The Contradictions of Genre in the Nehemiah Memorial

by

Sean Richard Burt

Graduate Program in Religion
Duke University

Date:_____

Approved:

_____
Eric M. Meyers, Supervisor

_____
Roland Boer

_____
Stephen B. Chapman

_____
Ellen F. Davis

Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor
of Philosophy in the Graduate Program in Religion
of Duke University
2009

ABSTRACT

THE CONTRADICTIONS OF GENRE IN THE NEHEMIAH MEMORIAL

by

Sean Richard Burt

Graduate Program in Religion

Duke University

Date:_____

Approved:

_____

Eric M. Meyers, Supervisor

_____

Roland Boer

_____

Stephen B. Chapman

_____

Ellen F. Davis

An abstract of a dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate Program in Religion in the Graduate School of Duke University

2009

Copyright by
Sean Richard Burt
2009

Abstract

The first-person Hebrew narrative of the Persian courtier sent to be governor of Judah, the "Nehemiah Memorial" (or NM: Neh 1-2:20; 3:33-7:3; 13:4-31), is a crucial text for understanding how elements within ancient Judaism conceived of their relationship to the Persian Achaemenid Empire, which ruled over Judah from the 6th to the 4th centuries BCE. This dissertation investigates NM via the issue of genre. Scholarship on NM in recent years has reached an impasse on this topic, suggesting that NM resists identification with any one genre. Newer developments in genre theory, however, offer resources for understanding genre not simply as a classificatory matter but also as a malleable relationship between writers and readers that can be exploited for rhetorical effect. NM makes use of two main genres: a "foreign court narrative" (cf. Daniel, Esther, and the Joseph narrative) slowly transforms into a biographical inscription or "official memorial", a genre attested throughout the ancient Near East. The subtle combination of these different genres suggests that Nehemiah's pious advocacy for his people and his city carries over from his role as Judean courtier before the Persian king to his role as governor over the Persian province of Judah. It also, however, ultimately underscores the ideological incompatibility of these genres, just as the goals of the subversive courtier at the mercy of the Persian king are at odds with the goals of the governor representing that king. Early readers of NM responded to these contradictions. A literary investigation of Ezra-Nehemiah reveals that editors of that book incorporated Nehemiah's story, but subtly corrected it, whether by reframing his actions in terms of the work of community as a

whole and the Torah (Neh 10, Neh 12:44-13:3) or by contrasting him to the superior reformer Ezra (Ezra 7-10). The Book of Ezra-Nehemiah thus mutes the signals sent by NM's use of genre indicating that the authority for Nehemiah's reforms, which were essential to Jerusalem's restoration, derived not from Israelite tradition or from the will of the people, but from the power of Judah's imperial masters.

Table of Contents

Abstract....iv
List of Tables....viii
Acknowledgements....ix
Introduction....1
Chapter 1. The genre of the Nehemiah Memorial: a review....5
1.1 The earlier, form-critical consensus....6
1.1.1 Meoptotamian royal inscriptions....6
1.1.2 Votive inscriptions and Egyptian biographies....16
1.2 The new redaction-critical consensus: The "Mauerbau-Erzählung" thesis....20
1.3 Evaluation of the Mauerbau-Erzählung thesis....27
1.3.1 The revised NM as a 'building inscription': Neh 6 as a test case....28
1.3.2 The Mauerbau-Erzählung thesis' impoverished understanding of genre....33
Chapter 2. Genre and the Nehemiah Memorial: a new proposal....45
2.1 The genres of NM....50
2.1.1 Genre theory I: The legacy of form criticism....51
2.1.2 Genre theory II: Toward a dialectical genre theory....58
2.1.3 Official memorials: a return of sorts to the earlier consensus....78
Excursus: The Gerizim votive inscriptions....90
2.1.4 Foreign Court Narratives (the "court conflict" story)....92
2.1.4.1 The Foreign Court Narrative: definitions....96
2.1.4.2 The court conflict story in NM....102
2.2 How genre works in NM....109
2.2.1 The transformation of genre in NM: from court tale to official memorial....111
2.2.1.1 In the court: Neh 1-2....111
2.2.1.2 The courtier and the governor: Neh 4-6....118

2.2.1.3 The transformation completed: Neh 13.....132
2.2.1.4 Reading the whole from the end.....140
2.2.2 The ideologies of NM's genres.....142
Chapter 3. The reception of the Nehemiah Memorial within Ezra-Nehemiah.....151
3.1 The response to Nehemiah's story in Non-NM sections of Ezra-Nehemiah (Ezra 7-10, Neh 10, Neh 12:44-13:3).....156
3.1.1 NM and the "Ezra Memoir" (Ezra 7-10).....162
Excursus: On the chronology of the historical Ezra and Nehemiah.....176
3.1.2 Neh 10 and Neh 13.....199
3.1.3 Neh 12:44-13:3.....206
3.1.4 Summary comments.....209
3.2 The boundaries of NM, an ancient-reader-centric account.....211
3.2.1 Non-controversial texts.....212
3.2.2 Neh 1:1b-11a.....213
3.2.3 Neh 3:1-32.....213
3.2.4 Neh 7, 11, 12:27-43.....217
3.2.4.1 The interdependence of Neh 7 and 11.....218
3.2.4.2 The relationship of Neh 7:5-72a; 11 to non-NM material 222
3.2.4.3 Neh 12:27-43 (and Neh 7:1-3 revisited).....230
3.2.5 Summary comments.....243
Chapter 4. The Nehemiah Memorial in the horizons of the late Persian Period.....245
4.1 The restored community: The insufficiency of the diaspora novella for the homeland.....245
4.2 The written text: Nehemiah's invisible power.....265
Conclusion. The resolution of genre in Ezra-Nehemiah.....273
References.....276
Biography.....292

List of Tables

Table 1.1: Occurrence of "in those days" phrases in the Nehemiah Memorial.....11
Table 1.2: Occurrences of the זכרה formula in the Nehemiah Memorial.....17
Table 2.1: "Court Conflict Tale".....100
Table 2.2: Court conflict elements present in the Nehemiah Memorial.....106
Table 2.3: The Nehemiah Memorial's departure from court narrative patterns.....132
Table 3.1: F. M. Cross' reconstruction of the high priestly line in the Persian Period....188
Table 3.2: Correspondences between Neh 10:31-40 and Neh 5; 13:4-31.....200
Table 3.3: Temporal clauses beginning with ויהי כאשר 241

Acknowledgements

I am greatly indebted to my advisor, Eric M. Meyers. His clear and sober insights were crucial for making this dissertation what it is. Even more, his confidence in my abilities was a continual source of encouragement, not the least during the times when I was not entirely sure of them myself. The other two members of my committee on the Duke faculty, Ellen Davis and Stephen Chapman, have helped to see me through a long, and still ongoing, process of maturation. Their patient, kind mentoring has always been made more powerful by their unwavering honesty in their evaluations. Roland Boer's time at Duke as a visiting professor was brief, but I learned greatly from him and his ideas have continued to influence me in ways unexpected. During my time at Duke, I was lucky to have access to such wonderful faculty resources, and Kalman Bland, Jim Crenshaw, Carol Meyers, Mel Peters, and Thea Portier-Young have each put his or her stamp on either this project or my graduate education in general and both are better for it. I also thank Gay Trotter for the countless times she assisted me; my time away from Duke in Tucson only made me realize how helpful her work is.

I cannot imagine what graduate school would have been like without such an amazing group of fun, mutually encouraging grad student colleagues. For all the conversations, input on my research, support, and most of all friendship, I would like to thank the members of the "Biblical Colloquium, Jr.", Amanda Mbuvi, Chad Eggleston, David Knauert, Erin Kuhns-Darby, and Matt Schlimm, as well as Ben Reynolds at UNC and

Davis Hankins at Emory. Jacob L. Wright of Emory University provided challenging, and essential, comments on an early version of the thesis. I would also like to thank the donors of the Katherine M. Stern Dissertation Year Fellowship, who graciously provided support for the 2007-2008 academic year.

I could not have asked for a more loving and supportive family. My parents, Rick and Dena Burt, and my brother Jeff have never ceased to encourage me and trust in my decisions, even when I pursued paths the end of which were not clear even to myself. I thank my in-laws, Bob and Linda Bowsher, along with my grandfather-in-law Robert L. Bowsher, for their love and generosity, which was always accompanied by an appreciated curiosity. Additionally, I am blessed to have a partner like my wife Julia for all my endeavors. Her support through this process has been level-headed, constant, and always loving. Thank you, Julia. As for my daughter Helen, I thank her for her patience and for her continual reminders that life doesn't begin and end in the study. Finally, I don't know if my academic career would have been even possible without the inspiration of my uncle and mentor James D. Clowes (1957-2004), and I dedicate this dissertation to his memory. His life and work are a model to me for how to merge a love of knowledge with a love for other people. If I am able to conduct a life (and career) guided by just a fraction of his characteristic sense of grounded wonder, it will have been a life lived very well indeed.

Introduction

The whole subject matter of the book of Ezra was narrated by Nehemiah the son of Hacaliah; why then was the book not called by his name? R. Jeremiah b. Abba said: Because he claimed merit for himself, as it is written, "Remember me, O my God, for good."

-*b.Sanh.* 38a

"Remember me, O my God, for good!": in Ezra-Nehemiah's story of Israel's restoration Nehemiah b. Hacaliah the cupbearer to Artaxerxes and governor has the exuberant last word. In some sense, however, Nehemiah's memory did not endure. At least in contrast to Ezra, the great lawgiver and seminal figure for apocalyptic literature, later Jewish and Christian tradition did not develop extensive traditions about Nehemiah, letting his entreaties remain in Ezra-Nehemiah. Yet, a closer look at Ezra-Nehemiah's account of the renewal of Jerusalem reveals that Nehemiah's story did not completely resonate even within the book itself. The style of the first-person narrative of Nehemiah, or the "Nehemiah Memorial" (Neh 1:1-2:20; 3:33-7:3; 13:4-31, hereafter NM) stands out as unique among the texts of the Hebrew Bible. Nehemiah's narratorial voice is blunt and plain-spoken, with scant allusions to biblical traditions, and its repeated direct addresses requesting that God remember him have few, if any, parallels in biblical narrative texts. When reading NM, one might wonder, with Rabbi Jeremiah in the passage from the Babylonian Talmud quoted above, if Nehemiah's focus on himself undermines the reliability of his account. In fact, other parts of Ezra-Nehemiah subtly suggest that Nehemiah's point of view may be limited. The story shows that the people as a group enacted

some measures for which Nehemiah claimed sole credit, all while Nehemiah ignores or even disparages his collaborators and predecessors. Further, the narrative precedes NM with the story of Ezra, who fills a role very similar to Nehemiah's, and does some of the same things, only with more humility and with more open consultation with the people.

In short, Ezra-Nehemiah finds some aspects of NM to be problematic. This study investigates NM with the goal of understanding what it is about this text that causes unease. It approaches NM through the perspective of the topic of genre. Does the unusual literary form of NM have anything to do with the character of its reception into and interpretation by Ezra-Nehemiah? As chapter 1 below will show, the matter of NM's genre was much discussed in scholarship on Ezra-Nehemiah until the last quarter of the 20th century. At that point, the debate had run aground, punctuated by H. G. M Williamson's conclusion that NM belongs to no single genre because it is not a single, unified text.[1] Nonetheless, chapter 2 discusses how newer developments in the theory of literary genre enable a reevaluation of this issue. Genre, as scholars now understand it, is not a classificatory exercise, but rather is a flexible system of patterns of expectation employed (and just as often altered) by both writers and readers. NM, accordingly, does not need to belong to one genre, but rather makes use of two genre types, the folktale-like foreign court story (such as with the stories of Daniel, Esther, Joseph and others) and the biographical or what I term the "official memorial" genre, a genre used widely throughout the ancient

1. H. G. M. Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*. (WBC 16. Waco, Tex.: Word, 1985).

Near East, from Mesopotamia to Persia and to Egypt. Further, NM skillfully blends these genres in a way that shows that the generic changes cannot be reduced to an effect of editorial activity. NM shows itself to be an attempt to portray Nehemiah simultaneously as an intercessor working for the welfare of his people and as a heroic and beneficent governor. This combination reveals itself to be unsustainable because based on conflicting ideologies: the protagonist of the foreign court story cleverly works within the strictures and power structures of a world he and his people did not make, whereas the memorializing protagonist projects the voice of power, recounting the imposition of Nehemiah's will (and the will of the foreign power he represents) on the people.

Chapter 3, then, begins the investigation into the reception of NM. It looks to identify the early readers of NM and characterize the nature of their interpretations. In short, Ezra 7-10, Neh 10, and Neh 12:44-13:3 each evidence literary dependence on NM, and each noticeably modify or comment upon NM, patching up deficiencies in Nehemiah's account or recasting Nehemiah's work as but a part of a community-wide effort. Chapter 4 attempts to analyze the response to NM by the writers Ezra-Nehemiah and to connect it, via the bridging concept of genre, to recent historical research on the mid- to late-Persian Period and the early Hellenistic Period. Drawing upon Tamara Cohn Eskenazi's literary reading of the book, Ezra-Nehemiah emphasizes three themes, the common effort of the people, the expansion from holy temple to holy city, and the importance of written texts.[2] If read on its own, however, NM displays none of these themes, essentially

2. Tamara Cohn Eskenazi, *In an Age of Prose: A Literary Approach to Ezra-Nehemiah*.

because the story of a restored community envisioned by Ezra-Nehemiah presumes the kind of local autonomy and self-determination that did not reflect the reality of Persian rule. The story of Nehemiah in NM reflects this central problem, this central contradiction, of life in Persian Period Yehud. Ezra-Nehemiah, by bringing NM in line with the central themes of the book, attempts to resolve this contradiction by subsuming Nehemiah into an idealized story of Israel's restoration.

(SBLMS 36. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988).

The genre of the Nehemiah Memorial: a review

While much of Ezra-Nehemiah frustrates attempts to compare it with established categories of biblical or other ancient literature, the Nehemiah Memorial has proved especially resistant to categorization. Many scholars have tackled the issue of NM's *Gattung*, or genre, but at this time no one proposal commands general agreement. Influential works in the mid-20th century by Sigmund Mowinckel, Gerhard von Rad, and Willy Schottroff produced a tentative consensus: NM was a variation on Mesoptamian or Egyptian royal- and official inscriptions. More recent studies, beginning with H. G. M. Williamson, and followed by Victor Hurowitz, Titus Reinmuth, and Jacob Wright, have strongly criticized that older consensus and have moved scholarship on NM in new directions. These scholars find earlier work unconvincing but, more importantly, have understood genre to be a misguided lens through which to view NM, and have instead employed a primarily redaction-critical approach. In this view, difficulties will always attend the search for NM's genre because NM itself is not a unified text but rather a core wall-building narrative, or "Mauerbau-Erzählung" (ME), supplemented by later additions that are fundamentally different from the underlying text. In this chapter, I will review both the earlier consensus (§1.1) and the most recent position, which I will term the "ME thesis" (§1.2). I then will offer a critique of the ME thesis (§1.3), arguing that its reevaluation of NM, though highly insightful, pushes genre to the background, negating the real advances of the earlier consensus and preventing a full analysis of NM in both its particularity and its conventionality.

1.1 The earlier, form-critical consensus

The current discussion on the issue of NM's genre finds it origins in a 1923 article by Sigmund Mowinckel,[1] which he later expanded upon in a 1964 study on Ezra-Nehemiah. Mowinckel surveyed earlier theories about the *Gattung* of NM, and arrived at the conclusion that a literary model for NM cannot be found within the corpus of the Hebrew Bible.[2] Though, as we will see, some of Mowinckel's ideas have come under serious critical scrutiny, no studies since Mowinckel's book have, to my knowledge, suggested that NM is based on a literary type already found in the Bible. Mowinckel is the first of several scholars to turn to extra-biblical literature in order to find compelling literary parallels for NM.

1.1.1 Mesoptotamian royal inscriptions

Mowinckel argues that NM reflects an Israelite variant of widespread genre of ancient Near Eastern (mostly, but not exclusively,[3] Mesopotamian) royal and official

---

1. Sigumund Mowinckel, "Die vorderasiatischen Königs- und Fürsteninschriften," in *Eucharisterion. Studien zur Religion und Literatur des Alten Testaments* (ed. Hans Schmidt; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1923), 278-322.

2. Mowinckel, *Studien II*, 86-92. He writes that theories that NM is modeled on biblical literary traditions, "schweben vollständig in der Luft."

3. Mowinckel discusses, for example, Achaemenid Persian inscriptions, the account of Idrimi of Alalakh, and the Mesha Inscription. He calls the royal- and official inscription "eine gemeinorientalischen Stiltradition," ("Die vorderasiatischen," 278) and claims that all the inscriptions in this tradition, from Sumeria down to the late manifestations in the

inscriptions. He draws attention to several significant parallels between these first-person inscriptions and NM.

The royal inscriptions, according to Mowinckel, tend to share a common plan — a five-stage pattern that unfolds with considerable similarity in NM. The opening element is (1) a series of titularies naming and describing the protagonist.[4] Then, the texts offer (2) a short description of how the protagonist has achieved his station with divine assistance. Mowinckel argues that the opening scene of NM, in which Nehemiah attains his appointment to Jerusalem with the help of God, exhibits this element much in the same way that the "Rassam Cylinder" shows Asurbanipal's rise to power.[5] The next two elements deal with the text's description of the deeds of the protagonist. In Mowinckel's estimation, the standard formulation of the genre includes (3) brief notices of earlier deeds followed by (4) a longer account of the main deed.[6] The content of this primary deed varied, though the Neo-Babylonian texts tended toward the description of building

---

Seleucid period, constitute a singular *Gattung* ("Die vorderasiatischen," 281).

4. Mowinckel, "Die vorderasiatischen," 282. However, this element may be the weakest connection with NM. See the opening of an inscription of Nebuchadnezzar II: "Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, the loyal shepherd, the one permanently selected by Marduk, the exalted ruler, the one beloved by Nabû, the wise expert who is attentive to the ways of the gods, the tireless governor, the caretaker of Esagil and Ezida, the foremost heir of Nabopolassar, king of Babylon." (*COS* 2.122B, i.1-9, translated by Paul-Alain Beaulieu). This series of titles dwarfs NM, which begins only with a brief, attenuated "Nehemiah son of Hakaliah" (Neh 1:1). Perhaps for this reason, Mowinckel does not include titularies in his (four-stage!) summary of the schema on p. 284.

5. Mowinckel, "Die vorderasiatischen," 287. See also 282.

6. Mowinckel, "Die vorderasiatischen," 284-285.

projects, making them the best point of comparison with NM.[7] The juxtaposition of a main event with other assorted events conforms, he argues, to the combination in NM of the wall project with the other reforms in Neh 5 and 13.[8] The final element common to genre is (5) the closing prayer or threat concerned with the memory of the protagonist addressed to the god or the reader, which would seem to be closely related to the characteristic "remember" language of NM.[9]

Mowinckel ties these similarities in content and large-scale structure to a distinctive prose style common to royal inscriptions and NM. He names it the *"Aufzählungsstil*," or "enumerative style" and, indeed, this stylistic peculiarity appears to be for Mowinckel the most distinctive aspect of the royal inscription genre.[10] Though it describes events, the enumerative style is not strictly speaking a variety of narrative, especially if one defines narrative in part as the telling of events that are causally (or at

---

7. Mowinckel, *Studien II*, 96.

8. Because NM presents the main event prior (both chronologically and literarily) to the other reforms, it diverges in a significant way from this pattern. See Kellermann, *Nehemia*, 77-79, Christiane Karrer, *Ringen um die Verfassung Judas*, 144. Mowinckel states (*Studien II*, 96) that a minority of texts reverse the order of (3) and (4), which would seem to mitigate the critique. Curiously, though, he does not offer any examples of this minority text type.

9. Mowinckel, "Die vorderasiatischen,"282. There, Mowinckel does not explicitly connect this prayer language to NM but he repeatedly elsewhere ties NM's concern for Nehemiah's eternal memory as a central parallel with the royal inscriptions. See *Studien II*, 76-86.

10. Mowinckel, *Studien II*, 97.

least not randomly) connected.[11] Enumeration (*Aufzählung*), in contrast to narrative (*Erzählung*), joins short notices of deeds or events with loose connections. An example of the enumerative style can be found, according to Mowinckel, in the Mesha inscription:[12]

I have built Karchoh, the wall of the woods and the wall of the citadel, and I have built its gates, and I have built its towers and I have built the house of the king, and I have made the double reser[voir for the spr]ing in the innermost part of the city. Now, there was no cistern in the innermost part of the city, in Karchoh, and I said to the people: "Make, each one of you, cistern in his house." And I cut out the moat for Karchoh by means of prisoners from Israel. I have built Aroer, and I made the military road in the Arnon. I have built Beth Bamoth, for it was destroyed. I have built Bezer, for [it lay in] ruins.[13]

A very brief narrative expansion, which includes direct discourse, appears in the account of the construction of the cistern and moat, but otherwise the style and pace of this text is quite clipped. Not every instance of this style need be so spare, though. Mowinckel argues that, over time and particularly in the Neo-Babylonian period, texts began to expand the style so that it could contain more narrative (in the sense of narrative as an adjective) passages.[14] Correspondingly, Mowinckel asserts that several parts of NM also make use of narrative expansions of the enumerative syle. See Neh 13:10-13:

And it became known to me that the portions of the Levites had not been distributed, and the Levites and the singers, those who do the service, had returned, each to his field. And

---

11. See, for example, Gerald Prince, *Dictionary of Narratology*, (2nd ed. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003), 58-59.

12. Mowinckel, "Die vorderasiatischen," 189.

13. Mesha inscription, 21b-27, translation by K. A. D. Smelik, *COS* 2.23. Mowinckel quotes from the German translation of Ungnad, AOTB, 172ff.

14. Mowinckel, "Die vorderasiatischen" 288. Mowinckel quotes Nebuchadnezzar no. 13 from the edition of Stephen Langdon.

I contended with the officials and said, "why is the House of God forsaken?" And I gathered them and appointed them in their positions. And all Judah brought the tithe of grain, new wine, and oil to the treasury. And I made treasurer[15] over the treasury Shelemyah the priest and Zadok the scribe and Pedaiah, one of the Levites, and for their assistance Hanan ben Zakkur ben Matanyah, because they were thought of to be faithful; and they were to distribute to their brothers.[16]

And also Neh 13:28-31:

And one of the sons of Yoiada ben Eliashib the high priest was the brother-in-law of Sanballat the Horonite. And I chased him away from me. Remember them, O God, on account of their defilements of the priesthood and the covenant of the priests and Levites. And I purified them from everything foreign. And I appointed the divisions of service for the priests and the Levites, each in his service. And for the delivery of wood at appointed times, and for the first fruits: Remember me, O God, for good.[17]

These two series of short descriptions of deeds that join the events in a parallel, "asyndetic" fashion reveals a similar usage of the enumerative style in NM.[18] Though Mowinckel identifies a movement toward the expansion of short narrative sections in later examples of the enumerative style, the presence of these mini-narratives inside the enumerated deeds does not materially alter the underlying shape (*Grundform*) of this genre. These texts, including the NM passage, make the style more like narrative

---

15. Heb. ואוצרה. Old Greek omits this word and the Lucianic Recension has και ενετειλαμην, perhaps from ואצוה. See David Marcus, *Biblia Hebraica. Quinta editione cum apparatu critico novis curis elaborato. 20. Ezra and Nehemiah* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006). Köhler-Baumgartner also suggests emendation to ואצוה.

16. All translations of texts from the Hebrew Bible, unless otherwise noted, are my own.

17. Mowinckel, "Die vorderasiatischen," 289-290. Mowinckel excludes Neh 13:30a, calling it a "mistaken addition" ("irrtumlicher Zusatz").

18. Mowinckel, *Studien II*, 64, also includes Neh 5:14-19.

(*Erzählung*), but the passage as a whole is nonetheless still composed in the enumerative style.[19] So long as the mini-narratives are juxtaposed simply and asyndetically, for Mowinckel they fall within the framework of the enumerative — that is, fundamentally non-narrative — style.

As a hallmark of the enumerative style, Mowinckel focuses on the repeated use of short, chronologically vague linking phrases that translated to "at that time," or "in those days."[20] While, in Mowinckel's estimation, these phrases had a more strictly chronological or historical function in earlier (annalistic) texts, by the time of the Neo-Assyrian and -Babylonian inscriptions, they had ceased to indicate a strong link between chronology and literary presentation of the events.[21] In these later texts, among which Mowinckel includes NM (see Table 1.1), these ostensibly chronological phrases exist in only a "faded" (*verblaßten*) sense, as loose connectors of short descriptions of events.[22]

Table 1.1 Occurrence of "in those days" phrases in NM

Neh 6:17a	גם **בימים ההם** מרבים חרי יהודה אגרתיהם הולכות על־טוביה
Neh 13:15aα	**בימים ההמה** ראיתי דרכים גתות בשבת ומביאים הערמות ועמסים על־החמרים ואף־יין ענבים ותאנים וכל משא
Neh 13:23a	גם **בימים ההם** ראיתי את־היהודים השיבו נשים אשדודיות

19. Mowinckel, "Die vorderasiatischen," 287.

20. Mowinckel, "Die vorderasiatischen," 282-283, cites the Akkadian phrases, "ina umisu," "inumisu," "enumisu" "ina umesuma."

21. Mowinckel, "Die vorderasiatischen," 285-286.

22. Mowinckel, "Die vorderasiatischen," 286.

The presence of the phrase "in those days" (בימים ההם) in Neh 6 as well as in Neh 13:15, 23 suggests that the enumerative style most prominent in the accounts of Nehemiah's miscellaneous reforms, is not limited to Neh 5 and 13. Mowinckel in fact maintains that the conflicts between Nehemiah and his enemies also are laid out as a series of episodic mini-narratives.[23] He argues that Neh 4-7 appear to increase the tension slowly and build toward a potential climax, which implies that they behave more like a narrative proper than Neh 13 does. Nonetheless, Neh 4 and 6, in his estimation, exhibit a disjointed and loosely-connected style. The episode in Neh 6:10ff. introduced by the notice that Nehemiah entered the house of Shemaiah ben Dalaiah ben Mehatabel, for example, reveals no clear relation to what comes before or after and does not itself come to any resolution or denouement.[24] As a result, Mowinckel rejects the notion that NM is a historical narration (*Erzählen*) and characterizes the majority of NM as a "enumeration of the deeds of the hero."[25]

Pointedly excluded from the understanding of NM as an "enumerative" text is Neh 1-2. Mowinckel notes that the more "artistic" (*künstlerisch*) and "suspenseful" (*spannend*) style of Nehemiah's discovery of Jerusalem's ruin and encounter with the king

23. Mowinckel, *Studien II*, 59ff.

24. Mowinckel, *Studien II*, 63.

25. "Aufzählung der Taten des Helden." See Mowinckel, *Studien II*, 63.

is "anomalous" (*abweichend*).[26] As such, these chapters diverge from the enumerative style, though in a manner not unparalleled in the genre, and Mowinckel notes the example of the inscription of Idrimi as another text that begins with a more purely narrative section.[27]

Beyond the stylistic similarities between NM and royal inscriptions, Mowinckel additionally observes significant connections in the texts' underlying purpose (*Zweck*) and bias (or perhaps ideology - *Tendenz*). Their shared purpose reveals itself in two main ways: one, a concern for the protagonist's eternal memory and two, an insistence that it be facilitated by the gods as just deserts for good deeds done. Regarding the first, Mowinckel asserts that royal inscriptions are concerned not with narrating events or experiences *per se*, but with elevating the reputation of the protagonist, with creating a lasting memorial (*ewige Name*).[28] They do so by emphasizing the worthy deeds and meritorious characteristics of the narrator alone at the expense of other characters, and conversely by denigrating predecessors and enemies.[29] Each of these are in abundant evidence in NM, which repeatedly and conspicuously highlights Nehemiah's good deeds

---

26. Mowinckel, *Studien II*, 58-75, see especially 68-74.

27. Mowinckel, *Studien II*, 97. For a recent translation of the Idrimi inscription, see Tremper Longman III, *Fictional Akkadian Autobiography* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1991), 216-218.

28. Mowinckel, *Studien II*, 93, 98-99. He also uses the term "unvergängliche Nachruf." See Mowinckel, "Die vorderasiatischen," 304.

29. Mowinckel, "Die vorderasiatischen," 305-308.

and contrasts them to the earlier governors (Neh 5:15) and Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem (for example, Neh 2:10; 3:33-37; 6:12-14). Mowinckel also interprets Nehemiah's mocking of, and desire for revenge against, his enemies as a generically (i.e., pertaining to genre) characteristic concern for sharp contrasts between the protagonist and all other, but especially rival, characters.[30]

As a corollary to the concern for memory, Mowinckel argues that central to the royal inscriptions are their call to the god or gods to remember the protagonist by delivering the merit that is deserved him.[31] Accordingly, the protagonist strikes a decidedly pious pose and addresses the deity directly,[32] noting how the deity helped him attain his position and achieve his deeds (cf. Ashurbanibal, Rassam Cylinder 5.97ff, Neh 2:8, 19).[33] Additionally, the protagonist details how he has been devoted to his god and motivated by fear of the god (Esarhaddon Prism C, II.48ff, Nebuchadnezzar no. 15, 1.37-39; cf. Neh 5:9, 15, 16).[34] The religious stance evinced in the royal inscriptions does not, in Mowinckel's opinion, fully correspond to Nehemiah's piety in NM. Nehemiah does not, in his view, strike as self-glorifying a pose as one sees elsewhere. Mowinckel

---

30. Mowinckel, "Die vorderasiatischen," 307-308. Mowinckel reads the characterization of Sanballat as "Horonite" and of Tobiah as "Ammonite servant" as insults.

31. Mowinckel, "Die vorderasiatischen," 308ff.

32. Mowinckel, "Die vorderasiatischen," 311-313; *Studien II*, 99.

33. Mowinckel, "Die vorderasiatischen," 310.

34. Mowinckel, "Die vorderasiatischen," 309, *Studien II*, 98.

attributes this divergence to a particularly Israelite development of the genre, related to inherent difference between Mesopotamian and Israelite religion.[35]

In sum, a few general tendencies of Mowinckel's comparison of royal (and official) inscriptions to NM should be highlighted. NM exhibits broad similarities in its literary structure, main content (building projects, particularly relevant in connection with Neo-Babylonian texts), non-narrative, "enumerative" style, and common purpose of glorification of the protagonist. Additionally, some of the ways in which NM diverges from the inscriptions corresponds to other late (Neo-Assyrian and -Babylonian period) developments, wherein the style and pattern broke down, or was "exploded" (*gesprengt*).[36] Manifestations of this appear, according to Mowinckel, in the narrative expansions within the distinctive enumerative style, as well as in the loss of the strict chronological meaning of temporal connector phrases. Third, as later scholars will pick up on (see §1.2 below), the points at which NM most closely resembles the royal inscriptions, the points on which Mowinckel draws his examples, occur mostly in the accounts of Nehemiah's non-building deeds in Neh 5 and 13. *Mostly* in Neh 5 and 13, but not *entirely*, however, as Mowinckel finds evidence of the enumerative style in Neh 6, as

---

35. Mowinckel, *Studien II*, 100-103. His approach here implicitly foreshadows the method employed by F.W. Dobbs-Allsopp in his study of the lament genre, *Weep, O Daughter of Zion: A Study of the City-Lament Genre in the Hebrew Bible*. (*Biblica et Orientalia* 44, Rome: Pontifical Institute, 1993). There, Dobbs-Allsopp employs more recent theory on literary genre to make the case that, rather than being static entities in which a text either belongs fully or not at all, genres mutate and develop over time, responding to different stimuli in different times and locations.

36. Mowinckel, "Die vorderasiatischen," 282-283.

well as similarities in purpose (*Zweck*) in Neh 2 and Neh 6.

1.1.2 Votive inscriptions and Egyptian biographies

The centrality of memory and the address to the gods that forms part of the parallel with Mesopotamian inscriptions comes to the forefront in the complementary thesis that NM is a votive or dedicatory inscription. Willy Schottroff, as a part of an extensive study of commemoration or memorial (*Gedenken*) and the semitic root *zkr* (and its cognates) in the ancient Near East, suggests that NM exhibits notable similarities with donation inscriptions (*Stifterinschriften*), such as are found in other West Semitic inscriptions.[37] These inscriptions share with NM, as mentioned above, an expressed desire that the protagonist be remembered for good deeds done. Additionally, this comparison also is able to draw direct comparisons with NM's most distinctive phrases, the 'remember,' or זכרה formulae, which occur mostly in Neh 5 and 13 (cf. Neh 5:19; 6:14; 13:14, 22, 29, 31 - see Table 1.2).

37. Willy Schottroff, *'Gedenken' im alten Orient und im alten Testament: Die Wurzel Zakar im semitischen Sprachkreis*. (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1964). See especially 218ff.

Table 1.2: Occurrences of the זכרה formula in NM

Neh 5:19	זכרה־לי אלהי לטובה כל אשר־עשיתי על־העם הזה
Neh 6:14	זכרה אלהי לטוביה ולסנבלט כמעשיו אלה
Neh 13:14	זכרה־לי אלהי על־זאה ואל־תמח חסדי אשר עשיתי בבית אלהי ובמשמריו
Neh 13:22	זכרה־לי אלהי וחוסה עלי כרב חסדך
Neh 13:29	זכרה להם אלהי על גאלי הכהנה וברית הכהנה והלוים
Neh 13:31	זכרה־לי אלהי לטובה

Schottroff stops short of making a decisive claim about NM's genre, however, and his argument has been overshadowed by Gerhard Von Rad's similar but more extensive comparison with Late-Period Egyptian grave and votive inscriptions.[38] Von Rad notes that the Egyptian texts, as NM does, stress the desire of the protagonist — often, like Nehemiah, high-ranking officials or upper-class persons — to serve his deity. Also, they include first-person narrative addressed to the deity (and reader) directly, including the repeated use of what von Rad calls the *Gedächtnismotif*, the direct appeal for the reader to remember the protagonist "for good" (See Table 1.2 above).[39] Von Rad's thesis has an advantage over Mowinckel's insofar as it finds a comparison point roughly contemporaneous with Nehemiah, although, as von Rad readily admits, one would have difficulty adducing a social mechanism for direct literary influence on NM by these

38. Gerhard von Rad, "Die Nehemia-Denkschrift," *ZAW* 76 (1964):176-187.

39. Von Rad, "Die Nehemia-Denkschrift," 183-4.

texts.[40]

In addition to these formal parallels, at least one of the late Egyptian texts, the inscription of Udjahorresnet,[41] is also quite similar in content to NM. Though von Rad refers to this text, Joseph Blenkinsopp investigates the connections between it and NM in much greater detail.[42] This inscription records the first-person story of Udjahorresnet, an Egyptian military official who collaborated with the Persians' invasion of Egypt and Cambyses. Cambyses then appoints him chief physician and sends him to Sais, where Udjahorresnet restores the cultic sanctuary of the local god, Neith. Blenkinsopp maintains that the similarities to NM here are quite striking: Udjahorresnet purifies the temple and drives foreigners from it (cf. Neh 13:4-9), he installs proper cultic personnel (Neh 13:10-14), he reinstates traditional religious service (cf. Neh 13:15-22).[43] Further, he exhibits a concern with how he is remembered; see, for example:

---

40. Joseph Blenkisopp, in "The Nehemiah Autobiographical Memoir," in *Language, Theology, and the Bible*, Samuel E. Balentine and John Barton, eds. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 212, follows von Rad and notes that both NM and the Egyptian inscriptions are best seen as independent local reflexes of a widespread tradition arising out of Mesopotamia.

41. See "Statue Inscription of Udjahorresne," in *Ancient Egyptian Literature: A Book of Readings. Volume III: The Late Period* (ed. Miriam Lichtheim; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), pages 36-41.

42. Joseph Blenkinsopp, "The Nehemiah Autobiographical Memoir"; see also "The Mission of Udjahorresnet and Those of Ezra and Nehemiah," *JBL* 106 (1987): 409-421.

43. These examples are provided by Blenkinsopp, "The Mission of Udjahorresnet," 410. For a fuller comparison of NM and the biography of Udjahorresnet, see chap 2.

One honored by Neith is he who shall say: "O great gods who are in Sais! Remember all the benefactions done by the chief physician, Udjahorresne[t]. And may you do for him all benefactions! May you make his good name endure in this land forever." (lines 47-48, [Lichtheim])

Both Nehemiah and Udjahorresnet are Persian officials sent to their respective homelands who serve as an instrument of Persia among their own people. In other words, the inscription of Udjahorresnet suggests a purpose, as well as a setting comparable to NM's: an apologia and self-glorification for a Persian official working among his own people. This parallel, in conjunction with the stylistic similarities that von Rad offered, leads Blenkinsopp to maintain that NM "was modeled on the Egyptian autobiographical votive inscription, with appropriate modifications especially in the long section on the building of the wall."[44] Note here Blenkinsopp's agreement with Mowinckel that the wall-building narrative represents an expansion on the expected form.[45]

The positions of Mowinckel, Schottroff, and von Rad and Blenkinsopp, despite employing different texts,[46] present a coherent and similar picture of NM's genre. To wit, NM is a local, Israelite development or variant of a genre of first-person royal or official inscriptions widespread throughout the ancient Near East. This perspective on NM offers

---

44. Blenkinsopp, "The Mission of Udjahorresnet," 417. Blenkinsopp does not himself here broach the topic of a *Sitz im Leben*.

45. Recent work on Late-Period Egyptian inscriptions by Jens Heise suggests stronger connections with NM than even von Rad or Blenkinsopp adduce. See chapter 2.

46. Mowinckel ("Die vorderasiatischen," 278) declines to include Egyptian biographical inscriptions in his analysis of royal and official inscriptions, though he does so on account of a lack of expertise on Egypt, not because of any observed differences between Egyptian and other Near Eastern texts.

an account of NM's purpose (elevation of Nehemiah's reputation and concern with memory), as well as some strong formal and stylistic parallels (the use of first-person style, the זכרה formula, the enumerative style). Additionally, each of these theories understands Neh 5 and 13 as the passages most characteristic to NM's genre, though the presence in chap. 6 of the enumerative style, along with one זכרה formula at Neh 6:14 shows that the comparisons are not limited to chap. 5 and 13. The narrative of Nehemiah's appointment and the account of the building of the wall, from this standpoint, consequently become the elements of NM that differ from or expand on the genre.

1.2 The new redaction-critical consensus: The Mauerbau-Erzählung thesis

Despite their differences, the work of each of the above-mentioned scholars can be seen as converging on a general consensus on the generic framework of NM at several points. Some more recent commentators, however, object that one of those points, namely the frequent discussion of chapters 5 and 13, points up the central weakness of the older consensus. In a monograph that appeared shortly after Mowinckel's, Schottroff's, and von Rad's work,[47] Ulrich Kellermann put forward an entirely different understanding of NM's genre.[48] His own proposal has not found any traction,[49] but his

47. Each of which were published in 1964.

48. Ulrich Kellermann, *Nehemia: Quellen, Überlieferung und Geschichte*. (*BZAW*, 102; Berlin: Töpelmann, 1967).

49. Kellermann claims that NM arose out of a legal *Sitz im Leben*, and that NM should be

critical remarks on previous scholarship are insightful and worth a closer look.[50] For the purposes of this discussion, the primary upshot of Kellermann's critique is that a comparison between NM and Mesopotamian or Egyptian inscriptions does not properly account for the entirety of NM — indeed it does not account for its *most important* sections. The inscriptional texts discussed in §1.1.1 and 1.1.2 are usually much shorter than NM and, as we have seen, compare best (though not solely) with Neh 5:14ff. and 13:4ff. In other words, the narrative of Nehemiah's commission and construction of the wall, which to Kellermann is the largest and thematically most central part of the story, is conspicuously absent.[51]

In light of Kellermann's critiques, H.G.M. Williamson finds the approach first laid out by Mowinckel to be a dead end and moves the discussion in a different direction. He writes that "it has been a fundamental mistake to tackle the form-critical issue before first establishing the unity of the material."[52] Observing that the characteristic of NM most notably similar to the inscriptional texts, the זכרה formula,[53] is found (with one

---

read as a legal defense, on parallel with the "prayer of the accused" (*Gebet der Angeklagten*) type of psalm proposed by H. Schmidt. For a convincing argument against Kellermann's thesis, see the extended review by J.A. Emerton in *JTS* 23 (1972): 171-185.

50. Kellermann, 76-84.

51. Kellermann, 76-79, 80-82. Blenkinsopp's work, published years after Kellermann, is not quite as susceptible to Kellermann's critique.

52. Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah* (*WBC* 16; Waco: Word Books, 1985), xxv.

53. Or at least the element most similar to the West Semitic votive and Egyptian inscriptions. Again, the זכרה formula does not occupy a prominent place in Mowinckel's

exception at 6:14) only in sections unrelated to the construction of the wall (5:19; 13:14, 22, 29, 31 — see Table 1.2 above), he posits a diachronic literary division within NM.[54] Further noting that the זכרה formula occurs either where the text offers a retrospective picture on Nehemiah's career (5:19) or where it narrates events taking place long after the completion of the wall project (chap. 13), he divides NM into two primary layers. The earlier layer comprises solely the story of events taking place during Nehemiah's commission and construction of Jerusalem's walls (Neh 1-4, 5:1-14, 6-7:72a).[55] Williamson understands this text to be a report written shortly after the events narrated. As a straightforward report of events, it would have been narrated without the prayers or the direct appeals to the reader (the remember formulae, plus 1:5-11; 3:36-37; 6:14). Later, he suggests, "Nehemiah may have felt that justice was not being done to him within his own community," and he accordingly would have revised and updated NM, adding text in the style resembling the inscriptions.[56]

Williamson's reconstruction of the literary history of NM has significantly altered how scholars discuss the issue of its genre. He argues, in short, that the inability of previous writers to name a single genre that matches NM in every facet is linked to a

---

theory.

54. Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, xxvi-xxviii.

55. Not including the list of builders at 3:1-32 and a few other parts Williamson considers secondary, namely 1:4-11; 3:36-37; 6:14.

56. Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, xxviii.

misguided conception of NM as a singular, unified text. Williamson thereby effectively reverses the understanding of how NM relates to its genre(s). Whereas earlier scholars viewed Neh 5 and 13 as the most generically characteristic elements of NM, Williamson envisions NM at its core as a building report that received secondary additions in the vein of votive inscriptions. This change signals a major turning point in the scholarship. Recent work on NM has taken up and expanded upon Williamson's concept of a core building report. Titus Reinmuth has developed this thesis even further, clarifying and expanding the two-layer theory. He terms the base text the Mauerbau-Erzählung (ME), or the "wall-building narrative," and the text comprising the revisions the Nehemia-Denkschrift (ND), or the "Nehemiah memoir".[57] Even more, Reinmuth has adduced different socio-historical backgrounds for the two genres. The ME, according to Reinmuth represents a collaborative effort toward reconstruction among political leaders,

---

57. Titus Reinmuth, *Der Bericht Nehemias: Zur literarischen Eigenart traditionsgeschichtlichten Prägung und innerbiblischen Rezeption des Ich-Berichts Nehemias* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2002). In order to maintain clarity of presentation, from here on I follow Reinmuth's terminology, even when referring to the work of other scholars who do not use these terms (primarily Williamson, Wright, and Hurowitz). Therefore, "Mauerbau-Erzählung" (or ME) refers to the proposed earlier layer of the Nehemiah Memorial that narrates the building of the wall alone. Accordingly, "Nehemia-Denkschrift" (or ND) names the other material in the Nehemiah Memorial (primarily chs. 5 and 13) considered by Reinmuth and others to be secondary additions. (Naturally, scholars differ on exactly which material is secondary, and such disagreements will be noted). When referring to the entirety of the first-person Nehemiah narrative, I will always use "Nehemiah Memorial" (NM). Note that although "Nehemia-Denkschrift" is one of the preferred terms for NM in German scholarship (see especially Von Rad, "Die Nehemia-Denkschrift"), "ND" here refers *only* to proposed secondary elements of NM, and not to NM itself.

priests, and the people. The ND, in contrast, reveals later discord in Yehud, wherein the Levites, lower-ranked priests, and peasants clashed with the political and cultic aristocracy.[58]

The most recent extended study of NM, Jacob Wright's *Rebuilding Identity*, can also be seen as, in part, an extension of Williamson's thesis. Wright's redaction-critical research posits a highly complex process of supplementary revisions within NM.[59] His argument is highly detailed and complex, and he explicitly rejects the two-stage model of NM's composition,[60] but one central aspect of his reconstruction stands out for the present purposes. When all the secondary additions are separated out as evidence of post-exilic disputes within Yehud what remains behind is a core text that narrates only Nehemiah's commission and construction project (Neh 1:1a, 11b; 2:1-6*, 11, 15, 16a, 17, 18b; 3:38; 6:15). Wright's underlying text (his "ME," so to speak) is far more spare than Williamson's or Reinmuth's (notably, Wright excises virtually all of Neh 4-6). Wright, in this sense, carries out Williamson's logic to its ultimate conclusion. Williamson envisions the ME as a narrative of the construction project, and therefore removes chaps. 5 and 13 as unrelated to the base text, yet retains much of chaps. 4-6, though they, strictly speaking, do not narrate the construction project. In Wright's reconstruction, NM

---

58. Reinmuth, 334-335.

59. Jacob Wright, *Rebuilding Identity: The Nehemiah-Memoir and its Earliest Readers* (*BZAW* 348; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2004). For a helpful but schematic overview of Wright's composition history of NM, see p. 340.

60. Wright, *Rebuilding Identity*, chap. 8

becomes in its essence a building report (and only a building report), though one that has grown through a long process of later supplements and modifications.

This newer perspective on NM, which I will call the Mauerbau-Erzählung (ME) theory, clarifies, for its proponents, the issue of genre: NM in its essence is a building report. Even more, it creates a manageable and straightforward origin or occasion for that genre: a report of an official concerning the work he was commissioned to do. Wright even locates an ancient Near Eastern generic parallel to augment his claim. He compares ME to Mesopotamian and Northwest Semitic building inscriptions, as presented by Victor Hurowitz.[61] Hurowitz devotes his study to the biblical account of Solomon's temple in light of building accounts from Sumer to Josephus. His comparative work leads him to isolate a six-phase structure exhibited by many inscriptions:

(1) Circumstances of project and decision to build

(2) Preparations, such as drafting workmen, gathering materials

(3) Description of the building

(4) Dedication rites and festivities

(5) Blessing and/or prayer of the king

---

61. Victor Hurowitz, *I Have Built You an Exalted House: Temple Building in the Bible in Light of Mesopotamian and Northwest Semitic Writings* (*JSOT Sup* 115; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992). Wright works with Hurowitz on pp. 150-152. Neither Williamson nor Reinmuth explicitly appeal to these building report texts. The extent to which the text corpora analyzed by Hurowitz and Mowinckel overlap, despite their very different conclusions about NM, will be addressed further below in chap. 2.

(6) Blessing and curses of future generations[62]

Hurowitz's survey of building accounts also includes a brief investigation of NM.[63] There, he arrives at the conclusion (apparently independent of Williamson) that a building account lies buried within the extant, and expanded, text.[64] Within NM, 1:1-2:8 correspond to Hurowitz's phase (1),[65] the rest of Neh 2 to (2), Neh 3 to (3), and the account of the population and dedication of Jerusalem in 7:1-5a; 11:1-2; 12:27-43 to (4). Such correspondences mean for Hurowitz that, when the underlying ME text is excavated from NM, what remains is "nothing more than a building account written according to the traditional format,"[66] and that,

> Removing the accounts of the disturbances [in Neh 4-6] as well as some additional secondary material not directly related to the building of the walls does not affect the continuity of the building story. In addition, all the 'extraneous' material is well defined literarily by the use of stereotyped introductory and/or closing formulae. From all this it

---

62. Hurowitz, 64.

63. Hurowitz, 118-124.

64. Hurowitz, 120-121 enumerates his version of ME as 1.1-2:9; 2:11-18; 3:1-32 (38); 6:15 (16); 7:1-72a; 11:1-2; 12:27:43. This is more extensive than Wright's ME, but note that Hurowitz, unlike Williamson and Reinmuth, excludes all of Neh 4-6 (minus 4:15-16). The reasons for removing chs. 4-6 will be discussed below.

65. Hurowitz, 122 further argues that Neh 1:1-2:8 contains "perhaps five elements characteristic of this phase … (a) description of situation requiring repair; (b) request for permission; (c) the granting of permission; (d) divine sanction; (e) fear," with (d) as the most doubtful element.

66. Hurowitz, 121.

becomes clear that the building story is the backbone and torso of Nehemiah's memoirs, to which everything else is secondarily attached.[67]

Though the various versions of the ME-theory do not make extensive use of form- (or genre-) critical methods, following Williamson's maxim of unity before form-critical analysis, with Hurowitz's form-critical work in ancient Near Eastern inscription texts, the redaction-critical ME thesis appears to have acquired its strongest corroboration.

1.3 Evaluation of the Mauerbau-Erzählung thesis

The current consensus that a building report lies at the heart of NM comes as the fruit of close and sensitive attention to subtle divergences of style, content, and ideology within NM itself, an attention that the earlier consensus perhaps failed to exhibit in its rush to find extrabiblical parallels to NM. Even more, the ME theory makes better sense of a prominent aspect of NM, the wall-building account. Despite these notable exegetical advances, however, when the ME theory rejects the older consensus it also rejects still-relevant insights of the power of genre for understanding NM. With the transition from old consensus to new, we trade an impoverished sense of variation within NM for an atrophied understanding of genre. Williamson called for the postponement of form- or genre-critical analysis until the completion of literary-critical work. Yet, though recent

67. Hurowitz, 123-124.

scholarship has ably taken up the call with regards to the first stage, the crucial task of picking up the pieces and returning to genre has yet to be done.

1.3.1 The revised NM as a 'building inscription': Neh 6 as a test case

A closer look into the proposed "building account genre," as we will see in the next section (§1.3.2), raises broad and significant questions about genre, specifically questions about the generic coherence of the ME. Nevertheless, the notion of a clean separation between the ME and ND additions reveals itself to be unstable even on a smaller scale. As a test case, Neh 6:10-19 is a particularly appropriate locus for investigation. Here, an undisputed part of the ME converges with texts deemed to be part of the ND supplements:

[10]And I entered the house of Shemaiah ben Delaiah ben Mehetabel (who was detained), and he said, "Let us meet in the House of God, inside of the temple, so that we may close the doors of the temple, because they are coming to kill you." [11]And I said, "Would a man like me flee? And would someone who is like me go into the temple and live? I will not go in." [12]And I recognized that God had not sent him — indeed he had spoke a prophetic utterance against me and Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him. [13]For this reason he was hired, so that I would be afraid and do this and sin, and so that I would have a bad name to them, in order to shame me. [14]Remember, O my God, Tobiah and Sanballat, according to these deeds of theirs, and also the prophet Noadiah and the rest of the prophets who were intimidating me. [15]The wall was finished (ותשלם) on the 25th of Elul, on the 52nd day. [16]And when our enemies heard, all the nations around us saw, and fell greatly in their eyes, and they knew that this work (המלאכה הזאת) was done (נעשתה) from [the help of] our God. [17]Also, in those days, the nobles of Judah were sending more and more letters to Tobiah, and Tobiah was replying to them. [18]Because many in Judah were bound by oath to him, because he was the son-in-law of Shekaniah ben Arah; and his son Jehohanan had married the daughter of Meshullam ben Berekaiah. [19]Also they spoke of his good deeds before me and they were bringing my words to him. And Tobiah sent letters to intimidate me.

This passage includes the notice of completion of the wall, which appears in every version of the ME, along with an indication of the disputes between Nehemiah and his enemies, included by Williamson and Reinmuth, but not by Wright, as well as the distinctive זכרה motif found elsewhere only in Neh 5 and 13 and unanimously excluded from the ME.

