon of Akkad and Sargon II.

In the last part of chapter IX the author offers a comparison between the culture of Mesopotamia and Gen. 11:1-9 as to the following points: the motif of 'one speech'; city + citadel; to make a name + the naming of a city; the motif of 'one people', and "eine Rede", Weltherrschaft und Weltordnung" (pp. 503-513). Special attention is devoted to texts of Sargon II in which the motif of 'one mouth' of peoples deported to Dur Sharrukin is related to a situation of many languages. In the end the following hypothesis is formulated: the motifs of Gen. 11:1-9, particularly in the way they are interrelated in this story, are best understood in the light of the Neo-Assyrian ideology and rhetoric of world dominion. In view of the motif of the failure of the building of a city in Gen. 11 the building of Dur Sharrukin by Sargon II, and its failure (because of the death of the king) might be seen as a most striking historical background. "Die bisher angestellten motifgeschichtlichen Überlegungen, die uns immer wieder zu den Inschriften Sargons II. und zu Dur-Sarrukin zurückgeführt haben, lassen

m.E. den zwingenden Schluss zu, dass die Grundschrift [...] als eine 'politisch-theologische' Reflexion angesichts des Scheiterns der Weltherrschaftsansprüche Sargons II. und (concretum pro abstracto) angesichts des Scheiterns von Dur-Sarrukin zu verstehen ist" (p. 513).

Chapter X (pp. 514-584), the last one, presents "eine neue Deutung" of Gen. 11:1-9 to the reader. The following conclusions and suggestions are given:

- (a) The original story of Gen. 11:1-9 is to be seen as a reflection on the failure of Sargon II to obtain world dominion, symbolized in his building of the city and citadel of Dur Sharrukin. Uehlinger typifies the story as a construed mythical story, in the light of construed myths from Mesopotamia. Isa. 14:4b.6-20a is adduced and discussed as a similar text;
- (b) The second stage of the story is represented by the basic narrative after having been reworked and expanded by the Babel-aetiology (v. 3, and v. 9a). This (new) story reflects, according to Uehlinger, a criticism on the world power of Babel, and should be seen as a satirical *relecture* from the time of Nebuchadnezzar II, the king of Babel who developed many building activities;
- (c) The next stage concerns the story, be it with minor additions, after having been inserted into the original, pre-priestly *Urgeschichte*. Attention is paid to the relationship between 11:6 and 3:22, and between 11:1-9 and 6:1-4 as well. It is argued that as a result of the insertion of the story into the *Urgeschichte* a major shift of emphasis took place: "von einer zeitgenössisch konkreten, zeitgeschichtlich kritischen Reflexionserzählung zu einer Episode der Frühgeschichte" (p. 571);
- (d) The final version is the story expanded by the motif of 'dispersion' (*pwš*; v. 4b; v. 8a and v. 9b). It is suggested that the addition of this motif solves the tension between Gen. 11:1-9 and Gen. 9-10 (see espec. 11:4b and 9:18f.). According to Uehlinger the cultural and historical background of this last reworking is the state ideology of the Achaemenid kings because, as he puts it: "Der achämenidische Kosmos ist durch die positive Wahrnehmung einer Vielfalt von Völkern mit je nationalen Siedlungsräumen, Sprachen und Gebräuchen charakterisiert" (p. 583).³⁾

The study of Uehlinger is a very impressive, and 'monumental' piece of work. It combines a vast knowledge with a very detailed discussion of many texts, biblical and extra-biblical, especially texts from Mesopotamia. The study also raises several questions. In this review article I will deal, first, with some questions related to (A) the literary-critical analysis of Gen. 11:1-9, and (B) the semantic treatment of this text in ch. VIII.

Literary-critical aspects of Gen. 11:1-9

(A) The author offers a literary-critical analysis of Gen. 11:1-9 in line with K. Seybold and H. Bost. Crucial to this type of analysis is the question which parts of the text are to be considered as disturbing the coherence of the text. As we have seen above Uehlinger points to several elements in

³⁾ In an Epilogue the text of 1QM 10:8-15 is treated (pp. 583f.). Uehlinger states (p. 12 [note 11]) that this text is the only one from Qumran which refers to the episode of the story of Gen. 11:1-9. However, there is another text in which this story is used, Pseudo Daniel Aramaic 1.5-8; see F. García Martínez, *Qumran & Apocalyptic. Studies on the Aramaic Texts from Qumran (STDJ) 9*, Leiden 1992, pp. 138f.141.

