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Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Social Scientific Study of Involuntary Migration

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C. A. Strine and C. L. Crouch

Final Thoughts

Reflections on Methodology

The conference that produced these papers aimed to engage scholars involved only in the discourse on either Jeremiah or Ezekiel in a way that encouraged them to work together and, in doing so, to identify shared concerns. It is pleasing, therefore, to be able to note a number of methodological commonalities that emerge across these five articles.

First, a consensus prevails in all of these pieces that scholars can and should employ the social scientific study of migration in order to interrogate the texts of Jeremiah and Ezekiel. At a textual level, the issue of involuntary migration is an overriding concern for both books. Of course, scholars have long noted that this is the case.[1] Nevertheless, scholars have been hesitant to theorise this concern and to differentiate the various ways in which involuntary migrations feature in these two texts. Employing social scientific research enables rigorous findings to inform our viewpoint on this issue, rather than allowing us to rely upon our pre-existing assumptions and expectations about an experience that is unfamiliar to the overwhelming majority of the guild (including the editors of this volume).

At a historical level, it is undeniable that the involuntary migrations of the late seventh century and the sixth century B.C.E. inform the books called Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Wherever and whenever these texts were written, those historical events offer the impetus for these stories and oracles and provide the framework through which they are communicated. Since the authors and tradents of these texts selected these events as their central communicative vehicle, scholars would be remiss not to attend to it, in conversation with the best research on that lived experience.

A hermeneutical lens should, of course, provide greater clarity into the text in question. The pieces in this volume demonstrate that a willingness to engage with social scientific insights about the variety of phenomena that comprise the category of "involuntary migration" produces a corresponding

1 P. Ackroyd, *Exile and Restoration* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox), 1968.

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variety of insights into the ancient context. First and foremost, an awareness of the best contemporary research on involuntary migration has permitted a greater nuance in the formulation of the questions that inform our reading of Jeremiah and Ezekiel. In other words, this approach allows us to ask better questions, and therefore find a more discerning understanding of these texts.

This approach also enables one to notice issues that have not typically been prominent in research to date. Among the most significant in these articles is the way that their attentiveness to the social scientific research has allowed them to highlight the divergent portrayal of the migratory experiences of the central figures of each book. The prophet Jeremiah is depicted as an internally displaced person, up until he is taken to Egypt by a group of fellow Judahites. This contrasts sharply with the presentation of Ezekiel, who is an externally displaced person, taken to Babylonia against his will by the imperial power of the Babylonians. Once one observes these differences and recognises their significance, it seems unsurprising to note that these texts exhibit divergent theological, social, and literary profiles.

Working with these articles as editors, we have observed how engagement with the social scientific study of migration generates fresh outcomes in both focused, exegetical work and also in broader, synthetic enquiries. The articles by David Reimer and Mark Leuchter, for instance, employ findings from the study of migration for readings of particular texts. Reimer trains his eyes upon Jeremiah 40–44, in particular on the question of why Jeremiah goes to Egypt. His work benefits from research on migration in the context of civil conflict. Leuchter reads Jeremiah 32 alongside research on place attachment and migration, helping him to differentiate between attachment to actual places and rhetoric about the intangible, conceptual importance of those places. Both articles exhibit exegetical ingenuity that follows on from dialogue with careful, academic analysis of the migratory experience. To a large extent, one can characterise these contributions – along with those from Strine's article, to be discussed momentarily – as highlighting the important, but often overlooked, contributions of the minority voices within the book called Jeremiah.

Equally, the articles by Crouch and Strine indicate how broader, synthetic, and more methodological inquiries benefit from interaction with the study of involuntary migration. Strine argues that social scientific studies distinguishing the lived experience of forced displacement to urban, multicultural, and integrated settings from the lived experience of communities who reside in rural, isolated, camp-like contexts place in clear relief the difference between the social setting depicted in Jeremiah 29 and 35 and that presumed

throughout Ezekiel. The texts' different attitudes towards foreign host communities follow on from these dissimilar contexts. Crouch, for her part, employs this insight about the differing impacts of forced displacement to urban, integrated settings and to rural, isolated settings in order to explain the fixation with defining group boundaries, the dangers of assimilation, and the ongoing significance of the lost homeland that characterizes Ezekiel's rhetoric, so distinct from the rhetoric of Jeremiah. These articles demonstrate that an interdisciplinary approach that attends to the social sciences has significant heuristic potential, enabling new insights into the long-noted fact that Jeremiah and Ezekiel share so much, yet diverge so greatly.