With regard to Williamson, in his more expansive view of the ME (he includes most of Neh 4:1-5:14; 6:1-7:5), most of Neh 6 belongs unproblematically to the core text. Nevertheless, his incorporation of Neh 6 leaves his argument vulnerable to a problematic verse, namely 6:14, which glaringly includes the זכרה formula. Because it contains this formula in a text related, in Williamson's estimation, to the wall, this verse muddies the clear divisions between the ME and the ND additions. Recall that Williamson's central literary-critical insight about NM is that the remember formulae are characteristic of the parts of the narrative unrelated to Nehemiah's construction project. Neh 6:14, though, is the conspicuous exception to this rule.[68] Williamson forthrightly concedes that this verse troubles his thesis,[69] but his explanation for it is not entirely satisfactory. He offers two possible reasons for the presence of the formula in 6:14. The first is that this verse could be understood as a transcription of a prayer uttered during the time of the events narrated,

---

68. Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, xxvi-xxvii.

69. Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, xxvii. He also notes that a remember formula occurs in 5:19.

on parallel with 3:36-37, where Nehemiah "seems to be reliving the events in so vivid a fashion that he includes words of a prayer without introduction."[70] This rationalization, though, neglects the demonstrably formulaic nature of the language of this verse, and the strong connection of this language with votive inscriptions minimizes the possibility that 6:14 could be a spontaneous utterance. His second proposal is that the verse is evidence of a secondary insertion — that is, when Nehemiah composed the ND additions, he also reworked Neh 6 in the characteristic style of the ND.[71] This is an intriguing suggestion, and Williamson leaves it at that, but it raises more questions than it solves. Why did the reviser add only one instance of the remember formula to the building narrative? Is this the only change to Neh 1-6, and if not, what other parts are secondary additions? Are the remember formulae in Neh 13 also unconnected to the narrative, and could therefore a skeleton narrative of the religious reforms in Neh 13 be isolated from secondary additions? Such difficult questions suggest that, even if a later addition is possible or even probable in NM, it is not so easily divisible from the earlier layer. Perhaps NM was reworked, but the problems with Neh 6:14 suggests that the proposed secondary layer is better integrated into the narrative than Williamson allows.

Because Wright's reconstruction of NM does not rely on a strict division between original report and singular later revision, it is better equipped to deal with the ostensibly

---

70. Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, xxvii.

71. Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, xxvii. I recount Williamson's two proposals regarding 6:14 in the order opposite of his own presentation.

anomalous appearance of זכרה in Neh 6:14. But the way in which he accounts for 6:14, along with the other remember formulae in NM, is to pare back the ME even further. He concludes that Neh 6:10-14 forms a separate unit, with the זכרה motif furnishing a closing formula.[72] This enables him to argue that vv.10-14 postdates the original text and thus to isolate v. 15 from the preceding text.[73] Wright thus asserts that 6:15 concludes the earliest composition and that 6:15 no longer stands in its original position. Rather, it is better understood as the continuation of 3:38, "So we built (ונבנה) the wall. It was completed up to half its height; the people had a will (לב) to work."[74] For this claim, he finds confirmation in Hurowitz's observation about word pairs in the completion of building accounts. Hurowitz uses a number of examples to argue that the pairing of בנה or עשה (plus sometimes מלאכה) with שלם, כלה, or תמם (plus sometimes מלאכה), or their Semitic-language cognates, is a common feature in building accounts.[75] Accordingly, Wright links the use of בנה in 3:38 to the occurrence of שלם in 6:15 in order to suggest an original pairing between the two verses.[76] Yet, as Hurowitz points out, the mention of שלם in 6:15

---

72. Wright, *Rebuilding Identity,* 149

73. See Wright, *Rebuilding Identity*, 145-150 for further reasons for considering 6:10-14 as later.

74. Wright, *Rebuilding Identity*, 150-151. Wright also excises "it was completed up to half its height."

75. Hurowitz, 235-242. Neh 6:15-16 is referred to on 238.

76. Wright, *Rebuilding Identity*, 150-151.

is juxtaposed with (נעשתה המלאכה הזאת) in the very next verse (Neh 6:16).[77] In other words, to turn all the way back to Neh 3:38 to find a word pairing for Neh 6:15 is to ignore the much nearer pairing in Neh 6:16. Indeed, one could conceive of a possible original sequence that included all three verses, progressed from 3:38 directly to 6:15 and 6:16. Neh 6:16, however, deals with Nehemiah's dispute against his adversaries, not strictly the construction of the wall. Wright must ignore the word pair in the immediate context, because to join 6:15 with 6:16 would be to admit an element of the dispute narratives into the core text.[78]

The link between v. 15 and v. 16, while less problematic for Williamson and Reinmuth, disturbs Wright's isolation of 6:15 from the the following text (6:16-19). Even more, it opens up the possibility that the accounts of Nehemiah's disputes are integral to the wall building report. To put a finer point on it, even if the disputes were not a part of the earliest version of Nehemiah's report, they have become integral, such that the case for reading the text as a building account strengthens with their inclusion. Whatever its original text may have been, NM, *in its extant, likely even revised, version* resembles a building account.

---

77. Hurowitz, 123, 238-239.

78. Wright, *Rebuilding Identity*, 152, calls 6:16 an “early amplification of v.15”

1.3.2 The ME thesis' impoverished understanding of genre

As I have discussed above (§1.2), Wright's appeal to Hurowitz's lengthy study of building accounts appears to provide a persuasive control on, and affirmation of, the ME thesis. If the ME text lying at the core of NM looks, to quote Hurowitz again, like "nothing more than a building account written according to the traditional format," then the ME acquires a reasonable generic and socio-historical context. A deeper look into Hurowitz's work, though, shows it to contain a somewhat cursory treatment of NM. The inclusion of NM into his survey is only of incidental importance to his primary topic – a comparison of the account of the construction of Solomon's temple with Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian texts – though that fact itself does not mean that the explanation of NM is inadequate. More relevant are the puzzling gaps and inconsistencies present despite Hurowitz's confident assurance. First, Hurowitz asserts that Neh 13 does not properly belong to the ME, because it contains 'extraneous' material that contains stereotyped language[79] and does not pertain to the construction narrative. In the same section, however, he suggests that Neh 13 may be fulfilling the role of his phase number 6 (blessings and curses of future generations). Neh 13, then, seems simultaneously to fit (according to the formal characteristics of building accounts) and not to fit (according to content, since Neh 13 describes reforms unrelated to the building project). If Neh 13 is

79. Each of its three sections, 13:4-14, 13:15-22, and 13:23-31, open with a temporal clause and close with the 'remember' formula. See Hurowitz, 119.

indeed to be considered a proper part of the base building text — and this is the central question — does that make the presence of stereotyped language itself no longer sufficient to exclude text as secondary?

Additionally, as we have seen above in §1.3.1, due to the distinctive word pairing, the *inclusion*, not the exclusion, of 6:16 into the building account would more closely align the text to the building inscription genre. Hurowitz seems to leave open the possibility that 6:16 (and the remainder of the dispute stories in Neh 4 and 6, since 6:16 contains both lexical and thematic connections with the former) could be closely connected to the ME story. Neh 6:16 provides another indication that texts that he deems extraneous to NM's building account are, with respect to genre, integral to building inscriptions as widely attested throughout the ancient Near East.

As a result, if one follows Hurowitz's own criteria for classifying building inscriptions, ME cannot be considered a building inscription — that is, not without including texts (such as Neh 6:14, 16 and Neh 13) that proponents of the ME theory exclude from the narrative. Or, the case for thinking of NM as a building account is *strengthened* by the inclusion of the ND additions. This critique of inconsistencies within Hurowitz's position should not be construed as a refutation of Williamson, Reinmuth, and Wright, each of whose reading of NM is more careful and detailed than Hurowitz's. However, the form-critical evidence provided by Hurowitz does not ratify the redaction-critical ME theory. To go even further, though, the form-critical question that Williamson postpones (and that Wright makes use of only as after-the-fact corroboration) raises its

head precisely at the moment that the redaction-critical work has been completed. Williamson and Wright quite reasonably seek to withhold judgment on the genre of NM in order to avoid forcing it into a category in which it does not fully fit. Williamson observes that it is "a fundamental mistake to tackle the form-critical issue before first establishing the unity of the material," but the ME thesis fails to substantiate a form-critical position. In other words, the ME thesis establishes the (dis)unity of the material, but never fully returns to tackle the form-critical issue in any rigorous manner; rather it assumes that the redaction-critical work will produce its own form-critical fruit.

Other than Hurowitz, none of the recent commentators who are proponents of the ME theory offer any sustained vision of what the genre of the ME might be. The notion that underneath the secondary additions lies a text that is a "building account" is left as self evident: after all, what else should one call a short narrative about a construction project? As a result, we see the virtual death of genre as a meaningful factor in the study of NM. Where Mowinckel claimed that NM is unique in the Bible, Reinmuth takes it one step further and states that it is unique in ANE literature as well.[80] Gunneweg maintains that the task of discussing NM's genre is an "impossibility" (*Unmöglichkeit*).[81] These such claims are primarily due to the conviction that NM is not a singular text, but the death of genre becomes even more glaring when we look at how recent scholarship has not fully addressed the genre of the ME.

---

80. Reinmuth, 17.

81. Antonius H. J. Gunneweg, *Nehemia*, (Gutersloh: G. Mohn, 1987), 178.

The absence of a robust discussion of genre is best illustrated by the strange coincidence that, despite all the ostensible differences in their approaches, Mowinckel and Hurowitz each speak of an essentially similar, even nearly identical, group of Neo-Babylonian building inscription texts! Hurowitz's study, to be sure, is sensitive to phraseology and language, but as we have seen with his six-phase structure in §1.2, Hurowitz frames his treatment of the building inscription genre (as it applies to NM) in terms of content, or "components of the stories."[82] NM fits the category of building account to the extent that it narrates certain events in a certain (slightly flexible) order. This approach to genre is visible particularly with Williamson, who reads the parts that diverge from the expected main subject of the text as intrusive and thus fundamentally external to the ME.

Mowinckel, too, attends to the content and order of the royal building inscriptions — indeed these characteristics are crucial to his characterization of the genre — but Mowinckel includes a treatment of the equally important other aspects of genre: form or style (*Stil*), and purpose or ideology (in Mowinckel's terms, *Zweck* and *Tendenz*).[83] For Mowinckel, again, the content (deeds of the royal protagonist), style (enumerative), and purpose (aggrandizement and creation of an eternal memory before the gods) are inseparable. In striking contrast, to the ME thesis, the distinctive style of NM, and of building inscriptions, is precisely *that which must be removed*. When one

82. Hurowitz, 64.

83. See Mowinckel, *Studien II*, 56.

eliminates the distinctive style, further, one should not be surprised to learn that the purpose or ideology of the genre has been stripped as well. On account of its imperative to set aside the parts of NM that do not conform to a content-driven notion of the building account genre, the ME thesis sunders content from form and ideology and delivers a generically unstable, and perhaps even generically impossible text.

By way of illustration, consider again Wright's "ME." (Neh 1:1a, 11b; 2:1-6*, 11, 15, 16a, 17, 18b; 3:38; 6:15). Wright's version of the core of the NM is significantly more pared down than that of Williamson and Reinmuth (though Hurowitz's is more similar), but all three calculatedly excise the elements that do not deal with the construction of the wall in order to reveal an underlying text solely focused on the unadorned narration of Nehemiah's early commission. However, once the redaction-critical work has been completed such that most or all of the text composed in the enumerative style has been set aside, what might the purpose of the ME be? Why would it have been composed? Williamson's answer to these questions is brief, but worth investigating. He writes that "the removal of the 'remember formulae' [and the sections in which they appear] … leaves this narrative much more a *description* or a *report* than a votive or dedication text."[84] Conceiving of the ME in this way makes sense intuitively, as it helps to explain why this text would have been produced (to fulfill an obligation to report on Nehemiah's commission), as well as who would have read it (presumably either

84. Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, xxvii. Emphases mine.

the Persian king or other high officials, or both). However, a text dedicated to a matter-of-fact report by a lower official to the king of a fulfillment of the former's commission would be unparalleled in extant ancient Near Eastern literature. With the possible exception of letters,[85] narrative texts were never, so far as is known, written for the purpose of simple, straightforward reportage.[86] More to the point, the ME shows a glaring lack of several features central to royal building inscriptions. The ME includes no mention of a deity, no appeal to the reader (divine or human), no celebration of the protagonist, no legitimation of the protagonist's rule. In short, it displays none of the features that were the hallmark of official (royal) written texts in the ancient Near East.[87]

The most visible problem with the ME text is the absence of any indications of address to an audience. Royal building inscriptions carried with them a deep concern for proper recognition of the king's deeds. Accordingly, they inscribed their audience into the text, often in the form of prayers to a deity or injunctions to future kings.[88] While this ostensible audience could be conceived of as primarily an address purely for posterity

---

85. No one, to my knowledge, has suggested that NM was originally composed as a letter.

86. Wright's approach, it must be noted, is more attuned to rhetorical and ideological matters than is typical for scholarship on NM. Nevertheless, his proposed building report text, because it strips away the ideology essential to this genre, becomes just as "common sense" historicist and untenable as Williamson's, even if only implicitly.

87. See Mowinckel, *Studien II*, 56.

88. Mario Liverani, "The Deeds of Ancient Mesopotamian Kings," in *CANE*, 2353-2366. See also Tremper Longman, *Fictional Akkadian Autobiography*.

(given that many texts were physically inaccessible and functionally illegible to most of the population),[89] they often also had a parallel audience of real readers (or hearers). As Mario Liverani observes, these texts "were written to become known – in some way – to subjects and enemies; they were written for self-justification, or to obtain or increase sociopolitical control, or to mobilize, or to impress, or even to frighten."[90] Royal (or official) texts were strategic acts of propaganda written with audience as a primary concern.

One could counter this claim and suggest that the ME did of course have an audience in mind, even if it does not make that audience explicit in the text. Williamson, for one, hints that it was written for the Persian king.[91] The difficulty with the ME text, however, goes beyond the simple absence of explicit indications of audience. Accompanying the concern with readers (or with posterity) in royal inscriptions is a sense of display or commemoration. Kings or high-ranking officials did not have building accounts published simply in order to pass on information to any interested readers or future historians. The disinterested narration of events could in fact be conceived of as the least of concerns for this type of text. The ME offers some moderate and implicit praise for its protagonist, insofar as Nehemiah succeeds in his task and completes the

89. Liverani, "Deeds," 2354.

90. Liverani, "Deeds," 2354.

91. Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, xxviii, "There is no good reason to doubt that the substance of the NM was written up as a report on how the commission was fulfilled."

wall. On the whole, though, the ME has a conspicuous lack of any connection with political or royal ideology. Nehemiah does not stress his obedience to a deity nor appeal to a deity's assistance, does not contrast his rule with those who came before him, does not point out his role in cultic reform, and does not even (in Wright's and Hurowitz's versions) display his ability to overcome impious enemies. Of course, NM does indeed report Nehemiah doing each of these things, but it does so in the very sections that the proponents of the ME thesis remove from NM as secondary. These supposedly secondary characteristics are, in contrast, absolutely central to ancient Near Eastern royal and/or memorial ideology (and central to the reason for writing building accounts), and cannot be reduced to rhetorical flourishes, made in a spirit of apologia, without fundamentally altering the notion of how written texts operated in the ancient world. Mowinckel's contention that content, style, and purpose are indivisible in NM is crucial here. Put another way, genres always encode ideological messages. One cannot excise the material unrelated to the wall in NM without also removing the ideological *raison d'etre* of the text (and indeed of the genre), leaving behind an unrecognizable, mostly ideology-free shell of a narrative.[92]

The ME thesis, in other words, finds itself too wedded to content alone as determinative of genre. The perspective on NM offered by Mowinckel and his successors, in contrast, understands genre as a matter of form/style and ideology as well

92. Wright factors in ideology in his reconstructed ME, see below on foreign court narratives (§2.1.4).

as content. Content is a factor in the comparison with royal and official inscriptions (especially with respect to the comparison with Udjahorresnet), but the other two aspects loom even larger. The objections to the older consensus that were voiced by both Kellermann and Williamson, though, are objections based largely on content.[93] Kellermann and Williamson observe, correctly, that earlier scholars paid insufficient attention to the central wall-building story in NM. Their emphasis on content reflects their incomplete account of genre (which is continued by Reinmuth and, to a lesser degree, Wright).[94]

Accordingly, despite its claim to producing a solution of the problem of genre more responsible to the text, the ME thesis ultimately fails because of its insufficient attention to genre. The ME thesis posits a genre (a simply-narrated building account) for which there are no corresponding extant examples outside of NM. Returning to Williamson's breakthrough in the scholarship on NM's genre, we can see that the key

---

93. Form is a factor in determining what material to exclude, but not in what to include, particularly for Williamson, who consistently appeals to the criterion of what the historical Nehemiah himself might have said. In other words, form strangely plays merely a perfunctory role in the discussion of genre, and when form does appear (as for example "stereotyped language"), it does so only to serve as a foil. The disappearance of form as a constructive criterion in the ME thesis creates a hypothetical text (the ME in its different shapes) that bears little resemblance to actual ancient Near Eastern building accounts, Hurowitz's claims notwithstanding.

94. In a passing remark in a footnote Wright leaves a revealing clue about the role of genre in his work. Referring to Hurowitz's work, Wright writes, "This confirmation [of the connection between 3:38 and 6:15] is even more rewarding as I discovered Hurowitz's investigation only after searching for analogies to 6:15," Wright, 151n70. The notion that the ME should bear some connection to genre and generic parameters comes only as an afterthought and as a fortuitous confirmation.

weakness of his proposal is already prefigured in his central insight. As quoted above, he writes, "it has been a fundamental mistake to tackle the form-critical issue before first establishing the unity of the material." Williamson is correct, insofar as Mowinckel (and even more so von Rad) made the mistake of allowing a small and distinctive part of NM to stand in for the entire text. If they focused on genre while assuming textual unity, Williamson is guilty of doing the reverse: interrogating the redaction of the text while assuming that the results would be generically coherent. Yes, the composition of NM must be held in view, but it cannot form the sole deciding factor. Composition history is relevant to genre, but then again, so is genre relevant to composition history.

None of the foregoing is meant to negate the advances of redaction criticism of NM, nor to enable an avoidance of the important issues it raises. Williamson, Reinmuth, and Wright each present compelling arguments that the text of NM contains noticeable internal contrasts. The possibility that NM was subject to revisions is extremely strong.[95] I do not wish to propose that NM was either written all at once or by one author. My argument, rather, is that one should insert a note of caution into the enterprise of redaction-critical division of the text, not in the form of closing debate by preemptively asserting a 'final-form' reading, but rather by reminding that genre can and ought to be a controlling criterion in redaction-critical decisions. Here, the ME simply is not a

95. The fact that Assyrian inscriptions themselves are known to have been revised is quite relevant here. See Liverani, "Deeds," 2358 and John Van Seters, "The Historiography of the Ancient Near East," in *CANE*, 2433-2444.

generically coherent text. If indeed it is the case that the extant version of NM hides an earlier edition, one should reasonably expect that edition to contain some stereotyped or ideological features constitutive of the royal (building) inscription genre. Any ND-type of revision of NM, in other words, seems to have been far more thoroughgoing than scholars who propose versions of the ME thesis are willing to admit (and cannot be limited to addition alone).[96] Even more, the texts that proponents of the NM thesis excise from NM bring NM closer to, not further away from, the (royal) building inscription genre. That NM as a whole resembles a building inscription more closely than just the ME alone does can be seen not only in Neh 6:16, but also in the prayers in Neh 13 that close NM, as well as in the strong indications (largely ignored in recent scholarship) that the enumerative style appears in Neh 6.

The proponents of the ME thesis follow a correct instinct when they insist that important, even essential, differences exist between NM and either Akkadian or Egyptian

---

96. Following Van Seters' recent critiques of redaction criticism, as well as the current consensus about Ezra-Nehemiah and 1 Esdras as fully different editions of a similar story, I would suggest that any layers within NM are attributable to a reasonably thoroughgoing revision of NM, not to piecemeal additions. A vocal proponent of this kind of model of ancient literary composition is John Van Seters. See his *The Edited Bible: The Curious History of the "Editor" in Biblical Criticism*. (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2006). My criticism of the ME theory is quite similar to Van Seters' criticism of Thilo Alexander Rudnig in his review of Rudnig's *David's Thron: redaktionkritische Studien zur Geschichte von Thronnachfolge Davids*, (BZAW 358. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2006). In this book, Rudnig undertakes a redaction-critical analysis of the Succession Narrative in Samuel-Kings. However, Van Seters critiques Rudnig's reconstruction, writing, "When all the fragments [of Rudnig's *Grundbestand*] are taken together they cannot possibly constitute the substance of a royal inscription, and no clear parallel is ever offered." See *RBL* 9/2007 (3).

inscriptions. One should remember that the older consensus was equally aware of this, too, but attributed NM's divergence from the genre's patterns to the adaptation to the needs of a writer's context. With Williamson and Reinmuth, in contrast, this divergence can only mean that the text itself is divisible. The implication here is that texts can be considered to be part of a genre only insofar as they fit that genre perfectly — the possibility of generic expansion, combination, or drift is assumed impossible, or at least left unaddressed. Therefore, perhaps the difficulties the ME thesis has with coming to terms with the issue of genre can be traced to a shared assumption that the analysis of genre is a fundamentally *classificatory* activity, potentially interesting but ultimately inessential. The next chapter endeavors to show the inadequacy of such a model of genre criticism by interacting with a growing body of scholarship devoted to reimagining form criticism and genre theory for a new generation. In order to synthesize the older consensus and the ME thesis, one must develop a theory of genre that has the ability to account for generic variation within texts, that is, a theory that recognizes writers, even ancient writers, stretch, combine, and modify genres. A fuller understanding of NM surely must incorporate redaction-critical insights. Yet it needs to move beyond them and perceive that genre, far from providing merely an academic exercise for critics distantly removed from the objects of study, has a power all its own (not unrelated to Mowinckel's *Tendenz* or *Zweck*) that exerts itself over the writers and readers in the ancient world.

2. The Genre and the Nehemiah Memorial: a new proposal

If the question of the genre or genres of the Nehemiah Memorial is due for a reevaluation, the atmosphere in biblical studies for such an investigation proves to be quite hospitable. The past decade has seen a small, but noticeable, growth in genre criticism of the Bible. A number of scholars of biblical and cognate texts, including Richard Burridge[1] F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp,[2] Barbara Green,[3] Tremper Longmann III,[4]

---

1. Richard Burridge, *What are the Gospels?* (2nd. ed. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2004).

2. F.W. Dobbs-Allsopp, *"Weep, O Daughter of Zion": A Study of the City-Lament Genre in the Hebrew Bible*. (Biblica et Orientalia 44. Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1993); *Ibid*, "Darwinism, Genre Theory, and City Laments," *JAOS* 120 (2000):625-630.

3. Barbara Green, *How Are the Mighty Fallen?: A Dialogical Study of King Saul in 1 Samuel*. (JSOTSup. 365; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003).

4. Tremper Longman, *Fictional Akkadian Autobiography*; "Israelite Genres in their Ancient Near Eastern Context," in *The Changing Face of Form Criticism for the Twenty-First Century* Marvin Sweeney and Ehud Ben Zvi, eds. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2003), 177-195.

Carleen Mandolfo,[5] Piotr Michalowski,[6] Carol Newsom,[7] Kenton Sparks,[8] H. I. J. Vanstiphout,[9] and Lawrence Wills,[10] have undertaken significant analyses of texts by means of theoretically-informed understandings of genre. Signs of the reemergence of the study of literary form can also be found in two notable edited volumes, *The Changing*

---

5. Carleen Mandolfo, *Daughter Zion Talks Back to the Prophets: A Dialogic Theology of the Book of Lamentations* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007)

6. Piotr Michalowski, "Sailing to Babylon, Reading the Dark Side of the Moon," in *The Study of the Ancient Near East in the Twenty-First Century: The William Foxwell Albright Centennial Conference*, Jerrold S. Cooper and Glenn M. Schwartz, eds. (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1996), 177-193; "Commemoration, Writing, and Genre in Ancient Mesopotamia," in *The Limits of Historiography: Genre and Narrative in Ancient Historical Texts*, Christina Shuttleworth Kraus, ed. (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 1999), 69-90.

7. Carol Newsom, *The Book of Job: A Contest of Moral Imaginations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); "Spying out the Land: A Report from Genology," in *Bakhtin and Genre Theory in Biblical Studies*, Roland Boer, ed. (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), 19-30.

8. Kenton Sparks, *Ancient Texts for the Study of the Hebrew Bible: A Guide to the Background Literature*. (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2005).

9. Herman L. J. Vanstiphout, "Some Thoughts on Genre in Mesopotamian Literature," in *Keilschriftliche Literaturen: Ausgewählte Vorträge der XXXII. Recontre Assyriologique Internationale. Münster, 8.-12.7.1985*, Karl Hecker and Walter Sommerfeld, eds. (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag, 1986), 1-11; "The Use(s) of Genre in Mesopotamian Literature: An Afterthought," *Archîv Orientâlnî* 67 (1999): 703-716; "'I Can Put Anything in Its Right Place': Generic and Typological Studies as Strategies for the Analysis and Evaluation of Mankind's Oldest Literature," in *Aspects of Genre and Type in Pre-Modern Literary Cultures*, Bert Roest and Herman Vanstiphout, eds. (Groningen: Styx Publications, 1999), 79-99.

10. Lawrence M. Wills, *The Jew in the Court of the Foreign King* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990); *The Jewish Novel in the Ancient World* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995); *The Quest of the Historical Gospel: Mark, John, and the Origins of the Gospel Genre* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

Face of Form Criticism for the 21st Century[11] and *Bakhtin and Genre in Biblical Studies*.[12] As the title of the former hints, though, the growth of genre criticism is taking place in the shadow of form criticism. Indeed, the small flowering of the study of genre coincides with, and is due largely to, the dismantling and reconstruction of form criticism. Many of the above-mentioned scholars, and particularly the contributors to *Changing Face*, have devoted significant effort to theorizing a method of studying literary form that jettisons or at least modifies elements of form criticism.

Broadly speaking, recent scholars have charged form criticism on two counts, for its rigid concept of genre (see §2.1.1) and for its historicist bent, its drive toward literary history (see §2.1.2).[13] Some of the critiques have their origins in the mid-20th century,[14] but what is new in current scholarship is the attempt to reconstitute form criticism in light of recent trends in intellectual history and, more specifically, in the theory of genre. In line with developments in genre study, this chapter will make the case for a genre theory that is equipped to handle the contours of and variation within NM and that does not

---

11. Marvin Sweeney and Ehud Ben Zvi, eds. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003

12. Roland Boer, ed. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007.

13. This division into two main areas of attack is necessarily schematic. Other aspects of form criticism, of course, have drawn attacks as well. Additionally, the concept of genre and the emphasis on literary history are themselves intertwined.

14. See Georg Fohrer, *Introduction to the Old Testament*. David E. Green, trans. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1968); Meir Weiss, *The Bible from Within: The Method of Total Interpretation* (Jerusalem: Magness Press, 1984); James Muilenburg, "Form Criticism and Beyond," *JBL* 88 (1969), 1-18; Rolf Knierim, "Old Testament Form Criticism Reconsidered," *Interpretation* 27 (1973): 435-468.

necessarily demand the division of the text. Whereas form critics have historically maintained that genre is a category useful only on the level of short (usually oral) forms unmarred by more complex literary structures or by other text-types, current scholarship both within biblical studies and without has strenuously and effectively argued that generic commonalities among texts are meaningful even with regard to larger, mixed literary forms. Genre, in this view, becomes de-essentialized, replaced by a flexibility and dynamism that affords critics a great deal of leeway for interpreting texts.

This theoretical redescription of genre in a way that does not demand strict categorization allows for a new look at the genres of NM. This necessitates a look into further issues within genre theory, because the admirable drive toward a more supple notion of genre described in §2.1.1 threatens, as the next section (§2.1.2) argues, to make genre an interesting but ultimately meaningless tool for the modern critic. Genre has a fundamentally diachronic aspect, insofar as changes and developments in genre cannot fully erase the earlier stages. Genre or, more properly, generic expectations, exert real power over writers and readers, even in the ancient world.

Consequently, this chapter will sketch out the two major generic strains present in NM: official memorials (§2.1.3) and foreign court narratives (§2.1.4). The former represents a return of sorts to Mowinckel and von Rad, and indeed a closer look at recent scholarship on Egyptian inscriptions reinforces the connections with NM, even if one cannot responsibly posit an Egyptian origin for NM. For this reason, the Egyptian texts, along with NM, must be viewed as a manifestation, or sub-genre, of the genre of royal

and official (auto)biographical inscriptions that appeared across the ANE. Because NM arises out of the context of the Persian court and because of evidence of the widespread dissemination of Persian texts throughout the empire, the Persian royal inscriptions must also be included in the discussion. Further, while §2.1.3 builds off of a well-trod avenue of investigation, §2.1.4 introduces a genre heretofore unexamined, beyond brief passing references, in studies of NM. The foreign court narrative, related to a text-type elsewhere named the "Diaspora Novella" or even "Wisdom Tale", exhibits striking and extensive parallels with NM. In particular, a sub-genre of court narratives, the court conflict tale matches many aspects of NM both in terms of setting and of syntactical ordering of specific plot motifs.

The notion that NM exhibits two major generic influences leads to the question of how the text weaves them together, and next in this chapter will come an investigation in how genre functions in NM (§2.2). There, I will offer a reading of NM that analyzes the manner in which the text brings these two major generic strains together. The story, as it progresses, reveals a slow transformation from court tale to memorial. Neh 1-2, in its depiction of the Persian court and the interactions between Nehemiah and courtiers and the king, present strong signals that the text is a court conflict story, clues that are reinforced by the accounts of Nehemiah's disputes with his enemies that read like disputes among courtiers. However, just as Nehemiah the courtier leaves the court to become Nehemiah the governor, beginning with Neh 5, the story begins to leave the court tale genre, subtly at first but ultimately decisively, the conclusion in Neh 13 revealing the

transformation to be complete. The juxtaposition, even blending, of these two genres raises the question of their overall effect on the text, and the final section of this chapter will investigate how biographical and court narratives are undergirded by ostensibly complementary, but in the final analysis contradictory, ideologies. The presence of this contradiction derives from the central problem of NM, the duality of Nehemiah's two roles: he is simultaneously the advocate for the people, their leader in their efforts to restore their former glory, and the representative of Persia's interests in Jerusalem.

2.1 The genres of NM

The study of literary, formal characteristics of texts in the field of biblical studies has long been the province of form criticism. Any attempt to talk about genre in biblical and cognate literature, accordingly, must contend with the methods and aims as outlined by form critics. Because one of the axiomatic principles of form criticism has been the demand to delineate discrete, generically unmixed units within a text, one could imagine a commentator like Williamson insisting that his subordination of genre in NM to redaction-critical analysis falls directly in line with traditional form-critical practice. The quest to find a fresh understanding of genre in NM therefore is obliged to engage with the legacy of form criticism. And indeed, my own critiques of the new consensus in NM scholarship, particularly those regarding genre — that it is not flexible enough to deal with generically complex texts, that it treats genre as useful primarily for classification —

dovetail with these recent critiques of form criticism. Several scholars have understood form criticism to be inadequate to the task of analyzing genre, or, more accurately, too limiting and inflexible to handle the wide variety of textual responses to genre. The following section will take on the most prominent and, to be forthright, the most easily dismissible, area of form criticism under attack, its inflexible understanding of genre and the corresponding tendency toward atomism. As we shall see, reconceptualizing genre in order to enable it to handle the diversity of textual formations opens up greater, more insightful possibilities for reading genre in NM.

2.1.1 Genre theory I: From form criticism to genre criticism

The first major critique of form critical approaches that I would like to address is the charge that it has been unable fully to account for complex texts. Klaus Koch, in his textbook on form criticism (*The Growth of the Biblical Tradition*) notes that for the father of the discipline, Hermann Gunkel, "the simple, original literary type is the basic unit, and in his opinion it is indivisible."[15] Several scholars assert that Gunkel's ideas were (mis)guided by a "essentialist" or "realist" (and, for the discussion at hand, I am treating these two terms as synonymous) understanding of genre.[16] "Generic realism", in the

15. Klaus Koch, *The Growth of the Biblical Tradition: The Form-Critical Method*. S.M. Cupitt, trans. (New York: Scribner, 1969), 25.

16. Longman, "Israelite Genres," 181; Martin Buss, "Dialogue in and among Genres," in Boer, ed., 9; Sparks, *Ancient Texts,* 6

words of Kenton Sparks,

> posits that texts are uniquely and intrinsically related to the generic categories in which we place them. For instance, when realists say that the book of Deuteronomy is a lawbook, they mean that there is an ontologically fixed category called 'lawbook' and that Deuteronomy fits into that genre and none else.[17]

According to these critics, two consequences follow from this understanding of genre. First, genres become unchanging categories, ill-equipped to handle both texts that diverge from a standard form and emerging genres that develop out of, or combine, earlier genres.[18] A good example of the problematic nature of genre essentialism can be seen in the difficulties form critics have had coming to grips with "mixed" Psalms. Accordingly, Marvin Sweeney and Ehud Ben Zvi, in their manifesto-like introduction to *Changing Face*, assert that future form-critical work "will no longer presume that genres are static or ideal entities that never change," and that form critics will "study the means by which genres are transformed to meet the needs of the particular situation of the text."[19] Second, when genres are essentialized, divergences from the pure genre in a text tend to become attributed to secondary additions, closing off possibilities for analysis of larger texts.[20]

---

17. Sparks, *Ancient Texts*, 6.

18. Carleen Mandolfo writes, "For Gunkel, genres, when altered, become impure." ("Dialogic Form Criticism: An Intertextual Reading of Lamentations and Psalms of Lament," in Boer, ed, 69).

19. Sweeney and Ben Zvi, "Introduction," in Sweeney and Ben Zvi, eds., 10.

20. Buss, *Biblical Form Criticism*, 359; Hyun Chul Paul Kim, "Form Criticism in Dialogue with Other Criticisms: Building the Multidimensional Structures of Texts and

We saw, in chapter 1 above, something approaching this drive toward atomization in the study of genre in NM going back at least to Kellermann. Carol Newsom notes a similar trend in studies on Job.[21] This notion that form criticism is (to its detriment) unable to handle larger units is not new: Eissfeldt remarked on it in his *Einleitung*.[22] For the current climate in (English-language) biblical studies, though, this critique increases in potency, particularly when framed as insufficiency not for reading *larger* texts per se, but for reading whole, or "final form" texts.[23] Sweeney and Ben Zvi voice this concern with their hope that a reformed form criticism "will no longer limit themselves to the presumed originally short, self-contained oral forms of expression that were presupposed

---

Concepts," in Sweeney and Ben Zvi, eds., 92-3. 96; Anthony F. Campbell, "Form Criticism's Future," in Sweeney and Ben Zvi, eds., 23.

21. Newsom, *The Book of Job*, 8.

22. Otto Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament; An Introduction, including the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, and the Works of Similar Type from Qumran: The History of the formation of the Old Testament*, Peter R. Ackroyd, trans. (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), 4. One might also see von Rad's attempt to construct a form-critical analysis of a larger text (the Hexateuch) as a recognition of the then-limited scope of form criticism. This project, however, still bases itself on originally small formula, "the short credo," areound which the entire work was built.

23. As this already suggests, the central crux of the contemporary critique of form criticism lies in the latter's emphasis on diachrony, its necessary interest in the history of literature, at the perceived expense of texts in their "received" form. Temporarily, however, I would like to hold this issue at arm's length in order to address it more fully in §2.1.2 below. For now, suffice it to say that internal development and growth of texts is an issue at least partly separate from the question of the origin and development of genres (a literary history proper).

throughout much of the twentieth century."[24] These demands for a more flexible method reveal a widespread perception that form criticism, originally designed to open up new avenues of research previously closed off by older *Literarkritik*, has itself limited its own scope to that of short, generically uniform texts, and further, that this limitation ultimately is due to an overly rigid view of genre.

Sweeney's and Ben Zvi's prescriptions for a 21st century form criticism come to us at a time when a burgeoning body of (non-biblical) literary scholarship on the theory of genre is making significant inroads into biblical studies. Additionally, recent advances in genre theory are moving the discussion of genre beyond the essentialist, inflexible concepts that have characterized earlier work. This convergence between form-critical research and genre theory, of course, is far from coincidental. Not all (neo-) form critics appeal to genre theory. Neither do all genre theorists in biblical studies operate in dialogue with form criticism (and outside of biblical studies form criticism and Gunkel seem to be footnotes at best). Nonetheless, out of the large mass of genre-theoretical work, only a small fraction of which can be covered here, we can trace the outlines of a general consensus: the creation of a genre theory that does not treat genres as immutable objects. This thesis entails two related but distinct ideas: that genre is not immutable and that it is not a self-contained object.

If traditional form criticism has become understood as ill-equipped to handle

---

24. Sweeney and Ben Zvi, 9.

mixed forms and the transformation of genre, contemporary genre theory has taken up development and change of genres as one of its central questions. David Duff, in his anthology of modern genre theory, writes, "the perception that literary genres are dynamic rather than static entities — that they change or 'evolve' over time — is the single most important factor separating modern from earlier genre theory."[25] Likewise, Michael Sinding notes that, "to uncover the nature and principles of genre combination and change is the central problem of genre theory today."[26] Important work in this right has been undertaken by Alastair Fowler, whose book *Kinds of Literature* outlines the various processes by which texts, rather than simply reflecting their generic influences, themselves transform the genres over time.[27] While much of this research has taken place in the larger field of modern literature, in the field of biblical and cognate literature, F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp's work on the development of the city lament genre offers a good example of the applicability of this kind of genre theory to ancient texts.[28]

---

25. David Duff, introduction to "Transformations of Genre," by Alastair Fowler in *Modern Genre Theory*, edited by David Duff (London: Longman, 2000), 232.

26. Michael Sinding, "*Genera Mixta*: Conceptual Blending and Mixed Genres in *Ulysses*." *New Literary History* 36 (2005): 589-619. Compare Christine Mitchell, "Power, *Eros*, and Biblical Genres," pages 31-42 in Boer, ed., 31.

27. Alastair Fowler, *Kinds of Literature: An Introduction to the Theory of Genres and Modes*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982), 170-183. See also John Frow, *Genre* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), especially chapter 2, where Frow discusses the generic complexity of so-called simple genres.

28. F.W. Dobbs-Allsopp, *"Weep, O Daughter of Zion": A Study of the City-Lament Genre in the Hebrew Bible*. (Biblica et Orientalia 44. Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1993). Dobbs-Allsopp also elaborates the theoretical underpinnings of his approach in "Darwinism, Genre Theory, and City Laments," *JAOS* 120 (2000): 625-630.

The openness to change and mixture among genres entails reconceiving genre such that one does not treat a genre as settled, defined thing that exists 'out there.' Because, in the words of critic Deborah Madsen, essentialist genre theory "simply does not entertain the possibility that there may exist such a thing as a multi-generic text,"[29] this view of genre, in the minds of several scholars, must be cast aside. The rejection of genre essentialism gives critics wider berth for drawing out creative connections among texts and for making fruitful comparisons. Martin Buss, critiquing Gunkel's idea that, in Buss's words, "there are right or wrong ways to categorize genres," envisions genres as "more or less useful ways of treating similar literary phenomena together."[30] In a similar vein, Van Leeuwen writes, "Generic knowledge is necessarily synchronic knowledge, for it puts comparable things side by side, whatever their historical origin."[31] Genre, from this perspective, is a tool for the literary scholar, and always has been, even when earlier generations of genre- or form critics misguidedly attributed to it some kind of abstract, inflexible existence. Newsom calls this newer strain of thought "neo-pragmatism," which

---

The word "Darwinism" in the title alludes to the evolution metaphor for genre transformation, which Dobbs-Allsopp draws from David Fishelov, *Metaphors of Genre: The Role of Analogies in Genre Theory* (University Park, Penn.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993).

29. Deborah Madsen, *Rereading Allegory: A Narrative Approach to Genre* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994) 8.

30. Buss, "Dialogue in and among Genres," 9.

31. Raymond C. Van Leeuwen, "Form Criticism, Wisdom, and Psalms 111-112," in Sweeney and Ben Zvi, eds., 75n42.

makes use of genres in order to read a text "as if" it is part of a group. This neo-pragmatism identifies genre as a function solely in the mind of the critic.[32] The theorist outside of biblical studies who has most fully worked out a neo-pragmatic position is Adena Rosmarin. Her conception of genre is encapsulated in her statement: "Once genre is defined as pragmatic rather than natural, as defined rather than found, and as used rather than described, then there are precisely as many genres as we need, genres whose conceptual shape is precisely determined by that need. They are designed to serve the explanatory purpose of critical thought, not the other way around."[33] This vision of genre underwrites a maximal flexibility for genre light years away from the perceived restrictiveness and rigidity of classical form criticism. In addition to these opportunities for the study of genre, however, neo-pragmatism presents significant limitations (and I will turn to those in §2.1.2 below). Nevertheless, the pragmatist position provides latitude for the literary critic to identify and isolate generic influences in a text.

---

32. Newsom finds a variant of this approach in the influential work of the SBL "Apocalypse Group" (see *Semeia* 14), insofar as it determined that "an 'apocalypse' is simply that which scholars can agree to call an 'apocalypse'" ("Spying out the Land," 440).

33. Adena Rosmarin, *The Power of Genre*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 25.

2.2.1 Genre theory II: Toward a dialectical genre theory

For the purposes of clarity, the previous section on genre theory zeroed in on the problem of inflexible and essentialized understandings of genre, as well as the theoretical resources for its remedy. We have already seen, however, strong hints of what is the bigger problem for many critics and reformers of form criticism. While its inflexibility contributed to form criticism's late 20th-century fall from favor, an even greater scandal has been the widespread characterization of form criticism as a method necessarily involved in the reconstruction of literary and social history. Even more than its essentialist understanding of genre and its atomism (which is itself intrinsically linked to textual diachrony), critics have lamented form criticism's drive toward historicism.

Form criticism's quest for historical precursors has been a source of vexation going back to the 1960s. Meir Weiss, for example, condemned form criticism, saying that, "Instead of concentrating on every element of the text, instead of listening attentively to every note of the song, [form critics] turn aside to look around and behind the poem, for what is not written."[34] Weiss' critique of overemphasis on diachrony and hypothesized earlier stages of the text, what Meir Sternberg names as source-oriented analysis,[35] was echoed many times over in the 70s and 80s by scholars who turned to the

---

34. Meir Weiss, *The Bible from Within*, 53.

35. Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1985).

New Literary Criticism. Proponents of this new approach, discourse-oriented analysis in Sternberg's terms (Alter, Trible, Crenshaw), found that form criticism (along with the old *Literarkritik*), in the name of literary analysis, ignored the actual extant literary text. In fact, this line of attack charges that form criticism is (or was) not a *literary* method at all. According to Erhard Blum, form criticism, in its canonical mid-20th century form, was, "a method for reconstructing the preliterary transmission of small units based on the observations of forms."[36] The fathers of form criticism, primarily Gunkel and Mowinckel, appear to have been more interested in the process of oral transmission itself than in its literary manifestations.[37]

Critics perceive this tendency toward textual precursors to be part of the legacy of form criticism even to this day, particularly in the essays in *The Changing Face of Form Criticism*. Antony Campbell, stresses that form criticism, in order to remain viable for contemporary scholarship, must clear away the "incrustation" of its earlier "passion for the preliterary past."[38] Campbell argues that the promise of an approach more holistic than *Literarkritik* is what originally drew scholars to form criticism, and that future work on form must take the final shape of the extant text as its guiding light. To Campbell,

---

36. Erhard Blum, "*Formgeschichte* — A Misleading Category? Some Critical Remarks," in Sweeney and Ben Zvi, eds., 38.

37. Sweeney, "Form Criticism," in *To Each Its Own Meaning: An Introduction to Biblical Criticisms and Their Applications*," Stephen R. Haynes and Steven L. McKenzie, eds. (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox, 1999), 61-62; see also Longman, "Israelite Genres," 182.

38. Campbell, "Form Criticism's Future," 16.

form criticism retains its value only if it jettisons or at least severely marginalizes its historical investigations. He writes, "Where is the diachronic dimension in [form criticism]? If, out of the shape and structure of the text, diachronic or growth issues force themselves on an interpreter, they need to be investigated with all the insights available to scholarship. Such investigation is part of the task of interpretation. I would be slow to see it as intrinsic to form criticism."[39] Likewise, Roy Melugin's essay in *Changing Face* stakes out a position that "place[s] more confidence in the literary (especially 'literary-artistic') side of form criticism and in a focus on the completed written text than in an ability on our part to reconstruct historical or conventional societal settings."[40] Sweeney and Ben Zvi predict, along these lines, that most future form critics, "will no longer restrict themselves to the presumed authors of text or the reconstructions of their presumed sociohistorical settings and intentions."[41] If some variety of form criticism is to thrive in the 21st century, it must be, it would seem, as a largely synchronic enterprise.

This vision of a modified form criticism makes the turn to genre theory, at least the aspects of genre theory discussed in §2.1.1 above, particularly attractive. When genre is conceived of in a highly flexible, mostly pragmatic matter, the question of literary history can much more easily be pushed to the side. And yet, I wish to argue that, in their

---

39. Campbell, "Form Criticism's Future," 31n40.

40. Roy Melugin, "Recent Form Criticism Revisited in an Age of Reader Response," in Sweeney and Ben Zvi, 58.

41. Sweeney and Ben Zvi, "Introduction," 10.

haste to distance themselves from Gunkel, the critics of form criticism overlook genre's essentially historical orientation. While some strains of genre theory underwrite a concept of genre criticism that could be construed as a primarily ahistorical enterprise, other areas within genre theory show how purely synchronic inquiry obscures the full power of genre. Genre analysis, yes, is synchronic analysis. Nonetheless, one must not lose sight of the ways in which genre analysis is also necessarily historicist. Every use of a genre, even – or especially – in derived and modified forms, carries traces of that genre's original function.

My defense of historicism should not be understood as a full-throated defense of the search for pre-literary or pre-"final form" stages of texts — my critique of what I term the "ME thesis" in chapter one shows that I believe that genre analysis can and should be done on complex, even composite texts. To that end, a crucial distinction must be made. It is one thing to argue that complex literary activity itself can be governed by generic conventions;[42] it is another thing entirely to say that genre critics can somehow ignore the historical development — the birth, life, death, and posthumous lingering — of genres. Diachronic textual development (on the level of individual texts) is a matter quite different from literary history. Many of the objections against form criticism are ostensibly directed against historicism per se, but in reality are critiques of a

---

42. I think this is indisputable and a powerful argument against the necessity of reducing individual texts into constituent parts in order to analyze them from the perspective of *Gattungen*.

overemphasis on textual growth.

The distinction between literary history and textual growth needs stressing because the recent scholarship involved in reconstituting form criticism, via genre theory, seems more driven by practical concerns than by the enterprise of creating a theoretically robust concept of genre. That is, some elements of genre theory have become useful for biblical studies simply because they crack open the received (prescriptive and restrictive) concept of genre. Yet the pragmatist approach to genre favored by some recent scholars hides a significant weakness, a blind spot best exposed by attention to the important distinction between critic and reader. I designate "critic" to mean one who is self-consciously involved in evaluating a text's genre qua "genre." In contrast, "reader" (or, in the context of biblical literature, "ancient reader") refers to one who approaches a text without particular, intentional attention to genre. The pragmatist version of genre criticism, despite (or perhaps on account of) an explicit emphasis on genre's flexibility, views genre as primarily a matter of categorization. It is a critic-centered approach.

Genre can be a useful categorization tool for the literary critic. However, genre simultaneously is, in a way, quite real insofar as it shapes the interaction between writers and (ancient) readers, even if they do not name it genre as such. The possibilities of genre analysis expand significantly when one conceives genre in terms of 'horizons of expectation', to borrow a phrase from the pioneer of reception theory, Hans Robert Jauss.[43] Both writers and readers arrive before a text informed by previous encounters

---

43. See Jauss, "Theory of Genres and Medieval Literature," in Duff, ed., pages 127-147.

with other texts like it and, accordingly, informed by the patterns, conventions, and ideologies shared by them.[44] In other words, the act of locating genre in expectation reframes it as an operation concerning the creation and reading of texts rather than one concerning a critic's second-order decisions about them. Moving the conceptual center of genre from critic to writer-reader is potentially quite fruitful for biblical studies, where the modern critic is far removed from the world of the ancient text. To this end, Thomas Beebee argues that genre "is only secondarily an academic enterprise and a matter for literary scholarship. Primarily, genre is the precondition for the creation and the reading of texts."[45] Genres, in this view, are guides for readers and writers and exert their force long before critics get their hands on the texts.

Thus we can make sense of Newsom's comment that, "classificatory schemes are by their very nature static."[46] Even if one broadens the scope of genre and blurs the boundaries between genres, the decision to categorize text X as part of genre Y is still a binary operation: either the text fits in the category or it does not, even if that decision depends greatly upon the creativity and intuition of the critic. The important distinction between a concept of genre flexibility per se and a concept of genre as an implicit

---

See also Madsen, *Rereading Allegory,* 15.

44. See Burridge, 33-34.

45. Thomas O. Beebee, *The Ideology of Genre: A Comparative Study of Generic Instability* (University Park, Penn.: Pennsylvania State University, 1994), 250, cf. 2-3; see also Frow, 101-102.

46. Newsom, "Spying out the Land," 439.

contract between writers and readers can be illustrated in E.D. Hirsch's pioneering but flawed work, *Validity in Interpretation*.[47] Hirsch maintains that the generic clues in a text are keys to understanding the text's meaning (tied, in Hirsch's view, to the author's intention). Prefiguring some of the recent critiques of form criticism, he faults traditional, essentialist understandings of genre for their tendency to force texts into categories in which they ill fit. Hirsch distinguishes "extrinsic genre," or the clumsy imposition of a clearly-defined generic label on a text, from "intrinsic genre," the precise evaluation of its generic influences based on close attention to the contours of the text. Proper interpretation, in other words, can only occur when the reader has in mind the very same system of generic expectations as the author.[48] The process of arriving at the "intrinsic genre" can lead one to an extremely specific understanding of a text's genres: in his reading of *Paradise Lost*, for example, he determines that its genre is best described heuristically as "Christian-humanist Epic."[49] Labels like this, however, are not as important for Hirsch as is the process of discerning a text's meaning by attending to both its typical and its unique aspects. Hirsch nonetheless gets bogged down in prescriptive notions of "correct" readings and the "proprieties" of a genre (note also the very title of his book, *Validity in Interpretation*). If readers, rather than critics, are the focus,

---

47. E. D. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967).

48. Hirsch, 80-81.

49. Hirsch, 84-89; cf. Beebee, 256.

"incorrect" readings become themselves interesting and worthy of investigation.[50] The question of whether a given text 'belongs' to a genre becomes far less important than how a reader would expect a text to behave. Hirsch reads prescriptively, solely *qua* critic, and, as a result, his approach closes off possibilities for inquiring after actual readers' creative readings, even misreadings.

Orienting genre toward readers also relieves pressure on the necessity of genre being a deliberate or conscious matter. Though it is the job of the critic to create and name genre categories, a reader, practically speaking, need not know how properly to label a text in order to have a basic (or even fairly precise) idea of what will happen in it.[51] Here, again, Hirsch has laid some of the groundwork with his concept of "heuristic genre," or the provisional guesses that readers make about texts as they read.[52] A more productive way of thinking about these guesses, what Newsom calls "the tacit and unselfconscious way in which people acquire a sense of genre by reading many texts,"[53] is in terms of "schemas" or "scripts." The script is a central concept for what could be termed the "cognitive" approach to genre, a prominent proponent of which is Michael

---

50. Newsom drives this point home: “the reading contract … should not be too rigidly understood. Authors often invoke generic models in order to deviate from them, and readers may resist the invitation to read in accord with generic conventions” (*The Book of Job*, 12).

51. See Longman, "Israelite Genres," 178.

52. Hirsch, 93; see also Sparks, 9.

53. Newsom, "Spying out the Land," 441.

Sinding.[54] Sinding describes scripts as mental frames for situations and for chains of actions or events in plots.[55] They are patterns, based on exposure to previous texts, that guide the reader, "skeletal frameworks of relations with 'slots' for various 'elements.'"[56] In a given text, particular kinds of characters, settings, or plot events will activate scripts, providing a set of concepts and expectations which guides a reader's journey through the rest of the text. Newsom puts this concept to work in her study on Job, where she writes, "[b]y means of generic markers the reader is invited initially to form one set of expectations, to respond according to those conventions, and to see the world from a particular nexus of values and perspectives."[57] As Newsom's words suggest, the clues to genre in the beginning of the text play a key role in reader expectation, an idea also supported by Fowler: "generic markers that cluster at the beginning of a work have a strategic role in guiding the reader. They help to establish, as soon as possible, an appropriate mental 'set' that allows the work's generic codes to be read."[58] Generic clues

---

54. See Sinding, "*Genera Mixta*"; see also ibid., "After Definitions: Genre, Categories, and Cognitive Science," *Genre* 35 (2002).