Gen. 11:1-9 which, in his view, should not be considered part of an original, coherent version of the story for one reason or another. As to this matter I would like to make the following critical remarks:

(1) The difference in meaning between 'the whole earth' (v. 1) in the sense of all mankind, and 'the whole earth' (v. 9) as referring to an area is given as the first case of "eine Kohärenzstörung" (p. 308). However, why should this expression, used with some variety of meaning within the same context, be seen as causing a problem? In both instances it makes perfect sense, and there is no need to consider the difference in connotation as an argument for inconsistency.

(2) The order of actions in vv. 7-9 causes some troubles, according to Uehlinger: v. 7, in which JHWH decides to confuse the language, is followed by v. 8 with the dispersion of mankind; then it is said that they left off the building (v. 8b), followed by the explanation of the name of the city (Babel) which in its turn is related to the confusion of the language, an action not yet mentioned before explicitly. V. 9b finally resumes the motif of dispersion.

Read in a straightforward way, the logical order of the actions in these verses seems strange indeed, but this reading does not take into account the stylistic aspects of the passage. Vv. 8-9 display a nice balance:

v. 8a	A	motif of being spread ⁴)
v. 8b	B	leaving off the building
v. 9aa	C	name of Babel
v. 9ab	B'	confusion of language
v. 9b	A'	motif of being spread

The underlying logical order (confusion of language, leaving off of the building of the city, naming of the city, being spread all over the earth) is expressed in a particular stylistic and structural way: v. 8a and v. 9b form an inclusion (A-A'), which clearly emphasizes the motif of the spreading of all men. By structuring the text this way, this motif is articulated as the ultimate purpose of the story. In order to establish an inclusion, the motif of 'being spread' had to be mentioned first in v. 8a. B and B' are clearly related to each other, because the leaving off of the building of the city is the direct consequence of the confusion of the (one) language. C forms the center: the naming of Babel. It is to be noted that the order of B-C-B' makes very good sense: first the termination of the building of the city, then the naming of the city introduced by 'al kēn, followed by a clause introduced by kī šām, containing the explanation of the name (Babel — bātal). It is built up according to a particular pattern which is also found in Gen. 21:31: "Therefore ('al kēn) that place was called Beersheba, because there (kī šām) ...". It is because of this pattern that the motif of confusion is mentioned in B', and not in B.

(3) The motif of 'being spread' in vv. 4b, 8a and 9b is seen as secondary by Uehlinger. It is argued that vs 4b, introduced by 'lest (pn) ...', is "doch wohl kaum als unmittelbare Näherbestimmung der Motivation 'Namenmachen' zu verstehen" (p. 308 [note 74]). The clause "so wollen wir uns einen Namen machen" should be seen as containing the purpose of the building of a city.

However, this remains to be seen. Syntactically and stylistically speaking the passage 'let us make a name for ourselves' is actually a clause running parallel to 'let us build a city':

בנה לנו עיר
ועשה לנו שם

Both clauses convey the meaning that mankind tried to 'build' a strong position for itself ('city', and 'name'), but these clauses do not say anything about the reason for this undertaking. That is given in the last clause of the verse, introduced by pn: 'lest ...'. (For my stylistic and structural comments on v. 8a and v. 9b, see above.)

As to the level of contents Uehlinger states that the three passages under consideration (vv. 4b, 8a and 9b) are "deutlich ... Interpretamente, die der ganzen Erzählung eine neue Ausrichtung geben" (p. 309). In his view, the three clauses were added in post-exilic times in order to solve the tension between the pre-priestly context (Gen. 9:17ff. and Gen. 10) and the story of Gen. 11, because in Gen. 9:18 and 10:18 where the same verb (pws) is used, it is said that the families, descending from the sons of Noah, were 'spread' (in the positive sense of the word), whereas Gen. 11, in its reconstructed original form, offers a picture of mankind as living together in one region. Thus, the passages with the verb pws were added in Gen. 11 in order to link up our story with Gen. 9 and 10. At the same time, however, Uehlinger is of the opinion that the verb pws in Gen. 11 is not to be taken in the positive sense (as in Gen. 9 and 10), but as conveying a negative connotation ("Zerstreuungsangst" [p. 309]), similar with the use of this verb in texts like Ezek. 34.