This line of inquiry prompted Strine to refer to Ezekiel's setting as "Camp" Chebar. Dalit Rom-Shiloni, in her discussion of Strine's piece, understandably remarks on "the unease that Strine's repeated references to the 'Chebar camp' evoke in me, given my Jewish and Israeli background." Rom-Shiloni's discomfort is justified and it would be remiss not to recognise the importance of her observation. Strine's selection of the phrase "Camp" Chebar evokes these uncomfortable, yet important, resonances intentionally, to underline the way in which involuntary migrants have experienced the isolated, regulated setting of camps as dehumanising and to emphasise that the book of Ezekiel arises in response to an experience of extreme trauma, personal humiliation, and communal subordination, at the boundaries of what most contemporary scholars are likely to be able to comprehend. It is meant to underscore the danger of allowing the sanitised language of "exile" – so often associated with the experience of political leaders living in comfortable circumstances, shielded from punishment – to colour our posture towards Ezekiel, Jeremiah, and the other texts that deal with the forced displacements of the seventh and sixth centuries B.C.E.

As this suggests, there remain areas of disagreement within this volume. While one might note narrower areas of divergence between the work of Strine, Leuchter, Reimer, and Crouch, the most obvious points of contention emerge in Rom-Shiloni's review of the other four articles. It is clear in Rom-Shiloni's evaluation of Leuchter's piece, for example, that disagreement based upon differing redactional convictions will continue to exercise scholars working on these texts. Even in studies approaching them through a primarily social-scientific lens, these differences retain their importance. Indeed, one might conclude from this that there is the potential for contemporary research on involuntary migration to stimulate further and more informed progress in diachronic reconstructions of textual development.

Rom-Shiloni's response to the pieces by Crouch and Strine highlights varying perspectives on the limits of the approach advocated by this vol-

ume. Whereas Crouch and Strine illustrate how the social scientific study of migration might be used proactively to contextualize textual and material culture in ways that allow us to go beyond our current historical reconstructions of the communities behind Jeremiah and Ezekiel, Rom-Shiloni emphasises the experimental and optimistic outlook of this approach. In short, Rom-Shiloni expresses a less sanguine attitude towards our ability to extend the extant biblical evidence in conversation with the social scientific research for analogous phenomenon in the contemporary world.

Ever was it thus. The scholarly enterprise is a perpetual dialogue between those who push our evidentiary base into new places through the introduction of new ideas, models, and approaches, as others judiciously caution against the potential pitfalls of anachronism, oversight, and novelty. Since the focus of this volume is thinking in a fresh way about such issues, it inherently invites – even necessitates – a negotiation between those two concerns. Scholarly progress always has been and probably always will be made through an intellectual give and take over how a far we can reach out into the currently unknown in a responsible way. It is pleasing to see that this volume has enabled the robust scholarly dialogue that is evidence of this process in action.

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The twin beliefs that there is a need for dialogue between those working on the books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel as well as the need to disarticulate the concept of "exile" to deal with the variety of experiences depicted in these two books motivated this project at its inception. Upon its completion, we, the editors, are satisfied that the work of these five scholars has demonstrated the necessity and the productivity of both concerns.

These texts portray a multiplicity of migratory experiences and, by virtue of that, preserve a multiplicity of responses to those experiences. It is unsurprising, then, that this volume indicates that further progress in our understanding of Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the cultures of Israel and Judah will require scholars to embrace the analysis of the myriad phenomena falling under the rubric of involuntary migration in awareness of and conversation with the social scientific study of migration.

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