55. The schema, in my opinion, complements quite nicely the Bakhtinian concept of the "chronotope," which has grown in prominence in biblical studies. In fact, because the schema can include plot and setting elements, while the chronotope is frame particularly encompassing space and time, the latter would seem to be a subset of the former.

56. Sinding, "*Genera Mixta*," 590. For a more comprehensive view of the role of scripts in narrative, see David Herman, *Story Logic: Problems and Possibilities of Narrative*. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002).

57. Newsom, *The Book of Job*, 13.

58. Fowler, 88.

that occur later in the text can modify and even subvert these early clues[59] (and below I will argue that this is indeed the case with NM), but signals at the beginning maintain a formative role in establishing generic scripts.

A concept of genre rooted in a reader-writer contract indeed helps to counter the more excessive ahistoricism of neo-pragmatism insofar as it locates the reception of generic clues in a particular historical situation. It does not, however, make genre itself any more of a historicist phenomenon. The fact that some group of readers read a text sometime in the past does not *by itself* necessarily mean that genres have a history and that that history somehow affects those readers. The historical embeddedness of readers and writers, and thus of scripts, does raise the question of how such scripts come to be. Here, we can find assistance in one of the lynchpins of the anti-essentialist theory of genre, namely the concept that instantiations of a genre over time themselves effect a change of that genre. If we no longer think of texts as reflections of real genres existing "out there" but rather as forces that themselves alter genres, the inescapable conclusion is that genres contain literary history.[60] To say that genres change, that individual innovations modify the category is to imply that genres necessarily have histories. This "sedimentation"[61] apparent in genres carries with it an important implication, one that

---

59. See Newsom, *The Book of Job*, 13.

60. John Snyder, *Prospects of Power: Tragedy, Satire, the Essay, and the Theory of Genre* (Lexington, Kent.: University Press of Kentucky, 1990), 205.

61. From Steven Helmlin, *The Success and Failure of Fredric Jameson: Writing, the Sublime, and the Dialectic of Critique*. (Albany: State University of New York Press,

renders literary history more than an academic question. Genres, in a metaphorical sense, are memories. As Bakhtin writes, "a genre lives in the present, but always *remembers* its past, its beginning."[62] This point is echoed by Van Leeuwen: "the power of genres is that even when modified and adapted, their original, primal force is evoked."[63] Further, Odil Hannes Steck observes that, "[g]enres can still continue to exist in a kind of inactive state long after the disappearance of their life setting."[64] The idea that genres hold within them their own history is in one sense a rephrasing of a commonplace, that a text's generic characteristics are shared characteristics; one does not invent a new language whenever one speaks. However, it also communicates something more meaningful, suggesting that *some part* of any literary transaction cannot be controlled by its author.

A purely pragmatist position (that is, an extreme synchronic anti-essentialism that insists that genre flexibility is practically limitless) therefore ignores an important aspect of genre, namely the embedded traces of its own history. Neo-pragmatism's eternal present, or, its demand for literary ahistoricism, deprives us of seeing that effect.[65] The

---

2001), 86

62. M.M. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (ed. and trans. Caryl Emerson with an introduction by Wayne Booth; Theory and History of Literature 8; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 106, cited in Newsom, "Spying out the Land," 447.

63. Van Leeuwen, 81.

64. Odil Hannes Steck, *Old Testament Exegesis: A Guide to the Methodology*. James D. Nogalski, trans. (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998), 116.

65. Snyder writes, "Pragmatism … fabricates an everlasting present from the fumes of a fully consumable past" (Prospects of Power, 203-204).

problem, this blindness to the unspoken power of genre, is not restricted to pragmatism alone, but more broadly speaking is an effect of the critic-centered (as opposed to reader-centered) approach. That this is the case can be illustrated by a return to Hirsch, whose positions are reflected, though perhaps dimly, in form- and genre-critical studies as well. Hirsch is by no means a pragmatist. His work is intimately, even exclusively, concerned with authorial intention and views generic clues as the most accurate means by which to arrive at it. Nevertheless, his method, as sensitive to the contours of the text as it is, still assumes an attenuated concept of genre. It does so, further, in two ways: by (in diametric opposition to essentialism) trivializing, or "incidentalizing," genre and, more problematically, by reducing the function of genre to a vehicle of textual meaning (whether authorial or otherwise).

My first claim, that Hirsch incidentalizes genre, simply means that the process of working toward an ultra-precise definition of a given text's genre (Hirsch's "intrinsic genre") renders that genre for all intents and purposes identical to the text itself. While the flexibility of the intrinsic genre is highly useful and a salutary correction to genre essentialism, genre then becomes, as Beebee notes, merely "the unique place of the text within literary history."[66] Or, this intrinsic method "allow[s] texts to assign themselves unique genres."[67] Accordingly, I am in agreement with Fowler, who argues that the task of painstakingly reconstructing the unique "intrinsic genre" of a text "merely duplicate[s]

---

66. Beebee, 252.

67. Beebee, 251.

the work of criticism, more cumbrously."[68] Thus, "intrinsic genre" becomes a way to talk about genre without having to attend to its primary distinguishing characteristic, shared literary characteristics (or, as the error manifests itself in biblical scholarship, a way to make use of an ambiguity in the German term "*Form*" in order to avoid having to contend with the very essence of form criticism).[69]

The incidentalization of genre, while troubling, does not necessarily present an obstacle for the analysis of a text. Some texts certainly have multiple generic influences, and the identification of each is an important undertaking. More serious is the notion that the understanding of the precise configuration of genres is the path to an author's intention, or to a text's meaning. For Hirsch, the critic's task is to enter into the same generic assumptions as the author; when he or she has done so, the intention of the author will become clearer. Such a stark insistence of authorial intention may cause uneasiness in the current climate in biblical studies, but this kind of process of interpretation has a

---

68. Fowler, 113.

69. See the comments of Blum in "*Formgeschichte*." This sentence may already lead me too far astray from the questions at hand, yet I should not fail to acknowledge that a major, and perhaps *the* major, stated objection to form criticism throughout its existence is its overemphasis on the "typical" as opposed to the unique artistry of texts. This objection is formidable, not the least because of its frequency, though I do not find it a particularly robust one, not in a theoretical sense. To critique form criticism (that is, *Gattungsgeschichte*) for its attention to shared, transindividual literary patterns would seem to be a category mistake, akin to rejecting reader-response criticism for its failure to interrogate redactional layers. Surely, poorly executed instantiations of form-critically informed interpretation may indeed pay insufficient attention to a text's unique voice, but that should not be construed as evidence for a theoretical failing. I therefore would not consider Campbell's vision of a 21st century form criticism ("Form Criticism's Future") properly to be form criticism at all.

strong pedigree in form-critical methodology. The four-step method of 1) form/structure, 2) genre, 3) setting, and 4) intention (or meaning),[70] commonly described in form-critical handbooks, and still a centerpiece in the *Forms of the Old Testament* commentary series, is the most prominent manifestation of this.[71] The sequencing of these four steps, while most certainly not rigidly restrictive insofar as decisions about each step are informed by decisions about others, crucially concludes with the goal of "meaning." So, where Hirsch writes, "the genre purpose must be in some sense an idea, a notion of the type of meaning to be communicated,"[72] we can also see Richard Burridge state that genre "is a system of communication of *meaning*,"[73] or Mitchell point out that "[b]iblical form criticism supposes that genres … are forms that give the key to content."[74] That attention to genre points a critic in the direction of a text's meaning has become a cornerstone of form criticism (and biblical genre criticism), particularly where it is used as a tool of exegesis.

At this juncture, one might be excused for wondering exactly why the notion that genre is a path to meaning is a problem. After all, it makes genre criticism into something

---

70. See Knierim and Sweeney, "Editors' Introduction," in Campbell, *1 Samuel* (FOTL. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), in which the editors note a change from "intention", used in other volumes, to "meaning"

71. See Sweeney, "Form Criticism," 68.

72. Hirsch, 101. So also Fowler, 22: genre "is an instrument not of classification or prescription, but of meaning."

73. Burridge, 51, emphasis in original.

74. Mitchell, 31.

more than a classificatory enterprise and allows us to take into account complex, mixed-genre texts. The source of my hesitancy, however, lies in the fundamentally critic-centered approach and its attendant neglect of (real and/or original) readers. If, as I have argued above, locating genre in readers, writers, and their scripts means that generic expectations are the aspects of literary communication that are, at least in part, out of writers' control, then the "meaning" of a text is not the final word. That is, neither the content of the author's intention nor the (semantic) content of a text's meaning exhausts the information provided by genres. A text, via its genre, carries with it information that may or may not be intended by the author, but that is no less present in a text.

What, then, might be that information passed on by the genre? Newsom, I think, makes strides in answering that question in her book on Job. Regarding the power of genres, she writes, “By means of generic markers the reader is invited initially to form one set of expecations, to respond according to those conventions, and to see the world from a particular nexus of values and perspectives.”[75] While we should not pass over her mention of the centrality of generic expectations for reading genre, this quote also introduces the idea that genres carry with them worldviews. That is, genres do not simply regularize ways of saying things (i.e. they are not just formal, stylistic patterns), they also encode ways of thinking about things. Frow, in his somewhat more opaque terminology, develops this idea. In his introductory chapter, he states that the central thesis of his book

75. Newsom, *The Book of Job*, 13.

is that,

> genres, far from being merely 'stylistic' devices, genres create effects of reality and truth which are central to the different ways the world is understood … The semiotic frames within which genres are embedded implicate and specify layered **ontological domains** - implicit realities which genres form as a pre-given reference, together with the effects of authority and plausibility which are specific to the genre. Genre, like formal structures generally, works at a level of **semiosis** - that is, of meaning-making - which is deeper and more forceful than that of the explicit 'content' of a text.[76]

While I am hesitant to endorse the terms "semiosis" or "meaning-making" because I would like to emphasize pragmatics over against semantics, or what texts do over against what they say, Frow's idea here dovetails with Newsom's. Whether one speaks of a "nexus of values and perspectives" (Newsom) or "effects of reality or truth" (Frow) (though to my mind the preferable descriptor would be "ideology"),[77] the commonality lies in the notion that genres arise out of, and perpetuate, a system of unspoken relationships between humans and the world around them. The word "unspoken" is critical in this case, because we must guard against the idea that genre's ideology is something that authors can choose with complete freedom. Doubtless, this is most

---

76. Frow, 19. Bold text in original.

77. I find that the most compelling account of ideology remains Louis Althusser's. See "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Towards an Investigation)" in *Lenin and Philosophy* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001). Famously, Althusser defines ideology as the "representation of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence" (109). The most relevant aspect of this definition for the purposes of this study is the notion that ideology "interpellates," or hails, individuals, drawing them in and placing them into a representation of a relationship with their fellow humans (whether that relationship be imperial, religious/ethnic, or familial) whose power is tied to its obviousness.

certainly not to say that authors are automatons, forced by convention or by their *Sitz im Leben* to use one genre over another. I would not deny that writers exercise a great degree of creativity and flexibility when composing texts, only that that creativity is absolute and exhaustive.[78]

The innate historicism of genre analysis, the recognition that genres carry within them traces of their past formations, is precisely what creates the possibility that the ideology of a particular genre would communicate a message that *differs* from the semantic meaning or intention of a text. Recall Van Leeuwen's claim that "the power of genres is that even when modified and adapted, their original, primal force is evoked." When an innovative text contributes to the modification of a genre it does not enact a wholesale reinvention of that genre, and to this effect Fredric Jameson writes, "[w]hen such forms [i.e. genres] are reappropriated and refashioned in quite different social and cultural contexts, this message persists and must be functionally reckoned into the new form."[79] Jameson's argument is that generic elements of a text present the text's unconscious memories of the situation in which they were created. He further illustrates this idea, writing that genre is "a narrative ideologeme whose outer form, secreted like a shell or exoskeleton, continues to emit its ideological message long after the extinction of

---

78. I would argue that the further a writer or reader is distanced from the genre's *Sitz im Leben*, the less likely he or she would be fully to grasp the ideology of the genre.

79. Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), 141.

its host."[80] To offer an example, and to foreshadow part of the argument regarding NM, one primary generic influence in NM is what I will term the "official memorial" (based on Egyptian biographies and Akkadian royal inscription). NM makes use of this genre, portraying Nehemiah as an achiever of great deeds and also as a leader of the people. While NM is in no sense the first to employ this genre on behalf of a non-royal figure, the origins of this genre in royal propaganda mean that this genre undermines the portrait of Nehemiah the advocate for Jerusalem by emitting an ideology of imperial power. The genre makes Nehemiah into a "king" who rules over his people rather than a reformer of and among the people.

Finally, the notion that genres carry ideologies, when coupled with genre's essential historicism brings us at last to the concept that can unify the various threads of the discussion: a "dialectical" theory of genre. Briefly to recapitulate the argument thus far, going back to §2.1.1, the flexibility and pragmatism of some major strains of genre theory have provided resources for correcting the rigid, essentialist assumptions about genre that have troubled many critics of form criticism (and which, to a lesser degree, have negatively affected studies of NM in recent years). However, this pragmatic approach, in its emphasis on the freedom of the critic and its celebration of synchronic analysis, neglects the necessary historicism of genre.

To argue that genre is inescapably historical, however, is not to reject the gains of

---

80. Jameson, *Political Unconscious*, 151.

the pragmatist position. A dialectical genre theory allows us to talk about how the anti-essentialist (pragmatist) and the historicist (realist) are both correct. The primary theorist of this concept of genre is Fredric Jameson, so the bent of the theory is naturally historicist. Accordingly, the starting point is the historical situation, the perhaps not-fully-articulated expectations of reader and writer that set up parameters whereby the text is understood. A dialectical theory nonetheless retains much of the critic-centered position. Genre still is a concept that has to be named and built by the critic. The balance is delicate but, I think, necessary: genres exert real power over their readers, even if those readers are uninterested in resolving the textual patterns into "genres", which of course do not exist *as such* outside of the work of the critic. In the somewhat dismissive words of Michael Sinding, Jameson, as a genre critic, "assumes the structure that he describes is really in the text, but wants also to see it as in the reader's mind, revealed by the critic, to be dialectically transcended."[81] Sinding provides a useful and concise summary, but where he missteps is in his assertion that genre is "revealed." If genre is understood as merely dug up out of the ground by the critic, we lose what is truly dialectical about this theory of genre. We lose, in other words, what is correct about the pragmatist insight. The historical situation of the reader does not simply appear unmediated to the historian. Rather, it must be creatively reconstructed, though in a manner responsible to the data.

---

81. Sinding, "Beyond Essence (or, Getting over 'There'): Cognitive and Dialectical Theories of Genre," *Semiotica* 149 (2004):377-395, 380.

Crucially, even the ancient reader him or herself must be reconstructed.[82]

Thus, dialectical genre analysis also helps to build bridges across the wide theoretical gaps we have encountered thus far. It reconciles the extremes of incidentalism and essentialism, as well as of synchronic and diachronic. First, it allows us to recognize that genre is, in a way, *real*, that it has an impact on readers, without requiring us to assert that genres exist "out there" as essential types that cannot be mixed. In this right, Jameson's work on genre is particularly relevant to the development of a biblical-studies genre criticism out of form criticism, insofar as it also has "focused on the bugbear of traditional genre criticism [and also of form criticism]: the multigeneric text."[83] Second, a dialectical genre theory helps us to recover the central, and still powerful, insight of form criticism that *Gattungen* are the best means by which one can link a text and its historical contexts.[84]

The foregoing review of some trends in recent genre theory allows for a fresh reading of NM in context of genre. My proposal in the remainder of this chapter will attempt to incorporate each of these major theoretical concepts — mixed genre (§2.1.1),

---

82. My process of reconstructing of ancient readers finds common ground in Ehud Ben Zvi's research on the ancient reception of prophetic texts. See, for example, *Signs of Jonah: Reading and Rereading in Ancient Yehud* (JSOT Supplement 367. London; New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003).

83. Madsen, 24.

84. Snyder writes, "intrinsic historicity of genre makes it a stronger bridge between the historical and the aesthetic than any other theoretical construct" (*Prospects of Power*, 203-204)

reader expectation and scripts, and genre's ideology (both in this section) — and, with some overlap, will address them in that same order. First, starting from the presuppositions that mixed-genre texts are worthy objects of study and that a text need not perfectly match a genre category in order to draw influence from it, I will readdress the question of literary (both biblical and extrabiblical) parallels to NM (§2.1.3 and §2.1.4). After discussing the connections between NM and its two primary generic influences from a 'synchronic' point of view (i.e. viewing NM as a grouping of literary characteristics laid out and viewable all at once), I then will (in §2.2.1) examine how the story unfolds, in 'real time', so to speak, in order to see how it both fulfills and subverts the expected pattern established in the beginning of the text. Finally, I will turn to ideology, specifically the matter of how NM attempts to integrate the similar but ultimately divergent ideologies of its two genres.

2.1.3 Official memorials: a return of sorts to the older consensus

How, then, might NM look different when we then return to it with an expanded and more flexible theory of genre? When we approach the text without expecting it to have an exact correspondence with one category or another? The first issue that must be addressed, or readdressed, as it were, is the relevance of the older Mowinckel-von Rad consensus that NM is a variant on the widespread ancient genre of royal and/or official biographical inscriptions. The criticisms of the Mowinckel-von Rad consensus hinge on the argument that it does not describe the entirety of NM; only small parts of NM, name-

ly chapters 5 and 13, resemble Mesopotamian or Egyptian texts. However, even setting aside momentarily the genre-theoretical problems, this critique is not entirely accurate on the merits. This section sets out to readdress the question, and in it, I will argue that Egyptian biographies are still the text type most similar to NM. Further, recent work on Egyptian biographies reveals aspects of these texts that reinforce the parallels between them and NM. Notwithstanding these parallels, however, von Rad and Blenkinsopp are still correct to caution that one cannot assert a reasonable historical or sociological link that would establish that the authors of NM had an awareness of Egyptian biographies. For this reason, and because Mowinckel's arguments about Mesopotamian inscriptions have not been directly refuted (but rather only dismissed as not probative), a fresh look at the potential relationship between NM and this text type is warranted. Because several of the characteristic aspects of the genre, both stylistic and ideological, are very similar across Egyptian and Mesopotamian texts, the best solution to the problem of NM's generic influences is to consider Egyptian and Mesopotamian, along with other West Asian (if we include Mesha and Idrimi), texts as differing manifestations of a larger, more encompassing genre. Finally, this section will bring into view a group of texts in this genre that heretofore have been absent from the discussion, the Achaemenid Persian inscriptions, particularly the Bisitun inscription of Darius I. These texts enrich the investigation into NM's generic influences because of Nehemiah's origins in the court of the Persian King, and because Bisitun is one of the few, if not the only, Mesopotamian royal texts that one can credibly suggest was read throughout the empire.

I begin my reconsideration of Egyptian texts, despite the difficulties with positing mechanisms of literary influence, by noting Margaret Odell's advice to "seek [generic] resemblances beyond the text's nuclear family, so to speak, and pay attention to the entire network of clustering traits and contexts."[85] Of course, this path is not new, having been trodden by von Rad and Blenkinsopp. Despite the criticism their work has come under,[86] recent scholarship on Egyptian biographies, in particular a new reappraisal of Late Period (25th and 26th Dynasty) texts by Jens Heise,[87] strongly suggests that these texts have much more in common with NM than previous studies of NM have allowed. Heise builds off of the observation, going back to Eckhart Otto,[88] that biographies appear in two different main subgenres, ideal biographies and career (*Laufbahn*), or narrative, biographies.[89]

---

85. Margaret Odell, "Ezekiel Saw What He Said He Saw: Genres, Forms, and the Vision of Ezekiel 1," in Sweeney and Ben Zvi, 168n19. Odell cites Fowler, *Kinds of Literature*, 41.

86. The rejection of von Rad's position has not been unanimous, though. Christiane Karrer, for one, finds the thesis still compelling and protests Williamson's assertion that it is only the addition of Neh 5 and 13 that made a "building inscription" into a biographical inscription (*Ringen um die Verfassung Judas: Eine Studie zu den theologisch-politischen Verstellungen im Esra-Nehemia-Buch* BZAW 308 [Berlin; New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2000], 144-146)

87. Jens Heise, *Erinnern und Gedenken: Aspekte der biographischen Inschriften der ägyptischen Spätzeit*. (OBO 226; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007).

88. Eberhard Otto, *Die biographischen Inschriften der âgyptischen Spätzeit: ihre geistesgeschichtliche und literarische Bedeutung*. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1954).

89. Heise, 286. This schematic division obtains in earlier periods as well; See also Elizabeth Frood, *Biographical Texts from Ramessid Egypt* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), 2. Andrea Gnirs, mostly describing pre-Late Period texts, expands the number of categories to five. Nonetheless, she argues that one can discern two broad "discourse forms," expository and narrative modes of expression, which would map on to

According to Heise, these texts exhibit a high degree of flexibility with the generic patterns (see more below),[90] but this broad, two part division remains the most important and clearest indicator of text type (*Textart* – perhaps "subgenre" would be an appropriate translation here).[91]

Both ideal and career biographies display the characteristic Egyptian concern for ensuring eternal memory of the protagonist.[92] Each, however, expresses that central idea quite differently. Ideal biographies tend to eschew narrative in favor of a focus on the protagonist's moral character, often expressed with nominal sentences, and his (and, less often, her) close adherence to ethical and social norms.[93] Career biographies, as the name would suggest, offer more narrativized descriptions of the protagonist's life, and often express his or her virtue as a function of the proximity to, and favor of, the king.[94] In the Late Period, most subjects of the biographies were high ranking officials (*Beamten*),

---

ideal- and career-biographies, respectively (Andrea Gnirs, "Biographies", in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, Donald B. Redford ed. (New York: Oxford University Press 2001), 1.184-189).

90. Heise, 366 observes that enough flexibility exists in the biographical texts that the two types cannot be rigidly defined.

91. Heise, 287.

92. Heise, 283.

93. Heise, 286.

94. Heise, 286. Heise 290, 311 notes that the emphasis shifted away from the king, while Gnirs finds that the proximity to the king is an element that varied depending upon the power of the non-royal class.

functionaries of temples, civil administration, or the military;[95] religious professionals tended to be more well-represented in ideal biographies, while military and civil officials were more likely to appear in career biographies.[96]

Viewing Egyptian texts, and most importantly Egyptian texts chronologically proximate to the Persian Period, fixes the comparison with NM in a clearer focus. The division of the biographies into two broad categories allows us to perceive that the point of connection between NM and biographical inscriptions need not be the genre in its entirety, but specifically career biographies. Accordingly, the lack of "wisdom" elements in NM observed by von Rad[97] does not count as a strike against the comparison, especially insofar as the tendency to emphasize ethical standards belongs to ideal biographies. Zeroing in on the career biographies allows several aspects of the biographical genre that show striking similarities to NM to emerge. Heise's work highlights many recurring themes and phrases,[98] several of which have already been remarked upon by Otto, von Rad, and others. These would include the goals common to both types of biographies of

95. Heise, 283. Heise also notes (287) that military officials began to appear during the 26th Dynasty.

96. Heise, 287.

97. von Rad, "Die Nehemia Denkschrift," 185.

98. Heise, 291ff.

attaining permanence[99] and a good reputation[100] for the protagonist. A number of other aspects of the career biographies, though, especially those that draw attention to the central theme of proximity to the king, open up the case for an even stronger connection with NM. In the career biographies, one can find repeated emphasis on service to one's kin or homeland,[101] loyalty to,[102] access to,[103] and favor of the king,[104] election by the king,[105] felicitous speaking abilities,[106] and ethical action toward fellow humans.[107] Of these characteristics, only the last one can be considered a parallel to Neh 5 and 13 alone. The remainder of them deal with the protagonists' relationship to the king and, as such, suggest a comparison with Nehemiah's proximity to the king in Neh 1-2.

Even more, Heise notes that it is not uncommon to find career biographies that discuss construction and renovation projects as important events in the protagonists'

---

99. Heise, 291.

100. Heise, 297.

101. Heise, 292

102. Heise, 334.

103. Heise, 332-333.

104. Heise, 339.

105. Heise, 337.

106. Heise, 302.

107. Heise, 309-314.

lives.[108] Late Period biographies represent a generic development in this right: the privilege of presenting oneself as a builder was reserved strictly for kings in earlier periods. The Late Period texts extend this privilege to religious and civil officials who were tied to the court, but not themselves monarchs.[109]

In sum, a survey of Egyptian career biographies offer extensive parallels to NM. They are narrativized (often, but not always, first-person) texts that operate under an overarching concern for the reputation of the protagonist for posterity, which at times highlight the closeness to and approval of the king, and which can depict or refer to building projects. Many individual elements of the career biographies are not present in every single text. A consistently noted aspect of the biographical genre is its flexibility. As the most continuously used genre in ancient Egyptian literature,[110] it was a site of innovation. Frood states that the generic conventions were often "reinterpreted" and "reanimated".[111] This flexible and mixed character of biographies, in fact, hints at yet another suggestive link with NM. Heise observes that the texts combine biographical statements or expressions (*Äußerung*) with requests for offerings and offering-prayers (*Opfergebet*).[112] Frood even identifies one text, the Inscription of Samut (Frood #11a), in which

---

108. Heise, 343 lists a series of terms employed for building projects.

109. Heise, 344.

110. Gnirs, "Biographies," 184.

111. Frood, 1.

112. Heise, 284.

different sections are composed in different linguistic registers — it begins with a more literary narrative but transforms into a hymnic text at the end.[113] Such mixed texts indicate that the presence of differing styles or registers in NM need not disqualify certain parts of NM from a genre analysis making use of the generic expectations of biographical texts.

To be clear, none of the foregoing is meant to indicate that NM somehow *is* an Egyptian, or Egyptian-style, biography. The recent work by Heise, Frood, and others, however, reinforces and amplifies the claims of von Rad and Blenkinsopp, echoed by Karrer,[114] that NM, in its aims and content, is more like an Egyptian biography than it is like anything else. Notable differences between NM and biographies remain, such as NM's lack of explicit direct discourse to the reader, its lengthier narrative section, lack of any indication that it is intended as a votive text, etc. Even more puzzling, considering the extensive similarities, is the extreme difficulties involved in establishing explicit awareness of this type of text on the part of the author(s) of NM. Both von Rad and Blenkinsopp correctly note that one can hardly posit a social mechanism for the practice of reading Egyptian biographical texts in Yehud. Even if the author(s) of NM composed their text with Egyptian models directly in mind (a possibility for which there is no reasonable

---

113. Frood, 24. Frood cites the study by Pascal Vernus, "Littérature et autobiographie: Les inscriptions de *S3-Mwt* surnommé *Kyky*." *Revue d'egyptologie* 30 (1978):115-146, especially 137-141.

114. Karrer, 144.

evidence), the likelihood that Yehudite readers would recognize the text as such is even slimmer.

How might we then make sense of NM's unmistakable resemblances to the biographical texts? An intriguing solution is hinted at in Kellermann's opinion that the likenesses between NM and Egyptian texts, particularly the Udjahorresnet inscription, are due to a standard official style in the Persian court.[115] The notion that one could adduce an official style from only two examples seems overly confident (and in the context of Kellermann's work most likely serves to provide a plausible means to explain away the connection). Yet, perhaps the Persian matrix of both Nehemiah and Udjahorresnet indeed can account for their similarities after all. My inclination is to conceive of the Egyptian biographical texts as a part of a larger genre which also includes Mesopotamian (or ancient West Asian) royal and official inscriptions. The Egyptian and Mesopotamian could be construed as sub-genres of a larger ancient genre. Accordingly, one could describe the basic contours of a common genre thus: self-presentation texts that combine short narrative-like texts with prayer or hymnic language, which exist in order to elevate the name and memory of the protagonist, and which operate out of a primarily royal milieu. To avoid repetition of such a cumbersome phrase, I would like to call this overarching genre "official memorial."[116]

---

115. Kellermann, 82. Kellermann calls it "eines einheitlichen Kanzleistils im persischen Großreich."

116. Admittedly, I choose this phrase in part to highlight the connection with the

This proposed (super-) genre is necessarily abstract — perhaps too abstract to be of use in determining the origins of NM. For that reason, I withhold judgment regarding exactly which texts or textual conventions the author(s) of NM had in mind (consciously or not) when writing Nehemiah's biography. At this juncture, however, the central importance of readers and reader expectation for genre study can be of use. Given the important role Persia plays in NM, the question of whether ancient readers may have perceived a Persian influence in the text should be raised. The Achaemenids produced several royal inscriptions of a biographical style. While most were shorter texts, building and votive inscriptions, one also finds the Bisitun (or Behistun, hereafter DB) inscription of Darius I, an extensive detailed text narrating the the deeds of the king in a manner not unlike the earlier Mesopotamian texts. One can never be certain that Yehudites would have had knowledge of DB or other inscriptions, but Darius' deliberate propaganda efforts, described in DB (Old Persian para. 70) and confirmed in the discovery of copies found in Babylon and far-flung Elephantine[117] strongly suggest that readers of NM in Yehud could have plausibly been aware of the Persian variety of the royal and official inscription genre.

No scholars to my knowledge have juxtaposed NM with DB or other Persian texts.[118] This omission is puzzling in a sense, particularly given the obviously Persian

---

phrase "Nehemiah Memorial."

117. Briant, 507.

118. One small exception I have encountered is Georg Misch, who in *A History of*

context of NM and the wide influence of the Mowinckel royal inscription thesis. Because the older consensus now lies dormant, scholars no longer search for *yet another* (extra-) biblical parallel for NM. Even if the case were otherwise, though, we have seen that Egyptian biographies form the closest possible template for NM. That is, so long as the point of genre criticism is to find the best *classification* for a text, so long as we look primarily for synchronic, phenomenological[119] parallels, the search stops with the Egyptian texts. Yet this, as we have seen, leaves us at an impasse. Because NM cannot be completely identified with Egyptian biographies, an attempt to classify it in a genre necessarily leads to a division of the text or to a proclamation that it is "unique." Surely NM is to some degree unique, bearing the stamp of its creators' minds (and indeed, as we will see, NM combines genres in a highly innovative way). NM's divergences from other, known (to us!) genres and texts, however, by no means whatsoever entails that ancient readers would have approached it with a blank slate. Genre has everything to do with expectations and schemas and, if we bring reader expectations into the discussion, DB becomes a significantly more illuminating choice.

Autobiography in Antiquity (vol. 1; E.W. Dickes, trans., London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1950), 45, notes that NM's "mingling of prayer with a careful detailed narrative of the historic facts corresponds with the definite type of factual report which we have followed as far as Darius' great inscription."

119. Newsom uses this term to describe the work of the SBL apocalypse group ("Spying out the Land, 440).

Additionally, DB itself bears a few small, yet notable, resemblances with NM. The overall structure of DB follows the five-part pattern of other Mesopotamian texts that parallels NM (see §1.1.1): titulary,[120] notice of divine grant of status,[121] main deed (defeat of the usurper Bardiya),[122] other deeds (thwarting of other rebellions),[123] and closing appeals to later readers.[124] Darius' deity, Ahura Mazda, much like Nehemiah's Yahweh, is depicted as a silent but firm supporter;[125] compare Neh 2:8, 18, "The good hand of God was on me." Also like NM, DB reports the narrator praying to his god (OP para. 12). Perhaps most intriguing, though, are the parallels in plot structure and narrative style. In DB, the completion of Darius' conquest requires the subduing of the entire empire, and this process is narrated by means of a series of loosely connected small narratives that tell of the repeated overcoming of obstacles set in front of him by minor rebellions, concluded by a summary notice (OP paras. 52-54). These mini-narratives, which could plausibly be described as manifestations of Mowinckel's "enumerative style", resemble the dispute

---

120. OP paragraphs 1-3.

121. OP paragraphs 5-9, 13.

122. OP paragraphs 10-14.

123. OP paragraphs 15-59; paragraphs 22-38 appear in the Aramaic (Elephantine) version.

124. OP paragraphs 60-70.

125. See the repeated phrases, "by the favor of Ahura Mazda..." and "Ahura Mazda supported me", for example, OP paragraphs, 51, 52, 70, 80, Aramaic version, lines 12, 16, 32, 55, (סעד, cf. Ezra 5:2). Translations of Old Persian from Roland G. Kent, *Old Persian: Grammar, Text, Lexicon*. (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1953).

narratives of Neh 4 and 6, wherein Nehemiah's enemies conspire against him no fewer than four times (Neh 4:1ff.; 6:1ff.; 6:5ff.; 6:10fff.), with a summary at Neh 6:17-19.

One finds, in sum, multiple and significant resonances among NM and the official and royal inscriptions that originated in a wide geographical and chronological range. Speaking strictly on the level of synchronic resemblance, the Egyptian texts appear to be the closest in shape and intention to NM. The royal (mostly Mesopotamian) genre, especially in its later Persian manifestation, though, is an attractive point of comparison, particularly given the strong possibility that readers and writers in ancient Yehud would have had some familiarity with it. Taking all of these points of connection in mind, I believe that one can fairly characterize NM as a local, and particularly Israelite, version of an official genre. The goal of this project, however, is not categorization alone. While the parallels between NM and official memorials extend across much of NM, and are in no way limited to chapters 5 and 13 alone, NM is still not a flawless example of an official memorial. The influence of another widely known ancient genre is visible in NM, and it is to that genre the next section turns.

Excursus: The Gerizim votive inscriptions

The recent publication by Yitzhak Magen, Haggai Misgav, and Levana Tsfania of hundreds of Aramaic stone inscriptions (along with a smaller number of Hebrew and Samaritan) found within the course of the Mount Gerizim excavations provide the most

recently discovered, not to mention most geographically and chronologically proximate, parallels to parts of NM.[126] These inscriptions were found on the site, including in the oldest, Persian-period temple precincts, but were not found in situ (likely due to the several destructions on site) and thus cannot be dated with stratigraphy.[127] A significant majority of these inscriptions display at least part of this highly formulaic Aramaic phrase, or slight variations thereof:

זי הקרב פלוני בר פלוני (מן מקום פלוני) על נפשה על אנתתה ועל בנוהי לדכרן טב קדם אלהא באתרא דנה

Magen, *et al*. translate this phrase "That PN son of PN (from GN) offered for himself, his wife, and his sons for good remembrance before God in this place."[128] The Aramaic לדכרן טב parallels, of course, NM's repetition of the טוב + זכרה motif. These texts are similar to Schottroff's and thus perhaps do not change the discussion radically, though they offer convincing evidence that Judean authors and readers of NM's would have been aware of the זכרה language *qua* votive, commemorative language. Once again, these texts are too short to be exact models for the entirety of NM, but the language is far too similar to be coincidental — and Neh 13:14 (זכרה־לי אלהי על־זאת ואל־תמח חסדי אשר עשיתי בבית אלהי ובמשמריו) is almost a direct parallel.

---

126. Yitzhak Magen, Haggai Misgav, and Levana Tsfania, *Mount Gerizim Excavations. Volume I: The Aramaic, Hebrew and Samaritan Inscriptions* (Judea and Samaria Publications 2; Jerusalem: Israel Antiquities Authority: 2004).

127. Magen, Misgav, and Tsfania, 14.

128. Magen, Misgav, and Tsfania, 18-19.

2.1.4 Foreign Court Narratives (the "court conflict" story)

To argue that NM has some generic link with ancient biographical inscriptions is to retrace the steps of many previous students of Ezra-Nehemiah. The second major genre influence of NM that I would like to highlight, however, has been consistently neglected and never fully developed by scholars. The foreign court narrative, or court tale, is an umbrella term for a story type popular in the Hellenistic (and probably late Persian) Period that tells of (usually Jewish) courtiers who endure threats but ultimately thrive by means of their skill and cleverness. Examples of these kinds of tales abound, including the Joseph narrative, Esther, Daniel 1-6, 1 Esdras 3-4, Ahiqar, 4Q550, 3 Maccabees, and the "Tobiad Romance" in Josephus' Antiquties.[129] Yet, despite the high visibility of Persian court elements in NM, particularly in, but not limited to, Neh 1-2, scholars have

---

129. The earliest study on this genre appears to have been Ludwig Rosenthal, "Die Josephgeschichte, met den Büchern Ester und Daniel verglichen," *ZAW* 15 (1895): 278-284, though Rosenthal did not identify these stories as part of a common story type or genre. Modern study of these narratives began with attempts to connect them with Wisdom literature. See von Rad, "The Joseph Narrative and Ancient Wisdom," in von Rad, *The Problem of the Pentateuch and Other Essays* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966); Shemaryahu Talmon, "Wisdom in the Book of Esther," *VT* 13 (1963): 419-455. However, see also James L. Crenshaw, "Method in Determining Wisdom Influence upon 'Historical' Literature," *JBL* 88 (1969): 129-42, for a convincing critique of this approach. Both W. Lee Humphries, "A Life-Style for Diaspora: A Study of the Tales of Esther and Daniel," *JBL* 92 (1973): 211-23, and John J. Collins, "The Court-Tales in Daniel and the Development of Apocalyptic," *JBL* 94 (1975): 218-234, take on the significance of the Diaspora setting of these stories. The most developed study on this subject remains Lawrence M. Wills, *The Jew in the Court of the Foreign King* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1990).

nearly universally missed the literary connections between NM and other court narratives. The similarities between the court scene of Neh 2 and Daniel and Esther (for a full catalog of these, see below and in §2.3), if noted at all, tend to be attributed to the realia and protocols of the Persian court. Some scholars have come close to identifying NM as a court tale, or at the least as a emplotted narrative with literary characteristics. For this we can go back to Mowinckel, who found that Neh 1-2 expresses itself in a "novelistic" (*novelistische*) manner "anomalous" (*abweichend*) to the rest of NM.[130] The literary character of Neh 1-2 has not formed a significant point of emphasis in the scholarship, though a few others have commented on it (sometimes only implicitly). Most forceful in this manner has been Joachim Becker, who asserts that Neh 2 has a "novelistic" character, but ties it to his not-well-received thesis that NM is a fiction wholly invented by the Chronicler, and himself makes no claims about genre.[131] Gunneweg refers to Neh 2 as a stereotyped court scene, comparable to Dan 5, Jdt 12, and Est 1, 5, 6, and 7, but rejects the idea that NM might be of the same genre as those texts.[132] Wright goes a step further

---

130. Mowinckel, *Studien II,* 68-74

131. Joachim Becker, *Der Ich-Bericht des Nehemiabuches als chronistische Gestaltung*, (Forschung zur Bibel 87. Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 1998).

132. Gunneweg, *Nehemia*, 63, 176-178. Gunneweg offers a fascinating reading that may be symptomatic for the reason why commentators have resisted thinking of NM as a foreign court narrative. He notes (63) that the style and content of Neh 2 *could* show that NM is "legendary", but that the rest of NM (as a historical document) prove that it is not. The hard-and-fast opposition between historical (and, by implication, unliterary) and legendary (and, by implication, unhistorical) finds its most extreme expression in Becker's misguided reading of NM but, in my opinion, informs a wide swath of NM scholarship. Even more, in a section on the "character" (*Charakter*) of NM, Gunneweg determines that the term "Denkschrift" is the best descriptor for the text, insofar it is a

and makes the explicit connection between NM and court tales, but does so only as a passing remark in a footnote, along with suggestion that it could be the subject of a later work.[133] W. Lee Humphreys comes the closest to an involved engagement with NM in terms of court narratives, even if also in an off-handed manner. Humphreys states that, regarding Nehemiah's conflict with his enemies, "in its initial stages it is carried out through diplomatic ploy rather than through the use of open force," and further, like Esther's story of Mordecai and Haman, "it is a contest of courtiers".[134] In this way,

---

neutral term that does not prejudice the discussion and because it accurately describes the "absolutely authentic records" (*unwiderleglich authentischen Aufzeichnungen*) found in NM (176). In other words, he comes to an unsubstantiated conclusion about the nature of the text in the name of withholding judgment! The notion that NM is a nakedly historical document allows one to ignore the evidence of parallels with court tales; reading NM as an "authentic record" is treated as a neutral position on genre, as if historical documents are not literature at all!

133. Wright, *Rebuilding*, 69n1.

134. W. Lee Humphreys, "A Life-Style for Diaspora: A Study of the Tales of Esther and Daniel," *JBL* 92 (1973): 211-223 (212n3). Humphreys, in the same footnote, also surprisingly (and perhaps inadvertently) diagnoses the lack of scholarly attention to NM as a narrative when he writes that the "form of [NM], that of a memoir or apology, tends to conceal" Nehemiah's behavior as courtier. The assumption that NM represents straightforward eyewitness account appears to have distracted scholars from the possibility that it has literary features. Or in the case of Clines, who has picked up on some of the literary features, which have led him to call Nehemiah a 'liar.' (Clines, "The Nehemiah Memoir: The Perils of Autobiography", in *What Does Eve Do to Help? And Other Readerly Questions to the Old Testament*. [Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990], 124-164). Clines is correct, insofar as if one reads NM as an eyewitness report, then yes, he is a liar. If, however, one reads NM as a literary document, Clines' accusation becomes irrelevant, even if still useful. The author(s) of NM are not liars, they are simply writers.

Humphreys is alone in noting, albeit only in a suggestive, unsystematic fashion, the presence of typical court narrative motifs in NM.

To be sure, the resonances between NM and other court narratives may very well have some historical origin. In the literary milieu of the Persian and Hellenistic periods, however, where stories with similar motifs are circulating, these elements of Neh 2 would have, for ancient readers, located NM in context with other court narratives. Adele Berlin's comments about the literary character of Esther are particularly relevant here. She writes,

> In many cases Esther does agree with the Greek authors, but there is something more interesting than historical accuracy at work here. That 'something' is literary rather than historical. Esther should be seen as part of the same literary context from which the Greek writings emerged. Esther and the Greek works share a set of literary motifs and stereotypes relating to Persian court life.[135]

And further, "the point is not that Esther's portrait of Persia is realistic, but that it is conventional."[136] I would like to suggest much the same holds true for the NM. The question of the historicity of NM has little, if any, relevance to its literary character as a story.

---

135. Berlin, *Esther*, xxviii; cf Berlin "The Book of Esther and Ancient Storytelling," *JBL* 120 (2001): 3-14.

136. Berlin, *Esther*, xxx.

2.1.4.1 The Foreign Court Narrative: definitions

I will emphasize three distinct, though intertwined, characteristics of the court narrative: setting, sequence of events or script, and purpose or social setting. The setting, while a crucial aspect, is nearly self-explanatory. These stories take place in and around the court of a great king, where the court is both a physical space and an arena for power struggles. Their protagonists and antagonists are courtiers who compete for the favor of the king. Further, in the variants read and circulated in Jewish communities, the courtiers live and act in the realm of far-flung foreigners.

Beyond the court setting, another major defining characteristic of these stories are their well-defined plot scripts. The broadest characterization of this story appears in the seminal work of G. W. Nickelsburg.[137] Nickelsburg traces the plot motif of the persecution and exaltation of the righteous person, or what he calls the "wisdom tale," following Hans-Peter Müller's "weisheitliche Lehrerzählung."[138] He finds examples of this story pattern in Gen 37ff., Ahiqar, Esther, Dan 3 and 6, Susanna, Wisdom 2, 4-5, 2 Macc 7, and 3 Macc, and isolates a long list of structural elements common to these stories.[139] His

---

137. G. W. Nickelsburg, *Resurrection, Immortality, and Eternal Life in Intertestamental Judaism*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972).

138. Hans-Peter Müller, "Die weisheitliche Lehrerzählung im Alten Testament und in seiner Umwelt," *WO* 9 (1977): 77-98.

139. Nickelsburg, *Resurrection*, 49ff. His list of elements is as follows: reason for persecution, conspiracy, accusation, trial, helper(s), choice, condemnation, ordeal, protest of innocence, trust, reactions, rescue, exaltation, reactions [again], acclamation, vindication, punishment of enemy, and confession of guilt by enemy.

approach is thematic and probabilistic, wherein no individual characteristic nor particular order of characteristics is absolutely necessary for the story to be included; rather, any story that exhibits a significant number of them qualifies. Susan Niditch and Robert Doran, in a sharply critical article, take on Nickelsburg for failing sufficiently to take into account the syntax, or order, of the plot elements.[140] In their estimation, a responsible delineation of a story type must attend to the particular formation of plot, though, problematically, to plot syntax alone; Niditch and Doran address neither style, setting, nor ideology. Additionally, if the question of generic influence can move beyond the matter of strict or precise correspondence, the power of this critique diminishes greatly. In a similar and more persuasive vein, Lawrence Wills offers a criticism that, while in agreement with the basic contours of Nickelsburg's position, presses him on the matter of which elements in his scheme are actually constitutive of plot, and which are merely descriptive.[141]

A similar, yet even broader, study by Armin Schmitt traces the theme of the "reversal of fortunes" (*Umkehrung der Ereignisse*) through biblical and other early Jewish literature.[142] Schmitt's schema is notably simpler than Nickelsburg's; for him the focus rests

---

140. Susan Niditch and Robert Doran, "The Success Story of the Wise Courtier: A Formal Approach," *JBL* 92 (1977): 179-193.

141. Lawrence Wills, "Response to 'The Genre and Function of the Markan Passion Narrative,'" pages 504-512 in *George W. E. Nickelsburg in Perspective: An Ongoing Dialogue of Learning*. (Jacob Neusner and Alan J. Avery-Peck, eds. Suppl. JSJ 80; Boston: Brill, 2003).

142. Armin Schmitt, *Wende des Lebens: Untersuchungen zu einem Situations-Motiv der Bibel*. BZAW 237 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1996), 2.

primarily on a single change of status, the turning point at which the persecuted protagonist, by means of a hidden or open divine intervention, triumphs over the evil antagonist.[143] Yet neither Schmitt's nor Nicklesburg's proposal are directly applicable to task of defining the court tale genre. Schmitt explicitly states that the *Umkehrung* motif is not limited to any one genre.[144] Nicklesburg's is a different case, insofar as he explicitly names the "wisdom tale" a *Gattung* and analyzes the story into a much more detailed, and useful, structure. Nonetheless, the notion that the widely different texts that he incorporates could all be part of a single *genre*, rather than a trans-generic *motif*, seems doubtful.

A more helpful analysis appears in an article by H. M. Wahl on the motif of the "Aufstieg," or elevation of the protagonist.[145] Wahl restricts his definition this motif to stories that contain four characteristics: court setting, exilic setting, Jewish or Israelite protagonist, and king as the one who elevates the protagonist.[146]

The most useful definition of the genre comes in Lawrence Wills' book, *The Jew in the Court of the Foreign King*.[147] Wills, following Humphries and Collins, identifies

---

143. Schmitt, *Wende des Lebens*, 286

144. He claims that the "Wende" motif occurs in drama, narrative, novella, wisdom poetry, prophetic disputation, and paranesis, among others.

145. Harald M. Wahl, "Das Motiv des 'Aufstiegs' in der Hofgeschichte: Am Beispiel von Joseph, Esther und Daniel" *ZAW* 112 (2000):59-74.

146. Wahl, 60-61.

147. Lawrence Wills, *The Jew in the Court of the Foreign King* (HDR 26. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990).

two major story types, the "court contest" and the "court conflict."[148] The "court contest" story features a protagonist of originally low status who solves a problem or interprets something that no one else is able to; examples include the Joseph narrative, Dan 2, and 1 Esdras 3-4. The "court conflict," in contrast, tells of a courtier who experiences a decline in status, or even a threat of death, as a result of a conspiracy by antagonists in the court, but who is later vindicated and/or exalted by the king or a deity. Narratives that fit in this category would be Esther, Dan 1, 3, and 6, Ahiqar, 4Q550 ("4QTales of the Persian Court"),[149] and possibly the Joseph narrative and the Croesus tales in Herodotus book 1.[150] Of the two, the "court contest" variety has limited relevance to NM, which lacks the central element of the contest.[151] The "court conflict" story, however, shows strong affinities with NM, and its plot elements deserve a closer investigation. Several different scholars

---

148. Wills, Jew in the court 3; Humphreys, "A Life-Style for Diaspora"; Collins, "The Court-Tales in Daniel"

149. Michael Wechsler, "Two Para-Biblical Novellae from Qumran Cave 4: A Reevaluation of 4Q550," *Dead Sea Discoveries* 7 (2000): 130-172, Sidnie White Crawford, "4QTales of the Persian Court (4Q550^{a-e}) and Its Relation to Biblical Royal Courtier Tales, Especially Esther, Daniel, and Joseph," in *The Bible as Book: The Hebrew Bible and the Judaean Desert Discoveries*, Edward D. Herbert and Emanuel Tov, eds. (London: The British Library & Oak Knoll Press, 2002).

150. I believe that an analogy can be made between the contest versus conflict types on the one hand and Egyptian ideal- versus career biographies on the other. In both pairs, the former emphasizes the skill, ability, or even "wisdom" of the protagonist. Correspondingly, the latter type in both pairs highlights the protagonists' proximity to, and favor of, the king and, as such, is less openly didactic.

151. For more on the court contest, see Humphreys, "Life-Style for Diaspora"; Wills, *The Jew in the Court*, 3

have outlined plot progressions for the story-type of fall and vindication. Lawrence Wills sketches out a three-stage schema for the court conflict. First is the introduction, which can be divided into the display of the protagonist's cleverness, information about the protagonist's relation to king and courtiers, and introduction to the fellow-courtier antagonists. Second, the body of the story has two parts, conflict created by conspiracy or accusation and the proving of the protagonist's virtue. Third, the conclusion includes punishment of antagonists, rewarding of protagonists, and new status in court (Table 2.1).

Table 2.1: "Court Conflict Tale"[152]

Introduction: Protagonist's cleverness
Introduction: Relation to king and/or courtiers
Introduction: Naming of antagonists
Body: Conflict/accusation
Body: Proving protagonist's virtue
Conclusion: Punishment of antagonists
Conclusion: Rewarding of protagonist
Conclusion: New status in court

This plot syntax, which effects a double reversal of fortunes — high status threatened by accusation and then reestablished via cleverness — shows that one main narra-

152. Adapted from Wills, *The Jew in the Court*, 199-200.

tive purpose of this type of tale is the exaltation of the virtuous person, along with the reinforcement of his or her status and power. Also reinforced in this genre is the power and validity of the king and the royal sphere. The court tale affirms, in Wills' words, "the implicit faith that justice will ultimately prevail *in the court*."[153] Certain elements within the court may be critiqued, but royal power itself is not questioned. Indeed, the final indication of the protagonist's success is his or her reinstatement *by the king*.

Variations on the court tale are found throughout the ancient Mediterranean world, but in its manifestations in Jewish literature, it appears to have grown in importance as a literary type particularly oriented toward life in the Diaspora. The elevation of the protagonist, then, seems to stand in for the survival of the people in foreign lands, either by providing models for faithfulness (as in Daniel) or by showing Jews more than capable to function and thrive in unfamiliar, even absurd, systems.[154] In some cases, most notably with Esther and Joseph, the protagonist explicitly intercedes for the people, making her or his elevation the people's as well.[155] However, true to the nature of the underlying genre, the triumph of the protagonist or the people (whether literally or symbolically) does not come at the expense of the court; the Jewish court tale does not depict a

---

153. Wills, *Foreign Court*, 22.

154. Erich Gruen takes this tack, highlighting the humor in stories like Esther and Daniel. See *Diaspora: Jews amidst Greeks and Romans* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002).

155. Wahl, 73.

defeat of the foreign powers. Thus Humphreys: "the tale does not permit any tension to develop between their double loyalty to king and co-religionists; the actual benefit of each party coincides."[156] The court, therefore, remains a place where the fate of the Jews *can* be adjudicated justly. The court tale ultimately affirms the world of the Diaspora. Any problems or obstacles can be overcome within the protocols and strictures of the court.