However, this is making things more complicated than necessary. The passages with the verb pws make good sense in Gen. 11, syntactically, structurally and as regards contents, because it is part of the contrast between 'being spread' all over the earth and living as 'one people' with 'one speech' on one spot. Since this verb (pws) is used in Gen. 9:18; 10:18, and in Gen. 11 in the same, positive meaning, and not in the negative sense of being dispersed (as in texts like Ezek. 34), there are no compelling reasons for the assumption of a post-exilic glossator in the case of the clauses with pws in Gen. 11.⁵)

(4) Uehlinger holds that, as to v. 1b, the position of the expression dbrym 'hdym is not clear, because in contrast to the parallel expression sfh 'ht it is not repeated in the rest of the text. "V. 1b scheint insofern weniger organisch in die narrative Logik der Erzählung integriert zu sein als V. 1a" (p. 310). Here, however, one can argue that the expression of v. 1b is not repeated later in the story, because it functions as a clarifying parallel of the expression of v. 1a. So the fact that it is not repeated does not constitute an argument for being secondary. It is further to be noted that the occurrence of two expressions with the numeral 'one' in v. 1 has a parallel in v. 6. This creates a nice balance between the two verses, and is in favour of the view that v. 1 as a whole was part of the 'original' story.

(5) Uehlinger argues that the text of v. 3 should be considered as secondary, because the statement about the building materials is not referred to in the rest of the story. This is,

⁵) It is interesting to note that the priestly writer prefers to use the verb *prd* (see 10:5,23), carrying also a positive meaning, because in his time the verb *pws* was often used in the negative sense of being dispersed (see the exilic prophets).

⁴) For this (positive) interpretation of Hebrew *pws* in Gen. 11 (instead of the 'negative' one of dispersion), see below.

however, not a convincing argumentation either, because on the conceptual level the statement of v. 3 makes perfect sense in relation to v. 7 (see below).

(6) Finally, Uehlinger is of the opinion that the explanation of the name 'Babel' (v. 9) creates a literary-critical difficulty. "Zwischen dem in der Regel angenommenen impliziten kulturmythisch-ätiologischen Interesse der Erzählung, den Ursprung der Verschiedenheit menschlicher Sprache(n) zu erklären, und dem explizit ätiologisch formulierenden V. 9a, der einen Ortsnamen erklären will, besteht eine deutliche Spannung" (p. 311). Though it may be right that our story tries to offer an explanation for the origin of the phenomenon of different languages this does not necessarily mean that the story should have been written without mentioning something specific. Here the matter of the genre of the story of Gen. 11 comes in. Uehlinger is of the opinion that the original text of Gen. 11 was a story without any concrete detail in the sense of names of an area (Sinear) or of a city (Babel). It was just a vague story about an unnamed city. However, the problem is that all this is based on literary-critical arguments which are too subtle or too rigid to be convincing. I would prefer, therefore, a view on the type (genre) of the story which does justice to the story as a whole. (See below.) It might be added that the wording of v. 8b, 'and they left off the building of the city', without mentioning the tower as one would expect on the basis of vv. 4-5, only makes sense if, contrary to the opinion of Uehlinger, this verse was followed by v. 9 ('therefore its name was called Babel'), because 'its name' refers to the city.⁶

Semantic aspects of the text

(B) As far as the semantic discussion of details is concerned I would like to make the following remarks.

(1) As to the meaning of *šfḥ ḥt* it is emphasized by Uehlinger that the translation "eine Rede" (one speech) is more to the point than "eine Sprache", although it is also stated by him, and rightly so, that this expression contains both aspects, — that of unilingualism (one language), and that of unanimity (one speech). In his discussion of the parallel expression *ḏbrym ḥdym*, Uehlinger argues that this (second) expression curtails the motif of one speech to that of one language (see p. 351).

It is to be asked, however, whether there are clear indications that the second expression of v. 1 should be taken in a purely linguistic sense. As has been stated above, the second expression of v. 1 serves as synonym of the first one, and both expressions convey the meaning of 'the same speech' in the sense of the same language and of unanimity as well. The parallelism between the two expressions can very well be seen as complementary rather than contradictory. (2) Uehlinger rightly suggests that the statement about building materials of v. 3 (baked bricks and bitumen) conveys the same meaning as the Akkadian expression *ina kupri u agurri*, known from inscriptions and other texts from the Middle Babylonian period onwards. Related to his literary-critical view with regard to v. 3 (v. 3 as part of a 'Babel-relecture'; see above), however, the following argument is put forward for a rather precise dating of this relecture: "Die

Materialnotizen von Gen 11,3 dürften die Babel-'relecture' tendenziell in die neubabylonische Zeit datieren, näherhin in die Zeit Nebukadnezars II., von dessen Baumassnahmen in Babylon weitaus die meisten Textbelege und archäologischen Befunde für die Bauweise *ina kupri u agurri* stammen" (p. 371f.).

The basic question here is the literary-critical view on v. 3 which we have discussed above. As to its function and meaning it is to be noted that v. 3 fits very well in with the rest of the story: it points to a culture (Mesopotamia) that is different from that of Palestine, and it makes clear that the building of the city (with citadel) should be carried out with the appropriate materials in order to realize a *strong* and *solid* structure. Thus, within vv. 1-4 it serves the idea of a very strong and powerful position which mankind attempts to realize.

(3) Uehlinger is of the opinion that the expression of 'one people' (*m ḥd*) should be taken in the political sense of the word, and not in terms of family relations (p. 397). It seems to me, however, that both connotations are present: as *bny ḥ'dm* (v. 5) mankind is seen as a big family (cf. 'the families of the earth' in Gen. 12:3), whereas the story also conveys the notion of a political unity.

(4) Finally, Uehlinger argues that v. 6 should not be understood in general terms, but exclusively story-immanent. "V. 6b folgert bzw. diagnostiziert, dass die Menschheit in der Tat zur Vollendung des Projekts in der Lage wäre" (p. 404). But why this distinction? Of course, the remark of v. 6b ('henceforward nothing they have in mind to do will be beyond their reach' [NEB]) has its function within the story, but it has a general meaning too: under certain conditions mankind has the power to do everything that they are planning. The wording in Hebrew, *l'... kl šr*, is that of a general statement. The same formula is used, in the general sense, in Job 42:2 about the power of God.

Gen. 11:1-9 and the culture of Mesopotamia

Chapter IX is crucial for the new interpretation of Gen. 11:1-9 as proposed by Uehlinger. In this chapter the motif of 'one mouth' in texts from Mesopotamia is dealt with extensively. This motif is considered as related to that of 'one speech' in Gen. 11. It is particularly on the basis of this relationship between Gen. 11 and texts from Mesopotamia that a new interpretation of Gen. 11:1-9 is given, namely that its 'original' version was actually alluding to the building of Dur Sharrukin by Sargon II, and to the failure of this project.

Several elements of Gen. 11:1-9 are indeed pointing to the culture of Mesopotamia, but the difficulty is that the older, original version of the story, as reconstructed by Uehlinger by means of a literary-critical analysis, does not contain any specific detail regarding Mesopotamia: it has become a story without mentioning the land of Sinear, the building materials typical of Mesopotamia, and the name of Babel! What is left is a story about the building of an unknown city in an unknown area by all men acting as 'one people' with 'one speech'. Uehlinger is of the opinion that this (original) form of the story is to be seen as a so-called 'constructed myth', a myth which offers a theological reflection on the building of Dur Sharrukin. The question, however, is not only whether the arguments for the reconstructed version of Gen. 11 are strong enough (see my comments above), but also whether this version, being stripped of certain specific details referring to Mesopotamia, reflects building activities by Sargon II.

⁶ The plus of 'the tower' as attested by LXX and SamarPent is the result of harmonisation with vv. 4-5, and is therefore secondary, as is pointed out by Uehlinger, p. 18.

The study of Uehlinger seems to suggest that it is impossible or improbable to look upon the story of Gen. 11 as it stands, including details like Sinear and Babel, as alluding to events in Assyria such as those at the end of the eighth century B.C. Since, in my view, there are no compelling reasons to doubt the literary unity and coherence of the text of Gen. 11:1-9 this text as a whole should be the point of departure for the issue of a relationship between our story and the culture of Mesopotamia. Gen. 11:1-9 presents itself as a story about prehistoric times, but this does not exclude the possibility that it also alludes to current events at the time of its author. The combination of several motifs in Gen. 11 (that of 'one speech' in the sense of unanimity [cf. 'one mouth' in the Assyrian texts], that of making oneself a name related to the building of a city with a tower, and that of stopping the building of the city) may suggest indeed that this story reflects the events of the building of Dur Sharrukin. However, this does not apply to the motif of 'one speech' in the sense of one language, and to that of the choice of the city of Babel. Yet it is not necessary to leave these elements in order to keep up the idea of a story alluding to particular events in the history of the Neo-Assyrian empire. The choice of the city of Babel needs not to be part of the topicality of the story; on the contrary, the city of Babel being one of the oldest cities of Mesopotamia according to Gen. 10:10 fits very well into a story about primeval times (and it is therefore not necessary to think of Babel in terms of the city built up by Nebuchadnezzar II). The choice of the name of 'Babel' also has the advantage of being most appropriate for the word-play between 'Babel' and *bālal* ('to confuse'). And the motif of one speech in the sense of 'one language', together with the motif of the confusion into many languages, fits in very well too with a story about primeval times. But, again, this does not exclude the possibility that both motifs, Babel and 'one speech', are part of a story which is set in the very past and yet which is alluding to specific events and ideological motifs (cf. 'one mouth') of Neo-Assyrian times.