2.1.4.2 The court conflict story in NM

My contention in this chapter is that NM's portrayal of Nehemiah's deeds in the royal palace and interactions with his political enemies are shaped by established generic patterns, including that of the court conflict tale. As we have seen, the neglect of this possibility arises, at least in part, from the widespread assumption that NM is a first-hand historical document, a text responsive to events and personalities rather than to literary demands. Even if, as I believe is the case, this assumption misunderstands the function of demonstrative and narrative/narrativized texts in the ancient world, another, more practical objection must be addressed prior to a fuller explication of my thesis. The existence of some parallels to court narratives in NM may indeed be present in a synchronic sense, but conventional wisdom places the composition of NM chronologically prior to Esther and

156. Humphreys, 215.

Daniel. Wright claims that if NM could be considered a court tale, it would be the first such example.[157]

Nonetheless, while the final form of the book of Daniel is certainly later than NM, and while Esther was a changing composition well into the Hellenistic Period, all indications suggest that the court tale was a genre that circulated well before the completion of Daniel. The tales in Dan 1-6 appear to derive from earlier, perhaps even Persian period, sources.[158] Regarding Esther, recent work by Berlin and Sara R. Johnson challenge the largely unexamined assumption that the story is "Hellenistic" storytelling and instead suggest that it has origins in an eastern, possibly Persian milieu.[159] If Dan 1-6 and Esther are only possible, and not certain, Persian era texts, the court stories of Ahiqar and Joseph are at least co-terminous with NM, if not much earlier. The widely-known Ahiqar appears in an Aramaic version at Elephantine, which is almost certainly not an autograph.[160] Likewise, while current scholarship on the Joseph novella upholds a "late" (i.e. not con-

157. Wright, *Rebuilding*, 69n1.

158. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, 87-90.

159. Berlin, *JBL* 2001, 14 "Esther typifies storytelling about Persia from the Persian period." See also Sara R. Johnson, "Novelistic Elements in Esther: Persian or Hellenistic, Jewish or Greek?" *CBQ* 67 (2005): 571-589.

160. See James M. Lindenberger, *The Aramaic Proverbs of Ahiqar*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983).

temporary with other, non-P Pentateuchal material) date,[161] even this position places it well before the composition of NM, let alone Ezra-Nehemiah.

If one remains open to the possibility that NM has literary (and not just historical) similarities with other court tales, the evidence for a generic connection is quite strong, particularly in Neh 1-2. These opening chapters set the stage for the rest of the narrative, and the very first verse of Neh 1 tells us where the story takes place: ואני הייתי בשושן הבירה ("Now I was in Susa the capital"). Nehemiah's presence at the king's banquet table (ויין לפניו) (cf. Est 1, 5, 7; see also Neh 5:17-18), the inquiry of the courtier before the king, and the presence of the king's concubine/queen (cf. Mordecai's and Haman's attempts to have Esther intercede) all suggest tropes common to court tales. Likewise, the phrases in the conversation between Artaxerxes and Nehemiah finds parallels in other texts. The courtier's face is downcast (Neh 2:2 cf. Dan 1:10 and Gen 40:6, though with different vocabulary — צעף rather than רע), which inspires fear (ירא) of the king's reaction (Neh 2:2b, cf. Dan 1:10) and is accompanied by an inquiry after the condition of the courtier(s) (Neh 2:2 מדוע פניך רעים, cf. Gen 40:7 מדוע פניכם רעים). Nehemiah frames his request for an appointment to Jerusalem with the phrases "if it pleases the king" (אם על המלך טוב- Neh 2:5, 6, cf. word-for-word parallels in Est 1:19; 3:9; 5:4; 8:5; 9:13) and "if your servant

161. See Reinhard Kratz, *The Composition of the Narrative Books of the Old Testament* (John Bowden, trans.; New York: T & T Clark, 2005), 274-279 ; J. A. Soggin, "Dating the Joseph Story and Other Remarks," in *Joseph: Bibel und Literatur*. A pioneer for the later dating is Donald Redford, *A Study of the Biblical Story of Joseph*. (Leiden: Brill, 1970).

has found favor before you" (ואם ייטב עבדך לפניך; Neh 2:5, cf. the slight variations in Gen 41:37; 45:16; Est 1:21, 2:4, 5:14).[162]

While the atmosphere and politeness language of Neh 1-2 clearly belong to the Persian court (as portrayed in our literary sources), and thus possibly to the court tale genre, these correspondences could still yet be due to the coincidental factor of (the historical) Nehemiah's courtly origins. Attention to the plot syntax of NM, however, reveals that the connection with the court tale genre goes beyond similarities in setting. As Table 2.2 shows, a striking number of features of NM fit into Wills' schema. With respect to Wills, Neh 1-2 nicely display the shared introductory characteristics. Observing Wills first, Neh 1 introduces Nehemiah's status at the court and establishes his position within it (as a משקה). Additionally, Nehemiah displays his cleverness via his deft negotiation of the dangerous territory of the royal audience (Wills 1a, see Neh 2:1-10, especially 2:3-8). He turns a potentially problematic situation to his advantage and secures authorization for his desired project. Immediately after Nehemiah receives what he requests from the king, however, the story foreshadows obstacles to come with the introduction of his antagonists in Neh 2:10 ("When Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite servant heard, it became a great evil to them that someone was coming to seek the good of the Israelites.")

---

162. Gen 41:37, וייטב הדבר בעיני פרעה; Gen 45:16, וייטב בעיני פרעה; Est 1:21, וייטב הדבר בעיני המלך; Est 2:4, והנערה אשר תיטב בעיני המלך; Est 5:14, וייטב הדבר לפני המן.

The introduction of NM, in other words, compares with introductions of other court stories.

Table 2.2: Court conflict elements present in NM (adapted from Wills, with additions from Nickelsburg in *italics*)[163]

Intro: Relation to king and/or courtiers Neh 1 (especially Neh 1:1, 11b)
Intro: Protagonist's cleverness Neh 2:1-8
Intro: Naming of antagonists Neh 2:10
Body: Conflict/accusation Neh 2:19-20; Neh 4:1-2; Neh 6:1-2; Neh 6:5-7; Neh 6:10-13; Neh 6:17-19 (summary)
Condemnation Neh 2:19; Neh 3:33-35; Neh 5:9; Neh 6:2ff.
Protestation of innocence Neh 3:36-37; Neh 6:3-4; Neh 6:8-9; Neh 6:14

163. I have incorporated "condemnation" and "protest of innocence" from Nickelsburg in order to highlight the importance of these elements in NM.

At this point in the story, Nehemiah leaves Susa for Jerusalem and this shift in setting might lead one to expect an end to the court conflict motifs in NM. Yet, since the introduction of Sanballat and Tobiah at Neh 2:10 reads like an introductory element to a conflict tale — "Naming of antagonists" in Wills' schema — the question is worth asking whether the interactions between Nehemiah and his enemies unfold in the manner of disputes among courtiers. The series of quarrels in Neh 4 and 6, as well as Nehemiah's invective against his enemies and proclamations of innocence, extend the court conflict narrative outside of Neh 2, outside of the court itself. Once in Neh 4 (vv. 1-2), and several times in Neh 6 (vv. 1-2, 5-7, 10-13), the pattern of conspiracy/condemnation and protestation of innocence matches the pattern of diplomatic wars of words in other court narratives. The disputes between Nehemiah and Sanballat and Tobiah are examples of political intrigue and gamesmanship, with carefully placed denunciations, a strategic open letter, and accusations of rebellion.

Now, in light of the Wills' schema, we can see that some elements of the court conflict and/or wisdom tale are not present in NM. In a later section (§2.2), however, I will suggest that these gaps are themselves illuminating. In fact, once we move beyond the limiting notion of genre analysis as classification, close attention to the ways in which NM both converges with *and diverges from* different genre types provides insights unavailable with other methodologies. At this point, it will suffice to say that Nehemiah's

disputes with his enemies are comparable, even if not identical, to the interactions between Mordecai and Haman, Ahiqar and Nadan, and others.

Regarding the purpose or ideology of the genre, a more detailed analysis should wait for a closer reading of the text (see §2.2.1 and 2.2.2 below). Nevertheless, that NM is eminently concerned with the elevation of the protagonist is more than well-established. Noting this aspect of NM in the context of court narratives complicates the matter, though. Does not the function of exaltation of the protagonist derive from NM's biographical inscription influence? Whatever genre was more original in NM (and, indeed, if one genre was more original at all), phenomenologically speaking, this function emerges out of both generic influences simultaneously. This intriguing overlap between court tales and official biographies raises important questions, no less because the apparent lack of the other major purpose of Jewish court narratives, the provision of models for survival in a Diaspora world. Because NM is not a Diaspora text, does its utilization of (typically Diaspora-oriented) court motifs signal a different message about how Jews should or do relate to their foreign rulers? The dovetailing of official biography and court narrative, which will be addressed later, suggests that the question should be answered in the affirmative.

This brief glance at NM in light of this genre points toward a surprising depth of correspondence between the two but also, of course, reveals important differences on all three levels, setting, plot, and function. The story opens in the court but moves to Jerusalem. When Nehemiah moves away from Persia, the king is nowhere to be found

when the time comes for Nehemiah to see his vindication. The plot, which begins as a court tale, dissipates without the expected conclusion. Similarly, Nehemiah's departure for Yehud signals NM's concern for Jews in the homeland, not those scattered in the Diaspora.[164] Accordingly, just as it would be a mistake to say that NM *is* an official memorial, so would it to say that it *is* a Foreign Court Narrative.[165] The unlikelihood of an air-tight comparison does not mean that the author(s) of NM could not have made use of these genres for their own purposes; even less does it mean that the ancient readers would not have perceived the presence of strong clues of a popular and widespread literary genre. NM's gaps in the pattern help to reveal exactly how NM blends its generic influences. NM makes use of the patterns, diverges from them, but does so in highly revealing ways.

2.2 How genre works in NM

One could simply identify the various generic influences of NM and leave it at that. Yet to stop with the act of naming genres leaves us no closer to any real advance in the study of genre. In order to move forward, we must go beyond a merely classificatory

---

164. Relevant in this regard is Nehemiah's opening chapter inquiry after "the remnant Yehudim who remained from the captivity" (היהודים הפליטה אשר־נשארו מן־השבי – Neh 1:2, 3).

165. Though, if pressed, I might suggest that NM is more like a biographical text with court narrative motifs than the other way around.

concept of genre, beyond treating genre like "a tag that an interpreter can put on a text after its secrets have been explored."[166] If the secrets have been explored, what use is a such a tag? As Frow writes, "[g]enre analysis can look like a very blunt instrument to use on texts. And indeed it would be, if all we cared about were identifying the genre to which a text 'belongs'".[167] The following section, accordingly, turns from the question of *what genre is NM?* to *how does genre function in NM?*.

In order to get at this question, I will first, in §2.2.1, offer a reading of NM that analyzes the manner in which the text brings its two major generic strains together, that is, how the text unfolds vis-a-vis genre. Neh 1-2, in its depiction of the Persian court and the interactions between Nehemiah and courtiers and the king, gives off strong signals that the story is a court narrative, signals that are reinforced by the accounts of Nehemiah's disputes with his enemies that read like disputes among courtiers. However, just as Nehemiah the courtier leaves the court to become Nehemiah the governor, beginning with Neh 5, the story begins to leave the court tale genre, decisively transforming to an official memorial, the conclusion in Neh 13 revealing the process to be complete. Finally, the juxtaposition, even blending, of these two genres raises the question of their overall effect on the text, and in the last section of this chapter (§2.2.2) I will discuss how the ideologies of official memorials and court narratives are undergirded by ostensibly complementary, but in the final analysis contradictory, ideologies.

---

166. Campbell, "Form Criticism's Future," 24.

167. Frow, 101.

2.2.1 The transformation of genres in NM: From court tale to official memorial

The insightfulness of the categorization model of genre study runs up against its limits when, as in §2.1.3 and §2.1.4 above, the categorizations are less than exact. NM bears strong resemblances to both the memorial and court tale genres, but so too does it diverge from each, in non-trivial ways. What, then, is one to conclude? Does genre have any real impact on how NM tells its story or how it would have been received? A straightforward tallying of generic similarities and differences has little to say in this regard. A "real time" reading of genre in NM, however, helps to reveal NM's slow and subtle, yet decisive, conversion from court tale to official memorial. This transformation, signposted by the shifts in meaning of the key words טוב and רע, itself points toward the intriguing affinities shared by the two genres, affinities that allow for such a felicitous combination.

2.2.1.1 In the court: Neh 1-2

The opening chapter, in more than one way, sets the scene for the rest of NM. For one, this chapter introduces the central narrative problem of NM. The first bit of information revealed to both Nehemiah and the reader is that the inhabitants of Jerusalem are in great trouble and shame (ברעה גדלה ובחרפה). The "shame" of the city and the community

becomes a refrain for NM (2:17, 1:3; 5:9; 3:36; 6:13[168]). In terms of the plot, the shame is the narrative obstacle that must be overcome. Additionally, Neh 1 is bracketed by two short complementary descriptors that highlight the spatial context of the beginning of the story. Following the text's introduction (1:1a) and the date formula, the narrator states, ואני הייתי בשושן הבירה ("Now, I was in Susa the capital," 1:1b). Correspondingly, the chapter ends with the syntactically parallel notice that ואני הייתי משקה למלך ("Now, I was a royal cupbearer," 1:11b). These two brief notices frame the opening scene, incrementally uncovering information about the story. They show that the beginning of the tale takes place not only in one of the capitals of the Persian Empire (1:1b), but also in and around the court, the closest sphere of influence of the king (1:11b). They also indicate that the main character lives in Susa (1:1b) and, what is more, is a ranking associate of the king (1:11b), an idea that is only reinforced by the king's interactions with Nehemiah later in Neh 2:1-10. Neh 1, therefore, begins the portrayal of Nehemiah as the advocate for the people of Jerusalem who has the ear of the most powerful person in the world. The events of Neh 2:1-10 develop the setting-based generic clues of Neh 1. As already indicated above, the interaction between Nehemiah and the king offers several indications that Neh 2 is not a series of events that just happens to take place in the royal court, but rather one that shares specific literary phrases, tropes, and motifs common to other court narratives.

168. This last instance of חרפה, notably, concerns Nehemiah's reputation, not the city's.

The setting established in Neh 1-2 is notable as the first indication of genre in NM. It signals that what follows might adhere to the conventions of the court tale. And indeed, the indications of place are far from the only clues for genre in Neh 1-2. As suggested in Table 2.2 above, Nehemiah's conversation with the king serves to illustrate his status as a wise, or clever courtier before the king. After reemphasizing the setting by placing Nehemiah at a banquet in the audience of the king ("Wine was before him and I carried the wine and gave it to the king" – Neh 2:1aβ-bα), the narrator states that "I was not in disfavor before him" (ולא־הייתי רע לפניו – Neh 2:1bβ). The extended emphasis in 2:1 of Nehemiah's closeness to the king,[169] phrased here as a circumlocution,[170] immediately and perhaps unexpectedly changes into a threat. Building off of the key word רע, the king inquires after his cupbearer's demeanor: "Then the king said to me, 'why are you downcast (פניך רעים)? You are not sick. This can only be sadness [evil?] of the heart (רע לב)'" (Neh 2:2a). The precise implications of the king's statement are difficult to parse, but that the consequences are ominous for Nehemiah is indicated by Nehemiah's response, "Then I was very greatly afraid" (Neh 2:2b). Perhaps the king alludes to "sadness/evil of the heart" as evidence of disloyalty, of unfitness to be in the presence of the king, or of some-

169. Note again the progression in terms of Nehemiah's proximity to the king: Nehemiah is in the capital (1:1b), then he is the king's cupbearer (1:11b), then he is serving the king directly at the banquet (2:1bα), then he is in the king's good graces (2:1bβ).

170. Wright, *Rebuilding Identity*, 72n16.

thing else entirely. Either way, however, the king's words in 2:2, via the wordplay on רע, threaten to undo Nehemiah's privileged status at the court.

Yet Nehemiah shows his cleverness and quickly turns this temporary danger to his advantage by continuing the wordplay. He responds to the king's question (perhaps accusation), first by employing politeness language ("May the king live forever" 2:3a), then boldly by accepting rather than rejecting the suggestion that his demeanor is רע. He says, "why would not I be downcast (מדוע לא־ירעו פני) when the city of the house of my ancestors' graves is in ruins and its gates are consumed in fire?" (Neh 2:3b). Nehemiah seems to succeed with this effort to turn רע to his advantage and change his position in the exchange from one of weakness (due to his potential unfitness or disobedience) to one of power, wherein Nehemiah stands to gain from his closeness to the king. We see the first bit of evidence of this change when the topic of discussion transforms from Nehemiah's appearance to Nehemiah's request; Neh 2:4a reads, "The king said to me, 'What is it that you seek?'" At this juncture, following a notice of Nehemiah's prayer to "the God of Heaven" (Neh 2:4b), the text signals Nehemiah's clever success by dropping the keyword רע in favor of its opposite, טוב. The word טוב appears five times in Neh 2:5-10, four of which occur in Nehemiah's direct discourse addressed to the king. Upon hearing the king ask him what he desires, Nehemiah responds, "If it is desirable (טוב) to king, and if your servant is in good favor (ייטב) before you, send me to Judah, to the city of the graves of my ancestors, so that I may build it." (Neh 2:5) With this politeness language, Nehemiah further presses his advantage. The king responds by asking how long he will be gone, an

elliptical response which has puzzled commentators,[171] but which certainly implies that the king has already agreed to Nehemiah's request. This implication is confirmed by the next clause, which reads, "It pleased (וייטב) the king to send me, and I gave him a time." (Neh 2:6b) His primary objective achieved, Nehemiah then successfully requests even more from the king: "And I said to the king, 'if it is desirable (טוב) to the king, send me letters to the governors of Eber Nahara," (Neh 2:7a) along with a letter to the king's garden (Neh 2:8a). From this point the king recedes into the background, offering his approval only as mediated by the narrator's remark that "The king gave [it] to me because the good (הטובה) hand of my God was upon me" (Neh 2:8b). Nehemiah has gained full control of the situation.

The pivot from רע to טוב illustrates how Nehemiah exercises his skill with pleasing words and his access to and favor with the king to achieve a goal beneficial for both him and his people. In this manner, Neh 2:1-8 reveals Nehemiah to be a clever courtier on a parallel with Daniel, Joseph, or Ahiqar.[172] Even more, the juxtaposition of the keywords רע and טוב appears twice more in this chapter, at 2:10 and at 2:17-18. The first of these establishes a contrast between Nehemiah and his enemies while the second anticipates how NM envisions Nehemiah's actions as beneficial for the community. In Neh

171. For example, Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 177.

172. See, for example, the pivot Joseph executes after interpreting the dream, when he turns Pharaoh's good will into a plum bureaucratic position: "Now, may Pharaoh search for a man of discernment and wisdom, and set him over the land of Egypt" (Gen 41:33).

2:10, Nehemiah's royally-assisted travel draws the attention of a new set of characters: "When Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite servant heard [this], it was greatly displeasing to them (וירע להם רעה גדלה) that someone had come to seek the well-being (טובה) of the children of Israel." The terminology contrasts Nehemiah's skill and cleverness with the maliciousness of his enemies. The introduction of Saballat and Tobiah, coming on the heels of the demonstration of Nehemiah's cleverness (notably by means of the key words of Neh 2) reinforces the signals that NM follows the pattern of court stories. The clever protagonist encounters his antagonists who seek to destroy his good name. Some disagreement exists on this point, but general consensus identifies Sanballat and Tobiah as powerful officials, perhaps even the governors of Samaria and Ammon, respectively.[173] The text itself is unclear on this point (perhaps purposefully – the epithets given to them suggest insult or parody), but the two antagonists are formidable rivals for Nehemiah, strongly indicating that they operate on the same political plane as Nehemiah. In other words, Nehemiah and Sanballat and Tobiah (as well as Geshem) are competing courtiers, and we will see that the nature of their subsequent conflicts in Neh 2:19-20, 4, and 6 bears this out.

If 2:10 were not enough to highlight the difference between Nehemiah and his antagonists, 2:17-20 hammer the point home, depicting Nehemiah as an advocate for the

---

173. Most recently, see Gary Knoppers, "Nehemiah and Sanballat: The Enemy Without or Within?" in *Judah and the Judeans in the Fourth Century B.C.E.*, Oded Lipschits, Gary N. Knoppers, and Rainer Albertz, eds. (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2007), 305-322.

city and its people and Tobiah and Sanballat as destructive influences. After his arrival in Jerusalem and secret nighttime tour of the city (Neh 2:11-16), Nehemiah tells the "priests, nobles, and prefects" about "the bad state (הרעה) we are in," and that "Jerusalem is in ruins and its gates destroyed by fire" (Neh 2:17a, using phrasing very similar to Neh 1:3). To remedy this situation, Nehemiah encourages the leaders of the community to rebuild the city, "so that there will no longer be shame [חרפה]" (Neh 2:17b). Then, he tells them of the "hand of God which has been good upon me" (יד אלהי אשר־היא טובה עלי) and of "the things that the king said to me" (Neh 2:18a). Nehemiah's audience responds enthusiastically, and v. 18 closes with the notice that "they strengthened their hands for the welfare (ויחזקו ידיהם לטובה)" (Neh 2:18b). This phrase could perhaps be more loosely rendered "came together for the common good". With this juxtaposition of רע (and חרפה) with טוב, the text portrays Nehemiah as figure who acts in the interests of the community, who works in concert with its leaders to remove the "badness" and the shame from the city and improve its "goodness," or welfare. Nehemiah's social benevolence contrasts starkly with the actions of his enemies who, according to the following verse, immediately "mocked and despised us [i.e. Nehemiah and the leaders]" (וילעגו לנו ויבזו עלינו) (Neh 2:19). This reaction serves as a reinforcement of the assertion in 2:10 that Nehemiah's rivals resent the work for the welfare of the city, and Nehemiah follows this attack with a condemnation of his own, proclaiming that "the God of Heaven, he will give us success, and we, his servants will begin building (נקום ובנינו). But you will have no portion or legal right (צדקה) or memorial (זכרון) in Jerusalem" (Neh 2:20). This first instance of memory

terminology (זכרון) may foreshadow Nehemiah's own requests to be remembered later on in the story,[174] but at this point the rejection aligns Nehemiah with the people ("his servants") against those who to block that work.

2.2.1.2 The courtier and the governor: Neh 4-6

As Neh 2:19-20 intimates, none of the disputes between Nehemiah and his enemies themselves take place in the Persian court. After the introduction of Sanballat and Tobiah, of course, comes the notice that "I went to Jerusalem" (2:11a). A significant difficulty with viewing NM in context with the literary genre of the court conflict tale is the simple fact that from 2:11 onward, Nehemiah leaves the court. Nonetheless, the indicators of setting (court and courtiers), theme (cleverness of the protagonist), and plot (successful interaction with king and introduction of antagonists and their reason for persecution) in Neh 1-2 activate the script for reading NM as a court tale and the plot of chapters 4-6 follows that script quite closely. To recall Alastair Fowler, "generic markers that cluster at the beginning of a work have a strategic role in guiding the reader. They help to establish, as soon as possible, an appropriate mental 'set' that allows the work's generic

174. This language is particularly intriguing in light of the Persian period memorial inscriptions from Gerizim, where the earliest sanctuary appears to date to the time of Sanballat. See Magen, Misgav, and Tsfania, *Mount Gerizim Excavations*. Note also the statement in Zech 6:14 that a person named טוביה, among others, is to watch over the crown(s) as a זכרון in the temple. See Meyers and Meyers, *Haggai, Zechariah 1-8*, 340-343.

codes to be read."[175] Considering the strong generic signals in Neh 1-2:10, the correspondences between NM and the narrative syntax proposed by Wills solidify its characterization as a court conflict narrative.

Returning to the schema in Table 2.2, the back and forth between Nehemiah and his enemies, the pattern of conspiracy/condemnation and protestation of innocence matches the pattern of diplomatic wars of words in other court narratives. The actions by Sanballat and Tobiah are deeds of political intrigue, with carefully placed denunciations, a strategic open letter, and accusations of rebellion, comparable to the interactions between courtiers in other literature. After the list of builders in 3:1-32, which is likely a post-NM addition (see chapter 3), the reader is notified that Sanballat, alongside his Samarian army and Tobiah, once again "mocked" the Judeans (וילעג על־היהודים) (Neh 3:33-35). The expressed presence of the "Samarian army" (חיל שמרון) heightens the danger, though Sanballat's blustering words do not constitute even a direct threat of force, let alone military action.[176] Nehemiah immediately counters with intemperate words of his own, directly tying Sanballat's and Tobiah's verbal jousts to the shame (חרפה) of the city introduced in Neh 1: "Hear, our God, that we have become mocked (בוזה), and return their shame (חרפתם) upon their heads! And give them as spoil to a land of captivity! Do

175. Fowler, *Kinds of Literature*, 88.

176. Clines, in "The Perils of Autobiography" notes that NM tends to make use of overstatement in its characterization of the threats (such as they may be) facing the people.

not cover their iniquity, nor let their sin be blotted out before you, because they insulted the builders!" (Neh 3:36-37). Nehemiah's interjection, whose concern for how his enemies be remembered serves as an intriguing complementary precursor to Nehemiah's own requests to be remembered, is a repetition of the pattern of Conflict/Accusation and Condemnation. Additionally, the characterization of חרפה as something emanating from Nehemiah's antagonists once again makes them out to be agents of division and disruption against the entire community.

In contrast, Nehemiah in the passages that follow becomes an agent of solidarity and common purpose. Following Nehemiah's curse appears a notification that the people and Nehemiah reach a milestone in the building project ("Then we built the wall, and the wall was joined to its halfway point. The people had a will [לב] to work." Neh 3:38). The enemies respond angrily (ויחר להם מאד) to the state of affairs that a "healing of the wall of Jerusalem was going up" (כי־עלתה ארוכה לחמות ירושלם)[177] and, once again, plot against Nehemiah and the people (Neh 4:1-2 – "Conflict/Accusation"). The plot, which is portrayed as an attempt to "work confusion (or error – [תועה]) in it [Jerusalem]," provides a platform for Nehemiah to display his skill in unifying and strengthening the people. He, with

177. This phrase is one of the few in NM (outside of the prayer in Neh 1) that strongly evokes language found elsewhere in the Bible. See Jer 30:17, 33:6 (cf. Jer 8:22), where (עלה + ארוכה) appears in oracles of comfort and restoration for Zion. This language also occurs in Isa 58:8 and 2 Chr 24:13, where it also refers to a building project (Joash's repairing of the temple).

the people, prays to God and establishes a watch to protect the project[178] (Neh 4:3). Then, when the people share their heavy doubts (Neh 4:4-6), Nehemiah stations further protective guards (Neh 4:7) and encourages the workers with a speech: "Do not be afraid of them. Remember (זכרו) the Lord (אדני), the great and awesome one, and battle for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your homes" (Neh 4:8). Nehemiah's apparently effective[179] words link the members of the audience by means of kinship language. They emphasize the people's ties to one another and to their city. However, the notice to remember (זכרו) God, in notable contrast with the frequent appeals for God to remember Nehemiah upcoming later in NM, ultimately roots that unity in their common cause with their deity. At this juncture in the story, Nehemiah advocates, and stands for, a deep expression of solidarity within the community, in opposition to the forces of shame and disorder that besiege it.

Even though commentators quite often view the account of economic reforms in Neh 5 as an interruption to the main story,[180] the presentation of Nehemiah as a unifying force within the community carries over from Neh 4. In terms of genre, this chapter contains significant elements of continuity with the preceding story. We find this

---

178. Both verbs, ונתפלל and ונעמיד, are first person plural.

179. In actuality, the text elides this issue, making no comment on the immediate aftereffect of Nehemiah's speech but noting in the next verse that "God frustrated their scheme" (Neh 4:9).

180. See Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 235-236, for a discussion of the odd debate over whether the economic crisis of Neh 5 was caused by the wall construction project.

continuity particularly in Nehemiah's repeated engagement with his antagonists in a cycle of Accusation and Condemnation, as well as in the return of the courtly scene, though this time refracted through the lens of the stand-in for the king, the provincial governor

The chapter opens with a litany of economic complaints ("a great outcry from the people and their wives," Neh 5:1) from three groups of people who lament of either their general lack of foodstuffs (Neh 5:2), the necessity to sell their property to eat (Neh 5:3), or being forced to mortgage their property and send children into slavery to pay the king's tax (Neh 5:4). Nehemiah responds to this situation with forcefulness, even vitriol, condemning these lending practices. In a manner quite similar to his denunciations of Tobiah and Sanballat (and Geshem, although he appears thus far only in the proleptic notice at 2:19), Nehemiah angrily contends (ואריבה) against the "nobles and prefects" (החרים ואת־הסגנים) and calls an assembly to denounce them (Neh 5:7). The language of kinship is again central to his complaints, as the text speaks of people of the community (both lenders and borrowers) as "brothers" or "siblings" (אח) eight separate times in this chapter (Neh 5:1, 5 [twice], 7, 8 [twice], 10, 14). Nehemiah is presented here as a figure eminently concerned with communal welfare. In front of the assembly, he charges, "This is not טוב, what you are doing here. Should you not walk in the fear of our God, because of the shaming (מחרפת) of the nations our enemies?" Translators usually render טוב here straightforwardly as "good", but perhaps, following Neh 2:10, it would better capture the sense of how the text presents Nehemiah if it were translated something like "beneficence" or "welfare".

Despite striking these notes of communal unity, Neh 5 also begins to reveal a change in accent in the portrayal of Nehemiah and in Nehemiah's relationship with the residents of Judah. Not coincidentally, this chapter is also where we find the first unambiguous signs of the transformation of genre. In Neh 5, Nehemiah takes on the nobles and prefects because they are not acting in the interest of the community and doing nothing to repair the shame (חרפה) of city; the implication being, of course, that Nehemiah very much is. In opposition to the selfish and destructive actions of the nobles and prefects, Nehemiah prominently, even ostentatiously, displays his own concern for the people. On the heels of the pledge exacted by Nehemiah to relieve the debtors' burdens (Neh 5:10-13), the text turns to a vivid description of the generosity of Nehemiah's governorship, and particularly his banquet table (Neh 5:14-19).

The banquet scene presents the reader with a curious, even unexpected, appearance of a motif of the court tale genre. Even though 5:14-19 takes place far from Susa, Nehemiah's table casts the text back into the realm of the Persian court by evoking the literary trope in both Hebrew and Greek literature of the extravagance and luxury of Persia. In Neh 5:17-18a, the narrator notes that "at my table there were 150 Judeans and officials, and those who came to us from the surrounding nations, and that which was prepared for one day was one bull, six select sheep, and also fowl was prepared for us, and every ten days abundant wine." The loaded table may be a common way to display royal glory – it appears in the portrait of Solomon in Kings (cf. 1 Kings 10:4-5)[181] – but

181. "When the Queen of Sheba saw all of Solomon's wisdom, the house that he had

the banquet table was a central image in literary portrayals of the Persian empire. The extravagance of Nehemiah's table is somewhat reminiscent of the banquet in Esther 1:5-8. The scene in Esther 1 emphasizes the luxurious decor and drinking vessels, common tropes in Greek portrayals of Persia,[182] but not present in Neh 5. The size of the feast and service of whole and/or exotic animals, however, is also a notable literary motif in Greek depictions of the Persian court.[183] Herodotus, for example, states that, "Well-off Persians serve an ox, a horse, a camel, or a donkey, roasted whole in an oven...They are extremely fond of wine" (1.133),[184] a notion that Aristophanes satirizes in *Acharnians*, 85-86, "And who has ever seen ox casserole? What swaggering charlatanism!"[185] Nehemiah's table in Neh 5 is an exaggerated (though exaggerated in a typical manner) vision of what Nathan MacDonald calls "Persian conspicuous consumption".[186]

Although this symbol of generosity and excess provides a link back to the court

---

built, the fare of his table … and his wine service … she was breathless." See Nathan MacDonald, *Not Bread Alone: The Uses of Food in the Old Testament*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 154.

182. Margaret Miller, *Athens and Persia in the Fifth Century BC: A Study in Cultural Receptivity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 127. Clines states that in Esther, "banqueting has been presented to us as the Persian pastime *par excellence*" (*The Esther Scroll: The Story of the Story*. [Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1984], 36).

183. Miller, *Athens and Persia*, 127ff.

184. *The Histories*, Robin Waterfield trans. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

185. Loeb translation by Jeffrey Henderson cited in Miller, *Athens and Persia.*

186. MacDonald, *Not Bread Alone*, 203.

setting, and thus to the court tale genre, Neh 5:14-19 also contains signals that NM might be doing something quite different from other court stories. The narrative focalization has moved, along with the character of Nehemiah, from Susa to Jerusalem, and this exotic banquet table accordingly belongs not to Artaxerxes but to Nehemiah. That is, where Nehemiah previously stood subordinate to the king, he now plays the role of the king himself. This episode is quite continuous with the preceding text, insofar as it emphasizes Nehemiah's concern for the well-being of the city and its people. Where it differs, though, is that it, for the first time, does not clearly portray Nehemiah as an actor working within the limitations of the existing power structure as framed by the court, but rather as a magnanimous ruler who bestows good will as an exercise of his own power. Nehemiah is no longer the intercessor for the people before the king. He is now the face of the foreign crown in Jerusalem. Notably, the first description of Nehemiah as a governor (Neh 5:14) appears in this section immediately after Nehemiah enacts a relief of debt by fiat. Not as much a drama of courtiers up against the empire, but now a showcase of gubernatorial (and, implicitly, imperial) power, NM begins its shift toward a new genre.

In fact, Neh 5:14-19 is also the site of two other indications of a new genre in NM, the official memorial. The first is the repudiation of previous rulers. Neh 5:15 reads, "The former governors who were before me burdened the people and took from them food and wine, in addition to 40 shekels of silver; even their servants abused power over the people. But I did not do this, because of the fear of God." This criticism and

denigration of his predecessors, which Mowinckel tied to royal inscriptions,[187] parallels what Mario Liverani calls "contrastive underscoring."[188] Contrastive underscoring is a common literary device in many Mesopotamian royal and official inscriptions, including Persian inscriptions such as the Darius' Bisitun inscription and the Cyrus Cylinder. The rejection of previous rulers serves as a justification of the current reign.[189] It also, as in the Persian examples, offers an ideological means for denying the possibility (and usually likelihood) that the current ruler was some variety of usurper. The Bisitun inscription is a classic example of the 'contrastive underscoring.' In it, Darius describes his ascent to power, which entailed the overthrowing of the dynastic heir, as a return to true Achaemenid rule. The inscription legitimates Darius' rule by asserting that the previous king, Bardiya son of Cambyses, but perhaps an impostor named Gaumata or Smerdis, was the real usurper, and that Darius, a distant relative of Cambyses, was merely reestablishing the royal line.[190] Although NM does not seem to propound this ideology of nostalgia, the text may be engaged in heading off criticism that Nehemiah was some sort of usurper (and it seems possible that Sanballat and Tobiah, or the parties for whom they stand in as representatives, would have viewed Nehemiah as such). As such, Neh 5:14-19

---

187. Mowinckel, "Die vorderasiatischen," 205-308. See also §1.1.1 above.

188. Mario Liverani, "Deeds," 2361.

189. Liverani, 2361.

190. See the discussion in Pierre Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander: A History of the Persian Empire*, Peter T. Daniels, trans. (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2002), 97-106.

indeed links the text to the device of "contrastive underscoring."

The second, and clearest, trace of the official memorial genre is the appearance of the זכרה formula (5:19), by which the text expresses the concern with Nehemiah's name and memory. Here the formula is expressed in this way: "Remember me, O my God, for the good [benefaction?] (לטובה), all of which I am doing for this people." As Mowinckel, Schottroff, and von Rad picked up on, this phrase clearly is at home in votive and memorial texts. 5:19 represents the first of several such phrases in NM, though at this point we should pause to note that the request for remembrance is linked specifically to Nehemiah's work on behalf of his people. Even if 5:19 appears directly after Nehemiah's display of wealth and excess, that display is nonetheless in service of doing good and eliminating the shame of the city. This will change, however — later instances of the זכרה formula strike, as we shall see shortly, a notably different tone.

Neh 6 marks a return to the dispute narratives, but once the genre change has been initiated, we can see more signs of the transition from Nehemiah as advocate to Nehemiah as one interested in self-glorification. The focus of the story continues to narrow onto Nehemiah himself and away from the community. At the outset of the chapter, Nehemiah's enemies cook up yet another scheme — or, at least, NM portrays this plan as a deceitful trick — and Sanballat and Geshem send a message requesting Nehemiah's presence in the Ono Valley (Neh 6:1-2a). Nehemiah, however, accuses them of planning "to do evil (רע) to me" (Neh 6:2b) and rejects this idea because "the work will cease if I leave it to come down to you" (Neh 6:3b). Sanballat and Geshem fruitlessly

repeat this offer four times, then send an open letter that reports rumors that Nehemiah is attempting to reestablish a kingdom of Judah (Neh 6:4-7). This last salvo leads Nehemiah to charge that "none of these things of which you speak happened; you invented them in your mind" (Neh 6:8). Nehemiah interprets the open letter as a ruse to distract him from the work at hand. The narrative then abruptly shifts to speak of a character named Shemaiah ben Delaiah inviting Nehemiah into the Temple (Neh 6:10). He treats this offer as a further scheme, an attempt perhaps to show Nehemiah as either cowardly ("Would a person like me flee?") or presumptuous or ignorant of holiness regulations ("What kind of a person such as I could enter the temple and live?") (Neh 6:11). He sees Tobiah and Sanballat behind this idea and interprets their plan as a way to give him a bad reputation (שם רע) in order to shame him (למען יחרפוני) (Neh 6:12-13). Nehemiah then utters another curse against his enemies, reminiscent of Neh 3:36-37, asking God to "remember" (זכרה) Tobiah and Sanballat "according to their deeds,"[191] as well as the prophets who tried to intimidate him (היו מיראים אותי) (Neh 6:14). This interjection is then followed by the notice of the wall's completion (Neh 6:15-16) and a summary catalog of various other small accusations against Nehemiah, including the allies of Tobiah who would speak of Tobiah's "good things" (טובתיו) in front of Nehemiah (Neh 6:17-19).

As this brief summary of Neh 6 suggests, Nehemiah continues to be portrayed, in court tale fashion, as a political actor who must fend off threats to his power or prestige.

---

191. Literally, "according to his deeds" (כמעשיו).

Yet, the tone of his condemnations, along with the usage of the key words טוב and רע (and חרפה), show signs of shifts in the characterization of Nehemiah. We begin to see the transformation of Nehemiah from a character whose (self-)evaluation is tied to the welfare of the people to a character whose concern is focused much more closely on self, at the expense, and even detriment, of the other Judeans. Neh 6:2 mentions that Sanballat and Geshem wish to do evil *to me* (לעשות לי רעה). Likewise, Nehemiah laments (Neh 6:13) that his enemies wish to give him a bad name and to shame *me* (יחרפוני); whereas earlier Nehemiah combatted the חרפה of the city, now he fights for his own reputation. He is affronted at the possibility that any of his enemies would have a good reputation (cf. Tobiah's "good things" [טובתיו] in Neh 6:19).

The shift unfolds further when one contrasts the second זכרה-motif of NM at Neh 6:14 with the first at Neh 5:19. The most obvious difference between 5:19, which reads, "Remember me, O my God, for the good (לטובה), all of which I am doing for this people," and 6:14 is the negative tone of the latter, unique among NM's זכרה motifs, but otherwise quite similar to Neh 3:36-37.[192] 6:14, nevertheless, is not a simple inversion of 5:19. In the earlier request, Nehemiah asked that he be remembered for all that he did (כל אשר־עשיתי) for the people. In 6:14, he requests that the enemies be remembered also for what they did (כמעשיו). The deeds of his enemies, however, were not directed against the people, as one might expect were this the mirror image of 5:19, but against Nehemiah

192. This is a further sign, I believe, of the integration of Nehemiah's apologia with the wall-building narrative.

and his reputation.

As Mowinckel noted, Neh 6 evidences a series of short, not well connected narratives which offer three separate notices of Sanballat and/or Tobiah's accusations or conspiracies (Neh 6:1-2, 5-7, and 10-13, with 17-19 as a resumptive summary),[193] as well as Nehemiah's responses (Neh 6:3-4, 8-9, and 14). The motif of accusation and protest, of course, is an element of the court narrative genre, and its repetition in Neh 6 suggests the continuation of the script begun in Neh 1. This conflict story motif, however, also finds a parallel in the memorial text of Darius I (DB). In DB, following the completion of the first conflict (between Darius and Bardiya/Gaumata), the text continues with a series of shorter narratives that tell of other rebellions and conspiracies against Darius (OP paragraphs 16-53; Babylonian sections 15-42; cf. Aramaic version,). In other words, the repeated conflicts with Nehemiah's enemies in Neh 6 simultaneously evoke both the court narrative and Bisitun. Additionally, we see another reflex of the inscription genre with the variation of the זכרה motif at 6:14. Finally, this chapter contains Nehemiah's accusation of falsehood against his enemies (6:8 "no such things as you say happened, for you have devised them out of your own mind"), which echoes the central motif in Bisitun of 'truth' (OP *arta*) versus 'the lie' (OP *drauga*), an opposition which carries strong connotations of loyalty versus disloyalty to the crown.[194]

---

193. Additionally, 6:4 makes reference to even further repetition ("they sent to me in this manner four times").

194. Briant, 124-127.

NM does not meet every criteria outlined by Wills' script for the court conflict tale, particularly regarding those elements pertaining to the resolution of the story (see Table 2.3 below).[195] In the narrative, Nehemiah never does see the vindication he urgently and repeatedly requests. His enemies never receive their punishment. The lack of narrative resolution, however, does not negate the generic signals of Neh 1-6. Rather, the absences are due to the subtle transformations in genre as the text progresses. Up through the end of Neh 4, the story reads very much like a lively court tale, a narrative that is about Nehemiah's building project, but a narrative in which the action is *framed* and *propelled* by the conflicts among courtiers for political status.

195. In this respect, Kellermann's suggestion that NM is a "prayer of the accused" on parallel to lament psalms is more convincing than other scholars give it credit for. Ultimately, Kellermann posits a specifically legal setting that is untenable (see Emerton's review of Kellermann in *JTS* 23[1972]: 171-185). Yet his proposal, more than others' astutely picks up on the unfinished nature of the Nehemiah's conflict, and in that sense, is also strikingly similar to Nickelsburg's emphasis on the protest of the innocent person.

Table 2.3: NM's departure from court narrative patterns. Missing or questionable elements in *italics*.

Court conflict tale (Wills)
Intro: Protagonist's cleverness Neh 2:1-8
Intro: Relation to king and/or courtiers Neh 1 (especially Neh 1:1, 11b)
Intro: Naming of antagonists Neh 2:10
Body: Conflict/accusation Neh 2:19-20; 3:33-35; 4:1-2; 6:1-2, 5-7, 10-13 Neh 17-19 (summary)
Condemnation Neh 2:19; 3:36-37; 6:2ff.
Body: Proving protagonist's virtue *Neh 6:15? (completion of wall)*
Protest of innocence Neh 3:36-37; 6:3-4, 8-9, 14
Conclusion: Punishment of antagonist
Conclusion: Rewarding of protagonist

2.2.1.3 The transformation completed: Neh 13

As the story progresses through chapters 5 and 6, the generic resonances between NM and official memorials pick up momentum. The use of the זכרה formula in Neh 5 and

6 and the contrastive underscoring in Neh 5 suggest a change in genre, and in Neh 13, the transformation finds its completion. In this chapter, we see that the narration of events in this chapter is dominated by what Mowinckel called the enumerative style and that the זכרה formula appears four times (13:14, 22, 29, 31). Additionally, the tenor of the זוכרה formula changes as well, developing the emphasis, foreshadowed in Neh 6, on the centrality of Nehemiah's reputation over against the well-being of community. Whereas the earlier chapters of NM focused on the טוב of the community and Nehemiah's efforts to overcome the חרפה of the city, Neh 13 shows a Nehemiah determined to elevate his own reputation (to ensure that his own טוב is remembered) , earned by combatting the abuses (described as רע) committed by the community itself.

Concerning its formal character of the account of events, Neh 13 employs mini-narratives that are loosely connected, often with vague temporal phrases (ולפני מזה at 13:4, ובכל־זה at 13:6, בימים ההמה at 13:15, and גם בימים ההם at 13:23). Mowinckel's contention that NM makes use of the enumerative style is most apt for describing this chapter. To summarize the chapter, beginning with 13:4,[196] the first section (Neh 13:4-9) begins with the phrase "and before this" (ולפני מזה) and tells of Nehemiah's casting out of Tobiah's interests from the temple. Partially related is the following section, Neh 13:10-14, which narrates Nehemiah's establishment of the Levitical portions and founding of a temple

196. For an argument that Neh 13:1-3 do not properly belong to NM, see chapter 3 below.

treasury committee,[197] and which concludes with the first instance of the זכרה formula. Neh 13:15-22, introduced by "in those days" (בימים ההמה), describes the cessation of commerce on the Sabbath, and also closes with a זכרה formula.[198] Also beginning with an "in those days" phrase (גם בימים ההם), Neh 13:23-27 details Nehemiah's rejection of purportedly mixed marriages, while Neh 13:28-29, likely a different section,[199] presents Nehemiah's rebuke of Jehoiada and concludes with a זוכרה phrase directed against "the defilements of the priesthood" (גאלי הכהנה). Finally, the chapter (and the book) closes with a summary verse (30) and one final appeal to remember Nehemiah (v. 31).

As we progress through this chapter, we see that the shift in emphasis from the state of the community to the deeds of Nehemiah that was subtle earlier in the story finally lands on the latter with certainty. The well-being of the people, in contrast, has fully disappeared, at least as an explicit motivation. When the text resumes Nehemiah's story (after the long break of Neh 7-12 in the extant, canonical version), we see that Tobiah, aided by Eliashib, has acquired a share in the tithes and other income of the temple (Neh 13:4-5). Nehemiah, evidently, had been back in the capital (Neh 13:6a-

---

197. See Joachim Schaper, "The Temple Treasury Committee in the Times of Nehemiah and Ezra," *VT* 47 (1997), 200-206.

198. Because Neh 13:19 begins with a phrase reminiscent of NM's frequent ויהי כאשר שמע phrases — here, ויהי כאשר צללו שערי ירושלם — one might also consider Neh 13:15-18 and 19-22 to be separate sections.

199. Cf. Wright, *Rebuilding Identity*, 257ff; C. Pichon, "La Prohibition des Mariages mixte par Nêhêmie (XIII 23-31)," *VT* 47 (1997): 168-199.

bα).[200] Nehemiah returns to Jerusalem and then observes "the evil [רע] that Eliashib did for Tobiah, to give him a chamber in the courts of the House of God" (Neh 13:7). The accusation that Tobiah is involved in רע against Jerusalem is, of course, nothing new to NM. Here, however, Nehemiah's accusations go against the highest levels of the priesthood and the temple establishment of Jerusalem.[201] Additionally, Nehemiah's response to this turn of events, "It was very displeasing to me [וירע לי מאד] and I threw all the goods of the house of Tobiah out of the chamber" (Neh 13:8) recalls the language of Neh 2:10, where Tobiah and Sanballat were angry with Nehemiah's concern with the people's well-being "it was greatly displeasing to them" (וירע להם רעה גדלה). Even further, contrast Nehemiah's accusation in Neh 13:8 to that of 5:9: in the latter, Nehemiah charged that what the lenders were doing was "not good," or "not in the interests of well-being" (לא־טוב). Neh 13:8, in other words, is the first signal in the chapter that Nehemiah's mode of interaction with the people in Jerusalem (and not just his named enemies) has finally and completely shifted from concern for well-being to contention.[202]

---

200. Neh 13:6 curiously describes the king as "Artaxerxes of Babylon"

201. Several commentators have claimed that this Eliashib is not to be identified with the high priest Eliashib in Neh 3 and 12. I find this claim to be possible, if unlikely, and motivated by a desire to rescue the traditional chronological order of Ezra and Nehemiah. However, even if this Eliashib is not a high priest, his control over a "chamber" (לשכה) of the temple, and thus over the collection and distribution of the temple's goods, would make him an official of the highest level. For a complete discussion of these problems, see Excursus in chapter 3 below.

202. This is not to suggest that the author(s) of chapter 13 did not seek to portray Nehemiah's reforms as in the best interests of the people; rather, the point is that the tone and means by which the text depicts Nehemiah's actions has noticeably changed, and

Next, upon discovering that the Levites had not been receiving their due from the temple, Nehemiah rebukes the prefects and then sets up a treasury committee to regularize the temple's processing of its tithes and offerings (Neh 13:10-13). Neh 13:14 then brings us NM's second זכרה formula, and the first in chap. 13, which reads, "Remember me, O my God, on account of this (על־זאת), and do not wipe out my faithfulness (חסדי), which I did (עשיתי) regarding the House of my God and its services (בבית אלהי ובמשמריו)." The content of this plea resembles the earlier one in 5:19, in which Nehemiah says, "Remember me, O my God, for the good/welfare, all of which I did for this people." Neh 13:14, though an subtle difference emerges. Both 5:19 and 13:14 turn on that which Nehemiah did (עשיתי), but where the former still evidences a link to the communal efforts of the early part of the book, the latter exhibits pure commemoration: if anything in NM resembles a votive donation text, it is this.

In Neh 13:15-22, the reader sees Nehemiah decry commercial exchange on the Sabbath. He once again contends (ואריבה) against elements of the Jerusalem community, this time the "nobles" (חרים), exclaiming, "What is this evil thing (הדבר הרע) that you are doing (עשים), profaning the Sabbath?!" (Neh 13:17). Appearing shortly after the lauding of what Nehemiah did (עשה) in the זכרה formula in 13:14, this verse's naming of the deeds done (עשה) by the nobles as רע contrasts them with the hero of the story. Neh 13:18a continues Nehemiah's rebuke of the nobles for their Sabbath practices: "Is this not what

---

changed in a manner consistent with a shift in genre.

our ancestors did (עשו)? Our god brought all this evil (כל־הרעה הזאת) against us and against this city." Here, not only do Nehemiah's words characterize the actions of the nobles of Jerusalem in terms previously reserved for Sanballat and Tobiah, they also make the deuteronomistic-flavored claim that these evils are on par with the sins that brought down the kingdom of Judah in the sixth century.

However, as the remainder of the chapter reveals, the contrast ultimately is not between the *deeds* of Nehemiah and the priests (13:4ff, 28ff.), the prefects (13:11), the nobles (13:15ff), the "merchants and sellers" (13:20), or the people who married women of "Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab" (13:23ff) — and note just how long that list is — but between those people and *Nehemiah himself*. The section on criticism of Sabbath violation concludes with yet another זכרה formula, which this time reads, "And also for this, remember me, O my God, and look compassionately upon me according to your great loyalty (חסדך)" (Neh 13:22). In this instance, Nehemiah's appeal asks that God treat him with חסד, mirroring his mention of his own חסד in 13:14. Additionally, 13:22 lacks any explicit mention of deeds, let alone of actions done in the interest of the people's welfare. Tracking the development of the זכרה formula thus far, we see that whereas Neh 5:19 cites both the good (הטובה) and what Nehemiah did (עשה), 13:14 refers to the deeds that he did (עשה) for the temple and its service ("Remember me on account of this (על־זאת), and do not blot out my devotion (חסדי), which I did for the house of my God and for its services"), but not the good. Finally, 13:22 removes both the deeds and the good and focuses on Nehemiah himself.

The last major section of Neh 13 contains another rebuke of Nehemiah's community, this time of "those who married Ashdodite, Ammonite, and Moabite women" (Neh 13:23). Nehemiah once again contends (ואריב) with them, this time enacting somewhat more extreme measures: "I cursed them, I beat some of them, and I tore out their hair" (Neh 13:25a). He makes them swear oaths to avoid such marriages in the future (Neh 13:25b), likens them to Solomon's disastrous marriages (Neh 13:26), and then asks rhetorically, "And to you we should listen and do (לעשת) all this great evil (כל־הרעה הגדולה הזאת) and transgress before God by marrying foreign women?" (Neh 13:27). Once again, the text attributes evil deeds to a segment of the people of Jerusalem and, after juxtaposing the not-entirely-related issue of Jehoida's marriage to Sanballat's daughter (Neh 13:28), the text takes the surprising step of enshrining Nehemiah's rebukes in a זכרה formula, stating, "Remember them, O my God, on account of the defilements of the priesthood (גאלי הכהנה), as well as the covenant of the priesthood and the Levites" (Neh 13:29).

The book closes with a summary of sorts, wherein the narrator states that "I cleansed them of all that is foreign, and I established the ordinances (משמרות) of the priests and Levites, each for his tasks, and the wood offering, at appointed times, and the first fruits" (Neh 13:30-31a). Appended to this summary is the final זכרה formula: "Remember me, O my God, for good" (לטובה) (Neh 13:31b), which does not contain any explicit mention of actions (in contrast with each preceding instance of the זכרה formula). This closing plea notably contains the sole usage of טוב in Neh 13, in either noun or verb

form. That Neh 13 makes use of טוב only in Nehemiah's appeal to be remembered, combined with the fact that the chapter repeatedly denounces several different elements of the community, suggests that we are now a long way from the portrait of Nehemiah as a benevolent intercessor for his people.[203]

If any trace of the court tale genre remains in Neh 13, it appears in the passing remark that Nehemiah had returned to the court of the Persian king while Tobiah had gained his foothold in the temple (Neh 13:6). The potentially crucial information about Nehemiah's surreptitious return to the court ("during all this, I was not in Jerusalem") warrants only a passing mention. Nonetheless, it serves to highlight the significant differences between the function of the court here and its usual role in other court tales. The court in Neh 13:6 stands not for a realm in which a courtier such as Nehemiah must use his or her cleverness to come out on top, but rather for a base of power underwriting Nehemiah's authority in Jerusalem. Neh 13 re-inserts Nehemiah into Yehudite politics. This chapter portrays a situation in which various local interest groups (Tobiah's family, high levels of the priesthood, merchants and traders, etc.) are operating and asserting their own power. Into this situation, Nehemiah reemerges from Persia to impose reforms on the local population. The degree to which the literary depiction of Nehemiah's reforms reflects Persian interests is a subject of discussion for later (see chapter 4 below). For

---

203. Note also that the only mention of עם, "people," in Neh 13 appears in Neh 13:24 and is used in a derogatory fashion to describe the languages of "the peoples," i.e. the nations.

now, however, suffice it to say that the role of the court subtly changes in parallel with the shift in genre. Nehemiah the courtier, representative for the people of Jerusalem, has become Nehemiah the governor, the symbol of the king in Jerusalem.

2.2.1.4 Reading the whole from the end

The idea that NM contains internal difference does not by itself advance the discussion. The current consensus position in scholarship on NM, of course, is based on the thesis of NM's inconsistency. This project's perspective differs, however, insofar as it suggests that the tensions within NM are not explicable, without remainder, as an effect of literary addition. NM exhibits a subtle, yet decisive, transformation of genre, not a clean break between one genre and the next. While the above reading has thus far emphasized a directional change, from court tale to official memorial, a review of the *entirety* of NM in light of this transformation shows that several elements in the text, which appear prior to Neh 5 and as early as Neh 2, are quite recognizable as features of the memorial genre. That is, rather than just a one-way change, NM reveals a simultaneity of genre, a parallax effect, so to speak. Reading the story as it unfolds, one perceives a court tale that does not arrive at its expected end. Reading from the perspective of NM's conclusion, however, one finds a memorial text which fully blooms in chapters 5 and 13 but which leaves traces throughout the story. In retrospect, some elements of the earlier part of NM

hint at the generic transformation to come. For one, the disjointed mini-narratives Neh 6 evoke, as Mowinckel observed, the "enumerative style" common to royal inscriptions.[204] Additionally, Nehemiah's status in the court in Neh 2, a central aspect of the presentation of Nehemiah as the clever courtier, also falls in line with the emphasis in Egyptian career biographies on proximity and access to the king.[205]

In fact, the proximity of the protagonist to the highest levels of royal power is an intriguingly versatile image in NM. It fits quite naturally into, indeed is a major aspect of, each major genre. The compatibility of the image of courtly power for both the memorial and court tale genre — along with other commonalities such as disputes between protagonist and antagonists, and emphasis on loyalty to deity — shows the extent to which these genres themselves are well integrated in NM, both literarily and thematically. However, this compatibility takes advantage of a fundamental ambiguity in the meaning of the court in the story. To what extent does Nehemiah craftily manipulate royal power for his own (and his people's) ends? To what extent does Nehemiah employ the court as a source of his own power? In other words, is Nehemiah's relationship with royal power at its core subversive (or, to be more precise, subversively accommodationist) or is it much more straightforward? This duality forms the central problem, even contradiction, of NM, because it derives from the duality of Nehemiah's twin roles. Nehemiah is simultaneously

204. Mowinckel, "Die vorderasiatischen," 286.

205. Heise, 286ff.

the restorer of Israel's former glory, the rescuer of the people, and the representative of Persia's interests in Jerusalem. While the implied author(s) of the text, by all appearances, sought to present these twin roles as part of a seamless whole, a closer look at NM's shifts in ideology, effected by the shift in genre, reveals these roles to be essentially antagonistic.

2.2.2 The ideologies of NM's genres

NM's attempt to join the court tale with the official memorial points toward how these two genres are based on strikingly similar, yet ultimately incommensurate ideologies. Specifically, the overtures toward the court narrative genre promise resolutions that the memorial genre cannot fulfill. On a literary level, the memorial genre, with its drive toward eternal remembrance, pushes the promised exaltation of Nehemiah and the punishment of the enemies to an indeterminate future time and makes the *narrative* resolution impossible. The problem goes deeper than that, though, and the ways that NM uses its constituent genres suggests that these genres are tied to different ideologies that are themselves irresolvable. Though NM appropriates the memorial genre, it does not simply replicate it. As Mowinckel argues, the inscriptional style of NM modifies the base (memorial/inscriptional) genre in order to minimize the glorification, indeed near-deification, of the protagonist found in its Mesopotamian manifestations. Nehemiah, unlike, say, a Neo-Assyrian king, strikes a more humble pose and emphasizes

his subservience to Yahweh[206] (though I might add that NM is like Behistun in this regard). Nevertheless, the very presence of this genre inevitably communicates the ideology of its original form, even if in a muted way. Here, I want to turn again to Jameson, who gives a key to understanding the uneasy balance between court tale and memorial when he writes,

> a genre is essentially a socio-symbolic message, or in other terms, … form is immanently and intrinsically an ideology in its own right. When [genres] are reappropriated and refashioned in quite different social and cultural contexts, this message persists and must be functionally reckoned into the new form.[207]

Put another way, genres, in the words of Carol Newsom, are "a means of grasping or perceiving reality, quite literally a *form of thought*."[208] By their very nature as shared modes of speaking and writing, genres constrain literary innovation such that their customary usage cannot be fully disavowed.

Above, I argued that the perspective from which one reads NM — whether from the beginning in 'real time' or from the end as a whole — influences whether one understands it as a court tale transformed into a memorial text or a memorial text with court tale elements. Neither perspective, of course, is unrecognizable to the other, and the importance of such a distinction lies ultimately only in the academic matter of generic categorization. Where this parallactic understanding of NM's genres gains importance is in the question of the ideologies that undergird each genre. In its self-presentation, the

---

206. Mowinckel, *Studien II*, 100-101

207. Jameson, *Political Unconscious*, 141.

208. Newsom, *Job*, 82, italics in original.

aim of NM is the depiction of the restoration of Judah and Jerusalem, and both genres contribute to that goal. However, each genre casts its own light on the meaning of that restoration, such that NM contains two superficially similar, yet fundamentally irreconcilable, interpretations of Nehemiah's work and relationship with the people of Judah. The extent to which the two genres parallel one another obscures the underlying ideological tension between them, a tension that parallels fundamental ideological problems of the Persian period restoration efforts: was the restoration a unified effort to solidify the community and reject outside influence or was it something imposed by outside (Persian) forces and their local representatives, effected by sowing division within the community? From the perspective of a modern historically-minded reader, it may not cause much difficulty to suggest that both factors were in play simultaneously. To Judeans of the Persian and Hellenistic periods inclined to favor the former factor, however, the presence of external influence made NM's account of the restoration into a contradiction in need of resolution.

In order to unpack this set of claims, we need more precisely to delineate the parameters of the ideologies tied to the genres of NM. Though one can (as I briefly did above in §2.2.1 and §2.2.2 above) outline general ideological characteristics of each genre, and I do believe that these characteristics ultimately exert a limiting (if not entirely determining) influence on the text, it would be a mistake to assume that one simply can import those ideologies directly into the text. Following Jameson, I would like to work toward establishing the terms the text itself uses for evaluating the events of the narrative.

These terms, what Jameson names "ideologemes," are the basic building blocks of ideology, the ideas that frame and limit the narrative.[209] In the case of NM, my reading suggests that the story filters all the events it narrates through the lens of the opposition between טוב and רע. NM presents Nehemiah's career as an effort to elevate the people's welfare and the good deeds undertaken in pursuit of that effort (טוב), as well as an attempt to combat the disruptive and shameful evil that has beset Jerusalem and its people (רע). These two key words drive the text's evaluation of events. Yet, as we also have seen, these key words are shifting sands on which to build a consistent framework. They are, of course, also quite supple terms (and ideas), and have been employed in NM with, I would submit, great creativity. The transformation of genre in NM, indicated by many different clues in the text, is simultaneously signaled by the subtle shift in the meanings of טוב and רע. The integration of the two genre-types can also be understood as an attempt to integrate two different ideologies or, in other words, two different sets of רע–טוב oppositions.

In the earlier, court tale part of NM, טוב signifies activity, particularly cooperative or communal activity, that effects a change from the current (shameful) status. Accordingly, the concept of רע is tied first to Nehemiah's temporarily precarious position before the king (cf. "The king said … 'This can only be evil of the heart.' Then I was very afraid" in Neh 2:2) and then to the shameful status quo of Jerusalem. The world has been

209. Jameson, *Political Unconscious,* 87-88.

turned topsy-turvy – Judeans live under foreign rule and Jerusalem is in a state of shame and disrepair – and Nehemiah makes use of his access to the king, along with his abilities to unify the people, to help effect a reversal.

As NM progresses, however, the word טוב begins to be associated with the person of Nehemiah and with the order that he has (re)established. Goodness belongs only to Nehemiah, while others, insofar as they are mentioned, are denigrated and portrayed as purveyors of רע. Evil, in the later parts of NM, describes the several affronts to Nehemiah and disruptions in his work. Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem are singled out for derision because they attack *him*, not the people. The lenders in Neh 5 upset the system of kinship and charity modeled by Nehemiah's table. The Sabbath-breakers, the high-level priests, and other offenders in Neh 13 disrupt the proper order of service of the temple. Nehemiah's status and reputation are paramount in the latter sections of NM, and his reforms are central to the story primarily (if not solely) insofar as they reflect well upon him.

When one juxtaposes these two sets of רע–טוב oppositions, two important points of contrast emerge. The first is that, when the genre shifts, the narrative changes how it evaluates and where it locates the concepts of order or status quo. In the early part of the story, the court tale portion, the state of affairs in the city is a source of shame. Also, in the court scene that opens NM, one is reminded that the Judeans are ruled by a foreign power and the order of things is determined by a fickle foreign king and his whims. This status quo must be overcome by the clever protagonist who works on behalf (and then

with) his people for the common good. Later in NM, order begins to signify something good, whether that be proper relationships between family members (cf. kinship language in Neh 5, or marriage in Neh 13), or proper maintenance of the temple cult. The intimation that Nehemiah only just discovered the many abuses detailed in Neh 13 (13:7, 10, 15, 23) upon his return to Jerusalem for the second time portrays these abuses as disruptions in the order that Nehemiah has helped to install. Toward the end of NM, Nehemiah has achieved the "good," while interference into Nehemiah's plans is evil and evidence of regression. This transition, to be sure, makes narrative sense: Nehemiah came to Jerusalem to complete a task, and once that task was (at least mostly) completed, Nehemiah has an interest in seeing that it is not undone. Yet it is a transition nonetheless. The notion that the political order is a system that one must work to "game," or even to subvert, fits well with the court tale genre. In other Jewish court tales, we see situations where the deck has been stacked against the protagonist, and he or she must employ cleverness to right the situation. In contrast, the emphasis on memory in memorials is an insistence on the permanence of how events are evaluated, as well as a celebration of the (divinely-underwritten) power of the protagonist; changes in status quo suggest a dissolution of that power.

The second contrast between the two sets of טוב–רע oppositions is more subtle, but better highlights the deep incommensurability between the two genres. When the common good (טוב) versus the stubborn, shameful status quo (רע) transforms into completed reform (טוב) versus regression or backsliding (רע), the text's evaluation of the

role of the people of Judah in the restoration reverses as well. At the outset of NM, the welfare of the city and its inhabitants is the motivating factor for Nehemiah's mission. Up through Neh 4 and 5, Nehemiah's concern for the people manifests itself with a unified community. The shift in focus toward Nehemiah's own deeds later in the story, however, means not only that community welfare diminishes in importance but also that some of Nehemiah's reforms are undertaken at the expense of some elements within Judah itself. The people of Judah are never explicitly equated with Nehemiah's enemies, but by Neh 13 no longer are they his partners. Nehemiah finds disruption, backsliding, and foreignness around every corner. Further, it seems that the boundaries that NM draws between foreign and local were, at the least, not obvious to all involved parties, and likely even misrepresented Yahwists as foreigners.[210]

Once again, these two genres share a great deal ideologically and, in a sense fit quite naturally in NM. Both intertwine implicit acceptance of foreign power with loyalty to community and Yahweh. Court tales, as evidenced in Esther, Daniel 1-6, and others, urge faithfulness to the Jewish community but also implicitly support the foreign rule. They, as Wills writes, presume that "the authority of the [foreign] court is finally affirmed."[211] As a narrative form suited to the needs of diaspora communities, court tales elevate the story's protagonist insofar as she or he offers a model for how Jews can

---

210. See Gary N. Knoppers, "Nehemiah and Sanballat: The Enemy Without or Within?"

211. Wills, *Jew in the Court*, 22.

remain faithful while living and thriving in a political world made by others. However, the community of the NM is *not* a diaspora community. And despite the attempt to adapt this diaspora genre for the homeland, when taken out of the diaspora, a model for living under foreign power meant a model for acquiescing to external control, particularly when juxtaposed with the less subtle ideology of royal power found in the memorial genre. Insofar as NM becomes more like a memorial text, it begins to celebrate courtly power in a manner much less complicated than in the court tale. The repeated use of the זכרה motif suggests that NM tries to portray Nehemiah as a mediator – a servant of Yahweh working for his people – but the genre frustrates those expressions of humility. NM's creation of an indigenous Israelite version of the memorial genre ostensibly points toward Nehemiah's faithfulness to Yahweh and to Israel's cultic traditions, but ultimately cannot rid itself of the traces of imperial ideology.

This discussion has already begun to implicate crucial historical questions regarding Persian and likely even early Hellenistic Judah — appropriately, given genre's mediating position between text and world — and hints at the limitations of a purely text-based study of genre. NM, by means of its combination of genres, puts forth a highly creative, highly imaginative, solution to a profound ideological problem of post-exilic Judaism: the tension between fidelity to Israel's traditions and acceptance of foreign rule. Israelite society after the exile utilized, perhaps required, Persian resources to rebuild their community, even though its own ideological and religious traditions demanded that community be shaped by the resources of the Yahwistic polity alone. The extent of the

seriousness of this problem, as well as NM's success in addressing it, are matters that will occupy the rest of this dissertation. Earlier, I identified readers as central to understanding how genre functions in a text and, while reader expectation can to some degree be inferred via generic patterns, more can be learned by attention to actual reception of the text. In chapter 3 below I will argue that the earliest identifiable readers of NM were the composers of other sections of Ezra-Nehemiah, particularly Ezra 7-10 and Neh 10. The authors of these texts, I believe, sensed the instability in NM and attempted to compensate for it with their own, ostensibly more comprehensive account of the restoration. Then, in chapter 4, I will review some recent work on the history of the late Persian and early Hellenistic periods in order to account for the nature of the reception of NM.

Chapter 3: The reception of the Nehemiah Memorial within Ezra-Nehemiah

The notion that ancient reader expectation is an essential aspect of genre raises the question of just who any such ancient readers may have been. One can partially reconstruct reader expectation through comparison with similar texts, assuming that readers would approach texts expecting repetition of the tropes and patterns found in texts previously encountered. Appeal to specific ancient readings of NM, though, can only help to sharpen the analysis of NM by providing a concrete response to NM. Unfortunately, in contrast to many other biblical tales, NM has produced only a small number of interpretations. The lack of any extant Targum or Midrash of Nehemiah and the dearth of any extended Christian commentaries prior to Bede suggest that the story of Nehemiah did not give life to an extensive interpretive tradition. In later Jewish tradition, Ezra's importance far outstrips Nehemiah's. Notwithstanding the relative unpopularity of NM, one can trace a minority strain of ancient Jewish reception of the NM through Ben Sira, the Maccabean literature, the Animal Apocalypse of 1 Enoch, and Josephus' *Antiquities*.[1]

The most proximate and most thoroughgoing response to NM, and the subject of this chapter, is found right next to NM, within the book Ezra-Nehemiah itself. In fact, following the work of Reinhard Kratz[2] and his student Wright, I find that NM is one of

---

1. See Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 54-59.

2. Reinhard G. Kratz, *The Composition of the Narrative Books of the Old Testament*

the earliest, if not itself the earliest, blocs of Ezra-Nehemiah, to which much of the rest the book has been added as a supplement, and even more, a response. I have thus far spoken about NM as if its parameters were a given.[3] I have up to this point withheld a more thorough discussion of the details of NM's literary boundaries. Part of the reason for such a delay is rhetorical, to allow the primary focus of this study – genre – to take center stage from the outset and to avoid getting bogged down in literary analysis. However, as I argue in chapter 1, redaction-critical analysis and genre are necessarily intertwined. The act of framing of genre in terms of ancient readers, therefore, also provides an ideal setting in which to present a definition for NM that can take into account two aspects of NM that are in tension. The first is the fact that the tale of Nehemiah is indisputably a source, that it is not identical to Ezra-Nehemiah and is indeed broken up by the authors of the book. Reading Nehemiah's story thus necessarily means doing implicit source or redaction criticism, the question being how far one wishes to pursue the literary divisions. The second is the notion, which I believe has been lost in recent redaction-critical work on NM, that certain commonalities stretch across NM, whether or not it has been revised or edited.

If we are to understand NM as a text that, whatever internal fissures it may have, displays an ideological continuity (or whose ideological shifts cannot fully be reduced to editorial activity), the next question to consider is which texts make up NM. The basic

---

(John Bowden, trans. New York: T & T Clark, 2005).

3. Again, I define NM as Neh 1:1-2:20; 3:33-7:3; 13:4-31.

contours of a literary document narrating some events in the life of a Nehemiah ben Hacaliah are not in any serious dispute. With some exceptions, most of the text of Neh 1-7, 12:27-13:31 is widely acknowledged as a composition that originates, at least in part, from the 5th century, if not from the historical Nehemiah himself. Further, the vast majority of scholars concur that this story was not the product of the writer(s) responsible for the other parts of Ezra-Nehemiah, whether that be (in older scholarship) the "Chronicler"[4] or (more recently) of another, unnamed final author/compiler of Ezra-Nehemiah. Even C.C. Torrey, not a commentator inclined to insist upon traditional authorial attributions, considers most of NM to go back to the Chronicler's source material.[5] In matters of vocabulary, syntax and style,[6] let alone that of theme and genre, commentators have long observed that NM stands apart from the rest of Ezra-Nehemiah.

As Wright suggests, however, despite the easy consensus about the shape of NM, the complexity of the problem grows with further investigation. First, the Nehemiah material comes to us in an undisputably fractured shape. The account of Nehemiah's later reforms in Neh 13 is not proximate to the rest of the first-person narrative, which ends in

---

4. Concerning the matter of the so-called "Chronicler," see Sara Japhet's pioneering, and convincing, work, especially in "The Supposed Common Authorship of Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah Investigated Anew" in *From the Rivers of Babylon to the Highlands of Judah: Collected Studies on the Restoration Period* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2006).

5. C. C. Torrey, *The Composition and Historical Value of Ezra-Nehemiah*. (BZAW 2. Giessen: J. Ricker, 1896.)

6. See Robert Polzin, *Late Biblical Hebrew*: *Toward an Historical Typology of Biblical Hebrew Prose*. (Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1976)

Neh 7. Indeed, between Neh 7 and Neh 13, the text shifts to a third person narrative telling of events not clearly related to Neh 1-7, then reintroduces first-person in Neh 12, but unevenly, in fits and starts, as if shaking off the third person, before picking up in the recognizable NM style at 13:4. Someone - perhaps the voice of Nehemiah - begins narrating in the first-person in Neh 12:31, but scholars have disputed whether and what parts of Neh 12:31-43 are in first- or third-person, and if the latter, whether it derives from a first person account. Because of these problems in Neh 12, the presence of first-person narration is not sufficient on its own to determine which parts of Neh 1-13 belong to NM.[7]

How, then, can one determine the contents of NM? What defines NM? One possibility, of course, is to ground the text of NM in its supposed author, so that NM can be defined as the narrative written by the historical Nehemiah (or his scribe). As the previous section has shown, though, the historical Nehemiah becomes a unsteady foundation when one begins to admit plurality within NM.[8] The authorship of the historical Nehemiah is an unnecessary, and unnecessarily dependent upon precarious historical reconstruction, criterion on which to base a proposal about NM.

Returning to the consensus position that the Nehemiah narrative differs from the other material in Ezra-Nehemiah, I would like to posit this definition of NM: The

---

7. Wright, *Rebuilding*, chap. 1.

8. Williamson takes the precarious (and unargued for) position that the historical Nehemiah himself was the author of the ND revisions. See Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, xxviii.

Nehemiah Memorial comprises 1) all the Nehemiah material that is also 2) neither written by the author(s) of the other major sections of Ezra-Nehemiah (Ezra 1-6, Ezra 7-10, or Neh 8-10), 3) nor dependent upon those texts, 4) nor reasonably suspected to be so late so as to be likely influenced by those texts (i.e. Hellenistic Period). In other words, NM is the textual material that is not literarily influenced or shaped by Ezra-Nehemiah. This definition has three advantages. One, it avoids excessive historical speculation (i.e. the questions about what Nehemiah wrote, achieved, or experienced becomes less important). Two, it limits the scope and necessity of redaction criticism. Three, it allows for a reading of a relatively unified text without overlooking diachrony. The subject of this investigation is therefore the Nehemiah tradition that spans the period from its earliest elements to the time when it first began to be either integrated into Ezra-Nehemiah or altered by the author(s) of the latter.

The plan of this chapter will follow a two-step movement. First, in §3.1, I will address the nature of the response to NM in Ezra 7-10, Neh 10, and Neh 12:44-13:3, three passages that are not generally considered to be part of NM. Section 3.2 then will move inward, to texts arguably part of NM itself (Neh 1:5-11a; 3:1-31; 7; 11; 12:27-43), some of which I include and others I exclude. This section has a dual purpose, to sharpen my definition of NM and to isolate Nehemiah traditions that should be characterized in part as interpretations of NM.

3.1 The response to Nehemiah's story in Non-NM sections of Ezra-Nehemiah (Ezra 7-10, Neh 10, Neh 12:44-13:3)

The Persian appointee Nehemiah takes center stage in only a minority of the chapters of Ezra-Nehemiah, yet his story casts its shadow well beyond the boundaries of the first-person narrative. Thematic and linguistic links between NM and other parts of Ezra-Nehemiah, namely the first chapter of Ezra's story (Ezra 7-10), the account of a community-wide agreement (Neh 10), and a summarizing notice (Neh 12:44-13:3) suggest that, these texts were, at least in part, modeled after NM and function as interpretations of it. This section thus engages with the literary history of Ezra-Nehemiah, though in broad strokes and primarily insofar as these texts exhibit interaction with NM (I will not address Ezra 1-6 or Neh 8-9)[9]. These three texts each address perceived deficiencies in NM's account of the restoration, emphasizing the role of community-wide unity and the authority of written texts, chiefly the law of Moses.

The impetus for this section's argument originated in the literary reading of Ezra-Nehemiah offered by Tamara Cohn Eskenazi.[10] Eskenazi's resolutely synchronic study may seem like a strange place to find guidance on the question of the literary history of

---

9. With most commentators, I understand the brief notice of Nehemiah's presence in Neh 8:9 to be a gloss. See Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 279; Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 284. That Nehemiah's appearance in this verse places him among the rest of the community (see Eskenazi, *In an Age of Prose*, 154) is worth noting as a microcosm of Nehemiah's relationship to the book Ezra-Nehemiah. Nehemiah becomes just a member of the community, and his efforts just a part of the comprehensive post-exilic restoration.

10. Tamara Cohn Eskenazi, *In an Age of Prose: A Literary Approach to Ezra-Nehemiah*. (SBLMS 36. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988).

the book. Nonetheless, despite her explicit disavowals of diachronic analysis, Eskenazi's work provides the key for understanding the nature of the relationship between NM and the remainder of Ezra-Nehemiah. The story of Nehemiah, Eskenazi's careful reading shows, expresses a minority report of the rebuilding of Judah and Jerusalem. In Ezra-Nehemiah (and contrary to 1 Esdras), Nehemiah is indeed understood to be a important hero of the restoration. Yet, elements of the story repeatedly undermine him and suggest to the reader that Nehemiah's work was 1) achieved through the collective effort of the people, his self-promoting language notwithstanding, and 2) done first and better by his precursor, Ezra. Regarding the latter point, Eskenazi is not the first to notice that Nehemiah appears in the text as a pale imitation of Ezra — Kellermann makes similar claims[11] — but her reading gives the fullest explanation of how NM plays out *as a part of Ezra-Nehemiah*. Further, it is precisely her attention to the literary and narratological contours of the whole text (theme, characterization, perspective of the implied narrator), as well as her accompanying refusal to make redaction-critical divisions, that casts light on divergent viewpoints within Ezra-Nehemiah.

Eskenazi devotes the largest section of *In an Age of Prose* to an analysis of the structure and themes of Ezra-Nehemiah.[12] She isolates three overarching themes of the book: 1) a focus on the agency of the entire community, not just the leaders, 2) the centrality of the building of "house of God" and the expansion of that concept from holy

---

11. Kellermann, 94-97.

12. Eskenazi, *In an Age of Prose*, chap 3.

temple to holy city, and 3) the importance of the written text.[13] Notably, however, NM is the section of Ezra-Nehemiah in which these themes express themselves with the least clarity. NM narrates a story intimately concerned with the deeds and reputation of a leader of the people. As for the house of God, while NM shows real interest in the construction of the city, Eskenazi must resort to the appeal to the smallest of hints that NM invests religious significance in the walls (the notice in Neh 3:1 that the priests "consecrated" the gate (קדשוהו), the appointment of singers and Levites to guard those gates at Neh 7:1 and 13:22, and the elliptical mention in Neh 3:1 and Neh 12:29 of the "Tower of Hananel", which may have eschatological or restorative significance in Jer 31:38-39 and Zech 14:10-11).[14] Additionally, while the story in NM does speak of written documents,[15] unlike the rest of Ezra-Nehemiah, these documents are not, with the possible exception of Neh 3, extensively quoted for the reader to see; in fact, Nehemiah refrains from revealing the content of the document that provides the source of his authority, the commissioning letter from Artaxerxes.[16] The themes that dominate the rest

---

13. Eskenazi, *In an Age of Prose*, 2. See my chapter 4 below for further investigation into these themes.

14. Eskenazi, *In an Age of Prose*, 84-86. Note also that Neh 3:1 and 12:29 are not, from the perspective of this project, part of NM (see §3.2.3 and 3.2.4 below).

15. Particularly in the request that the king send letters to accompany Nehemiah's trip to Jerusalem (Neh 2:7-8) and in the diplomatic battles between Nehemiah and his enemies (Neh 6). See Eskenazi, In an Age of Prose, 87.

16. Donald Polaski, "Nehemiah: Subject of the Empire, Subject of Writing," unpublished paper.

of Ezra-Nehemiah, in other words, are minor, if not wholly absent, in NM.

The notable absence in NM of these three major motifs of Ezra-Nehemiah does not, however, gainsay Eskenazi's reading of Ezra-Nehemiah. If one reads NM not in isolation from, but rather in context with, the remainder of Ezra-Nehemiah (as Eskenazi takes pains to do), these themes do emerge, insofar as NM's literary context modifies and highlights the traces or hints of these themes in NM. Regarding the theme of the community's central role in NM, Eskenazi writes, "Nehemiah, at first glance, emerges as the great hero, particularly if we listen only to his words. But a closer inspection shows that Ezra-Nehemiah subverts Nehemiah's self-glorification."[17] The "first glance" is the reading of Nehemiah's story in isolation, while the "closer inspection" accounts for NM's position as only a part of Ezra-Nehemiah. NM, in other words, plays into this major theme, but *only* insofar as NM is made use of by Ezra-Nehemiah. The scant hints of the religious significance of the wall in NM are likewise magnified by the presence of the dedication of the wall in (non-NM) Neh 12.[18] Additionally, the quotation of extensive written documents, present in NM only in Neh 3 and notably absent in the first-person narrative, *becomes* part of the narrative about Nehemiah with the inclusion of documents in Neh 7 and 11. That the themes absent or minor in Nehemiah become apparent in the larger literary context fits perfectly with Eskenazi's interpretation of characterization in

---

17. Eskenazi, *In an Age of Prose*, 79.

18. Perhaps we can also see a "theologizing" of the wall in Ezra's prayer, which praises God for bestowing a fence/wall (גדר) in Judah and Jerusalem (Ezra 9:9).

Ezra-Nehemiah. In short, Eskenazi argues that "[w]hereas Ezra is the exemplar, Nehemiah is the foil".[19] That is, NM expresses certain ideas that, in the context of Ezra-Nehemiah, take on new significance.

Eskenazi scrupulously focuses her analysis on the shape of the extant text of Ezra-Nehemiah. Throughout the book, the question of literary agency — that is, who is responsible for framing NM in such a way? — threatens to break free of Eskenazi's resolutely synchronic reading. Eskenazi relies on text-based language to keep such questions at bay. She refers to "the narrator"[20] and impersonal actors such as "the passage" and "the text" as the agents of literary devices or makes use of passive verbs to defer the question of agency entirely. This language serves its purpose (and one should not necessarily expect a synchronic literary reading to attend to matters of composition) but even in her reading, it maintains a placeholding function. The notion that the text has some kind of agency leads naturally, even necessarily, to questions about the text's composition.[21] Unless we assume common authorship of the entire text or coincidence

---

19. Eskenazi, In an Age of Prose, 144.

20. For example, see Eskenazi's discussion of the evaluations made by the "omniscient narrator" in the book of Ezra (*In an Age of Prose*, 132-135).

21. Even if one would desire to maintain a strict ahistorical synchronic reading, the very use of the term "narrator" or "text" raises unavoidable questions about the production of texts. Ezra-Nehemiah is not, strictly speaking, a pure narrative. Even on its own terms, it reads as an assemblage of narrative and non-narrative texts. That is, it presents itself as a text that makes use of preexistent documents, documents that have a life outside of or before the creation of the main text. To treat Ezra-Nehemiah as the product of one mind, one narrator, is therefore to be *less* responsive to the literary contours of the book. I do not claim that Eskenazi is guilty of this kind of flattening, only that her synchronic reading provides the groundwork, and not the final word, for a literary reading of the

occasioned by similar historical situations,[22] the modifications of the Nehemiah narrative must be considered the work of an author/redactor, and not an inert "text". As we will see below, the connections between NM and other parts of Ezra-Nehemiah, especially EM and Neh 10, are far too multifarious and precise to be the result of coincidence. The gap between the portrayal of Nehemiah in NM itself and the portrayal of Nehemiah in Ezra-Nehemiah must, in other words, arise from efforts on the part of readers of NM properly (in their eyes) to contextualize Nehemiah's role in the rebuilding of the community.

The unpursued diachronic implications of Eskenazi's work, therefore, form this section's guiding questions. If Nehemiah is Ezra-Nehemiah's foil, who is it that presents Nehemiah this way, how, and why? §3.1.1, §3.1.2, and §3.1.3 will discuss the relationship between NM and Ezra 7-10, Neh 10, and Neh 12:44-13:3, respectively, and argue that the connections between NM and each text are so consistent and precise as to indicate that each used NM as a reference point. Further, each supplements and calls into question Nehemiah's version of events and his self-evaluation of his role in the community's restoration. The best explanation for the parallels between NM and Ezra 7-10, Neh 10, and Neh 12:44-13:3 is that NM is the underlying text to which the

---

book.

22. I would argue that this has been the dominant trend in English-language Ezra-Nehemiah scholarship, prominent examples of which would be Williamson and Blenkinsopp, whose commentaries continually seek historical (i.e. historical in terms of day-to-day events) solutions to literary problems. Additionally, virtually every study that touches upon Ezra-Nehemiah or the Persian Period, unless it expressly addresses the ideology or rhetoric of the text, treats Ezra-Nehemiah as a primarily, if not wholly, historical document.

author(s) of other parts of Ezra-Nehemiah felt compelled to add a supplementing account. To claim the reverse would be to presume either that the author of NM meant to create a portrait of a second hero, but failed miserably, or that the author meant to create an anti-hero.

3.1.1 NM and the "Ezra Memoir" (Ezra 7-10)

Despite appearing together only two times in Ezra-Nehemiah (Neh 8:9 and 12:26),[23] the careers of the Persian-appointed reformers Ezra and Nehemiah are tightly intertwined. Scholars have invested much time and effort attempting to determine exactly how these very similar characters related to one another. For much of the past century, the discussion has revolved around the matter of the chronological problems of determining which person arrived in Jerusalem first. While that topic still maintains some relevance for contemporary understandings of Ezra-Nehemiah (see Excursus below), this section will address the literary aspect of this question – not who came first, but whose *story* came first. The literary portrayals of these two characters share a remarkable number of characteristics. What Ezra does, so too does Nehemiah, on the level of both

---

23. I concur with the scholarly consensus that these two notices are the products of later editorial activity. The appearance of the name "Nehemiah" in Neh 8:9 appears to be an insertion. See Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 279; Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 284; Pakkala, 149-150. The entire passage in which Neh 12:26 appears, the list of priests and Levites in Neh 12:1-26, however, is the product of a later period, which is indicated by the presence of names from the late Persian period (such as Jaddua, the high priest during the reign of Darius III).

plot and phraseology. These connections are so extensive as to suggest literary dependence. Further, the stories of the two reformers of the post-exilic age come together in Ezra-Nehemiah to show Ezra to be the superior leader: more humble, pious, deferential, and scripturally literate, and less beholden to Persia than Nehemiah. This consistent pattern, accordingly, suggests that the portrayal of Ezra appears in the book as a deliberate attempt to recast Nehemiah as a pale imitation of Ezra, to show Nehemiah's work to have been important but not decisive – in other words to hint that Nehemiah's view of events was not fully accurate.

The basic contours of the narratives' beginnings resemble one another: a person of some stature in the Diaspora receives a commission from Artaxerxes to travel to Jerusalem on official business. The similarity between the two texts, however, compounds when one turns attention to the details of the plot. In both stories, the protagonist is offered a military envoy for his journey (Ezra 8:22; Neh 2:9). Each procures a letter of commission from the king (Ezra 7:11-26; Neh 2:7-9). Each waits three days before beginning their work in earnest (Ezra 8:32; Neh 2:11). Finally, both figures respond adversely to the presence of exogamous marriages, situations that were ostensibly incidental to the core of each of their missions.

As Kellermann and Eskenazi have pointed out, these plot coincidences set up an implicit comparison between the two characters, and this comparison does not flatter Nehemiah. Though both are presumably high-level officials in the Diaspora, only Nehemiah is explicitly located in the court of the Persian king; Ezra is identified as a

leading member of the Babylonian Gola (Ezra 7:6; 8:15-31).[24] Even more, while Nehemiah's story is framed by the briefest of introductions (דברי נחמיה בן־חכליה), Ezra is greeted with a rich priestly pedigree and a genealogy that goes back to Aaron (Ezra 7:1-5).[25] Ezra's connections to the (Gola) community, evident from the first six verses of his story, offers an early indication that he does his work in continual consultation with the people and with transparency to that community and to the reader. The letter that Artaxerxes provides to Ezra is revealed in full to the reader (Ezra 7:11-26). This situation stands in stark contrast to NM's, in which the content of the crucial letter is withheld from the reader.[26] Additionally, upon accepting his mission, Ezra gathered with a group of Diaspora luminaries in Babylon and waited there three days (ונחנה שם ימים שלשה) (Ezra 8:15) in order to prepare his group materially and spiritually (by fasting and "humbling" themselves - Ezra 8:21) before departing for Jerusalem. Nehemiah, however, departs immediately after receiving his letter, informing the "governors of Across the River" (פחוות עבר הנהר) along the route, but not the reader, of his commission (Neh 2:9). Only when he arrives in Jerusalem does he wait three days (ואהי־שם ימים שלשה) (Neh 2:11).[27] Nehemiah then gets to work inspecting the city, under the cover of night, and without informing the community ("I did not tell anyone what my God put in my heart to do" -

---

24. Kellermann, 95

25. Eskenazi, *In an Age of Prose*, 144.

26. Donald Polaski, "Nehemiah: Subject of the Empire, Subject of Writing".

27. Kellermann, 95; Eskenazi, *In an Age of Prose*, 147.

Neh 2:12). Nehemiah's secrecy – curious in its own right – becomes suspicious in the light of Ezra's earlier behavior.

Ezra's transparency and trust for the community parallels his pious trust in God. He declines the kind of Persian military escort (Ezra 8:22) that Nehemiah accepts (Neh 2:9); he instead confidently declares that "the hand of our God is for good (לטוב) upon those who seek him" (Ezra 8:22).[28] After the journey, he reiterates his trust and states that "the hand of our God was upon us, and he delivered us from the grasp of the enemy and from ambush along the way" (Ezra 8:31). Nehemiah relies on the might and protection of Persia, but Ezra relies on his God.

The contrast between the reformers' relationships with their community also emerges in their responses to the crisis of exogamous marriages (for a discussion of Ezra's and Nehemiah's interpretation of Israelite tradition on the matter of intermarriage, see below). Each narrative shows the situation coming as a surprise to the protagonists, and both react with strong (though perhaps ritualized) emotion. Upon hearing that the Judeans "had not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands", Ezra tears his garments and pulls out his hair and beard (ואמרטה משער ראשי וזקני) and then sits in a mourning silence, while the pious ("all who tremble at the words of the God of Israel" – כל חרד בדברי אלהי־ישראל) gather about him (Ezra 9:3).[29] If Ezra responds to this crisis in piety and solidarity with the (like-minded part of the) community, however, Nehemiah

---

28. Kellermann, 95; Eskenazi, *In an Age of Prose*, 146-147.

29. See Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 177-179.

turns his outrage outward against the community. He "contends against" or "disputes with" the offenders (ואריב עמם), curses and beats some of them (ואקללם ואכה מהם), and pulls out *their* hair (ואמרטם) (Neh 13:25). Nehemiah sets himself against the people; Ezra gathers with them.

Each of the correspondences between the two stories could be attributed to historical coincidence. Perhaps Ezra simply was a leader more pious and attentive to his people than was Nehemiah. As the comparison between Ezra 9:3 and Neh 13:25 already suggests, though, the connections between NM and the Ezra narrative extend beyond plot structure to the level lexical and phraseological imitation. The term for "pulling out hair" in these two verses, מרט, appears elsewhere in the Bible denoting being shaven (Lev 13:40, 41) or, more metaphorically, clean or perhaps sharpened (among others, Ezek 21:14, 16; Isa 18:2, 7). Exclusively in Ezra 9:3 and Neh 13:25, however, does the term indicate hair pulling.

Several other instances of direct lexical or phraseological connections between NM and Ezra 7-10 occur. A minor, and not decisive, example would be the appearance of the terms for the practices of weeping (בכה) and praying (מתפלל) (Ezra 10:1; Neh 1:4). More intriguing is the phrase, repeated in both stories, that the "hand of God" is upon them (Ezra 7:6, 9; 8:22, 31; Neh 2:8b, 18b). Notably, even this parallel serves subtly to elevate Ezra at the expense of Nehemiah. Eskenazi observes that while both claim that the hand of God is upon him, only Ezra's claim receives narratorial confirmation (Ezra

7:6, 9), which, one should note, appears at the outset of Ezra's story.[30] Additionally, the phrase that begins Ezra 9:3, "when I heard this thing" (וכשמעי את־הדבר הזה) echoes the phrase quite common in NM "when X heard" (Neh 1:4; 2:10, 19; 3:33; 4:1, 9; 5:6; 6:1, 6:16)[31]

While the presence of several linguistic links between NM and Ezra 7-10 render unlikely a non-literary explanation for the stories' similarities, at the end of the day, arguments for literary independence based on phraseological links can go either way. One could interpret any of these parallels as evidence for NM's dependence upon Ezra 7-10, or, as with Pakkala, understand them simply as products of "the preferences of a certain period".[32] Strict attention on the similarities in phraseology, however, misses the forest for the trees. Taken alongside with the consistent elevation of Ezra at the expense of Nehemiah, the shared language suggests that the literary portrayal of Nehemiah in NM was the basis on which the literary portrayal of Ezra was built. As Kellerman asserts, Ezra 7-10 treats Nehemiah in NM as an "archetype" (*Vorbild*), or, put in contemporary terms, a beta version, that Ezra "surpasses" (*überbietet*).[33]

The case for Ezra 7-10's dependence upon NM would be incomplete, however,

---

30. Eskenazi, *In an Age of Prose*, 136.

31. Wright, *Rebuilding*, 28. Other commentators observe a similar pattern, though they tend to pass over Neh 1:4. See Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah,* 225; Reinmuth, 93.

32. Pakkala, 229, also 63.

33. Kellermann, 95.

without a full investigation into the area where the two stories most fully intersect, namely the response to exogamous marriages. We have already seen how one aspect of the accounts of mixed marriages, their use of rare terminology for hair pulling, suggest that Ezra has been made to be a response to Nehemiah. Even more, though, the speeches that each reformer delivers, in particular the ways in which they appeal to Israelite tradition to justify their harsh response to the marriages, is a complex issue that deserves a closer look. Forceful cases for the priority of the narrative in Ezra 9-10 are made by Williamson and Pakkala (and, to a more modest degree, Wright). The following discussion will review these arguments and show them ultimately to be not compelling.

Williamson understands these stories in terms of the purported historical events that these stories report. The text in Neh 13 presupposes the text in Ezra 9-10, but more importantly for him, the work of Nehemiah presupposes the work of Ezra. He interprets Neh 13:23ff. as a reaction to a situation on a much smaller scale than in Ezra 9-10, a limited backslide following Ezra's more wide-ranging reforms: he calls it a "very local manifestation of the problem."[34] This is a plausible understanding of the text, though Neh 13:23-24 is more reticent on this point than Williamson would have it. Neh 13:23 states merely that יהודים had married foreign women, offering no quantifying, let alone restrictive, adjective. Similarly, Neh 13:24 notes that "half of their children" (ובניהם חצי) were speaking "Ashdodite," which may even support the notion that the narrative

34. Williamson, *Ezra,Nehemiah*, xliii--xliv, 398-399; the quote is from xliii. See also Ralph W. Klein, "Ezra-Nehemiah, Books Of," *ABD* 2.731-742.

(whether exaggerating or not) means to indicate that the the problem was widespread.

Williamson also puts forward an argument that resembles an argument for literary dependency, but which at its core is an appeal to shared historical circumstances - in this case, shared hermeneutical practices on the part of the authors. He suggests that Nehemiah's justification for condemning the marriages in Neh 13:25 ("I made them swear by God, 'you shall not give your daughters to their sons, and you shall not marry their daughters to your sons or to yourself") reveals knowledge of Ezra 9:1-2a, which reads,

> The people of Israel, the priests, and the Levites, have not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands with their abominations, from the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites. They have taken (נשאו) some of their daughters for themselves and for their sons. Thus the holy seed has been mixed among the peoples of the lands.

About this passage, Williamson writes,

> although Ezra did not introduce a new law, he did introduce a new method of interpretation whereby what had come to be regarded as outmoded laws were given a new application. It is significant that in Neh 13:25 Nehemiah bases himself on the same approach. This suggests that Ezra's interpretation of the law, which is not attested in the earlier period, has now become generally accepted in Judah.[35]

Temporarily setting aside the substantial problems with this quote, it is worth noting that Williamson's rationale is actually more complicated than a straightforward claim of Neh 13:25's dependence upon Ezra 9:1-2. He observes the close connection between Nehemiah's actions in Neh 13 and the stipulations of the pledge in Neh 10 (more on this

---

35. Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, xliii.

connection below in §3.1.2), and explains it by saying that "Neh 10 [chronologically] follows soon after Neh 13."[36] Further, since Neh 10, like Ezra 9:1-2, applies texts from both Priestly and Deuteronomistic traditions,[37] Neh 10 (and by implication, Neh 13) must be aware of "a hermeneutic … particularly characteristic of Ezra."[38] This line of reasoning is deeply problematic. Williamson hangs a good deal on the notion that Neh 10 comes "soon after" Neh 13. Even if Neh 10 is aware of Ezra 9:1-2, it by no means follows that Neh 13 is. "Soon after" is not enough to link Neh 10 with Neh 13. Additionally, even if one could attribute to Ezra alone the method of "appl[ying] texts from both Priestly and Deuteronomistic traditions",[39] one could just as well call this method characteristic of Neh 10 and argue that Ezra 9:1-2 builds off of Neh 10. Williamson here assumes Ezra's priority to argue for Ezra's priority.

One could make better sense of the similarity between Neh 10 and Ezra 9 by leaving Neh 13 out of the equation and positing that Neh 10 and Ezra 9 belong to post-

---

36. Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, xliii, 330-331.

37. Ezra 9:1-2 appeals to Deut 7:1-3 and 23:3-4, along with Lev 18 and 19; Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, xliii, 399. See also Harold Washington, "Israel's Holy Seed and the Foreign Women of Ezra-Nehemiah," *BibInt* 11 (2003): 427-437.

38. Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, xliii.

39. This 'hermeneutic' would also seem to be characteristic of 1) the compilers of the Pentateuch, according to the current *Redakationsgeschichte* method of Rendtorff and Blum, as well as 2) the genre of penitential prayer, which, according to M. Boda, "reveals close affinities with Priestly-Ezekielian emphases drawing on a base of Dtr orthodoxy" See Mark Boda, *Praying the Tradition: The Origin and Use of Tradition in Nehemiah 9* (BZAW 277. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1999), 197.

NM layers in Ezra-Nehemiah. In fact, the highly scripturally-literate language of Ezra 9 differs noticeably from Neh 13. Neh 13:25-27 indeed includes some tradition probably based on Deut 7:3 ("I made them swear by God, 'you shall not give your daughters to their sons, and you shall not marry their daughters to your sons or to yourself'"), but its similarities with Ezra 9:1-2 end there. Neh 13:25-27 shows no trace of Priestly traditions. Instead, it explicates the marriage prohibition by means of critique of Solomon's marriages to foreign women. Neh 13's pragmatic style of argumentation lacks the rigor and scriptural literacy found in Ezra 9-10.[40] Far from being a pupil of Ezra's school of biblical interpretation, the author of Neh 13 seems rather to offer an ad hoc, eclectic rhetorical argument, one which receives skillful exegetical and theological refinement in Ezra 9.

Williamson's argument would stand on firmer ground had he appealed to a specifically literary relationship between Neh 13 and Ezra 9-10 rather than a shared hermeneutical perspective or presumed historical scheme. Pakkala, in fact, proposes the priority of Ezra 9-10 on just this basis. He points to a series of correspondences between

---

40. Another reflection of Nehemiah's pragmatic use of tradition emerges in his appeal to the negative example of Solomon. Nehemiah argues that "among the many nations (ובגוים הרבים) there was no king like him," slightly echoing the language of Deut 7:1, "when Yahweh your God brings you to the land that you are about to enter and possess, and he expels the many nations (גוים רבים)." Nehemiah's use of this small, two-word fragment right next to a clear reference to Deut 7:3 suggests that the fragment should be construed as having some connection to Deut 7:1, but the phrase in Neh 13 does not seem to carry any legal exegetical weight. Rather, it reads like a catchword or a rhetorical flourish connecting the Deuteronomic prohibition to the story of Solomon.

Ezra 9-10 and Neh 13 and then argues that these similarities are due to a common literary source.[41] These textual correspondences are lexical: he mentions מעל at Ezra 10:2, 10 and Neh 13:27, הנשים הנכריות at Ezra 10:2 and Neh 13:23, נשא at Ezra 9:12 and Neh 13:25 in place of לקח at Deut 7:3, and Hiphil ישב meaning "to marry" at Ezra 10:2 and Neh 13:23 (a usage of the term that is ישב exclusive to these passages in the Bible).[42] These texts also tell similar stories: both "assume that priests participated in the sin" (Ezra 9:1; 10:5 and Neh 13:28-29), in both refer to marriages of the hearers (that is, not of their sons and daughters; Ezra 9:2, Neh 13:25 - contrast Deut 7:3), and both make the offenders swear an oath (Ezra 10:5, Neh 13:25).[43] Pakkala concludes that the extent of these parallels rules out the possibility that they are due to coincidence or shared topic or underlying event. It then follows that "[a]n independent origin of the passages is out of the question."[44] One of the texts must have served as a resource for the other.

Pakkala correctly anchors the connection between Ezra 7-10 and NM in their literary parallels, and not in the presumed historical events or trends in intellectual history that lie behind the stories. As a next step, he claims (contra several other scholars)[45] that

---

41. Pakkala, 222-223.

42. Pakkala, 222.

43. Pakkala, 222-223.

44. Pakkala, 223.

45. Pakkala acknowledges that he disagrees with Hölscher, Gunneweg, Kratz, Reinmuth, and Wright (223n38).

Neh 13:23-32 is dependent upon Ezra 9-10. This proposal is plausible, but Pakkala's narrow focus on Ezra 9-10 and Neh 13:23-31 leads him to overlook evidence that undermines his thesis that Ezra 9-10 precedes and has influenced Neh 13. Pakkala finds the priority of Ezra most probable because the links between Ezra 7-10 and NM, in his words, "extend to verses that we have seen to be later additions to the original EM [Ezra Memoir]."[46] The oath (Neh 13:25) appears in Ezra 10:5 and the notion that priests married foreign women (Neh 13:28-29) in Ezra 9:1 and 10:5. These verses, according to Pakkala, belong to secondary additions to Ezra 7-10. He thus argues that, "It is easier to assume that Neh 13:23-31* is dependent on a late and edited version of Ezra 9-10 than to assume that the original author of the Ezra 7-10 in Ezra 10 and its later editors in Ezra 9 and 10 were subsequently and independently using Neh 13:23-31* (Occam's razor)."[47] This point is certainly reasonable in principle but in this particular instance, Pakkala's razor hand makes too fine a cut. According to this argument, despite the admission that one can make use of the parallels between Ezra 9-10 and Neh 13 to argue for priority in either direction, the opinion that Neh 13 precedes Ezra 9-10 entails presuming that several authors of the Ezra tradition were concerned with linking Ezra 7-10 and NM.[48] Yet, of all the elements in Ezra 9-10 that correspond to Neh 13, only two derive from

---

46. Pakkala, 223. His discussion of Ezra 9:1 can be found on 90, and Ezra 10:5 on 96-98.

47. Pakkala, 223.

48. This, too, presupposes the acceptance of Pakkala's account of the growth of EM. Pakkala is alone in explicitly attributing Ezra 10:5 to a later editor. See Pakkala, 96n37.

what Pakkala deems to be later additions to Ezra 7-10, both of which are found in a single verse, Ezra 10:5. The supposition that a single editor of Ezra 7-10 inserted Ezra 10:5 (perhaps in order to draw out the parallels to NM already noticeably present in Ezra 7-10) hardly requires the multiplication of unnecessary entities.