Thus, the story of Gen 11,1-9 may be compared with a coin having two sides, resulting from a technique, which is widespread in world literature, of setting a story in the past, and yet speaking of the present. A story seen in this way is based on the idea of a certain analogy between events in the very past and in the present. It is interesting to note that the hermeneutical clue for this type of story is in fact offered by Uehlinger himself, without being explored by him: by this I mean the phenomenon, known from the time of Sargon II, of composing texts about the early history of Sargon of Akkad which are clearly reflecting and alluding to the situation of Sargon II (see Uehlinger, pp. 496-503).⁷⁾ It is this type of analogy which might be fruitful to reach a better understanding of Gen. 11:1-9 in relation to the culture of Mesopotamia. It would mean that the story about Babel has been built up with the use of motifs derived from what happened in Assyria at the time. Babel is of course Babel, but can then be seen in analogy with a city like Dur Sharrukin; and mankind as being one people making the attempt of realizing a

strong position by building the city of Babel can be viewed in analogy with the striving to world dominion of the king of Assyria by making all peoples into 'one mouth', a phrase which means obedience to him.

This may also throw light on the motif of mankind 'being spread' all over the earth. I do not think it is necessary to ascribe this element of the story to a writer-redactor from Persian times, neither on literary-critical nor on referential grounds. This motif can also very well be considered as yet another element of the story with two sides: on the one hand as offering an explanation of why mankind is living spread all over the earth, but at the same time as alluding to the topicality of the time: namely to the politics of mass deportations by the Assyrian kings. The basic idea then is that it is not good that all peoples are living together in one and the same area (willingly [Gen 11], or by force [Assyrian politics]), but all peoples should live being spread all over the earth. In both cases, in Gen. 11 and in that of the politics of someone like Sargon II, the matter of living together is related to the motif of supreme power (cf. the reaction of God in Gen. 11:7).

In this connexion it is most interesting to read what is stated at the end of the Cylinder-inscription of Sargon II about the population of Dur Sharrukin: 'Untertanen aus (allen) vier (Himmelsrichtungen), von fremder Zunge, mit Sprachen ohne jede Übereinstimmung, sowohl Gebirgs- wie auch Flachlandbewohner, so viele (verschiedene), als das Licht der Götter, der Herr über alles, hütet, die ich auf Geheiß Assurs, meines Herrn, durch das Wüten meines Szepters erbeudet hatte, liess ich eines Sinnes werden [here the expression 'to make into one mouth' is used, vdK] und in ihr [i.e. Dur Sharrukin, vdK] wohnen' (l. 72f.).⁸⁾

Thus, instead of labelling an earlier version of Gen. 11:1-9 as a 'construed myth' the story as it stands can very well be seen as a part of the *Urgeschichte* and yet as alluding to particular events at the time of its author.

This is not the place to deal with the most intriguing story of Gen. 11:1-9 in more detail. The only thing I would like to add is that, contextually speaking, the passage of Gen. 10:8-12 should be taken into consideration more seriously than is done by Uehlinger and others, not only because it is closely related to Gen. 11:1-9, but also because it is yet another passage which refers to the ancient culture of Mesopotamia, reflecting a stage of that culture sometime before the period of the Neo-Babylonian empire.

It may have become clear that Uehlinger has provided a very learned and most stimulating and challenging study of the story about the Tower of Babel, in particular because of his attempt to read this text against the wider religio-cultural background to which the text itself draws our attention.

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⁷⁾ See also A.K. Grayson, *The Empire of Sargon of Akkad*, *AfO* 25 (1974-77), 56-64; B. Lewis, *The Sargon Legend: A Study of the Akkadian Text and the Tale of the Hero who was exposed at Birth* (ASOR DS 4), Cambridge 1980, 101-107; W. Horowitz, *Moab and Edom in the Sargon Geography*, *IEJ* 43 (1993), 151-156.

⁸⁾ See A. Fuchs, *Die Inschriften Sargons II. aus Khorsabad*, Göttingen 1994, 296. For this text see also Uehlinger, p. 471.