This leaves the brief mention of priests in Ezra 9:1, which is indeed perhaps a secondary addition to Ezra 7-10. However, this single text (in actuality, single word) cannot override the widespread evidence for Ezra 7-10's dependence upon NM, not just in Ezra 9-10 and Neh 13, but throughout the entirety of NM and Ezra 7-10. This point can be highlighted when we return to NM's and Ezra 7-10's use of pentateuchal material. As mentioned above, the use of such material in Ezra 9:1-2 reveals a highly scripturally literate perspective and as such is likely expansive over against Neh 13:25. Pakkala avers that this is possible, but that "the opposite development is also conceivable."[49] To what end, however, would an author create a story in which Nehemiah repeats Ezra's interpretation in an underdeveloped (though expansive in its own idiosyncratic way – note the allusion to Solomon) manner? Pakkala's proposal, following Georg Steins, is that "[t]he author of the chapter [Neh 13] would try to convey that Nehemiah, like Ezra, was an advocate of the law."[50] The difficulty with this statement, though, lies in its assumption that a later author would have sought, via illustrating Nehemiah's familiarity

---

49. Pakkala, 224.

50. Pakkala, 212, referring to Georg Steins, *Die Chronik als kanonisches Absclußphänomen. Studien zur Entstehung und Theologie von 1/2Chronik* (Winhein: Beltz Athenäum Verlag, 1995), 198-205.

with "the law", to elevate the perception of Nehemiah, to bring him up toward the level of Ezra. If that were the case, however, one would have to assume that the author of Neh 13 did a substandard job of portraying Nehemiah as a scripturally literate interpreter. Conversely, the conclusion that Ezra 9-10 succeeded Neh 13 matches quite well with the notion of Ezra as exemplar. One can easily imagine the author(s) of Ezra 7-10 attempting to show that Ezra's familiarity with Torah outshines Nehemiah's unsophisticated use of tradition.

The portrayal of Ezra as a learned interpreter of law (or at least more learned than Nehemiah) in Ezra 9-10 becomes yet one more way in which the Ezra 7-10 contrasts the two reformers. In his response to exogamous marriages, Ezra's reveals a sensitivity to Torah that foreshadows his public reading of the book of the law in Neh 8. Held up to Ezra's standards, Nehemiah cannot compete. Adherence to Torah is, as we have seen, but one way in which Ezra compares positively to Nehemiah. Nehemiah operates according to his own devices, at times both secret and antagonistic toward the community. Ezra, however, operates in a spirit of transparent openness to the community and to its goals. Given the numerous literary links between NM and Ezra 7-10, this contrast indicates that the Ezra narrative has been shaped as a response to NM, in a way such as to downplay and implicitly critique Nehemiah.

Excursus: On the chronology of the historical Ezra and Nehemiah

To return to Williamson's above-mentioned claim – that Ezra introduced "a new method of interpretation whereby what had come to be regarded as outmoded laws were given a new application" and that "Nehemiah bases himself on the same approach" – the notion, even if true, that two texts display a similar hermeneutical orientation carries no relation whatsoever to the question of chronological priority.[51] Accordingly, though Williamson deduces that ``[t]his suggests that Ezra's interpretation of the law, which is not attested in the earlier period, has now become generally accepted in Judah,"[52] the basis for such a conclusion is far from clear. The statement that Ezra introduced a methodology that Nehemiah adapted appears to amount to an argument that because Ezra historically preceded Nehemiah, Ezra 9-10 likewise must have preceded Neh 13.[53] While the historical is not irrelevant, this proposal runs into several problems on account of its several hidden assumptions. It assumes that the historical Ezra and the historical Nehemiah wrote Ezra 9 and and Neh 13, respectively, that Ezra wrote Ezra 9 early enough for Nehemiah to have read it, that Nehemiah indeed read it or heard about it, and

---

51. This is not to mention the problems with maintaining that Ezra "introduced" the method of applying old laws to new situations. Fishbane's *Biblical interpretation in Ancient Israel* provides more than sufficient refutation of this idea.

52. Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah,* xliii.

53. Williamson's argument is especially troubling when one considers that the priority of the *text* of Ezra 9-10 over Neh 13 is itself a key element of his argument for the *historical* priority of Ezra over Nehemiah.

that neither text was subject to any substantial revisions. Certainly any one of these assumptions may be true, but as we have seen, and as much recent scholarship has strongly suggests, the composition history of Ezra-Nehemiah is far too complicated to allow for a straightforward appeal to the order of the missions of Ezra and Nehemiah as traditionally understood. The simple fact of similarities between an "Ezra Memoir" text and an NM text (especially as in this particular case where the similarities are quite thin) does not mean that the Ezra text is earlier.

Williamson's treatment of Ezra 9-10 and Neh 13 suggests how the question of the literary relationship between these two texts conjures the specter of the well-trod and insoluble debate about which reformer came to Jerusalem first, Ezra or Nehemiah. The question of the chronological order of the missions of Ezra and Nehemiah, once a major site of scholarly debate,[54] has ceased to be of significant concern for the study Ezra-Nehemiah. Already in 1994 Eskenazi's survey of current research on Ezra-Nehemiah and the Persian Period makes no mention of this problem.[55] Likewise, Thomas Willi's 2002 survey of the 1980s and 1990s suggests that this once-vexing problem has receded from the scene.[56] Part of the reason for the wane in interest could be attributable to the decline

---

54. The literature on this topic is extensive, to say the least. The following discussion will cover the work of a more recent vintage (the past forty years or so). For earlier scholarship, see H. H. Rowley, "The Chronological Order of Ezra and Nehemiah," in *The Servant of the Lord and Other Essays on the Old Testament* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1965).

55. Eskenazi, "Current Perspectives on Ezra-Nehemiah," *CRBS* 2 (1994): 25-42.

56. Thomas Willi, "Zwei Jahrzehnte Forschung an Chronik und Esra-Nehemia,"

of the biblical archaeology movement and its drive to address the historicity of biblical events. More responsible for the change, however, seems to be the notion, expressed by Miller and Hayes, that "any conclusions about the relationship of the work of the two men and the historical contexts to which they belonged must remain highly uncertain and partially rely on intuition and speculation."[57] Reasonable cases can and have been put forward for the priority of either Ezra or Nehemiah and, given the contradictory and elusive evidence, no commanding argument appears forthcoming.

Nevertheless, the question is worth addressing, not despite these limitations, but because of them. The state of the debate, the uncertain dead end it has reached, is itself instructive. Perhaps the chronology cannot be decided upon because the terms of the discussion are themselves improperly defined. On balance, the chronological priority of Nehemiah remains the most likely position, even if it fails to be an open and shut case.[58] That Nehemiah was first, however, is the most probable thesis largely because almost all of the problems and gaps in the historical record arise from the problematic nature of the Ezra material. The nature of the Ezra story, as the following will suggest, is such that a solution to the question of the relationship of Ezra and Nehemiah will always be elusive, if that question is framed in terms of the historical, flesh and blood personages and not.

Theologische Rundschau 67 (2002): 61-104.

57. James Maxwell Miller, and John Haralson Hayes, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah* (ed.; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006)., 529.

58. So Miller and Hayes, *History of Ancient Israel and Judah*, 529.

The question of the chronology of Ezra and Nehemiah is a literary problem that requires a literary solution.

Many scholars adhere to what can be called the 'traditional' thesis, that Ezra arrived in Jerusalem in 458, the 7th year of Artaxerxes I. This dating scheme rests primarily on the date formula in Ezra 7:7, which notes that Ezra arrived in Jerusalem in "the 7th year of Artaxerxes the king." The 'traditional' thesis, however, is not solely based on the biblical text, since the text itself does not clarify which Artaxerxes the king. Rather, this date is nailed down by reference to dates in NM and in the Elephantine papyri. Neh 1:1 and 2:1 speak of Nehemiah appearing in the court of the king in the 20th year of (presumably the same) Artaxerxes. Further, a letter from Elephantine datable to 407 BCE (AP 30; TAD A4.7; COS 3.51) appeals to Jehohanan the High Priest in Jerusalem. Since Jehohanan was the successor of Eliashib, a contemporary of Nehemiah, and Artaxerxes II did not take the throne until 404 BCE, the Artaxerxes mentioned in Neh 1:1 and 2:1 must then be Artaxerxes I. Proponents of the 'traditional' thesis accordingly presume that the monarch mentioned in Ezra 7:7 is the same, and therefore locate Ezra's mission in 458.

While the 445 date for Nehemiah's activity corroborated by AP 30 is well-established – Blenkinsopp calls it "beyond reasonable doubt"[59] – Ezra's position in this chronological scheme has been repeatedly and seriously challenged. Beginning with

---

59. Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 140.

A.van Hoonacker (and refined by H. H. Rowley), scholars have challenged the 'traditional' position, highlighting several inconsistencies and curious details in the biblical text that seem to undermine the notion of Ezra's priority. Some scholars seem to be troubled by the idea that Ezra seems to have waited 13 years, from 458 to 445, before initiating his public reading of the Torah (see Neh 8:9, which notes Nehemiah's presence at the reading).[cite examples] NM offers no hint of Ezra's life or work,[60] but EM, contrastingly, seems to reveal knowledge of Nehemiah's work. Scholars have drawn attention to several clues in EM that suggest Ezra followed Nehemiah, some more compelling than others, but four in particular stand out as worth further consideration. 1) The committee of priests entrusted to handle and distribute the temple vessels and other funds (Ezra 8:33-34) appears to be an established group in EM, whereas Nehemiah is described as creating a similar or identical group in Neh 13:13.[61] 2) Ezra's penitential prayer praises YHWH for setting what could be translated as a wall (גדר) in Judah and in Jerusalem (Ezra 9:9). This "wall" could be an oblique reference to Nehemiah's wall. 3) Ezra 10:1 notes that Ezra convened a "very great assembly" (קהל רב מאד) of men, women, and children in Jerusalem, while the description of the repopulation of Jerusalem in Neh 11 (cf. Neh 7:4-5) seems to presume that Jerusalem was sparsely populated up until this

60. Rowley, 160. A possible exception, as we have seen, can be found in Nehemiah's rejection of intermarriage (Neh 13:23-29).

61. Rowley, 162.

moment.[62] 4) Ezra is associated with a person who may be identified as the High Priest Eliashib's successor. Ezra 10:6 notes that Ezra went to the chamber (לשכה) of Jehohanan ben Eliashib. If this Jehohanan is the same Jehohanan who is in office in 410 BCE (AP 30), the king mentioned in Ezra 7:7 must be Artaxerxes II and Ezra thus arrived in 398 BCE.[63]

The hypothesis that Ezra's mission began in 398 has stood as the primary challenge to the traditional theory.[64] The attribution of Ezra to the reign of Artaxerxes II provides an elegant solution to the nagging problems with the Ezra story, but it has not received universal support, and several have disputed its claims. Regarding 1), the temple committees in Ezra 8:33-34 and Neh 13:13, Williamson (along with Blenkinsopp) claims that Neh 13 makes no sugestion that Nehemiah created it, and further, that the two panels

---

62. Rowley, 152, Miller and Hayes, 529.

63. Rowley, 153-158. The theory that Ezra arrived in Jerusalem long after Nehemiah had come and gone requires the deletion as late additions of texts that suggest the two worked together (8:9, 12:26).

64. Other theories, of course have been proposed. One position, taken up by John Bright, among others (see A History of Israel, 4th ed. [Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000], 391-402), is that Ezra arrived in 428 BCE, between Nehemiah's two "terms." This theory has the advantage of dealing with the supposed thirteen-year gap between Ezra's arrival and his reading of the Torah of Moses, while maintaining, to a large degree, the credibility of the story in the text. Unfortunately, it arrives at this date by means of an unattested emendation, changing Ezra 7:7 from "the 7th year" to "the 37th year." Aaron Demsky shows that Bright's emendation is unsupportable, because Ezra 7:7 uses the ordinal number (שביעית), which never appears for numbers higher than ten. Accordingly, to posit 428 BCE, one must maintain both that (שלשושים) dopped out and that (שבע) was changed to (שביעית). See Demsky, "Who Came First, Ezra or Nehemiah? The Synchronistic Approach," *HUCA* 65 (1994): 1-19. See also J. A. Emerton, "Did Ezra Go to Jerusalem in 428 BC?" *JTS* 17 (1966): 1-19.

had different functions.[65] Even more, Williamson adds, the makeup of each committee differed: two priests (Meremoth and Eleazar) and two Levites (Jozabad and Noadiah) in Ezra 8:33-34, but a priest (Shelemiah), a scribe (Zadok), a Levite (Pedaiah), and a "layman" (Hanan) in Neh 13:13.[66] In response to Williamson's position, however, Joachim Schaper insists that these two texts indeed describe the same institution, namely the "temple treasury committee".[67] He disputes the notion that the membership of the committee in Neh 13:13 differed from that of Ezra 8:33. The term "scribe" describing Zadok denotes a function, a job, not a cultic category. In fact, given his name, one can presume that Zadok is a priest.[68] As for Hanan, whom Williamson terms a "layman," Schaper maintains that the committee's task, "to distribute to their 'brothers'" (לחלק לאחיהם) suggests that Hanan was himself a Levite.[69] More importantly for Schaper, though, is his thesis that both committees refer to the temple treasury committee, the body entrusted with managing both the tithes desginated for the Levites and priests and the Achaemenid taxes. He concedes Williamson's point that Ezra 8:33-34 and Neh 13:13

---

65. Blenkinsopp, 142; Williamson, 388. Williamson further speculates that Ezra 8:29 suggests that the committee was an ad hoc creation, though the basis for that claim is unclear.

66. Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 388.

67. Joachim Schaper, "The Temple Treasury Committee in the Times of Nehemiah and Ezra," *VT* 47 (1997): 200-06.

68. Schaper, "Temple Treasury", 202-203.

69. Schaper, "Temple Treasury", 202. See also Marc Z. Brettler, "Hanan," *ABD* 3.44.

describe different tasks of the committee, but argues that the institution was the same.[70]

Schaper's description of the temple treasury committee is quite compelling, but ultimately does not afford a decisive position on whether Ezra's or Nehemiah's committee was created first. Schaper himself asserts that his discussion of the committee assumes Nehemiah's historical priority.[71] Williamson's claim that the committees seem to be different does not hold up to scrutiny, but even if the two bodies were part of the same institution, that does not speak to the chronological issue. While it would be a mistake to consider Ezra's committee an ad hoc creation (especially if it is a central aspect of Persian administration), it could nonetheless have been instituted in Ezra's time. Ultimately, then, the biblical evidence is inconclusive in this instance. The position that Nehemiah created this committee still seems to be more likely, since Nehemiah (not Ezra) was the figure who would have had authority to institute or reform elements of Achaemenid bureaucracy, but cannot be seen as determinative.

With respect to 2), several scholars (Tuland, Klein, and even a proponent of Nehemiah's priority, Rowley) are skeptical that the גדר that Ezra mention in his prayer in Ezra 9 is meant to refer to a city wall, which in NM is without exception termed a חומה.[72]

---

70. Schaper. "Temple Treasury," 203-205. Schaper asserts that Ezra 8:33-34 refers to the committee in its role as measurer and distrubutor of state tax, and Neh 13:13 in the role of distributor of temple tax. See also Joachim Schaper, *Priester und Leviten im achämenidischen Juda : Studien zur Kult- und Sozialgeschichte Israels in persischer Zeit* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000).

71. Schaper, "Temple Treasury", 201.

72. Carl G. Tuland, "Ezra-Nehemiah or Nehemiah-Ezra?," *AUSS* 12 (1974): 47-62, 53;

More compelling, however, is the notion that the mention of a wall is metaphorical.[73] Though this reading of גדר on the face of it looks like an attempt to explain away a difficult piece of evidence, it is significantly bolstered by the neighboring appearance of יתד ('tent peg') in Ezra 9:8a ("And now in a moment grace has been shown by Yahweh our God, who has left us deliverance and given us a tent peg in his holy place"), which almost certainly must be taken as a metaphor. As a result, the occurrence of גדר in Ezra 9:9 should not be construed as revealing the presence of Nehemiah's historical wall during Ezra's historical mission.[74]

The notion that Ezra's great assembly anachronistically presupposed a repopulated Jerusalem (#3) is likewise suggestive but not probative. Blenkinsopp rejects this criticism on the speculative grounds that the city was re-destroyed in the intervening years between Ezra's and Nehemiah's purported missions.[75] Blenkinsopp's creative proposal offers a convenient solution but, aside from resting on a shaky historical

---

Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 141-142; Rowley, 147-148.

73. Klein, ABD, 736.

74. Though these details most likely mean that a hidden historical reference to Nehemiah's wall is not encoded in Ezra 9, the connection between these two walls is too suggestive to be entirely coincidental. Rather than a historical reference, however, perhaps we see a literary allusion to the theological significance of Nehemiah's wall as a boundary around Israel. See Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (ed.; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979). Notably, this reading suggests that EM be younger than NM.

75. Blenkinsopp also adds the suggestion that Neh 11 hints at an underpopulated city, not a depopulated city, but does not fully delineate this difference (*Ezra-Nehemiah*, 142).

foundation,[76] it merely presupposes the conclusion he is trying to prove. Even less convincing in Tuland's justification of the great crowd in Ezra 10 on the basis of the "return" in 538 BCE, particularly given the current state of research on the population of Yehud in the early Persian Period.[77] On the other hand, in support of the traditional position, one could undermine any potentially historical claims of Neh 11 by drawing attention (following Lipschits) to that passage's own ideological aims, as well as to the evidence of late textual additions. The simplest way, of course, to salvage Ezra's priority here would be to read the description of the city in Ezra 10 as an ideologically influenced exaggeration designed to inflate the importance of Ezra and/or his reforms. However, to do so would alse be to begin to unravel the enterprise of evaluating EM as a primarily historical document.

Ultimately, Ezra 10 does seem to speak of a large population (and, indeed, like Ezra 1-6 has ideological/theological reasons for doing so).[78] The disconnect between EM's claims and the demographic realities of the Persian Period indicate, at the very

---

76. See Lester Grabbe, *A History of the Jews and Judaism in the Second Temple Period, Volume 1. Yehud: A History of the Persian Province of Judah* (LSTS 47. New York: T & T Clark, 2004), 292-294.

77. See Oded Lipschits, *The Fall and Rise of Jerusalem*. (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbranuns, 2005), 267-271. Lipschits estimates that the population of Yehud and Jerusalem numbered no higher than 30,000 and 2750, respectively, in the Persian Period.

78. Eskenazi, In an age of prose. Central to Eskenazi's compelling reading of Ezra-Nehemiah is that a primary theme of the book is the notion of the reconstruction taking place under the unified will of the people as a whole. Particularly relevant for Ezra 10 are pp. 68-70.

least, that Ezra 10:1 does not offer a fitting description of pre-445 Jerusalem. This fact in itself does not establish that Ezra's mission presupposes Nehemiah's (a fantastic description of the people of Jerusalem could have been written at any time), but it does suggest that things are not quite what they seem in EM. Most importantly, it hints strongly that the question of the chronological order of Ezra and Nehemiah is intimately tied to the matters of what kind of aims EM had and what kind of literature it is.

The most intriguing detail and potential slip in EM remains 4), that is, the possible mention of Eliashib's descendent Jehohanan in Ezra 10:6. The placement of Ezra in Jehohanan ben Eliashib's chamber suggests that Ezra dates at the earliest to Jehohanan's time, if not later. This observation may not hold true, however, if the Jehohanan and Eliashib in Ezra 10:6 are not the same people as the High Priests listed in Neh 12 and in AP 30. They could be descendents of Eliashib and Jehohanan (that is, high priests, but not the exact high priests in Neh 12) or they could be non-high priest contemporaries with similar names. An example of the first option, pointed to by several proponents of the traditional theory, is F. M. Cross' innovative reconstruction of the high priestly line. Cross observes that the list of high priests in Neh 12:10-11 (cf. also Neh 12:22) does not provide enough names to fill in the 275-year time span, from Jozadak (ca. 595)[79] to Jaddua (ca. 320).[80] He finds the average number of years per generation, 34.3, to be "an

---

79. Jozadak is not named in Neh 12 but is mentioned as the father of Jeshua, the first named person in Neh 12:10, in 1 Esdras 5:5.

80. F. M. Cross, "Reconstruction of the Judean Restoration," *JBL* 94 (1975): 4-18, 9. Neh 12:10-11 does not explicitly identify itself as a list of High Priests, but no one to my

incredibly high figure."[81] To solve this perceived problem, Cross posits two instances of haplography in the list, and fills each gap with a pair of papponymous priests: Eliashib I and Johanan I in the fifth century Johanan III, and Jaddua III in the fourth (see Table 3.1). In this reconstruction, Johanan I therefore becomes the contemporary of Ezra, and Eliashib II becomes the High Priest who is the contemporary of Nehemiah.

knowledge has characterized it otherwise. For a convincing argument that this list is indeed of High Priests, see Benjamin Scolnic, *Chronology and Pappynomy: A List of the Judean High Priests of the Persian Period* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999), 6.

81. Cross states that, "[i]n Near Eastern antiquity, the generation … is ordinarily 25 years or less," but offers no footnote or evidence for that claim ("Reconstruction," 9),

Table 3.1 F. M. Cross' reconstruction of the high priestly line in the Persian Period. Unattested names in *italics*.

Neh 12:10-11, 26	**Cross**
Jeshua	Jeshua
Joiakim	Joiakim
	Eliashib I [Joiakim's brother]
	Johanan I
Eliashib	Eliashib (II)
Joiada	Joiada I
Jonathan (or Johanan; cf. Neh 12:23, Ezra 10:6)	Johanan (II)
Jaddua	Jaddua/Joiada II
	Johanan III
	Jaddua III
	Onias I/Johanan IV

Cross' proposal is ingenious, but it has also encountered serious critique. Geo Widengren finds the existence of two separate haplographies without any textual evidence highly implausible.[82] Williamson, though he also concludes that the list in Neh 12 is incomplete, agrees with Widengren and adds, "[j]ust because papponymy was practiced, we are not justified in postulating it at every point without any supporting

82. Geo Widengren, "The Persian Period," in *Israelite and Judaean History* (ed. John H. Hayes and J. Maxwell Miller; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977), 507.

evidence."[83] However, neither is an expression of incredulity alone enough to constitute a counter-argument, and Cross' reconstruction still retains some merit, though it requires significant modification.

The weakest part of Cross' supplemented list of High Priests is his addition of a pair of fifth century names, Eliashib I and Jehohanan I. For the time period between the fall of Babylon and 410 BCE (the date at which Johanan is attested by AP 30), the extant list in Neh 12 cites five High Priests: Jeshua, Joiakim, Eliashib, Joaida, and Johanan. Even one accepting the maximalist (earliest) dating of the return, the range of years is only 128, or 25.6 years per generation. As VanderKam notes, if the average term of High Priests over the entire Persian Period is suspiciously long (which is itself of course a debatable and speculative point), the average for the 6th and 5th centuries is most certainly not.[84] Cross's case for a haplography in the 4th century is stronger, as there only Johanan, Jaddua, and Onias I (named as the son of a "Jaddus" in Ant. 11.8 §347) are attested for a span of nearly 80 years, and Onias appears to have begun his reign at the very end of the Persian Period at the earliest.

At least with respect to the 5th century, in other words, the supposed difficulty that prompts Cross to insert a "first" Eliashib and Jehohanan, namely the lengthy terms of the High Priests, turns out not to be a problem after all. Indeed, neither is there even a

---

83. Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 363.

84. James VanderKam, *From Joshua to Caiaphas: High Priests after the Exile* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004) 90-97.

trigger for haplography for the 5th century priests. In Neh 12:10-11, the extant list (Jeshua, Joiakim, Eliashib, Joiada, Johanan/Jonathan) does not have a trace of papponymy.[85] If the list read "Jeshua, Joiakim, Eliashib, Johanan," a scribe could have mistakenly overlooked the first Eliashib-Johanan pair. As it stands, an instance of homoiteluton with the name "Eliashib" is within the realm of possibility. However, since the extant text provokes no difficulties, and since no textual variants are attested, Neh 12:10-11 makes no text-critical demand on the interpreter to emend the text. In sum, the list of High Priests for the 6th-5th centuries is simply not problematic and is in no need of correction. The list of High Priests is not in need of salvaging; rather, it is only the "traditional" order of Ezra and Nehemiah that requires rescue.

Nonetheless, even if a second (or first) pair of High Priests named Eliashib and Jehohanan are not a warranted addition to the succession list, Ezra's association with Jehohanan's chamber in Ezra 10:6 still might have no bearing on the question of chronology. As several scholars have surmised, the Eliashib and Jehohanan of Ezra 10:6 may not be High Priests at all.[86] Williamson, among others, appeals to the supposed frequency of the names Eliashib and Jehohanan, citing three other instances of Eliashib in Ezra 10, as well as an occurrence of Jehohanan at Neh 12:13.[87] Additionally, he notes that

---

85. VanderKam, *From Joshua to Caiaphas*, 93-94.

86. Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 143, Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, xli, Tuland, "Ezra-Nehemiah," 57, Yamauchi, "Reverse Order," 8.

87. Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 151; VanderKam also notes Eliashibs in 1 Chr 3:24 and 24:12. See J. W. Wright, "Eliashib," ABD 2.460-461; Stephen L. McKenzie and John M.

Jehohanan in Ezra 10:6 is not given the title הכהן הגדול, an omission that he reads as specifically distinguishing this Jehohanan from the High Priest by the same name (VanderKam makes a similar argument).[88] However, as VanderKam admits, no person is identified as הכהן הגדול in the book of Ezra (or Neh 8-10, for that matter). This bit of evidence, actually an argument from silence, therefore does not seem sufficient to dissociate Ezra 10:6 from Neh 12:10-11.[89] Likewise, the names Eliashib and Jehohanan may indeed be relatively common names, but to posit a coincidental pairing of names is not just to argue for the recurrence of two common names, but is also to argue for two separate families that have a Jehohanan directly descended from an Eliashib, as well as a close association with the highest levels of the Temple bureaucracy (note the connection with a לשכה --- more on this below). Both claims are thus possible but seem to amount to special pleading on the behalf of Ezra's chronological priority.

A better case for two different Eliashib-Jehohanan families can be made by appeal to the apparent discrepancies in genealogical information about these persons. VanderKam points out that while Neh 12:10-11 describes Jehohanan as the grandson of

---

Berridge, "Johanan," ABD 3.880-882.

88. Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 151-156; VanderKam, *From Joshua to Caiaphas*, 50-53.

89. Klaus Koch makes much of this fact, and argues that the term הכהן, without the adjective, indicates a High Priest. Accordingly, he identifies Ezra as a High Priest. See Koch, "Ezra and the Origins of Judaism," *JSS* 19 (1974): 173-197.

Eliashib[90] (cf. Neh 12:22; 13:28),[91] Ezra 10:6 names Jehohanan as the "son" (בן) of Eliashib (cf. Neh 12:23).[92] VanderKam takes this as evidence for a second, non-high-priestly family. However, "ben" in Ezra 10:6 and Neh 12:23, as elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, need not refer only to a immediate parent-child relationship, but can mean "grandson" (Gen 31:28, 32:1; 2 Sam 19:25; 2 Kings 9:20; Ezra 5:1).[93] Several commentators reject the possibility that "ben" can mean "grandson," based on an article by J.R. Porter.[94] Porter contends that "[w]hat may be suggested is that it is invalid to claim that 'son' in this verse [Ezra 10:6] has the meaning of 'grandson', if that claim rests on an alleged regular Hebrew idiom."[95] To make his case, however, Porter must explain away several instances where "ben" seems clearly to mean "grandson," including one in the Ezra-Nehemiah corpus (Ezra 5:1, where Zechariah is named "ben Iddo")![96] Porter's

---

90. This reading is an interpretive move. Neh 12:10bβ reads, "ואלישיב את יוידע", that is, it lacks the verb הוליד present between every other name in the list in Neh 12:10-11. Jonathan/Jehohanan is explicitly marked as the son of Joiada, but the relationship between Eliashib and Jonathan/Jehohanan is not specified. I have not come across any interpreter who has not assumed that a father-son relationship is meant, likely because Neh 13:28 describes Jehohanan's father Joiada as the son of Eliashib.

91. Neh 12:22 is simply a list of names, with no explicit indication of parentage, but it follows Neh 12:10-11 – excepting, of course, the former's יוחנן where the latter (twice) has יונתן.

92. Neh 12:23 does have יונתן.

93. See H. Haag, TDOT 2.150.

94. J.R. Porter, "Son or Grandson (Ezra X. 6)?" *JTS* 17 (1966): 54-67.

95. Porter, "Son or Grandson," 67.

96. Porter suggests that Zechariah is called "ben Iddo" because Iddo was the name of a "section of the priesthood" (i.e. he was one of the priests who returned with Zerubbabel

thesis is not convincing, and in fact irrelevant to the discussion. An illustrative example of the weakness of this proposal can be found in his treatment of 2 Sam 19:25, where Mephibosheth (son of Jonathan – see 2 Sam 4:4) is called "ben Saul." Porter claims that "ben Saul" means that Mephibosheth was a member of Saul's family, something like a "Saulide."[97] If this is the case, it would appear equally appropriate to think of Jehohanan of Ezra 10:6 as "the Eliashibide" or "member of Eliashib's family." The position that Jehohanan and Eliashib of Ezra 10:6 are of a different, non-high-priestly family requires that "ben" can mean only "biological son" and nothing else. If we conceive of Jehohanan as descendant of Eliashib in a broader sense, the case for a separate family weakens considerably. Recall Porter's assertion that one cannot claim that "ben" means "grandson", "if that claim rests on an alleged regular Hebrew idiom": even if Porter's statement is true, a "regular idiom" is not necessary to show that "ben" need not indicate "biological son" alone.

The final argument for differentiating Jehohanan and Eliashib in Ezra 10:6 from the high priestly family comes in the claim that Ezra-Nehemiah describes two different family lines with two distinct and incommensurate occupations. The Eliashib mentioned in Ezra 10:6 contains a striking connection to "the priest Eliashib" whom Nehemiah rebuked in Neh 13:4-9. These two Eliashibs share an association with a chamber (לשכה)

---

and Joshua in Neh 12:4), and that his name could also be translated "Zechariah the Iddoite" ("Son or Grandson," 57-58). This proposal is highly speculative and not strong, since there is no other evidence for the priestly prominence of Iddo.

97. Porter, "Son or Grandson," 60.

of the temple, the former via the chamber of his descendant or follower Jehohanan (Ezra 10:6), the latter as "the priest Eliashib who was appointed over the chamber (בלשכת) of the house of God" (Neh 13:4). To Williamson, this connection suggests that these two texts speak of the same family, which was charged with care of the temple's chamber.[98] This Eliashib's family is to be distinguished from the high priest Eliashib's family, because the Eliashib in Neh 13 is named as the "priest" and not the "high priest."[99] Moreover, the temple's chambers, in Williamson's view, is beneath the purview of the high priests. He writes that "we would not expect the high priest to function as a caretaker," which echoes Tuland's remark that this Eliashib was "merely the guardian of the temple chambers".[100]

Yet Eliashib in Neh 13 was far from a mere caretaker or guardian. The temple לשכה ("chamber") may sound on first blush like a trival location, perhaps something akin to a storage space. Schaper notes, however, that the לשכה is paralleled to the אוצר, or "treasury" in Neh 10:39, strongly suggesting that it occupied a central position in the administration and disbursement of (both Persian and Temple) tithes as well as rations.[101]

---

98. Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 154. VanderKam also distinguishes between the high priest Eliashib and the Eliashib of Ezra 10:6 and Neh 13. Blenkinsopp thinks that Ezra 10:6 doesn't refer to the same Eliashib as in Neh 13 because Ezra would not have associated himself with a high-priestly family that had "defiled the priesthood" (Neh 13:28-29) if Nehemiah had come first..

99. Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah,* 153.

100. Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah,* 153, Tuland, 57.

101. Schaper, "The Temple Treasury Committee," 204-205.

The text states that this priest Eliashib prepared a large לשכה for Tobiah, in which "the grain offering, the incense, the vessels, and the tithes of grain, new wine, and oil, which were commanded [to be given to] the levites, singers, and gatekeepers, as well as the tax (תרומה) for the priests" (Neh 13:5). In other words, this priest had the power both to manage and distribute these significant stores and to choose to whom to give authoritiy over them. The task of overseeing a (if not the) central economic institution of Persian Yehud would seem to be a position of high importance and prestige, quite possibly the province of a person at the highest levels of the priesthood.[102]

Even if the Eliashib in Neh 13 and Ezra 10 is to be distinguished from the high priest Eliashib (despite all indications that the "chamber" of the temple — and thus too the person in control of it — was central to the temple's economic role and thus to the highest levels of power), Ezra's association with the *descendant* of a person who clashed with Nehemiah would in any event still suggest that Nehemiah preceded Ezra. Aware of this problem, Williamson posits that Eliashib in Neh 13 is himself a descendent of the Jehohanan ben Eliashib in Ezra 10:6.[103] However, the notion that Eliashib in Neh 13 is a different person relies on an unattested papponymy[104] of the kind Williamson himself

---

102. Further, see Scolnic, *Chronology and Pappynomy,* who maintains that the role of the high priest was not in the Persian Period yet fully established, making any claim that the high priest *could not have* been in charge of a particular task quite suspect.

103. Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 153-154.

104. "[S]ince it may be regarded as established that papponymy was widely practiced, the Eliashib of our verse [Ezra 10:6] could easily have been the grandfather of the one in Neh 13:4," Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 154.

rightly rejects regarding the high priestly line and cannot be accepted. The separation of the various Eliashibs succeeds only as a creative means of rescuing Ezran priority anchored by the assumption that Ezra *must have preceded* Nehemiah.

In review, the four primary arguments advanced for Nehemiah's priority, taken together, make a suggestive, even if not fully conclusive, case. Of the four, only the supposed mention of a "wall" (גדר) in Ezra 9:9 can be conclusively rejected as evidence for Nehemiah's historical priority. The other three — and the highly curious mention of Eliashib in Ezra 10:6 remains the most compelling — show that, if one must choose between the chronological priority of Nehemiah and that of Ezra, the former is the best available option. As we have seen, scholars have put forward a great amount of effort, with variable degrees of success, to counter each argument that brings the traditional thesis in question. Indeed strategies are available for those who would choose to support Ezran priority. Thus Edwin Yamauchi: "though the reverse order of Nehemiah before Ezra which has dominated for over two decades still has many eminent supporters, there has been within the last decade a remarkable development of support among equally distinguished scholars for the traditional order of Ezra before Nehemiah."[105] Yamauchi's statement, written in 1980, holds equally well today. The debate over this historical issue, such as it was, has ground to a halt, leaving us with no good answers and a host of speculative theories about textual minutia. One way to frame the problem is as the result

105. Edwin Yamauchi, "The Reverse Order of Ezra/Nehemiah Reconsidered," *Themelios* 5 (1980): 7-13, 13.

of a lamentable lack of evidence, whereby a future discovery may finally allow for a revival of research. Another way would be to see as forthcoming a new consensus-compelling interpretation of the evidence, perhaps an even more innovative scheme for identifying the various Eliashibs in Ezra-Nehemiah. Naturally, neither of these two possibilities can be ruled out, but perhaps this avenue of research has come to a dead end because the question itself — what does Ezra-Nehemiah reveal about the historical Nehemiah and Ezra? — is misguided.

The limits of the investigation into the chronology of Ezra and Nehemiah reveal the limits of reading Ezra-Nehemiah as a strictly historical document and, what's more, reading it as a *uniformly* historical document. While NM cannot be considered a strictly historical document because its presentation of both events and character is highly stylized and controlled (see chap 2 below), we can nonetheless observe that the texts problematic for the contemporary historian have all been located in EM, not NM. The insistence upon the fundamental historicity of EM leads interpreters into some curious lines of argumentation, the most revealing of which comes from J. Stafford Wright. Wright rejects arguments for Nehemiah's priority because these arguments presume that the author/compiler of Ezra-Nehemiah would have been a devious falsifier easily exposed by ancient readers.[106] Wright makes several unjustifiable assumptions about the practices and attitudes of ancient writers and readers; yet it nonetheless originates in an

106. J. Stafford Wright, *The Date of Ezra's Coming to Jerusalem*. (2nd ed. London: Tyndale Press, 1958).

important insight. One of the lynchpins of the traditional thesis is that Ezra shows no awareness of Nehemiah in EM. Although I reject the Ezra-first thesis, this assertion is surely correct. The character Ezra as portrayed in EM absolutely speaks of no previous reformer; the date formulas regarding Ezra and Nehemiah are clear, despite a general dischronologizing tendency in Ezra-Nehemiah; any understanding of the date in Neh 1:1 depends on its literary context within Ezra. As portrayed in the literary text of Ezra-Nehemiah, the character Ezra precedes the character Nehemiah in story time.[107] If EM and NM are of equal historicity, then the attempts to uncover the fragmentary clues for Nehemiah's priority begin to resemble exercises in irrelevant minutae-cataloging, missing the forest for the trees. Put another way, if EM (and/or Ezra-Nehemiah) is a fundamentally historical text, then Ezra *must have arrived first* and it is thus the task of scholars to find more and more creative ways to interpret the texts such that they fit this thesis.

Because the inconsistencies in EM vis-a-vis Nehemiah present insurmountable problems for the historian, therefore one must seek out a way to ground the relationship between Ezra and Nehemiah not in historical events, but rather in the relationship betwenn the narratives about them. The demand for historicity leads to a dead end. Perhaps, however, understanding the problem as literary and ideological, not historical,

---

107. For the definition of "story time" as "the period of time in which the narration occurs," see Gerald Prince, *A Dictionary of Narratology* (rev. ed. Lincoln, Neb.: University of Nebraska Press, 2003), 94.

will open up more productive avenues of inquiry.

3.1.2 Neh 10 and Neh 13

The close relationship between Nehemiah's religious and economic reforms and the terms of the community's "agreement" (אמנה) in Neh 10 has long been recognized. Each/nearly each stipulation in Neh 10:31-40 is violated elsewhere in NM, mostly in Neh 13:4-31, but with an important outlier found in Neh 5. The correspondences are many (see also Table 3.2). Neh 10:31's injunction against "giv[ing] our daughters to the peoples of the land, nor taking their daughters to our sons" resembles Nehemiah's angry response to exogamous marriage in Neh 13:23-30. The following pledge to avoid commerce on the Sabbath or holidays in Neh 10:32a is echoed in Neh 13:15-22. The (re)commitment to let land lie fallow and relieve debts every seventh year in Neh 10:32b does not have a counterpart in Neh 13. However, Neh 5 tells of Nehemiah's own debt-relief program; indeed, the term משא for "debt" appears only in these two texts (Neh 5:7, 10, 11; 10:32). Similarly, notices regarding provisions for the "wood offering" (קרבן העצים) occur in Neh 10:35 and Neh 13:31 alone. The offering of first-fruits and tithes each appear in the agreement (Neh 10: 36-37, 38-39) and in the account of Nehemiah's reforms (Neh 13:31; 13:10-14).

Following up on the description of first-fruits and tithes, Neh 10:40a offers an elaboration, "indeed, it is to the chambers (הלשכות) that the Israelites and the Levites will bring the gifts (תרומת) of grain, wine, and oil (הדגן התירוש והיצהר); there also are the

vessels (כלי) of the sanctuary, along with the ministering priests, the gatekeepers and the singers (שהכהנים המשרתים והשוערים והמשררים)." The language of this half-verse corresponds extensively to that of Neh 13:5, which tells of abuses Nehemiah confronted: "[Eliashib] had set up for [Tobiah] a great chamber (לשכה), where previously the grain offering, the incense, the vessels (והכלים), and the tithes of grain, wine, and oil (הדגן התירוש והיצהר), the dues of the Levites, singers, and gatekeepers (הלוים והמשררים והשערים), and the gifts for the priests (ותרומת הכהנים)."[108] Finally, the closing declaration of the agreement, "we will not neglect the house of our God" (ולא נעזב את־בית אלהינו) (Neh 10:40) used language similar to Nehemiah charge against the prefects (סגנים): "'why is the house of God neglected?" (מדוע נעזב בית־אלהים) (Neh 13:11).

Table 3.2 Correspondences between Neh 10:31-40 and Neh 5; 13:4-31

Topic	Neh 10	Neh 13
Exogamous marriage	10:31	13:23-30
Commerce on Sabbath	10:32a	13:15-22
Release of debt	10:32b	5
Wood offering	10:35	13:31
First-fruits	10:36-37	13:31
Tithes	10:38-39	13:10-14
Bringing gifts to chamber	10:40	13:5
(Not) neglecting the temple	10:40	13:11

108. See Pakkala, 205.

With the exception of the provision for the yearly one-third shekel temple tithe (Neh 10:33-34), each stipulation of the agreement is transgressed in the accounts of Nehemiah's reforms in Neh 5 or 13. Numerous scholars have already recognized the extensive ties between Neh 10 and 13, and several have argued that Neh 10 is dependent upon Neh 13 (for example, Mowinckel, Kellermann, Gunneweg).[109] The links between Neh 10 and Neh 5, 13 are too close and repeated to chalk up the similarity to coincidence, though some have insisted on historical factors for the origins of the agreement as it stands.[110] As Wright observes, the primary argument most scholars, beginning with Bertholet, employ for understanding Neh 13 to be earlier arises from the unlikelihood of such an extensive set of coincidences during Nehemiah's governorship.[111] I would add that this improbability rules out the dependence of Neh 10 and Neh 13, *in either direction*, on the grounds that one records a historical reaction to the events described in the other; given the close connections in diction, the relationship between chapters 10 and 13 must be literary. Nonetheless, the coincidences themselves do not present an open-

---

109. Mowinckel, *Studien I*, 56-57; Kellermann, 39-41; Gunneweg, 135-139.

110. An interesting case in this right is Williamson's. He concludes "with the majority of scholars" that Neh 10 postdates Neh 13. At the same time, though, in keeping with his historicist bent, suggests that the agreement was made during Nehemiah's own lifetime because Nehemiah's reforms may not have been lasting and required a stronger communal will to maintain. He then concludes his discussion of the matter with this: "we may wonder whether in both of these passages Nehemiah is not claiming for himself the credit for the agreement of Neh 10" (*Ezra, Nehemiah*, 331). The assertion of a historical origin for Neh 10, in other words, easily slips into a claim that Neh 13 is the later text.

111. Wright, *Rebuilding*, 214n69. Wright cites Bertholet, *Die Bücher Esra und Nehemia*. (Tübingen-Leipzig: J.C.B. Mohr, 1902).

and-shut case for the priority of Neh 13. This argument gains persuasiveness, though, when combined with the fact that Neh 10 brings together elements from two different chapters in NM, 5 and 13.

The possibility that Neh 10:31-40 is involved in interpreting NM should come as no surprise. Several interpreters, most notably David Clines[112] and Michael Fishbane,[113] have noted that Neh 10 quite extensively adapts Pentateuchal and prophetic legal provisions. The agreement in Neh 10 represents "a small treasure house"[114] of inner-biblical interpretation. The phrase "as it is written in the Torah" (ככתוב בתורה) appears twice in the agreement (Neh 10:35, 37), signifying the text's orientation toward authoritative written texts.[115] The content of the agreement, further, reveals several points of contact with Pentateuchal and prophetic texts. A detailed review of these reinterpretations and expansions of the legal tradition would lead us too far afield, but a brief tour offers a taste of the deeply scriptural (or at least legal) orientation of Neh 10:31-40. The reference to marriage restrictions in 10:31 may draw on Deut 7:3[116] and/or

---

112. David J. A. Clines, "Nehemiah 10 as an Example of Early Jewish Biblical Exegesis." *JSOT* 6 (1981): 111-117.

113. Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation*.

114. Clines, "Nehemiah 10," 111.

115. Reinmuth, however, represents a minority voice in this regard. He argues that Neh 10 influenced the Pentateuch, not vice versa (213-219).

116. Pakkala, 187.

Exod 34:11-16.[117] The restrictions against commercial activity on the Sabbath (10:32a) build off of Jeremiah's interpretation of Pentateuchal Sabbath laws (such as Deut 5:12-14) that expands the concept of work so as to include carrying burdens through the city gates (Jer 17:21-22).[118] The clause regarding the release of debt every seventh year (10:32b) may be drawing upon Deut 15:1-18.[119] Clines points out that the concept of an annual temple tax (10:33) appears to be a development upon the "half-shekel" offering in Exod 30:11-16.[120] The listing of the various first-fruits that the people will bring (10:36-37) widens the definition of first-fruits to, for the first time, include produce of trees (Deut 26:2 and Exod 23:19 mention only the fruit of the ground).[121] Additionally both Fishbane and Pakkala take note of several links between Neh 10:36-39 (the stipulations regarding first-fruits and tithes) and the allocations due the Levites in Num 18.[122]

Clines understands Neh 10's interactions with Pentateuchal laws as "*ad hoc*

---

117. Clines, "Nehemiah 10," 115.

118. Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation*, 131-134; Clines also notes the expansion of the concept of "work" Neh 10:32 ("Nehemiah 10", 114).

119. Pakkala, 190.

120. Clines, "Nehemiah 10," 112. Eskenazi adds the mention of the temple repair tax in the story of Joash (2 Kgs 12:4-15; 2 Chr 24:4-14) (*In an Age of Prose*, 102).

121. Clines, "Nehemiah 10," 113; Michael W. Duggan, *The Covenant Renewal in Ezra-Nehemiah, (Neh 7:72b-10:40): An Exegetical, Literary, and Theological Study*. (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2001), 282-283.

122. Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation*, 214; Pakkala, 197-204.

responses to the problems encountered by Nehemiah."[123] The adaptions, on the whole, are not systematic and do appear to be responding to some external stimulus – the wood offering in particular is unprecedented in the Pentateuch, and Clines' attempt to read it as a prescription necessary to fulfill the command to keep the sanctuary's fire burning (Lev 6:1-6)[124] is a bit of a stretch. Neh 10 is therefore more explicable as an attempt to address something that Nehemiah had done or had been reported to have done. However, while Clines, along with Williamson and Blenkinsopp, assume that the agreement in Neh 10 arose out of a *historical* response to certain events taking place during Nehemiah's return to Jerusalem, the character of this text indicates that it is more properly understood as an *exegetical* response to the texts in Neh 5 and 13.

Neh 10's reinterpretation of Neh 5 and 13 functions as an exegetical response to those texts insofars as it places Nehemiah's reported actions on more secure footing, in two ways. Neh 10 frames Nehemiah's reforms 1) as a part of a community-wide project and 2) as an extension of laws and norms already found in the Torah. As we saw above in chapter 2, Neh 13 (and to a lesser extent, Neh 5) maintained an relationship with the people that was dismissive of the community, if not downright adversarial. The agreement in Neh 10, however, because it has been placed before Neh 13, shows that Nehemiah was only carrying out prescriptions already laid out and agreed to by the

123. Clines, "Nehemiah 10," 113.

124. Clines, "Nehemiah 10," 112.

community.[125] Neh 10, in Eskenazi's words, "deflat[es] Nehemiah's claims to uniqueness and grandeur. Nehemiah's 'I did this …' is contrasted with the narrator's 'they.'"[126] The agreement does not entirely contradict Nehemiah's version of events, it merely tempers them. Nehemiah is, after all, a signatory to the agreement (Neh 10:2), but he is only one among many.[127]

Neh 10 also brings Nehemiah's reforms closer in line with norms derived from the Torah. As evidenced in the response to exogamous marriages, Nehemiah justifies his actions in Neh 5 and 13 with loose and ad hoc rhetorical appeals to Israelite tradition,[128] not with informed interpretation of scripture (additionally, in chapter 4 I will argue that the reforms also likely originated out of other, more political concerns). Neh 10, however, presents its stipulations as outgrowths of Torah instructions. The agreement implicitly recontextualizes Nehemiah's reforms by interpreting several of them in light of various passages from the Pentateuch or the Prophets. This agreement also ties Nehemiah's work to the Torah explicitly, by using the phrase "as it was written in the Torah" (10:35, 37), as well as by introducing the stipulations with the statement that the

---

125. Eskenazi, *In an Age of Prose*, 102-104.

126. Eskenazi, *In an Age of Prose*, 151.

127. Michael Duggan calls Nehemiah "first among equals" in the list of signatories. (*The Covenant Renewal in Ezra-Nehemiah*, 288).

128. Williamson aptly states that NM portrays a "strongly lay type of belief system" with a "pragmatic approach to religion" ("The Belief System of the Book of Nehemiah," in *Studies in Persian Period History and Historiography* [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004], 273, 276).

people "join with their siblings, their nobles, and enter into a curse and an oath to walk in the Torah of God (ללכת בתורת האלהים), which was given through the hand of Moses, servant of God, and to observe and do all the commandments of YHWH our Lord, and his ordinances and statutes" (Neh 10:30). Because this agreement in Neh 10 precedes Neh 13, it hints that Nehemiah's work grows out of attention to, and interpretation of, Israel's written Torah.

3.1.3 Neh 12:44-13:3

If read in context with the undisputedly NM material that succeeds them, the first three verses of Neh 13 could mistakenly be taken as part of the story of Nehemiah's return to Jerusalem. A closer look at Neh 13:1-3, however, shows that it is more properly connected to the summary notice before it in Neh 12:44-47. Indeed, scholarly consensus firmly identifies Neh 12:44-13:3 as an editorial addition unrelated to the Nehemiah narrative.[129] Neh 12:44-13:3, in fact, is not even really about Nehemiah: it summarizes the procedures for contributions and tithes for the priests and Levites (12:44), the services at the temple, done "according to the command of David and Solomon, his son" (12:45-46), the portions given to the singers and gatekeepers (and once again the Levites and priests - 12:47), and the practice of separating from the Ammonites and Moabites

129. Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 380; Clines, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 234; Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 349; Wright, *Rebuilding Identity*, 315-317.

(13:1-3). Despite the mention of "on that day" in Neh 12:44 and 13:1, this segment speaks about ongoing practices and customs. Neh 12:47 suggests that "on that day" in Neh 12:44 refers to the entire period from Zerubbabel to Nehemiah.[130]

The description of the time "in the days of Zerubbabel and in the days of Nehemiah" (Neh 12:44) functions, therefore, as a summary notice regarding the community's behavior during the early Persian Period. This synopsis of Nehemiah's governorship is, on the face of it, quite positive about his achievements. The text notes that cultic procedures were maintained in a way that would have met the approval of David and Solomon (Neh 12:44-47) and that the people kept a proper distance from foreigners, just as the Torah commanded (Neh 13:1-3). Nonetheless, its placement in the narrative, just prior to the final episodes in NM (13:4-31), has the function of robbing Nehemiah's work of its uniqueness. The reports of the activity of the temple picks up on the agreement in Neh 10. Neh 12:44a makes allusion to several of the stipulations of Neh 10 ("men were appointed on that day over the chambers for the stores, the gifts, the first-fruits, and the tithes, to gather in them from the fields and the cites the portions of the Torah (מנאות התורה)," cf. Neh 10:35-40).[131] This text, then, shows that the people made a habit of following the agreement and thus that Nehemiah's establishment of tithes and Levitical portions was a matter of due course, or that Nehemiah addressed an anomalous situation and brought it back in line with the norm.

---

130. Clines, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 234.

131. Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 349.

Additionally, the opening of Neh 13 remarks that the separation from foreigners was an ongoing practice and that it was done in consultation with the Torah: "on that day, it was read in the book of Moses (נקרא בספר משה) in the ears of the people, and it was found written in it that no Ammonite or Moabite should enter into the assembly of God" (Neh 13:1). Further, the people enact that message found in the book of Moses: "when they heard the Torah (ויהי כשמעם את־התורה), they separated all foreignness from Israel" (Neh 13:3). The use of the "when X heard" language distinctive to NM evokes Nehemiah's account, but pointedly attributes agency to the people, showing that the separation from the foreign was not primarily achieved by Nehemiah's actions. Even more, this short notice draws on the story of Ezra, in two ways. It plays off Ezra's public reading of Torah in Neh 8,[132] but it also, with the mention of Ammonites and Moabites, makes use of an interpretation of Torah strikingly similar to that found in Ezra 9:1-2. Neh 13:1-3 thereby suggests that it was Ezra's work that was a major catalyst for the restoration, that his instruction in the Torah shaped the people's behavior. Nehemiah may have tidied things up around the edges, but the groundwork was laid by the people, in response to Ezra.

Placed after Neh 12:44-13:3, Nehemiah's reforms in Neh 13:4ff. become merely a coda,[133] a perhaps important, but not instrumental, episode in the restoration period. Nehemiah is not an innovator, but rather a servant of the people who does what has

---

132. Wright, *Rebuilding Identity*, 317.

133. Eskenazi, *In an Age of Prose*, 151.

already been ordained by Torah, by Ezra, and by the community's agreement. The abuses that Nehemiah corrects, then, become minor lapses, exceptions to the rule. Further, and perhaps most intriguingly, Neh 12:44-13:3 indicates that the authority for Nehemiah's decisions arises from principles derived from the Torah, and reaffirmed in a written agreement by the people, and not from his gubernatorial powers bestowed by the foreign king in Persia.

3.1.4 Summary comments

Neh 10, 12:44-13:3 therefore, approach NM very much as Ezra 7-10 does. That is, they undertake what Kellermann terms a "deliberate disavowal" (*bewußten Desavouierung*) of Nehemiah.[134] Eskenazi, however, correctly notes that Ezra-Nehemiah ultimately does not reject him.[135] The modification of NM's portrait of Nehemiah by these texts is just that, a modification, and not an outright repudiation. The counter-testimony in Ezra-Nehemiah is subtle, though unmistakeable. In the case of both Ezra 7-10 and Neh 10 (though not with Neh 12:44-13:3), I concede that one could interpret the evidence for literary links between these texts and NM as indications that Nehemiah was in fact modeled on Ezra or that Neh 13 was created with Neh 10 already in mind. These kinds of arguments, however, would have to contend with the larger literary problems they would

134. Kellermann, 95.

135. Eskenazi, *In an Age of Prose*, 152.

create, especially with regard to the relationship between Ezra 7-10 and NM. To assert that the author of NM modeled its protagonist on Ezra is to suggest that NM, either intentionally or with an incompetent hand, created a sub-par hero. Yet, if Nehemiah was seen as a problematic figure in need of modification or diminishment, but was not yet a part of the account of Judah's restoration, why not simply leave him out of the story? We are in possession of one text that exercised that option: 1 Esdras.[136] Ezra-Nehemiah, of

---

136. I agree with Zipora Talshir, against Dieter Böhler, that 1 Esdras postdates Ezra-Nehemiah. See Böhler, *Die heilige Stadt in Esdras α und Esra-Nehemia* (OBO 158. Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1997); *ibid*, "On the Relationship between Textual and Literary Criticism: The Two Recensions of the Book of Ezra: Ezra-Neh (MT) and 1 Esdras (LXX)" in *The Earliest Text of the Hebrew Bible: The Relationship between the Masoretic Text and the Hebrew Base of the Septuagint Reconsidered*, Adrian Schenker, ed. (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2003); Zipora Talshir, *1 Esdras: From Origin to Translation* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999); *ibid*, "Ezra-Nehemiah and First Esdras: Diagnosis of a Relationship between two Recensions, *Biblica* 81 (2000): 566-573. The discussion between Böhler and Zipora, naturally, focuses extensively on the details of textual variants, but as is the case in general with textual variation, one could argue that either is earlier. (Though Böhler's strange insistence that 1 Esd 9:37 is only coincidentally similar to Neh 7:72a ["Esdr 9:37a ist nicht Neh 7:72a", cf. Böhler, *Die heilige Stadt*, 86-92], despite their nearly identical wording, strikes one as a case of special pleading. Neh 7:72a//1 Esd 9:37a concludes the list of returnees, and is not at all related to Ezra's reading of the law which follows it in 1 Esd 9:38-55. Thus the presence of Neh 7:72a//1 Esd 9:37a in 1 Esdras very strongly suggests that the editor of 1 Esdras neglected to cut out one final verse of Ezra-Nehemiah's story of Nehemiah (Neh 1-7). See Talshir, "Ezra-Nehemiah and First Esdras," 571). The larger point, however, is even more problematic. Böhler admits that the question of which text is earlier "cannot be answered on direct literary grounds" ("On the Relationship," 45); instead, Böhler insists that Ezra-Nehemiah is later than 1 Esdras for the reason that the textual variants in Ezra-Nehemiah systematically prepare the way for the addition of the hero Nehemiah. Whether the variants indeed reveal such a pattern is a question for another time (though Tashir disagrees on this point, see "Ezra-Nehemiah and First Esdras," 567), but regardless, I find the notion that 1 Esdras was adapted to accommodate Nehemiah misses the forest for the trees. The evidence for the literary connection between the portraits of Ezra and Nehemiah must be taken into account in any investigation of the relationship between

course, is not 1 Esdras, in large part because it retains Nehemiah, flaws and all.

The notion that Ezra 7-10 and Neh 10 each function as responses to NM reinforces the thesis that NM was an original, if not the original, part of Ezra-Nehemiah, around which other texts grew.[137] This two-stage model for the composition of Ezra-Nehemiah (or, better, heuristic scheme – I would readily accept a much finer-grained account of the growth of the book) raises the question of the extent to which parts of Nehemiah's story are indebted to that second stage. In other words, which parts of the Nehemiah narrative should be excluded as secondary additions? Having proposed serious objections to recent redaction-critical scholarship on NM in chapter 1, I hesitate to proceed with total confidence. Nevertheless, the full explication of an ancient reader-centric definition of NM demands a sharper division of what belongs to NM (which, again, itself may have undergone revision) and what does not.

3.2 The boundaries of NM, an ancient-reader-centric account

If Ezra 7-10 and Neh 10 are in part interpretations of NM, to what extent does the interpretation of NM reach into sections of the text relate to Nehemiah? What are the parameters of NM? The differentiation between NM and the rest of Ezra-Nehemiah provides a basis for an ancient reader-centric understanding of NM. My definition of

---

Ezra-Nehemiah and 1 Esdras.

137. Again, cf. Kratz, *Composition of the Narrative Books*; Wright, *Rebuilding Identity*.

NM, once again, is as follows: 1) all the Nehemiah material that is also 2) neither written by the author(s) of the other major noncontroversially non-NM sections of Ezra-Nehemiah (Ezra 1-10, Neh 8-10, 12:44-13:3), 3) nor dependent upon those texts, 4) nor reasonably suspected to be so late so as to be likely influenced by those texts (i.e. originating in the Hellenistic Period). This definition offers a snapshot of a moment in time in the growth of Ezra-Nehemiah, after the completion of any internal revision of NM but prior to early readers' (i.e. the author(s) of Ezra 7-10 and Neh 10) reception and reinterpretation of NM. Such a particular delineation might be dismissible as historical hair-splitting were it not also methodologically useful. On one hand, it enables some resistance to the atomistic logic of redaction criticism without denying its validity in assumptions or even results. On the other, it creates some space to talk about the commonalities and organic developments within NM without necessitating a capitulation either to declarations of "final form" or to Ezra-Nehemiah's own literary characteristics (which differ from NM's). In other words, it enables a *historically responsible literary reading* of NM as a document not identical to Ezra-Nehemiah.

3.2.1 Non-controversial texts

The following texts will be considered non-controversially to belong to NM: Neh 1:1a, 1:11b; 2:1-20; 3:33-6:19; 13:4-31. I treat them as such either because no research on Ezra-Nehemiah has suggested any influence of non-NM Ezra-Nehemiah traditions on them, or, in the case of Neh 13:4-31, I have already discussed its relationship to Ezra

7-10 and Neh 10 above.

3.2.2 Neh 1:1b-11a

Nehemiah's prayer in Neh 1:5-11a (along with the narrative frame that introduces it in 1:1b-4) has been the site of much debate. Commentators in almost equal number on each side argue over its relationship.[138] Whether or not the prayer is secondary per se is not a question directly relevant to this chapter. However, scholars such as Wright and Pakkala have argued that this prayer is dependent upon similar prayers in Ezra 9 and/or Neh 9. The question is worth exploring, but because Nehemiah's prayer does not play a major role in this study, a summary will be sufficient. In short, Nehemiah's prayer cannot be shown to be dependent upon Ezra 9 or Neh 9. Neither, for that matter, can the reverse be demonstrated; rather, the similarities among these texts are due to their shared genre, the "penitential prayer". Therefore, Neh 1:1b-11 should not be excluded from NM.

3.2.3 Neh 3:1-32

Wright observes that the list of the builders in Neh 3 creates "the most difficult problem relating to the earliest editions of the building account,"[139] and indeed scholars

---

138. See Wright, *Rebuilding Identity*, 9n1, for a listing of scholars on each side of this issue.

139. Wright, *Rebuilding Identity*, 109.

have and continue to debate whether it was composed by Nehemiah, imported from elsewhere but inserted by Nehemiah, or inserted by another writer. Despite the differences among various researchers, only a small number have proposed that this list has been composed or influenced by writers involved with non-NM portions of Ezra-Nehemiah. Torrey viewed this list as an invention of the Chronicler, separate from NM.[140] More recently Joachim Becker has advanced a similar proposal, though, he he advances the argument that the entirety of NM, of which the list of builders is a part, is the product of the Chronicler.[141] The arguments by Japhet and Williamson against common authorship of Ezra-Nehemiah and Chronicles are persuasive, though that fact alone does not necessarily nullify Torrey's and Becker's claims. Becker's argument is nonetheless a weak one. He begins with the observation that a handful of terms link Neh 3:1-32 with other parts of NM. Namely, he points out the use of Hiphil עמד in connection with setting up gates, doors, and bars at Neh 3:1, 3, 6, 13-15 parallels usages at Neh 6:1 and 7:1; in contrast, other biblical passages use ישב (Jos 6:26, 1 Kings 16:34) or שוב (Job 38:10) rather than Hiphil עמד in similar contexts.[142] He also draws attention to Piel קרה ("provide, supply") at Neh 3:3, 6, and also Neh 2:8, but on the basis of one other occurrence, at 2

---

140. Torrey, Composition, 37-38. On Torrey's position, Williamson writes, "this extreme view has been rightly rejected by all recent writers" (*Ezra, Nehemiah*, 201). Exactly why labeling an argument as "extreme" is sufficient to reject it is left unexplained, though.

141. Joachim Becker, *Der Ich-Bericht,* especially 23-24, 53-60.

142. Becker, 55

Chr 34:11, to call this word a "typisch" chronistic term.[143] Becker, it would seem, would not go so far as to equate a single usage with typicality, but his argument does require that NM itself is chronistic, such that an occurrence of a term in NM outside of Neh 3 would count as evidence for that term's origin in the Chronicler. He consequently goes on to claim that נשכה ("chamber") is a chronistic word, even though it is found only in Nehemiah (3:30, 12:44, 13:7)![144] Becker's evidence does suggest that the author(s) responsible for writing Neh 3 into NM took care to integrate the list with the narrative, yet the proposed links between Neh 3 and the Chronicler are tenuous at best (and none of Becker's links join Neh 3 with non-NM portions of Ezra-Nehemiah. Therefore, whatever compositional difficulties Neh 3 presents,[145] it displays no clear influence of non-NM Ezra-Nehemiah.

Nevertheless, Neh 3 remains problematic. Very recent scholarship on Neh 3 raises the possibility that the description of the wall's construction, and perhaps the wall itself, date to the Hellenistic period. In an article subsequent to *Rebuilding Identity*, Wright has modified his earlier understanding of Neh 3 as a relatively early supplement to NM.[146]

---

143. Becker, 55-56.

144. Becker 56. See also his puzzling claim that אדיר ("mighty one/lord") is chronistic because it appears in Neh 3:5, 10:30, and 1 Chr 27:30, and despite the fact that it also appears several other times as a substantive in a variety of biblical texts.

145. See Lipschits, *Fall and Rise*, 171-172 for a brief discussion of some of these difficulties.

146. Wright, "A New Model for the Composition of Ezra-Nehemiah," in Lipschits, Knoppers, and Albertz, eds., 337; cf. Wright, *Rebuilding Identity*, xx.

Wright observes that the frequency of the term שר in both Neh 3 and Neh 12 distinguishes it from the rest of NM, which instead speaks of "rulers" and "nobles".[147] In a more general sense, he takes note of a "close correspondence of the list to the account of the expansion of the holiness of the temple into the city as a whole in Nehemiah 11 and 12."[148] The connection with Neh 11 and/or Neh 12 does not itself tie Neh 3 to non-NM material, though the discussion on Neh 11 and 12 to come (§3.2.4 below) will suggest that these texts do not belong to NM. One might also recall (cf. §3.1 above) that in Eskenazi's three main themes of Ezra-Nehemiah (community, expansion of holy temple to holy city, written text), she could locate in NM only the briefest of traces for the second theme, and those traces appear in Neh 3 and Neh 12.[149]

Yet another cause for caution is indicated by a 2008 article by Israel Finkelstein.[150] There, Finkelstein raises concerns about the assumption that Neh 3 accurately describes a Persian Period wall around Jerusalem. He argues that one finds no clear archaeological evidence for a city wall from the time period of Nehemiah.[151] Based on a review of two sites mentioned in Neh 3, Beth-Zur (Neh 3:16) and Gibeon (Neh 3:7),

---

147. Wright, "A New Model," 336-337, especially 337n11.

148. Wright, "A New Model," 337.

149. Eskenazi, *In an Age of Prose,* 84-86

150. Israel Finkelstein, "Jerusalem in the Persian (and Early Hellenistic) Period and the Wall of Nehemiah" *JSOT* 32 (2008):501-520.

151. Finkelstein, "Jerusalem in the Persian," 507-510; cf. John R. Bartlett, "Editorial: Nehemiah's Wall,' *PEQ* 140 (2008): 77-78..

both of which in his opinion were settled in Iron II and Hellenistic, but not Persian, Finkelstein suggests that Neh 3 may originate in the Hellenistic Period.[152] Finkelstein's conclusions, combined with Neh 3's possible connection with Neh 12, which, as the next section will show, is itself a problematic text, means that Neh 3:1-32 is best treated as secondary to NM.

3.2.4 Neh 7, 11, 12:27-43

The series of narratives and lists that spans Neh 7-12 makes up the most complicated and uncertain stretch of text in the entire book. Because this material has such a complex literary history and because it appears to be densely intertwined, I find it most appropriate to deal with the majority of it in one place. The determination of which parts belong to a Nehemiah tradition will be difficult, even uncertain, and I am in agreement with Williamson that with these texts, "the solutions favored can be but tentative since frequently decisions must perforce be taken on less than substantial evidence."[153] From the outset, though, I will exclude both Neh 8-10 and Neh 12:1-21 (the lists of priests and Levites). I leave out the former because it has no real connection to Nehemiah (save the editorial addition of Nehemiah's name at Neh 8:9), and the latter because I can find no commentators who attribute these lists to NM. I also refrain from

152. Finkelstein, "Jerusalem in the Persian," 510-514.

153. Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah,* 267.

addressing the end of chap 12, Neh 12:44-47, here, though I will discuss it in connection with Neh 13:1-3 in the next section.

Regarding the remainder of Neh 7, 11, 12, I submit that only Neh 7:1-3 can be anchored with any amount of confidence in NM. Neh 12:27-43 is a possible candidate for NM, though the evidence is so unsure that, on balance, it is best to refrain from including it. The following investigation will show that Neh 7 (and particularly 7:4ff) and Neh 11 are inextricably interconnected. Also, these two chapters display multiple connections with non-NM material. Secondly, it will show that the narrative of the dedication of the wall in Neh 12:27-43, though clearly derived from some kind of Nehemiah tradition, is heavily revised or edited and also may be influenced by the dedication narratives in Ezra.

3.2.4.1 The interdependence of Neh 7 and 11

Shortly following the notice of the wall's completion at 6:15ff., the narrative in Neh 7 implies that the next step of Nehemiah's work may be the repopulation of Jerusalem. Neh 7:4 reads, "The city was wide and large, with only a few people in it, and there were no built houses." (והעיר רחבת ידים וגדולה והעם מעט בתוכה ואין בתים בנוים). This notice seems to set the scene for the settlement of Jerusalem, but the rest of chap. 7 moves away from this topic - the next verse (7:5) notes that the next action was to gather the people and their leaders for a genealogical accounting (להיתיחש), which leads into the list of families (Neh 7:6-72a). In the context of the brief narrative at the beginning of

chap. 7, one might presume that this genealogical list has some relation to the project of populating the city, a presumption heightened by the brief mention at the end of the list (Neh 7:72a) that "the priests, the Levites, the singers, some of the people, the Netinim, and all Israel settled (וישבו) in their cities (בעריהם)." Yet, following the conclusion of chap. 7, Ezra-Nehemiah begins the long narrative of Torah, confession, and pledge that interrupts NM, only to return to the topic at Neh 11:1: "The leaders of the people (שרי–העם) settled in Jerusalem, and the rest (שאר) of the people cast lots to bring out one in ten to settle in Jerusalem, the holy city (עיר הקדש). The nine were in [their] places in the cities." The remainder of chap. 11 then goes on to list the purportedly new inhabitants of Jerusalem (Neh 11:3-24), as well as the villages/towns (חצרים) of Judah (Neh 11:25-36).

Given that Neh 11 appears to fill out in detail an action hinted at in Neh 7:1-5, many scholars have suggested that Neh 11:1 originally followed Neh 7, whether at Neh 7:5 or Neh 7:72a.[154] This literary link is not entirely airtight, however, for both thematic and stylistic reasons. Neh 7 seems to suggest that decisions regarding the population of the city will be somehow guided by genealogy (7:5), whereas Neh 11:1-2 reports that the casting of lots was the determining factor. Additionally, Neh 11:1-2 makes no mention of

154. Loring W. Batten, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah*, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1913), 266-267; Jacob M. Myers, *Ezra; Nehemiah* (AB 14. Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1965), 186; Lester Grabbe, *Ezra-Nehemiah*. (London; New York: Routledge, 1998), 59-60; Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 268. Dissenters on this issue include Kellermann, Blenkinsopp, and Wright, each of whom find the continuation of Neh 7 at Neh 12:27 (for more on this see below).

Nehemiah[155] and in fact employs terminology that is unusual for NM. Examples of non-NM language in Neh 11 are 1) שאר where NM usually uses יתר (see Neh 2:16; 4:8, 13; 6:1, 14), 2) שרים for leaders, in place of the usual and frequent terms חרים and סגנים (Neh 2:16; 4:8, 13; 5:7, 17; 6:17; 13:11, 17; most notably at 7:5), 3) the unparalleled in NM use of "holy city" (עיר הקדש).[156] Once again, however, the aim of the present discussion is not to establish which passages come from the hand of NbH, nor to determine common authorship. Accordingly, in order to avoid getting lost in a speculative discussion of the redaction, the point may be made that the narrative frame of the list in Neh 7 is plausibly connected (perhaps by an editor or reviser)[157] to the introduction of the list in Neh 11.

Worth mentioning at any rate is the fact that Neh 7:1-3 appears irrelevant to the issue of repopulation. Those verses speak of the appointment of an overseer for the fortress (בירה) and the establishment of the guards of the city gates. Verse 4 introduces a new topic, the size and emptiness of the city. In addition, the following verse (5), which on its own says nothing about repopulation, leads directly into the list in Neh 7:6ff. Neh 7:5b reads, "I found the book of the genealogy of those who had immigrated at the beginning (ספר היחש העולים בראשונה), and I found written in it: [beginning of list at Neh 7:6]." That is, whereas 7:1-3 deals with topics unrelated to either the remainder of chap. 7

---

155. Eskenazi, *In an Age of Prose*, 112n182..

156. See Kellermann, 43, Williamson *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 345.

157. Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 344-346; Eskenazi, *In an Age of Prose*, 112-113; Grabbe, *Ezra-Nehemiah*," 168; Oded Lipschits, "Literary and Ideological Aspects of Nehemiah 11," *JBL* 121 (2002): 423- 440, 427.

or chap. 11, 7:4-5 contains links to both.

This double connection, from Neh 7:4-5 to both Neh 7:6ff and Neh 11:1ff, also points us toward the links that exist not only between the narrative frames in Neh 7 and 11, but between the lists in each chapter as well. A recent article by Oded Lipschits shows that the numbers in Neh 7 and 11 reveal a surprisingly exact correlation. The total number of settlers in Jerusalem tallied in Neh 11:14-19 comes to 3,044. The total of people who went up in Neh 7:6-71, excluding slaves and the priests who were unable to prove their descent, is 30,447. The number of settlers in Neh 11, in other words, is nearly exactly one tenth of the number of immigrants in Neh 7, which corresponds appropriately to the description in Neh 11:1-2 of casting lots to select one of ten people.[158] In Lipschits' view, this correspondence can be attributed to editorial activity in Neh 11,[159] but Wright explains it on the basis of Neh 7's response to Neh 11.[160] It may be impossible to tell to what extent or how Neh 7 (or any potential earlier literary stages therein) influenced Neh 11, or vice versa. Indeed, perhaps these two lists may have influenced one another.

---

158. Lipschits, "Nehemiah 11," 432. Lipschits also observes that the number actually cited as the final tally in Neh 7:66, 42,360, does not match the number arrived at by addition of the numbers within - though neither does 42,360, though cited in the parallel lists at Ezra 2:64 and 1 Esd 5:41, match the numbers in those lists either (29, 818 and 31, 850, respectively)! See Lipschits, "Nehemiah 11," 432n40.

159. See Lipschits "Nehemiah 11," 432n39 for details regarding a comparison between Neh 11 and a parallel list in 1 Chr 9. For more on the relationship between Neh 11 and 1 Chr 9, see below.

160. Wright, *Rebuilding Identity*, 306-307.

3.2.4.2 The relationship of Neh 7:5-72a; 11 to non-NM material

The interconnectedness, even interdependence, of Neh 7 and 11, by itself, does not speak to the question of whether it should be considered part of the NM corpus. Much as with Neh 3:1-32, the possibility remains that these lists could have been incorporated into NM before the latter's reception into Ezra-Nehemiah. Links between Neh 7//11 and other texts outside of NM, however, suggest that the former should not be read with NM. This section will discuss two parts of Neh 7//11 that show possible or likely influence by non-NM texts: 1) the list of Neh 11 and its possible source in 1 Chr 9 (or its Vorlage), and 2) the list in Neh 7:6-72a, which is likely dependent upon its parallel in Ezra 2:1-70.

The list of settlers in Neh 11:3-19 is quite similar to 1 Chr 9:2-18. These lists are not exact parallels and often differ from one another in many (not entirely systematic) ways. Gary Knoppers shows argues that the relationship between Neh 11 and 1 Chr 9 is impossible to describe as unidirectional.[161] Not only can influence not be determined between MT Neh 11 and MT 1 Chr 9, but the LXX versions of each text also differ notably from their MT counterparts. Knoppers, following Tov, further observes that the shorter LXX version of Neh 11 likely represents a version of the list older than that preserves in MT.[162] Knoppers' comments illustrate the complexity of the situation: "In

---

161. Gary Knoppers, *1 Chronicles 1-9: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 12. New York: Doubleday, 2004), 493-511. For Knoppers' full treatment of these texts, see "Sources, Revisions, and Editions: The Lists of Jerusalem's Residents in MT and LXX Nehemiah 11 and 1 Chronicles 9," *Text* 20 (2000): 141-168).

162. See Emanuel Tov, *Text-Critical Use of the Septuagint in Biblical Research*, (Jerusalem: Simor, 1997), 257. Knoppers writes that LXX Neh 11 is "less prone to

this context, it is pertinent to point out that MT and LXX 1 Chr 9 have a number of pluses that both MT and LXX Neh 11 do not have and that MT and LXX Neh 11 have a number of pluses that both MT and LXX 1 Chr 9 do not have."[163] This situation makes direct dependence either way unlikely, and while the idea that some relationship between Neh 11 and 1 Chr 9 appears inescapable, the two (MT) texts diverge enough to be considered separate texts.

Given the primary criterion that I have established for determining the parameters of NM – Nehemiah texts are to be considered part of NM if they do not show influence of non-Nehemiah texts – the relative independence of Neh 11 and 1 Chr 9 would argue for the inclusion of Neh 11. Yet, the extreme complexity of this text and the evidence for very late, post-LXX Vorlage additions militates against a sure judgment. As argued above, lateness or secondariness themselves should not be sufficient to argue for exclusion, since the aim of this chapter is not to locate the words of the historical Nehemiah, but to demarcate a uniquely "Nehemian" tradition. The present study, however, also takes a position that resides within a diachronic horizon, namely, the reception of NM into Ezra-Nehemiah. Accordingly, late textual additions such as are found in MT Neh 11 surely must run the risk of impinging on the period of the

---

various kinds of expansion, such as the filling out of genealogies (MT Neh 11;7, 13, 14, 15, 17), explanatory comments (MT Neh 11:16, 17, 18, 19), summaries (MT Neh 11:3, 12), and descriptions of functions (MT Neh 11:17)." See Knoppers, *1 Chronicles 1-9*, 510.

163. Knoppers, *1 Chronicles 1-9*, 511.

composition of Ezra-Nehemiah as a whole. This problem must at the very least raise caution flags regarding its inclusion in NM and, in my view, offers a good reason to exclude it.

The status of Neh 11 is intertwined with that of Neh 7, and turning to the list of returnees in Neh 7, one must consider how the list in Neh 7:6-72a is related to its nearly identical counterpart in Ezra 2:1-70. The question of which of these lists (along with their strikingly similar narrative conclusions in Ezra 3:1 and Neh 7:72b-8:1a) precedes the other has divided the scholarship on Ezra-Nehemiah, and one can find several defenders on either side of the issue.[164] While this distribution of opinion shows that one argument cannot be foolproof, the position I take here is that Neh 7 is later than, and likely dependent upon, the list in Ezra 2.

The most forceful argument for the converse thesis, the priority of Neh 7, has been offered by Williamson. He puts forward four primary reasons why Neh 7 should be seen as earlier. First, he states that the "7th month" mentioned in the parallel narrative conclusions in Ezra 3:1 and Neh 7:72b is relevant to the context in Nehemiah (see Neh

---

164. Pakkala, 137. Those who promote the priority of Ezra 2 include Mowinckel, *Studien I*, 29-45; Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah,* 43-44; Wright, *Rebuilding Identity*, 301-303; Klaus-Dietrich Schunck, *Nehemia* (Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1998), 204-208. Arguing for the priority of Neh 7 are Rudolph, Galling, Williamson. Fensham argues that each list goes back to an independent source. The recent increase of scholars asserting that Neh 7 is earlier now mitigates Williamson's claim (see "The Composition of Ezra 1-6", in *Studies in Persian Period History and Historiography*, 245) that "the overwhelming majority" is on his side of the issue.

8:1), but not in Ezra 3:1, where it is, in his words, "left completely in the air."[165] Second, he claims that Ezra 2:68-69 summarizes Neh 7:69-71 by rounding off the numbers in the latter. The number of priestly garments is listed in his reconstruction of Neh 7:69-70 is 97 (67 + 30), whereas Ezra 2:69 counts 100; additionally, Neh 7:69- 70 tallies 4700 (500 + 2200 + 2000) silver minas, in comparison to the 5000 of Ezra 2:69.[166] Third, the naming of the date as the "7th month" (as an ordinal number not further specified - Ezra 3:1, Neh 7:72b), does not fit with the usual practice in Ezra 1-6 of tying the year to a king (Ezra 1:1; 4:24; 6:15) or to "some other fixed occasion" (Ezra 3:8), yet, "this system of dating is exactly what we find regularly in the Ezra material, to which Neh 7:72b belongs" (Ezra 8:31; 10:9, 16-17; Neh 8:2).[167] Fourth, Ezra 2:68, which describes offerings for the temple given by the heads of families, is a "clear plus," in Williamson's view, and one that fits the context and vocabulary of Ezra 1-6.[168]

Upon further investigation, however, this case for the priority of Neh 7 breaks down. Williamson's contention that the seventh month (Ezra 3:1; Neh 7:72b) is unconnected to the larger context in Ezra is curious, particularly given the notice only

---

165. Williamson, "Composition of Ezra 1-6," 245.

166. Williamson, "Composition of Ezra 1-6," 246. Williamson's numbers for Neh 7 depend upon an unattested emendation - for a discussion and critique, see below.

167. Williamson, "Composition of Ezra 1-6," 246. Williamson's claim that Neh 7:72b belongs to the "Ezra material" presumes the answer to the very question at hand. Nonethless, his thesis here, if correct, is worth keeping in mind.

168. Williamson, "Composition of Ezra 1-6," 246.

five verses later that sacrifices were offered beginning in the seventh month (Ezra 3:6). In actuality, the mention of the seventh month is equally at home in both contexts.[169] Also, while Williamson is correct that the naming of the month by ordinal number alone is not wholly characteristic of Ezra 1-6 (though the designation of the month as Adar in Ezra 6:15 shows that Ezra 1-6 is not consistent), even less is it characteristic of NM, which uses month names exclusively (Neh 1:1; 2:1; 6:15).[170] Turning next to his observation about the lack of a parallel for Ezra 2:68 in Neh 7, the insertion of a secondary text does not necessarily entail that the entire context is as late as that plus. If Ezra 2:68 is indeed a plus, it need not have been written simultaneously with the rest of Ezra 2, and cannot provide evidence that Ezra 2 as a whole is younger. Williamson opens himself up to such a critique in his discussion of Mowinckel's proposal. Mowinckel, who argues that Ezra 2 is earlier, marshals for his evidence a plus at Neh 7:69 (which tallies some gifts not mentioned at the end of Ezra 2).[171] Williamson correctly counters that Mowinckel, "has not considered what is surely the most likely suggestion, namely that if Neh. 7:69 is indeed an addition it was made by the editor of Neh. 7 to the antecedent source on which

---

169. Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 43; Wright, *Rebuilding Identity*, 302.

170. Blenkinsopp, 44. Even if one concedes Williamson's point here, the upshot for this study differs little, as his proposed connection with Ezra material nevertheless suggests that Neh 7 is dependent upon the Ezra material, since Neh 7:72b uses a date formula characteristic of EM and Neh 8. One could argue that EM//Neh 8 appear later than Neh 7, but that would imply the untenable position that the author(s) of EM//Neh 8 consistently utilized and applied a certain kind of date formula (ordinal numbers) based solely on the single occurrence of that formula in Neh 7:72b.

171. Mowinckel, *Studien I*, 30-31.

he was drawing."[172] Surely a parallel objection to Williamson's own claims about Ezra 2:68 can and should be made.

Williamson's most substantial proposal, that Ezra 2 rounds up numbers found in Neh 7, while intriguing, oversimplifies and misrepresents the relationship between these two texts. First, his totals for both the priestly garments and the silver minas in Neh 7 – 97 and 4700, respectively – requires an unattested two-word textual emendation. As it stands in MT, Neh 7:69 ends with the phrase כתנות כהנים שלשים וחמש מאות, which could be translated as "530 priestly garments." Williamson rejects this translation and cites GKC § 134i to the effect that, in Hebrew numerals, the hundreds have to come first. He thus asserts that the phrase וכסף מנים has to be added (or "restored"), creating the translation "30 priestly vestments and 500 minas of silver."[173] However, variant numeral orders, while rare, are not unheard of (cf. Num 3:43, 50), and thus the extant text makes grammatical sense and cannot be ruled out as impossible.[174] Without emendation, the totals in Neh 7 come out to 597 garments and 4200 silver minas, neither of which can be considered rounded off by 100 garments and 5000 minas in Ezra 2:68. Additionally, neither do the 61,000 gold darics (דרכמונים) in Ezra 2 round off the 41,000 gold darics in

---

172. Williamson, "Composition of Ezra 1-6," 247.

173. Williamson, "Composition of Ezra 1-6," 246n8.

174. Bruce K. Waltke and M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 15.2.5d.

Neh 7.[175] Williamson does not mention the relationship between the numbers of gold darics in both lists. In sum, the numbers in the extant texts do not support the theory that Ezra 2 rounds the numbers in Neh 7.

In fact, as we have already seen with Lipschits' reading of Neh 11, a different set of numbers suggests the opposite conclusion: that Neh 7 has modified the numbers found in its source. Again, the total number of immigrants added up in in Neh 7:6-41 comes to virtually exactly ten times the number of settlers in Neh 11:14-19. The question of whether Neh 11 influenced Neh 7, or vice versa (or if both texts are mutually interdependent) cannot be answered with any certainty. Yet, while one can discern a good reason for the author(s) of Neh 7 to modify the totals in Ezra 2 (to match the one-in-ten ideology of Neh 11), a justification for the opposite procedure is difficult to conceive of. Why would the author(s) or Ezra 2 change the number of immigrants away from the total in Neh 7? To be fair, a good explanation for the variation in numbers among each of the three variants (Ezra 2, Neh 7, and 1 Esd 5) is hard to find, and so far has been out of the grasp of scholars of Ezra-Nehemiah. However, if any of the three has altered the numbers from its source document, it is Neh 7. And, since the text of 1 Esd postdates Ezra-Nehemiah, the most likely candidate for Neh 7's source document is Ezra 2 - unlike with Neh 11 and 1 Chr 9, the text traditions of Ezra 2 and Neh 7 do not reveal enough internal development to suggest independent text traditions.

---

175. Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 43.

While the position I take here is that the direction of literary influence more likely travels from Ezra 2 to Neh 7 than vice versa, this conclusion requires a few cautionary observations. Foremost, the assertion of the literary priority of Ezra 2 over Neh 7 entails no necessary conclusion about the list's historicity in in Ezra 1-6. The claim that Ezra 2 was composed earlier than Neh 7 speaks neither to the accuracy of Ezra 2 nor to its chronological proximity to the events it describes. As Neh 7 and 11 appear to be quite late additions to Ezra-Nehemiah (see the post-LXX Vorlage developments in Neh 11), texts that precede them could have been composed any time during the Persian and even early Hellenistic period. Additionally, the point needs to be raised that the priority of Ezra 2 also implies no necessary conclusion about the relationship between Ezra-Nehemiah and 1 Esdras. Williamson notes that earlier arguments for Neh 7's dependence on Ezra 2 were driven by the thesis that 1 Esdras predates Ezra-Nehemiah and Chronicles:[176] since the narrative context of 1 Esd 5 parallels Ezra 1-6 and 1 Esdras contains no Nehemiah material, the priority of Neh 7 would exclude the possibility that 1 Esdras is an earlier text. However, the opposite position, that Ezra 2 is earlier, merely makes 1 Esdras' priority possible, not actual.

Notwithstanding the evidence that Neh 7 is literarily dependent upon its counterpart in Ezra 2, another recent publication by Finkelstein suggests that, Neh 7 may date to the Hellenistic period.[177] In this article, much as with his discussion of Neh 3, he

---

176. Williamson, "Composition of Ezra 1-6," 246.

177. Israel Finkelstein, "Archaeology and the List of Returnees in the Books of Ezra

makes the case that the lists of returnees in Ezra 2 and Neh 7 mention many sites that do not offer strong evidence of occupation during the Persian Period, many of which were occupied during Iron II and/or Hellenistic.[178] Finkelstein, once again, suggests that Ezra 2//Neh 7 may represent the Hellenistic Period more than it does the Persian.

The interconnectedness of Neh 7 and 11, along with the Neh 7's probable and Neh 11's possible dependence upon non-NM material and the possibility that Ezra 2//Neh 7 may be in any case Hellenistic, lead me to conclude that, for the purposes of this study, these texts do not belong to NM. The case here is admittedly not airtight. Enough uncertainty surrounds these texts, however, to occasion extreme caution. The possibility does remain that Neh 7 and 11 were composed as a part of an exclusively Nehemian tradition, but this is far from certain. Neh 7 and 11, as well as 12:27ff. (as we shall see in the following section), are marginal texts, in that their provenance is uncertain. On the whole, though, the balance of evidence indicates that they should be excluded from NM.

3.2.4.3 Neh 12:27-43 (and Neh 7:1-3 revisited)

If Neh 11 cannot be judged as the continuation of Neh 7:1-3, perhaps the narrative of the dedication of the wall in Neh 12:27-43 can. Proponents of the theory that Neh

---

and Nehemiah," *PEQ* 140 (2008): 7-16.

178. Finkelstein, "Archaeology and the List of Returnees," 8-14. See the table on 14. Finkelstein discusses seventeen different sites.

7:4-12:26 interrupts the NM have included Kellermann and Blenkinsopp.[179] It is in the dedication narrative that the first person narration finally returns to the story, if fitfully and incompletely. The first person voice appears here in 12:31 and continues (presumably) through 12:42. Since Nehemiah is not named in the third person anywhere in this passage, one could read the entire span of vv. 27-43 as a first person text. Conversely, because much of this text narrates events in an impersonal voice (see 12:27-30, 33-37, 42-43) one could accordingly read it as a mixture of first and third person.

The renewed presence of NM's characteristic first person narration suggests intuitively that at least some of this passage should be attributed to NM, and indeed the standard position on 12:27-44 is that the verses containing first person reveal the core of the narrative (Williamson, for example, proposes vv. 31-32; 37-40, 43),[180] to which the third person/impersonal elements were added.[181] This reconstruction presents its own problems, however. Wright challenges it, asserting that the purported beginning of the first-person NM layer (12:31) begins the episode in an abrupt manner.[182] Neither in his

---

179. Kellermann, *Nehemia*, 44; Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 343.

180. Note here that v. 43 is itself not composed in the first-person.

181. Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 370; Kellermann suggests vv. 31-32; 37-40 (44, 56). For a detailed review of the discussion of this narrative's composition, see Wright, *Rebuilding Identity*, chap.12.

182. Wright, *Rebuilding Identity*, 273-274.

view does the final first person text (12:40) properly conclude the story.[183] For these reasons, Wright submits that the first person texts do not present a viable, continuous narrative. His solution, in contrast, is to posit that the third person/impersonal texts (specifically vv. 27 & 43) comprise the earliest layer of the dedication narrative.[184] An in-depth evaluation of Wright's thesis over against the prevailing position goes beyond the aims of this project, but while Wright's thesis appears counterintuitive because it finds a third person substratum (which is not, it should be noted, part of Wright's original ME), it thesis does not prima facia eliminate Neh 12 from consideration, since the question of whether Nehemiah himself wrote any given text is not at issue.

Nevertheless, while some kind of Nehemiah tradition undoubtedly exists in Neh 12:27-43, the highly-edited nature of this text gives pause, no matter whether the first person or the third person portion is earlier. The potential presence of editing here does not, of course, by itself give reason to exclude it from NM; rather, it merely raises the question of non-NM influence on Neh 12. And indeed, a significant set of parallels between Neh 12:27-43 and the account of the temple's dedication in Ezra 6 strongly suggests that the former has been affected by the latter. Wright discovers several striking

---

183. Wright, *Rebuilding Identity*, 284-287. Wright concedes that some scholars (Williamson, Kratz, and Throntveit) argue that the underlying first-person narrative concludes with v. 43, but counters that v. 43 is more properly considered as a continuation of the third person/impersonal text in vv. 27-30. The opening verb (ויזבחו) is masculine plural, and thus cannot refer back to the grammatically feminine subjects of the previous verse, the תודות. However it can refer back to the subjects of v. 30, the priests and Levites.

184. Wright, *Rebuilding Identity*, 284-287.

similarities between Neh 12 and Ezra 6.[185] Some of these parallels, such as the presence of purification rites, sacrifices, and ordination of priests, may be merely indications of common patterns in dedication ceremonies and/or dedication narratives,[186] yet others suggest a literary connection. Both narratives term the ceremony a "חנכה", a fact which may only show reference to common terminology. Most telling, however, is Neh 12:43, which is worth quoting in full:

ויזבחו ביום־ההוא זבחים גדולים וישמחו כי האלהים שמחם שמחה גדולה וגם הנשים והילדים שמחו ותשמע שמחת ירושלם מרחוק

("On that day, they sacrificed great sacrifices, and they rejoiced, because God had gladdened[187] them them with a great rejoicing - even the women and children rejoiced. The rejoicing of Jerusalem was heard [Niphal שמע] from far away.") This concluding notice of the dedication of the wall reads like a recapitulation of the narratives of the refoundation and the dedication of the temple (Ezra 3:10-13 and Ezra 6, respectively). Ezra 3:10-13 tells of the celebration marking the foundation ceremony, at which "many

---

185. Wright, *Rebuilding Identity*, 284-285, 309-313.

186. Purification rites (Neh 12:30, Ezra 6:20); sacrificial activities (Neh 12:43; Ezra 6:17); ordination of priests and Levites (Neh 12:44; Ezra 6:18). See Wright, Rebuilding, 309-310. The appeal to an ordination in Neh 12 is the least persuasive, as it incorporates a verse (Neh 12:44) outside of the present passage (Neh 12:27-43). As we shall see, however, Neh 12:44-13:4 is likely linked to 12:27-43.

187. The translation "made them rejoice" would perhaps be preferable in order to emphasize the repetition of שמח, but it would also falsely portray the Piel (causative stative) verb as Hiphil (causative active). See Waltke and O'Connor, §24.1.

[shouted] with joy (בשמחה)" (v. 12), and that "none of the people could distinguish the sound of the shout of joy (תרועת השמחה) from the sound of the people's weeping, because the people shouted a great shout and the sound could be heard from far away (נשמע עד–למרחוק)" (v. 13). The repetition of the root שמח ("joy," "rejoicing") and the note that the sound was heard far away match similar language in Neh 12:43. Likewise, Ezra 6:22 states that the people celebrated the Passover at the time of the temple's completion "for seven days with joy, because Yahweh had gladdened them (Piel)" (בשמחה כי שמחם יהוה). Neh 12:43, in other words, displays elements of each story: "heard from far away" (Niphal שמע) from Ezra 3 and Piel שמח with deity as subject and 3ms object suffix from Ezra 6, as well as repetition of שמח found in both. This combination suggests that the author(s) of Neh 12:27-43 drew upon Ezra 1-6.

As I have argued above with Neh 1, though, lexical correspondences between texts do not necessarily establish literary dependence and, indeed, a few objections could be raised against this conclusion. First, on a parallel with the above discussion of Neh 1, perhaps the common phraseology can be attributed to a common genre - something like the dedication celebration narrative. Even if a relationship of literary dependence between Neh 12 and Ezra 1-6 can be inferred, additionally, the direction of influence could point in either direction. Finally, given even a dependence of Neh 12 upon Ezra 1-6, perhaps the verse in which these parallels appear (Neh 12:43), and which does not contain NM's characteristic first-person narration, is a gloss.

While the possibility certainly exists that the lexical similarities between Neh 12

and Ezra 3 and 6 boil down to shared generic conventions, the extant evidence rules against such an objection. The sample size of dedication narratives in the Hebrew Bible is small, extending (beyond Neh 12 and Ezra 1-6) only to the stories of Solomon's dedication in 1 Kgs 8 and 2 Chr 6. In neither of these texts, however, do the key phrases appear ("rejoice a great rejoicing," Piel (שמח), Niphal מרחוק (ל) + שמע). If the terminology in Neh 12:43 and Ezra 3:10-13; 6:22 belongs to a common genre or type-scene, similar language should appear in the narratives describing the dedication of Solomon's temple. The absence of these phrases, particularly "(rejoice) a great rejoicing", from the Chronicles narrative is quite notable. שמחה גדולה or Qal שמח + שמחה occurs with some frequency in Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah, often in narratives describing worship and cultic activities.[188] Neither should the relative frequency of these phrases in Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah allow the commonalities between Neh 12 and Ezra 1-6 be attributed to coincidental shared late Persian-early Hellenistic literary usage.[189] The specific collocation of phrases in Neh 12:43 mitigates against this conclusion. The expression "was heard from far away" shows up only in Neh 12:43 and Ezra 3:13. The same holds true for "Elohim/Yahweh gladdened (Piel שמח) them," which, with one exception (1 Chr 20:27), is restricted to Neh 12:43 and Ezra 6:22. Additionally, manifestations of the root

---

188. Neh 8:12, 17; 1 Chr 28: 22; 29:9 2 Chr 30:21, 26. Also, 2 Chr 20:27 contains כי שמחם יהוה, cf. Ezra 6:22 These are not phrases exclusive to Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah: see also 1 Kings 1:40, Jonah 4:6.

189. I use this circumlocution in order to avoid implying common authorship of Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah and simultaneously to appeal to a common linguistic milieu (perhaps related to "Late Biblical Hebrew").

שמח, in verbal and noun form appear five times in Neh 12:43. שמח is not a rare word, but the extreme emphasis on it in this verse suggests, as Wright states, that Neh 12:43 "seems to presuppose the joy in Ezra 3:13 and 6:22 and attempts to surpass it."[190] The combination of rare phrases from two different places in Ezra 1-6, along with the one-upmanship in the expressions of joy, strongly implies that the author(s) of Neh 12:43 knew of, and consciously drew upon, the similar scenes in Ezra 1-6.

Accordingly, this study will not treat the dedication narrative in Neh 12:27-43 as a part of NM, even if, as may very well be the case, this narrative contains some Nehemiah material. Strong signs of the influence of Ezra 3 and 6 are present in the integral concluding verse (Neh 12:43). This verse may be part of a secondary revision of the underlying Nehemiah material, but even then, it is integral to the extant narrative (cf. Williamson's inclusion of v. 43 in his reconstruction of the earlier layer). If, in contrast, Wright is correct about the composition of this passage, v. 43 belongs to the original shape of the dedication narrative and its connection to the passage is even stronger. Moreover, if one takes Wright's reconstruction of Neh 12:27-43 seriously, a corollary of his theory also calls into question the status of Neh 7:1-3. As mentioned above, scholars including Kellermann and Blenkinsopp have proposed that Neh 7:1-3 originally continued on to 12:27ff. If Neh 7:1-3 is part of the same compositional layer as the dedication, it too may have to be bracketed out of NM.

---

190. Wright, *Rebuilding Identity*, 285.

Now, the mere narrative juxtaposition of 7:1-3 and 12:27ff would not itself be sufficient to tie the two together, and thus suggest that Neh 7:1-3 too was influenced by Ezra 1-6. Neh 7:1-3 and 12:27-43, however, differ perceptibly both in content and style. Wright, however, advance the proposal that these first-person texts have a more hidden connection: both developed from a now-obscured third-person substratum. This third-person composition, itself younger than the first-person Nehemiah texts, was subsequently edited with first-person elements. If a third-person substratum common to both 7:1-3 and 12:27-43 can be established with a reasonable level of certainty, then 7:1-3 must be adjudged, like 12:27-43, as a post-NM passage. Accordingly, what follows is a review and evaluation of Wright's discussion of Neh 7:1-3.

Wright builds his case around an observation that 7:1-3 contains both infelicities and grammatical difficulties. The opening verse begins with a passive construction, ויהי כאשר נבנתה החומה ("When the wall was built [Niphal perfect]"). He contrasts this formulation with the parallel, yet active (1st person Qal perfect), description earlier in Neh 6:1: בניתי את–החומה ("I built the wall").[191] He views the passive construction as problematic because it immediately leads into a first-person wayyiqtol verb form, (ואעמיד הדלתות) ("I set up the doors").[192] This "incongruity created by the sudden change from qatal (נבנתה) to wayyiqtol (ואעמיד)," however, is not the only problem in vv. 1-3,

191. Wright, *Rebuilding Identity*, 288.

192. Wright, *Rebuilding Identity*, 288-289.

according to Wright.[193] The description of Hanani's (and/or Hananiah's) appointment over Jerusalem interrupts the topic of its surrounding context in vv. 1 and 3, namely the appointment and instructions for the gatekeepers (שוערים) and the gates (שערים).[194] Additionally, this intrusive verse highlights the difficulty with understanding the opening clause of v. 3. The ketib of 7:3aβ reads, ויאמר להם ("And he said to them"), but who is speaking to whom? Is the speaker Hanani, Hananiah, or Nehemiah? And are the addressees Hanani and Hananiah or the gatekeepers?[195] Reading with the qere, ואומר, solves the problem of the speaker (who becomes Nehemiah/the first-person narrator), but does not deal with the unspecified addressee.

Wright's solution to these problems, as mentioned above, is to posit an original third person narrative. In order to do this, he suggests that 7:1aβ (because of its abrupt syntax) and the entirety of 7:2 (because it interrupts the topic of and transition between v. 1 and 3) are later additions. He also rejects the qere in 7:3 in favor of the ketib, and revocalizes one verb in 7:3b, והעמיד. Other translators follow the Massoretic pointing and read this verb as an infinitive absolute with imperative force, interpreting it as a part of the direct discourse introduced in 7:3a, which yields something like "And I [or he] said to them ... appoint watches of the inhabitants of Jerusalem..." Wright repoints it as a Hiphil 3ms perfect (he'emid), making it part of the narrator's description of what Nehemiah did.

---

193. Wright, *Rebuilding Identity*, 289.

194. Wright, *Rebuilding Identity*, 291.

195. Wright, *Rebuilding Identity*, 289.

The reconstructed text thus reads:

Now when the wall had been built, [...] they appointed the porters (השוערים) [...]. And he said to them, "The gates (שערים) of Jerusalem are not to be opened until the sun has grown warm (...?)."[196] And he assigned guard divisions from the inhabitants of Jerusalem, each in his own division and each over against his own house. (Wright, Rebuilding, 291. Lacunae are Wright's.)

The outline of Wright's arguments regarding 12:27ff are sketched out above, and he provides a more than plausible account of that passage's history. The notion of a third-person substratum may be counterintuitive, but it is by no means to be ruled out for that reason - compare the fluctuations between first- and third-person in Ezra 7-10. His analysis of 7:1-3, however, does not fully persuade. The presumed difficulties in the text upon further investigation are resolvable without submitting it to major alteration. To begin with, the juxtaposition of passive (Niphal) perfective and first-person wayyiqtol verbs is not unusual to NM, nor does it suggest that Neh 7:1aα is not written in first person. Wright contrasts the third person beginning of 7:1 ("When the wall was built") with the similar, yet first person, statement in 6:1 ("I built the wall"), but this comparison does not employ syntactically similar phrases. Far from being unusual, Neh 7:1 actually parallels 6:1 quite closely. The opening of 7:1, ויהי כאשר נבנתה, is syntactically identical to the opening of 6:1, ויהי כאשר נשמע. Both are temporally subordinate clauses that employ Niphal perfect verbs. Further, though Wright maintains that the transition from perfect to

196. Wright notes the extreme difficulty of the text here.

wayyiqtol verbs is abrupt, a wayyiqtol verb is actually a perfectly acceptable, even expected, marker of the beginning of the main or independent clause following a temporal clause (see, for example, Judg 3:18)[197] Neh 6:1-2 in fact contains the very same juxtaposition. The dependent temporal clause is longer in Neh 6, occupying the entire first verse, but 6:2 begins a main clause with a wayyiqtol verb. In other words, the syntactical parallel to 7:1's נבנתה in 6:1 is נשמע, not בניתי; the parallel to 7:1's ואעמיד is וישלח, not העמדתי. The syntax in 7:1 is quite acceptable, even characteristic of NM. The temporal dependent clause with ויהי כאשר occurs elsewhere at Neh 3:33; 4:1, 6, 9; 6:1-2, 16; 13:19, each of which introduces the main clause with a wayyiqtol verb (see Table 3.3). Wright briefly addresses the possibility that ואעמיד הדלתות begins the independent clause, but rejects it in passing, quoting Rudolph to the effect that this phrase is "not an independent clause, but rather parallels נבנתה" ("nicht Nachsatz, sondern steht parallel zu נבנתה").[198] The interpretation of ואעמיד הדלתות as an extension of the dependent clause begun by ויהי כאשר נבנתה is a reasonable one, but no more than seeing it as the beginning of the independent clause, but the latter interpretation shows that the the extant text is not problematic and in fact corresponds to typical NM syntax.

197. Waltke & O'Connor §38.7.

198. Rudolph, 138, quoted in Wright, *Rebuilding Identity*, 289. The English translation is mine.

Table 3.3. Temporal clauses beginning with ויהי כאשר. Main clause *wayyiqtol* verbs in bold.

Neh 3:33	ויהי כאשר שמע סנבלט כי־אנחנו בונים את־החומה **ויחר** לו
Neh 4:1	ויהי כאשר שמע סנבלט וטוביה ... **ויחר** להם
4:6	ויהי כאשר באו היהודים הישבים וצלם **ויאמרו**
4:9	ויהי כאשר־שמעו אויבינו כי־נודע לנו **ויפר** אלהים
6:1–2[199]	ויהי כאשר נשמע לסנבלט וטוביה ולגשם ... **וישלח** סנבלט וגשם
6:16	ויהי כאשר שמעו כל־אויבינו **ויראו** כל־הגוים אשר סביבתינו
7:1	ויהי כאשר נבנתה החומה **ואעמיד** הדלתות
13:19	ויהי כשר צללו שערי ירושלם לפני השבת **ואמרה**

Nor does the slight change of topic need be understood as intrusive. Yes, the introduction of Hanani and/or Hananiah intrudes between the appointment of the gatekeepers and the instructions regarding the gates of Jerusalem. The extant text though does not necessarily create logical or syntactic problems - one could read 7:1-2 as the appointment of all the positions needed to staff the gates and 7:3 as the instructions and procedures for the personnel. Treating 7:2 as integral to the narrative in fact provides resources to make sense of the ketib of 7:3a ("And he said"). As Wright points out, the most likely reading of 7:2a (ואצוה את–חנני אחי ואת–חנניה שר הבירה על–ירושלם) understands

199. The entirety of Neh 6:1 is taken up by the temporal clause. The main clause begins with וישלח in Neh 6:2.

the two names to refer to one person ("Hanani my brother, that is Hananiah"), particularly given the following clause, "because he (3ms - הוא) was a faithful man."[200] Because the direct quote in 7:3 is addressed to a plural object (להם), though, Williamson insists that חנני וחנניה refers to two different persons - he reads with the qere ("And I said") and makes these two men the addressees of v. 3. The notion that the story would refer to two persons, one of whose name is a hypochoristic of the other, is unlikely and avoids the most straightforward reading. Rather, 7:2 most likely speaks of two names for one person, and that person, Hanani/Hananiah then becomes a ready candidate for the subject of the ketib of 7:3a ("And he said") who addresses the gatekeepers of v. 1.[201]

The retention of 7:2, in other words, makes some emendations of Neh 7:1-3 unnecessary, whether the revocalization of והעמיד or the rejection of the ketib in v. 3. This does not mean that the text of 7:1-3 is completely comprehensible. This textual problem, however, is not resolved by Wright's proposal. The possibly corrupt status of this text nevertheless should insert a note of caution into a reading of it. Partly for this reason, but mostly because the perceived difficulties are explicable without resorting to emendation,

---

200. The waw on וחנניה is an "explicative waw"; see Williams §434, also Waltke & O'Connor §39.2.1b.

201. See Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 275. Williamson rejects this reading because v. 3 later refers to a third person entity ("they will shut the doors"), which he identifies with the gatekeepers. If this is the case, he reasons, the gatekeepers could not be the addressees of 7:3. (*Ezra, Nehemiah*, 266). This objection has some validity, but given the difficulty, if not impossibility, of determining the exact roles of the שוערים in v. 1, not to mention the inexplicable (by any account, even Wright's) undefined "they" who appoint the gatekeepers, I submit that we do not have enough information to rule out what otherwise makes up the most uncomplicated reading.

Wright's thesis of a third-person substratum in Neh 7 should be rejected.

Without this affinity between Neh 12:27-43 and Neh 7:1-3, the latter has no perceptible literary connection to Ezra 1-6 or to any other non-NM text. Therefore, Neh 7:1-3, unlike the remainder of Neh 7:4-12:43, will for the purposes of this study be considered part of NM. The status of and potential influences in any of these texts of course cannot be established with complete confidence. Yet, the balance of evidence leads me to the conclusion that only 7:1-3 reveals no traces of composition or editing by those involved with the creation of Ezra 1-10 or Neh 8-10. While a Nehemiah tradition, or even the work of the hand of Nehemiah himself, may lie buried underneath parts of the rest of Neh 7-12:43, the state of the extant text rules against characterizing them as NM passages.

3.2.5 Summary comments

The Nehemiah narrative that early readers, such as the authors of Ezra 7-10; Neh 10, 12:44-13:3, encountered thus consisted of Neh 1-2:20, 3:32-7:3, 13:4-31. NM may have included more (perhaps an earlier edition of parts of Neh 12:27-43). NM also may very well have gone on to tell stories that are now lost to us. Whatever NM's original shape, it was quite clearly adapted and broken up by the writers of Ezra-Nehemiah, most obviously evidenced by the break between Neh 7 and Neh 13. The foregoing has been an attempt to gain some precision about the nature and extent of the editing of the Nehemiah traditions. The following chapter will attempt to analyze the reception of NM in Ezra-

Nehemiah, to tie together the investigations of chapters 2 and 3. The notion that some parts of Ezra-Nehemiah looked askew at NM raises the questions of why, and what NM's generic contradictions may have to do with it. Chapter 4 will address these questions through the lens of the three themes that Eskenazi identifies as central to Ezra-Nehemiah: the focus on the entire community, the expansion of the concept of house of God from holy temple to holy city, and the importance of the written text as a source of authority.[202] NM emphasizes none of these themes, and the expansions of and responses to NM engaged in correcting these deficiencies. Ezra-Nehemiah's later vision of the restoration, removed as it was from the events described, could afford to offer a holistic and idealized version of history that was unavailable in the mid Persian Period, when real power behind any restoration efforts came from outside the community, and on Persia's terms. NM's own attempts to address the problem of external influence on the community's affairs, to craft the figure of governor into an intermediary by joining court tale with an official memorial, seems not to have been sufficient for the writers of Ezra-Nehemiah.

---

202. Eskenazi, *In an Age of Prose*, 2.

Chapter 4. The Nehemiah Memorial in the horizons of the late Persian Period

This chapter will now turn to the task of integrating the findings of chapters 2 and 3. In this chapter, I seek to generalize, if not quite systematize, the observations concerning Ezra-Nehemiah's reception of NM and to reassess the question of genre in light of an actual instance of ancient reception. The question I would like to raise here is: what effect might NM's genres have had on its readers? To focus the discussion, I will draw upon Eskenazi's conclusions about the major themes of Ezra-Nehemiah. As above, NM quite startlingly does not participate in Ezra-Nehemiah's three major themes: emphasis on the people as a whole, expansion of holy temple into holy city, and the prominence of written texts. Two of these themes will guide this chapter, emphasis on the people (4.1) and written texts (4.2).

4.1 The restored community: the insufficiency of the diaspora novella for the homeland

In his recounting of a return under Zerubbabel Josephus writes, "and thus did these men go, a certain and determinate number out of every family, though I do not think it proper to recite particularly the names of those families, that I may not take off the mind of my readers from the connexion of the historical facts, and make it hard for them to follow the coherence of my narrations" (*Ant*. XI.68).[1] Josephus skips over the names of the returnees present in Ezra 2 to maintain the flow of the narrative, yet, as Eskenazi replies, lists in Ezra-Nehemiah are far from a distraction, and in fact their dogged

1. William Whiston, trans.

and meticulous attention to the names of personalities large and small reflects one of the central themes of the book.[2] For the writers of Ezra-Nehemiah, the restoration is enacted by the community, not just the leaders. As we have seen in chapter 3, several passages in Ezra-Nehemiah, when juxtaposed with NM, highlight NM's inattention to the community. Included among these passages are some of these lists. Neh 10 turns Nehemiah into but one of numerous signatories to a community-wide agreement. Nehemiah's name appears in the twin lists of returnees at Ezra 2:2 and Neh 7:7, where the pairing of NM with the list makes Nehemiah's mission into a unified, corporate return, much like Sheshbazzar's and Ezra's returns. Though it does not mention his name, the list of builders in Neh 3:1-32 serves to show that the work on the wall required the hard work and support of many people.

Of these lists, Neh 10 adds a further twist: in addition to integrating Nehemiah into the activity of the community, it also recasts his reforms as temporary corrections based upon the stipulations of a covenant-like agreement (אמנה). This agreement implies that Nehemiah's power emerges from the will of the people (itself based, not insignificantly, on the law of Moses – see §4.3 below). The summary text in Neh 12:44-13:3 functions similarly by recontextualizing Nehemiah's work as the response to a temporary anomalous situation. Ezra 7-10 presents a special case. It makes no explicit use of Ne-

---

2. Eskenazi writes that Josephus, "omits this list [Ezra 2] from his account of the return because, as he admits, he does not wish to distract his readers' attention from the main issues (*Ant*. XI.68). For Ezra-Nehmiah, however, these people and their fate *are* that main issue" (*In an Age of Prose*, 49).

hemiah's story, but quite clearly contrasts Ezra's open and cooperative manner with Nehemiah's tendency to act alone (§3.1.1).

In the aggregate these texts show that only when the image of Nehemiah is accordingly adjusted, is Nehemiah fully integrated into the restoration effort as it is envisioned. The observation that NM, if read in isolation from the rest of Ezra-Nehemiah, focuses on the achievements of its protagonist is important, but not new. It goes back at least to the time of the Babylonian Talmud, when R. Jeremiah b. Abba surmised that Nehemiah did not get a book of his own (a book separate from Ezra-Nehemiah) because he selfishly boasted about his deeds (*b. Sanh.* 38a). The question is: to what extent might have Ezra-Nehemiah's corrections of NM been responses to aspects of NM's genres? To some extent, the answer to this question is clear. Nehemiah claimed too much credit for himself, and did so by making use of elements of the "official memorial" genre. By the closing of NM, the text became a catalog of hero's deeds in accordance with the tendency of the genre; NM seeks to elevate Nehemiah's eternal name; it uses the "contrastive underscoring" technique to denigrate the protagonist's enemies, and so on.

Perhaps surprisingly, even NM's use of the court tale genre serves to highlight Nehemiah's fundamental disconnect with the people he presumes to serve. Unlike the official memorial genre, the court tale by no means reproduces an ideology of individual regard or royal power. It does, as Wills notes, tacitly accept the authority of the court,[3] but

3. Wills, *Jew in the Court*, 22.

the protagonist of the court tale is a person who must work within its power structures. The other manifestations of the court tale in ancient Jewish literature, such as Joseph, Esther, or Daniel show the main character succeeding in a foreign realm but doing so as a member of and on behalf of his or her minority community. The protagonist maintains two identities, faithful courtier and faithful Israelite/Jew.[4] Humphreys, in reference to Esther and Mordecai, writes that their "tale does not permit any tension to develop between their double loyalty to king and co-religionists; the actual benefit of each party coincides."[5] Humphrey's image of a "double loyalty" is highly instructive for how NM makes its idiosyncratic use of the court tale genre. Nehemiah's response to hearing of the shame of Jerusalem and the cleverness he displays in his quest to help his people suggests that Nehemiah will be a character who maintains the delicate balance between his obligations to his king and his desire for welfare of his people.

The narrative's movement from Susa to Jerusalem, coupled with the emergence of Nehemiah *qua* governor (who, we recall, is not explicitly identified as such until Neh 5:14) begins to reveal cracks between the double loyalties. Over the course of the story, as we have seen, the solidarity with the people disintegrates and becomes a series of antagonistic relationships. Not to get ahead of ourselves, though, the unraveling of the dual loyalties is not just a function of the dissolution of the court conflict tale and the appear-

---

4. Mary E. Mills, "Household and Table: Diasporic Boundaries in Daniel and Esther," *CBQ* 68 (2006): 408-420, 408.

5. Humphreys, "A Life-Style for Diaspora," 215.

ance of a memorial text. The very act of moving the story from Artaxerxes' court to Jerusalem bends the story's generic conventions. One of the fundamental aspects of the ancient Jewish court conflict story is its assumption that the courtier is operating among the labyrinthine protocols and laws of a foreign court over which one has little control. The successful courtier, then, is one who thrives in a world she or he did not make; it is in this sense that the court tale provides a model for life in the diaspora.

Now, to some extent, NM portrays Jerusalem as a foreign court, in the sense of a political realm with its own norms that require negotiation. Nehemiah steps into a minefield of already-established allegiances and customs. His enigmatic nighttime ride around the city (Neh 2:11-16) seems to attest to a desire to escape notice from some unnamed parties. Additionally, Sanballat, Tobiah, and sometimes Geshem are of course aligned against him, but so is Tobiah linked with "many in Judah" who speak well of him (Neh 6:17-19). NM interprets the overtures made by some of Nehemiah's enemies to be tricks intended to entrap him (Neh 6:2-3, 10-14). In order to complete his work on behalf of the city, Nehemiah must be clever, must act like a courtier.

From Neh 2 onward, Nehemiah is no longer a courtier, though. The success or failure of his goals do not depend solely upon his ability to manipulate the political status quo. As governor, he has and exercises the power to alter the political landscape, something he could not have done as merely a courtier. By moving the story from a realm in which Nehemiah's power was contingent upon the wishes of a capricious ruler to one where he as governor set the rules, NM alters the balance of the protagonist's "double

loyalty". With Nehemiah outside of the Persian court, functionally speaking there is no longer any foreign ruler: he is the ruler. Insofar as he expresses loyalty toward his people, he does so as a beneficent ruler. He cannot be in complete solidarity with the people, because he is no longer one of them. In Esther and the Joseph story, Humphreys writes, "there are two foci for the courtier's life: the king and his own people. These tales permit no ultimate tension to develop between them."[6] By having Nehemiah bring the Persian court into Jerusalem, however, NM creates this kind of tension. Later on in the story, Nehemiah's actions stretch that tension to the breaking point. With his denunciations of his own people, the antagonists increasingly become not just fellow courtiers, but the people among whom Nehemiah lives.

Nehemiah's ascent to a prominent role in the foreign government is a common feature of court tales that does not by itself differ from, say, Joseph's or Daniel's. Where NM diverges from the usual form of this type of story is in its presentation of Nehemiah not just as a high-placed official, but as a royal figure in his own regard. The problems with NM's uses of the court tale are best illustrated in Nehemiah's discourse about his practices as governor, particularly in his description of his lavish table. Worth quoting again, Neh 5:17-18 reads:

at my table there were one hundred and fifty Judeans and officials, and those who came to us from the surrounding nations, and that which was prepared for one day was one bull, six select sheep, and also fowl was prepared for us, and every ten days abundant

---

6. Humphreys, "A Life-Style for Diaspora," 216.

wine; yet even with all this I did not request the governor's food allotment because heavy was the burden of work put upon this people.

The end of verse 5:18b, Nehemiah's refusal to take a special source of revenue due to him as governor, shows him sacrificing alongside his fellow Judeans, many of whom have been suffering through an economic crisis (Neh 5:1-5). At the same time, the text that precedes his cry of solidarity undermines his claims. NM makes careful enumeration of the bounty found at Nehemiah's regular banquet, offering a clear demonstration of "Persian conspicuous consumption,"[7] an image common in other court stories in Jewish and Greek culture (see §2.2.1.2 above).[8] The banquet table is a mark of exoticism or unfamiliarity in Greek texts, often tinged with disdain for the decadence of Persia.[9] In Jewish stories, this image can symbolize a boundary,[10] whether in Daniel, where the table is a place where one encounters the impurities of the nations or, less pejoratively, in Esther, where the banquet is a site of meeting and decision, of encountering the king.[11]

The precise significance of the table is dependent upon the context of each story, and one should avoid importing these specific meanings directly into NM. Nonetheless, one important facet of the banquet image common across these stories is the narrative fo-

---

7. MacDonald, *Not Bread Alone*, 203.

8. There seems to be some historical validity to the notion of the vast Persian banquet table. See Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 286-297.

9. MacDonald, *Not Bread Alone*, 205-207.

10. Mills, "Household and Table," 408.

11. Mills, "Household and Table," 417-419.

calization on the perspective of one who is invited to the table, and who encounters the banquet scene as grandiose at the least and perhaps even dangerous. Neh 5, however, quite literally turns the table. Nehemiah, the provincial representative of the king, stands in for the king, proudly announcing the magnificence of his offerings. Yes, he sits with Judeans,[12] and this brief notice may be drawing upon the extensive kinship language used earlier in the chapter to express solidarity (see the frequent use of "brother", "daughter", and "son" in Neh 5:1, 5, 8, 10).[13] Also present at his table, however, are the "officials (סגנים) and those who came to us from the surrounding nations." The word סגנים appears only a few verses prior, naming one of the groups of people that Nehemiah censured for their lending practices (Neh 5:7).[14] "Those who came to us from the surrounding nations," further, seems to be a reference to officials brought in by the Persian bureaucracy.[15]

---

12. Neh 5:17 reads יהודים. Lisbeth Fried suggests emending to חורים (*The Priest and the Great King: Temple-Palace Relations in the Persian Empire* (Biblical and Judaic Studies from the University of California, San Diego 10. Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2004), 190n113). Fried argues that the change is warranted because the people at the table must have been Persian officials. Marcus' critical edition of Ezra-Nehemiah notes that חורים might be the origin of a variant in Syriac, but no other variants exist.

13. Rainer Albertz, "Purity Strategies and Political Interests in the Policy of Nehemiah," in Seymour Gitin, J. Edward Wright, and J. P. Dessel, eds. *Confronting the Past: Archaeological and Historical Essays on Ancient Israel in Honor of William G. Dever* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 199-206, 201.

14. Norman K. Gottwald, "The Expropriated and the Expropriators in Nehemiah 5," in *Concepts of Class in Ancient Israel*, Mark R Sneed, ed. (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999), 1-19, 4.

15. As a parallel, Fried appeals to the notice in Ezra 4:9 that the officials included "men from Persia, Uruk, Babylon, [and] Susa" (*The Priest and the Great King*, 190).

Nehemiah, in other words, presides over his own Persian court, populated by an international staff[16] of possibly highly placed officials, some of whom were involved in the financial excesses dealt with earlier in the chapter. The imagery of the table now shows governor reclining at the exquisite table, immediately after having imposed sanctions on parts of his population. NM's transformation of Jerusalem into a "foreign" court thus puts Nehemiah on both sides of the table, first as cupbearer, then as governor. This transformation is not unrelated to the change in genre – it is no coincidence that Neh 5:19 offers the first instance of the זכרה motif – but because it takes place around a central motif of the court tale, it cannot be reduced to generic shift. Nehemiah's compassion for his subjects flows from his identity as a good governor, pious to his God (cf. the "contrastive underscoring" in Neh 5:15). To be sure, NM explicitly states that Nehemiah's actions as governor are driven by his of "fear of God" (Neh 5:15). In that sense, the half of the "double loyalty" that is directed toward his people and deity remains unquestioned, though his stance becomes one of a benevolent ruler, rather than one of "co-religionist" caught in the same unfamiliar scene. NM makes no direct mention of Persia or Artaxerxes. Crucially, the very absence of the explicit naming of his political authority means that the other half of the "double loyalty", his faithfulness to Persia, hides in the background (for more on the implications of NM's muted nature regarding Nehemiah's Persian authority, see 4.2

16. Contra Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 234.

below). The faithfulness to Judah and Judah's God that is the public face of NM's portrayal of Nehemiah obscures the Persian influence that lies beneath.

The disconnect in NM between visible solidarity with the Judeans and indebtedness to Persia can be tied to the situation on the ground in 5th century Yehud, where Persian control is easily mistaken by scholars as local autonomy. To begin with, few recent developments in the study of this time period have more wide-ranging implications than the recognition, based on survey data, that Jerusalem and its environs remained mostly depopulated and likely mired in poverty. Charles Carter estimated that Yehud contained 13,350 people during the early Persian Period,[17] while further investigation into the matter has led Lipschits to adjust the numbers upward, to 30,000.[18] Despite the effusive language of Ezra 1:5-11 describing the movement of people and wealth from Babylon to Jerusalem immediately upon Cyrus' defeat of the Neo-Babylonian empire, any potential early "return" of Judeans was so minimal as to leave no trace in the archaeological record.[19] The continuity of settlement patterns throughout the 6th and early 5th centuries,

---

17. Charles Carter, The *Emergence of Yehud in the Persian Period: A Social and Demographic Study* (JSOTSup. 294. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 201-202.

18. Lipschits, *Fall and Rise*, 267-271. The low population numbers render Joel Weinberg's "citizen-temple community" thesis unlikely (*The Citizen-Temple Community* [Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, trans. JSOT Supplement 151. Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992]). See Grabbe, *History of Jews and Judaism*, 143-145, 154-155.

19. Lipschits, *Fall and Rise*, 271.

along with the patterns of distribution of the "*MWṣH*" seals for the early Persian period[20] suggests that the Persians made use of the administrative system already established by the Neo-Babylonians. In and around *Yehud*, this meant that Mizpah appears to have remained the administrative center and de facto capital up until the mid-5th century. The current understanding of the state of affairs in Jerusalem, in fact, offers some credibility to the oft-puzzled-over report Nehemiah receives at the outset of his story, "the remainees who were left from the captivity there in the province are in great evil and shame: the wall of Jerusalem is breached and its gates have been destroyed by fire" (Neh 1:3). The onset of the Persian Period did not bring with it an age of prosperity for Jerusalem.

The poverty of Jerusalem did not mean, however, that Persia did not exert control over the area. Contrary to the theory by Alt, Yehud was not a part of Samaria,[21] and indeed based on literary and epigraphic data, one can identify the line of governors of Yehud going back to the beginnings of Persian rule. The affairs of Persia's western possessions, in Pierre Briant's judgment, were subject to a consistency in approach from Cyrus to Artaxerxes.[22] The central Persian authority built and monitored travel along an extensive road system and made use of garrisons for the transport of both goods and per-

---

20. Lipschits, 179-181.

21. Lisbeth Fried, *The Priest and the Great King*, 184-188. See also Grabbe, *History of the Jews and Judaism*, 140-142.

22. Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 585.

sonnel.[23] In Judah, as elsewhere, this meant that the governor reported, via the satrap, to the Persian king, and was ultimately responsible for the delivery of tax and tribute revenue.[24]

The presence of a consistent bureaucratic framework did not entail a micromanaging empire, and at any rate tiny Yehud did not rate as a particularly important strategic asset.[25] In the middle of the 5th century, however, signs emerge that Persia initiated an intervention into Yehud, the first supported by non-literary evidence.[26] Kenneth Hoglund has proposed that, in response to a series of Egyptian revolts in the 5th century, Persia sought to strengthen its military presence on its western frontier and build a series of fortresses.[27] Even if Hoglund overstates our ability to date the fortresses with such preci-

---

23. Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 357-387.

24. Grabbe, *History of Jews and Judaism*, 194-197

25. Briant asserts that the importance of Yehud "is only an 'optical illusion' created by the uneven distribution of evidence" (*From Cyrus to Alexander*, 586).

26. Previous Persian interventions would include the early return under Sheshbazzar and the construction of the Temple under Zerubbabel, each of which is attested by biblical texts alone. Regarding the completion of the Second Temple, the consensus still holds that it dates to 515, despite Diana Edelman's attempt to attribute it to the time of Nehemiah. Edelman, *The Origins of the "Second" Temple: Persian Imperial Policy and the Rebuilding of Jerusalem* (London: Equinox, 2005). See also the critique by Klein, "Were Joshua, Zerubbabel, and Nehemiah Contemporaries? A Response to Diana Edelman's Proposed Late Date for the Second Temple," *JBL* 127 (2008): 697-701.

27. Kenneth Hoglund, *Achaemenid Imperial Administration in Syria-Palestine and the Missions of Ezra and Nehemiah*. (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992).

sion,[28] other evidence converges on the conclusion that the mid 5th century saw an intensification of the Persian presence in Yehud. Lipschits takes note of the depopulation of Mizpah and Benjamin at that time. The decline of the former administrative center, coupled with the distribution of the *YHD* stamp seals, suggests that Jerusalem had become a new center. These seals, in contrast to the *MWṣH* seals of the 6th century which were more often found in Benjamin, appear now in Yehud.[29] Finally, as a corroborating sign of Persian interest in the area, the corpus of seal impressions displays an introduction of persianized motifs in only the mid- to late-5th century, quite late in comparison to Anatolia and Egypt.[30] All told, material evidence converges on the thesis that Persia sought to shore up its interests in and around Yehud around the mid-5th century.

To this material evidence, of course, can be added NM's narrative testimony of Nehemiah's governorship. The notion that the Nehemiah ben Hacaliah mentioned in NM came to Jerusalem from Persia is uncontroversial.[31] Not every aspect of the story of NM,[32] however, is universally agreed upon. On the one hand, David Clines expresses a

---

28. Grabbe, *History of Jews and Judaism*, 296-297.

29. Lipschits, *Fall and Rise,* 174-181.

30. Christoph Uehlinger, "'Powerful Persianisms' in Glyptic Iconography of Persian Period Palestine," in *The Crisis of Israelite Religion: Transformation of Religious Tradition in Exilic and Post-Exilic Times*. Bob Becking and Marjo C.A. Korpel, eds. (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 134-182.

31. The major exception is Becker, *Ich-Bericht*.

32. Here I refer only specifically only to the texts in NM as I define it. It goes without saying that I would exclude non-NM texts about Nehemiah from consideration.

thoroughgoing skepticism about the veracity of Nehemiah's words, though his objections pertain more to Nehemiah's skewed and self-serving perspective on events than on the substance of the narrative.[33] On the other hand, Wright and Edelman each propose that certain parts of the narrative of Nehemiah's "second term" (Neh 13) speak to events of a later period.[34] Even if some of the stories of Nehemiah's work derive from post-historical-Nehemiah stories, NM nevertheless repeatedly, and thoroughly, portrays Nehemiah acting in a manner that would befit a newly installed governor called upon to enact reforms consonant with Persian aims.

The extant text of the book of Nehemiah, because it emphasizes the narrative of the community-wide effort of constructing the wall (see especially the prominent placement of the list of builders in Neh 3:1-32), makes it easy to overlook the elements of Nehemiah's commission in Neh 2 that hint at an imperial context. The stray, but intriguing, statement that Nehemiah requested a letter that would provide him material to build "the gates of the fortress of the temple" (שערי הבירה אשר־לבית) (Neh 2:8), is picked up by Hoglund and Fried[35] as an indication that part of Nehemiah's task was to build a garrison, enabling a re-militarization of sorts. Along these lines, the "commanders of the army and cavalry" (שרי חייל ופרשים) (Neh 2:9) who escorted Nehemiah may have been troops in-

33. Clines, "The Nehemiah Memoir."

34. Wright, *Rebuilding Identity*, 202-204; Edelman, "Seeing Double: Tobiah the Ammonite as an Encrypted Character."*Revue Biblique* 113 (2006): 570-584.

35. Fried, *The Priest and the Great King*, 193-194.

tended for staffing that fortress.[36] At any rate, Briant affirms the widespread attestation for the practice of requiring satrapal consent for travel along Persia's roadway system (cf. Neh 2:7, 9).

All that being said, none would deny Nehemiah's connection to the concerns of the court in Neh 2, made explicit by the presence of the Persian king. Even more intriguing is the consistent manner in which Nehemiah's activities as governor line up with general imperial goals for provincial administration and solidify Persian control over the territory. Fried's work on provincial areas' relationship with the Persian court takes up a strong position on Persian control. Fried offers a counter to common assumptions that Persia was a hands-off, tolerant ruler, or to recently popular theories of Yehud's autonomy, such as Weinberg's thesis of a citizen-temple community, or theories of Persian support of local enterprises, most prominently in the concept of the "Persian authorization of the Torah"[37] or, for that matter, in the book of Ezra (cf. the Decree of Cyrus in Ezra 1 or Artaxerxes' letter to Ezra in Ezra 7). Fried insists that, throughout its existence, the Persian province of Yehud was kept under close watch. In this account, local participation in the governance of Yehud was minimal and governors held broad powers.[38]

---

36. Hoglund, 210; Fried, *The Priest and the Great King*, 194-195.

37. See Jean Louis Ska, *Introduction to Reading the Pentateuch*. (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 217-225

38. Fried, *The Priest and the Great King*, 188-193.

Fried's quite compelling reading of Nehemiah's career teases out the actions of the governor submerged underneath the story's portrayal of an advocate for Judeans against foreign elements (or, in my reading, the beleaguered courtier). Further, it supports Briant's claim that Nehemiah's mission was designed to "establish a new basis for assessing tribute and guaranteeing regular payment."[39] Nehemiah's struggle against his enemies is part of a broad-based attempt to tamp down the growth of the local aristocracy.[40] Each of Nehemiah's primary antagonists, Fried points out, are heads of prominent families and, in that sense, hereditary rulers (Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem, and Eliashib the high priest).[41] These families potentially threaten Persia's control over Yehud, and by limiting their influence over the province, Nehemiah could shore up Persian power. Nehemiah's relief of debt burdens laid upon the smallholders and tenant farmers would have severed the control wealthy creditors were gaining over the poorer populace. Additionally, it would have the benefit of creating goodwill and loyalty toward the governor among the peasant class.[42]

The religious reforms in Neh 13 likewise eliminated sources of competition for Persian power and tribute. Nehemiah's ejection of Tobiah from a "chamber" (לשכה) in the temple likely meant that Nehemiah was interested in removing a drain on the goods and

---

39. Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander,* 586.

40. Fried, *The Priest and the Great King*, 202.

41. Fried, *The Priest and the Great King*, 210.

42. Fried, *The Priest and the Great King*, 210.

wealth funneled through the temple. The possession of a chamber is not the work of, as Williamson dismissively suggests, a "caretaker."[43] Rather, as is becoming widely recognized, the temple was the centerpiece of Yehud's economic life as well as its religious life;[44] more properly, in fact, its religious life and economic life were one and the same.[45] The "chamber", thus, as Schaper asserts, was likely related to the temple's stores from its tithes.[46] The maintenance of rights to a chamber by a powerful individual like Tobiah signified a share in the temple's revenue, acquired in collaboration with Eliashib, and as such diverted resources from their free flow through the Persian tax and tribute systems. Fried does not dwell on the economic function of the temple per se – she focuses on Nehemiah's concern over staunching the power and influence of wealthy families[47] – but shoring up tax revenues for Persia is but the flip side of removing from power those who would like to gain a share in that revenue. In a similar vein, Fried interprets Nehemiah's decision to close the city gates on the Sabbath (Neh 13:19) as an attack on the power of the high priest,[48] but the economic import of such a move is clear as well. The limitation on commercial exchange on the sabbath (Neh 13:15-18) perhaps redirects spending to-

---

43. Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 153.

44. Marty E. Stevens, *Temples, Tithes, and Taxes: The Temple and the Economic LIfe of Ancient Israel*. (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2006).

45. Roland Boer, "The Sacred Economy of Ancient 'Israel,'" *SJOT* 21 (2007): 29-48.

46. Schaper, "Temple Treasury."

47. Fried, *The Priest and the Great King*, 207.

48. Fried, *The Priest and the Great King*, 207-208.

ward temple-related services, but at the least allows the governor greater control over economic activity.

Viewing Nehemiah's actions through the lens of his imperial commission, his two-fold mission to counter growing local aristocracies and to make more efficient the means of tribute payment, has the benefit of unifying the nature of many of Nehemiah's actions. The disputes against Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem can be understood as battles with important families with significant and possibly growing constituencies. Additionally, the reforms, both the debt relief and the religious reforms, become the actions of an emissary of Persia interested in solidifying the power and income stream of his masters. NM frames Nehemiah's governorship as an effort to restore the earlier glory of the city, and scholars such as Rainer Albertz argue that "Nehemiah's first interest was to provide the province of Judah with a more independent, secure, and respected political status."[49] Albertz is correct, to a degree, especially if one adds the caveat that "independent" means free from interference from opportunistic elements from neighboring peoples, such as Samaria or Ammon. Strictly speaking, though, Persia's mid-5th century intervention was not an act of liberation. Fried notes that, from the perspective of the governance of Yehud, "rather than indicating a situation of *more* autonomy for Judah, Nehemiah's appearance signaled a period of *less* autonomy."[50] In a situation, such as the mid-5th centu-

---

49. Albertz, "Purity Strategies," 201.

50. Fried, *The Priest and the Great King*, 198.

ry, when Persia sought to strengthen its control over some of its western colonies, the people – particularly the landed or hereditary aristocracy, but not limited to them[51] – would hardly have been in a position to install self-rule.

The recognition that Nehemiah may have acted like a governor responsible to Persia is not a skeleton key that unlocks the entirety of NM. Fried at times stretches the evidence to fit her interpretation. For one, the rejection of exogamous marriages is difficult to understand as part of a directive from Persia.[52] In fact, even given the extent to which Nehemiah's actions suggest Persian policy, Nehemiah was more than a pure proxy for the empire's wishes. Grabbe is correct to express caution in this regard: "there is not the slightest hint that he was implementing specific imperial policies or directives (beyond his general commission as governor to support the Persian system)."[53] Grabbe, however, mistakenly concludes that Nehemiah was pursuing his own program of reform, not Persia's.[54] Nehemiah's personal benefit and Persia's benefit are not mutually exclusive goals. Even Fried makes this mistake, writing that, "Nehemiah was not acting in his own inter-

---

51. Nehemiah, it should be noted, may have relieved debts, but did not go so far as to reallocate the land. Thus Briant notes, "like a Judahite Solon, Nehemiah was not a social revolutionary" (*From Cyrus to Alexander*, 585).

52. Fried, *The Priest and the Great King*, 218-220. However, Nehemiah's response to this development, the plucking of beards, does appear to have been possibly an official Achaemenid punishment, as evidenced in a mid-5th century tablet from the Murashu archives. See Michael Helzer, "The Flogging and Plucking of Beards," *Archäologische Mitteilungen aus Iran* 28 (1995-1996): 305-307.

53. Grabbe, *History of the Jews and Judaism*, 298.

54. Grabbe, *History of the Jews and Judaism*, 307.

ests here but in the interests of his Persian masters."[55] By weakening the empire's rivals and engendering good will toward the bureaucracy, he would be increasing his own power.

To be clear, I am not arguing that the verisimilitude of NM means that it accurately reports events; rather, the verisimilitude speaks to the political realities of Persian (or at least the governor's) interests in Yehud. A lack of governmental autonomy was a fact of life in the Persian Period. Nehemiah's actions described in NM are in several ways meritorious (canceling of debts; cessation of bribery or commerce in holy spaces; construction of a dilapidated wall), but they were not (and could not be) the work of the people as a whole. Accordingly, the effects of an incursion in the 5th century may very well have been seen as beneficial by at least some elements of the community. And yet, the appointment of a governor from the ranks of the local population, a governor who, as far as one can tell, had the best interests of his community in mind (at times), led to less autonomy.

In this way, the court tale in NM functions as a reflection of the historical situation in Yehud. The restoration of the physical state of the city and its religious practices may have suggested an end to shame and a return to glory, but also brought a reduction in local autonomy. Accordingly, NM's twist on the court tale suggests solidarity with the people, and possible subversion of the powers that be, but brings a governor who presides

---

55. Fried, *The Priest and the Great King*, 210n198.

over the people like a king and imposes the empire's will. The court tale, as witnessed by its popularity in the Diaspora, is ideal for a people ruled by foreign powers, but problematic for those for whom the foreign power was present in their midst, while yet being one of them.

4.2 Written texts: Nehemiah's invisible power

The narrative of NM contains a noticeable absence of written texts. None of the myriad lists in Ezra-Nehemiah can be reliably traced back to NM. Admittedly, my methodology may have led this study to be too lax in removing the lists that others have associated with NM (Neh 3:1-32; 7:5-72; 11). Even so, NM reveals a pattern of not just neglecting written texts, but even of eschewing aspects of written culture. As we have seen, NM makes scant, and unsophisticated at best, reference to the Torah (cf. §3.1.1). The lack of sustained exegesis of Torah associated with the account of a lay, governmental official may not surprise; far more startling is the fact that NM does not quote a single document of official royal communication. NM's failure to cite Persian sources in the context of a book that contains so much in the way of quoted written texts, indeed that characterizes Persia's interaction with Yehud as essentially textual, is jarring and worth investigating.

A large portion is taken up in the book of Ezra by direct quotations of purportedly original documents. These documents hold such a place of prominence that the writers of

Ezra 1-6 and 7-10 appear to be driven by what Sara Japhet terms a "documentary imperative."[56] The Cyrus edict calling for the rebuilding of the temple opens the book (Ezra 1:1-4). The subsequent narrative of the building efforts builds tension by recounting a contest of letter writers: the officials Rehum and Shimshai write to Artaxerxes accusing insubordination, and the king replies with a decree halting the work (Ezra 4:11-22). Later in the story, the satrap Tattenai composes a letter to Darius requesting authorize (or, if one is to follow the flow of the narrative without knowledge of or attention to the chronology of the kings of Persia, reauthorize).[57] Darius conducts a search of his archives and reports that he found a copy of Cyrus' decree, quotes that decree, and restores the Judeans' right to build (Ezra 5:8-6:11).

Following the completion and dedication of the temple, followed by the celebration of Passover (Ezra 6:13-18), the narrative introduces the character of Ezra. Ezra arrives in Jerusalem with a commissioning letter from Artaxerxes in hand and on display to the reader (Ezra 7:11-26). This letter details the tasks Ezra was enabled to undertake: freedom to transport whomever he wished and whatever silver or gold he could get his hands on (Ezra 7:13-16), use of those funds for sacrifices or for any other purposes (Ezra

---

56. Sara Japhet, "'History' and 'Literature' in the Persian Period: The Restoration of the Temple" in *From the Rivers of Babylon to the Highlands of Judah: Collected Studies on the Restoration Period* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 162-163

57. It is worth noting that the authors here make use of creative chronology: Artaxerxes I (465-424) ruled after the completion of the temple, which took place during the reign of Darius I (549-486).

7:17-18), the return of vessels to the temple (Ezra 7:19), license to take from the kings treasury to support the temple (Ezra 7:20), a set ration of silver, wheat, wine, oil, and salt (Ezra 7:22), "whatever is commanded by the God of heaven" (Ezra 7:23), creation of a tax-free status for the temple (Ezra 7:24), and the ability to appoint a judicial system and establish instruction in the law (Ezra 7:25). Ezra's commission is extensive to say the least but, more importantly, its contents are laid bare in a written document for the reader to see.

The contrast with the narrative of Nehemiah's commission is stark. Like Ezra, he receives a letter (or letters) from Artaxerxes:

> I said to the king, 'If it is pleasing to the king, let letters be given to the governors of Across the River, so that they will allow me to pass through until I arrive in Judah. And a letter to Asaph, guardian of the king's garden, for wood for the beams of the gates of the temple fortress, and for the wall of the city and for the house I will live in (Neh 2:7-8a).

Nehemiah reports that the king granted his request (Neh 2:8b), but does not at this or any point in the story reveal the content of the letters. NM's reluctance to let the reader open the letter is but one instance of NM's consistent pattern of neglecting or even rejecting the written. Donald Polaski describes the world in which Nehemiah moves in NM as an "oral universe"[58] He observes that Nehemiah's letters from the king would have been more than useful in his struggles with Tobiah and Sanballat, but never appear.[59] Nehemiah's report to Artaxerxes about the state of affairs in Jerusalem is not followed up by a search in the

---

58. Polaski, "Nehemiah: Subject of the Empire," 4.

59. Polaski, "Nehemiah: Subject of the Empire," 6.

royal archives, the omission of which is even more intriguing if, as suggested by Richard Steiner, Ezra 4-6 includes documents from Nehemiah's archives.[60] In Polaski's words, "[the books of] Ezra and Nehemiah thus have differing Artaxerxeses."[61]

Polaski characterizes NM's relationship to textuality, or lack thereof, as a means of withholding Nehemiah's imperial role (he also interprets the delay in announcing Nehemiah's title until Neh 5:14 in this light).[62] Nehemiah, by this account, attempts to exert some kind of power over his place in imperial ideology by opting out of written discourse. Polaski's treatment of NM's relationship to textuality is highly suggestive. Undoubtedly, the ideology of the Persian empire, enacted by its use of written texts, located all humanity in a totalizing, though framed as harmonious, order, with the king as its center.[63] However, the account of NM, like Polaski's, that emphasizes the absence of written culture in contrast to Ezra is an account that assumes Ezra as a starting point. Since NM precedes the story of Ezra, though, perhaps one should ask, not why NM lacks writing, but rather why Ezra goes out of its way to feature it.

---

60. Richard C. Steiner, "Bishlam's Archival Search Report in Nehemiah's Archive: Multiple Introductions and Reverse Chronological Order as Clues to the Origin of the Aramaic Letters in Ezra 4-6," *JBL* 125 (2006):641-685.

61. Polaski, "Nehemiah: Subject of the Empire," 5

62. Polaski, "Nehemiah: Subject of the Empire," 7.

63. Cf. Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander,* 172-175.

In this respect, a return to the comparison between NM and Ezra 7-10 can be useful, particularly with regard to the parallel accounts of the reformers' trips to Jerusalem (cf. §3.1.1 above). After receiving his permissions, Nehemiah travels to Jerusalem and waits three days (Neh 2:11). He then gets up during the night, with "a few men" (אנשים מעט), and undertakes an inspection of the walls, without telling anyone, concluding the work with the notice that "the officials did not know anything of where I went or what I was doing … because I did not tell them" (Neh 2:12-16). Ezra, too, waits three days at the beginning of his journey, but he does so among a long list of members of the Babylonian Diaspora before leaving for Jerusalem (Ezra 8:15-20). He then, in their company, calls a fast, offers a prayer for safe travels, then distributes the temple vessels to all the proper persons (Ezra 8:21-30). Only then does he begin his journey with his entourage to Jerusalem. NM tells a story of secrecy and explicit unwillingness to share with the people. On the other hand, Ezra's actions are fundamentally transparent. He is accessible to the community and his justifications made clear by the narrative.

Accordingly, the differences between the Ezra story and NM regarding their use of written documents, should be seen in the light of this opposition between secrecy and transparence. The details of Nehemiah's nighttime ride, like his letters of passage, are revealed only to a select few. Nonetheless, both the silent letters and the actions Nehemiah undertakes upon arrival hold within them real, effective power, derived directly from Persia. The letters allow him passage; the secret inspection is the precursor to Nehemiah's decision to begin to mobilize the massive resources necessary to repair the wall. The as-

pect of NM's portrait of Nehemiah most threatening, most in need of correction by Ezra 7-10's refashioning of the tale of the Diaspora reformer, is the deafening silence from his source of power. Nehemiah the governor had the authority to enact a host of reforms, yet he rarely speaks of Persia and never refers to the terms of his commission. Even further, NM, I submit, in this way accurately represents the governor's power in Persian Period Jerusalem. Nehemiah did not quote documents in support of his decisions. He did not need to. The content of his letters maintained their power even while – perhaps especially while! – sealed.

While Nehemiah's source of power is secret, but very real, Ezra's is boisterously open but likely questionable. In recent years, serious questions have been raised about the authenticity of the documents in the book of Ezra.[64] A review of the arguments, mostly technical in nature, cannot be undertaken here, but a brief review of a couple of aspects of Ezra's commission can nonetheless be revealing. First and foremost, the sheer excess of the commission both in terms of the material granted (Grabbe calculates that all the silver and gold in Ezra 7 add up to a total of more than 25 metric tons),[65] and the power bestowed upon Ezra, stretch credibility. Similarly, the claim that Artaxerxes exempted the

64. See Grabbe, "The 'Persian Documents' in the Book of Ezra: Are They Authentic?" in Oded Lipschits and Manfred Oeming, eds., *Judah and the Judeans in the Persian Period* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2006). See also Steiner, "Bishlam's Archival Search," for a vigorous defense for the authenticity of the letters' origins if not their current states.

65. Grabbe, "The 'Persian Documents,'" 554.

Jerusalem temple from any taxes finds no parallel in the ancient world[66] (and may even be a slap in the face to Nehemiah). At any rate, the debate about the authenticity of these documents might be a red herring: the portrayal of Ezra is deeply literary and thematic, and the quoted documents appear where they do because they contribute to the depiction of Ezra's power as transparent.

Eskenazi comments that Ezra-Nehemiah's use of written texts presents a "shift … to textualization as control, constructing a different infrastructure, separate from either court or temple."[67] Eskenazi's comments here refer to the role of the Torah in Ezra-Nehemiah, but they can also be instructive regarding Persian written texts as well. Written texts, she claims, provide an alternate source of authority, a check on various parties' own claims of power. This is perhaps true in theory, or in a theological sense, but with respect to the rhetorical function of written text in Ezra-Nehemiah, the direct opposite is the case. First, concerning the Torah: when, for example, Ezra cites Torah in Ezra 9:1-2 as a justification for his dissolution of marriages, he is involved in an interpretive act, one that makes creative use of various Pentateuchal texts. He, in fact, joins various texts (Deut 7,

---

66. The "Gadatas Letter" has been cited as a parallel, but recent research has identified it as a "late" (Hellenistic) forgery. See Grabbe, *History of Jews and Judaism*, 116-7, citing Briant, "Histoire et archéologie d'un texte: La Lettre de Darius à Gadatas entre Perses, Grecs et Romains', in M. Giorgieri, M. Salvini, M.-C. Trémouille and P. Vanicelli, eds., *Licia e Lidia prima dell'Ellenizzazione: Atti del Convegno internazionale–Roma 11-12 ottobre 1999* (Rome: CNR, 2003), 107-144.

67. Eskenazi, "Implications for and from Ezra-Nehemiah," in "In Conversation with W. M. Schniedewind, *How the Bible Became a Book: The Textualization of Ancient Israel* (Cambridge, 2003)," Gary N. Knoppers, ed. *JHS* 5 Article 18 (2005), 26.

Lev 18) and develops an expansive concept of menstrual impurity (נדה) that adds a pejorative, sinful sense by no means apparent in Leviticus.[68] Ezra, in other words employs the authority that Torah provides to express and enforce an idea not entirely present in those texts. The one who quotes texts puts them under his or her power, not vice versa. The quotation of Persian texts in Ezra functions in much the same way. By placing the Persian documents in view of all to see, the writers of Ezra-Nehemiah can choose to frame them, even edit them, as they will. And in Ezra-Nehemiah, the kings of Persia do not impose upon their peoples, but rather are always put at the service of their provincial subjects. The clearest example of this comes in the extremes of Ezra's commission letter. Also, however, the royal order to block further construction is solicited by officials in Across the River (Ezra 4:17-22): even restrictive measures by Persia are enabled, not imposed, by the king.

When contrasting the commissions of Ezra and Nehemiah, finally, one notes that Ezra 7-10 removes the Persian court entirely. Ezra comes from Babylon (which is itself important, but beyond the scope of this study), not Persia. Even more, in place of NM's mystery-filled face to face interaction with the king, Ezra offers a document. Text can be controlled, the inscrutable and dangerous will of one's foreign masters cannot.

---

68. See Washington, "Israel's Holy Seed."

Conclusion: The resolutions of genre in Ezra-Nehemiah

The self-glorifying entrepreneur is as necessary as the self-effacing teacher of Torah
-Tamara Cohn Eskenazi[69]

In conclusion PORTISHEAD's book – though containing many excellent things – is a fine example of the mad contradiction at the heart of Modern English Magic: our foremost magicians continually declare their intention of erasing every hint and trace of JOHN USKGLASS from English Magic, but how is this even possible? It is JOHN USKGLASS's magic that we do.
-Susanna Clarke[70]

Contemporary historical scholarship offers us a vivid picture of early Persian Period Jerusalem. One familiar with the book of Ezra-Nehemiah might be startled, however, to find that this picture recalls the bleak language of Lamentations: "The roads to Zion mourn, for no one comes to the festivals. All her gates are desolate, her priests groan" (Lam 1:4). Even three-quarters of a century after Cyrus' defeat of the Babylonians, Jerusalem remained depopulated and mired in poverty. The restoration of Jerusalem, beginning in earnest only in the middle of the fifth century, and then still slowly, was initiated not by the people banded together for a common purpose, but by the king of Persia.

The Persian Period thus presented the followers of Yahweh with an ideological problem: how does a community that prizes its uniqueness among the nations come to terms with the fact that its city and religious institutions were rebuilt and maintained by a

---

69. *In an Age of Prose*, 154.

70. *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell*, (New York: Tor, 2004), 532

foreign empire? The Nehemiah Memorial, whatever else it is, is also an attempt to solve this problem. NM located its solution in the efforts of one pious man standing before God and king. Nehemiah himself, however, was not a strong enough ideological pillar to bear that burden. NM's vision of the restoration was unsustainable, so the writers of Ezra-Nehemiah tried another. Perhaps not unlike the rationalist modern magicians in Susanna Clarke's fantasy novel, the writers of Ezra-Nehemiah, safely removed from the events of those formative years, required an understanding of the restoration that better fit their times. A complete investigation of Ezra-Nehemiah's reception and modification of NM would entail the addressing of a whole host of questions regarding the changes (and continuities) between the late Persian and early Hellenistic periods. Those matters must yet remain a matter for further research.

Notwithstanding, the diverging versions of history found within Ezra-Nehemiah suggest that Eskenazi is correct to observe that both Nehemiah and Ezra were necessary for the success of the restoration of Jerusalem. The work of each reformer, though, was required in different ways: Nehemiah for his hands-on willingness to put Persia's resources to work rebuilding the city, and Ezra for his abilities to adapt the history of fifth century Jerusalem into a stable ideological whole. The story of Nehemiah, coupled with a historical reconstruction of his time, show that the notion of the autonomy of the community of Israelites based on the guidance of the Torah was a fantasy. Without Nehemiah the governor, the emissary of Persia, perhaps Jerusalem does not rise again; yet without Ezra, the story of the restoration does not sustain a community. To liken Ezra-Nehemiah's

vision of the restoration to a fantasy is not to dismiss it. Rather, it is to point out that any restoration, just as much as it calls for practical work, requires also an act of imagination.

References

Albertz, Rainer. "Purity Strategies and Political Interests in the Policy of Nehemiah." Pages 199-206 in *Confronting the Past: Archaeological and Historical Essays on Ancient Israel in Honor of William G. Dever*. Edited by Seymour Gitin, J. Edward Wright, and J. P. Dessel. Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2006.

Althusser, Louis. *Lenin and Philosophy*. Translated by Ben Brewster. New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001.

Bakhtin, M. M. *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. Theory and History of Literature 8. Edited and Translated by C. Emerson. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984.

Batten, Loring W. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah*. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1913.

Becker, Joachim. *Der Ich-Bericht des Nehemiabuches als chronistische Gestaltung*. Forschung zur Bibel 87. Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 1998.

Beebee, Thomas O. *The Ideology of Genre: A Comparative Study of Generic Instability* University Park, Penn.: Pennsylvania State University, 1994.

Ben Zvi, Ehud. *Signs of Jonah: Reading and Rereading in Ancient Yehud.* Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 367; New York: T & T Clark, 2003.

Berlin, Adele. *Esther: The Traditional Hebrew Texts with the New JPS Translation*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society.

Berlin, Adele. "The Book of Esther and Ancient Storytelling," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 120 (2001): 3-14.

Blenkinsopp, Joseph. “The Mission of Udjahorresnet and Those of Ezra and Nehemiah,” Journal of Biblical Literature 106 (1987): 409-421.

Blenkinsopp, Joseph. “The Nehemiah Autobiographical Memoir,” Pages 199-212 in *Language, Theology, and the Bible*. Edited by S. E. Balentine and J. Barton. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994.

Blum, Erhard. "*Formgeschichte* — A Misleading Category? Some Critical Remarks," Pages 32-45 in *The Changing Face of Form Criticism for the Twenty-First Century*. Edited by M. Sweeney and E. Ben Zvi. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2003.

Boda, Mark. *Praying the Tradition: The Origin and Use of Tradition in Nehemiah 9*. Beiheft zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 277. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1999.

Boer, Roland. "The Sacred Economy of Ancient 'Israel,'" *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 21 (2007): 29-48.

Böhler, Dieter. *Die heilige Stadt in Esdras α und Esra-Nehemia*. Orbis biblicus et orientalis 158. Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1997.

Böhler, Dieter. "On the Relationship between Textual and Literary Criticism: The Two Recensions of the Book of Ezra: Ezra-Neh (MT) and 1 Esdras (LXX)" in *The Earliest Text of the Hebrew Bible: The Relationship between the Masoretic Text and the Hebrew Base of the Septuagint Reconsidered.* Edited by A. Schenker. Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2003.

Briant, Pierre. *From Cyrus to Alexander: A History of the Persian Empire*. Translated by P. T. Daniels. Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2002.

Bright, John. *A History of Israel*. 4th ed. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000.

Burridge, Richard. *What are the Gospels?* 2nd ed. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2004.

Buss, Martin. "Dialogue in and among Genres." Pages 9-18 in *Bakhtin and Genre Theory in Biblical Studies*. Edited by R. Boer. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007.

Buss, Martin J.. *Biblical Form Criticism in Its Context*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press

Carter, Charles. *The Emergence of Yehud in the Persian Period: A Social and Demographic Study*. Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series. 294. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999.

Campbell, Anthony F. "Form Criticism's Future." Pages 15-31 in *The Changing Face of Form Criticism for the Twenty-First Century*. Edited by M. Sweeney and E. Ben Zvi. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2003.

Childs, Brevard S. *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979.

Clines, David J. A. "Nehemiah 10 as an Example of Early Jewish Biblical Exegesis." *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 6 (1981): 111-117.

Clines, David J. A. "The Nehemiah Memoir: The Perils of Autobiography." Pages 124-164 in *What Does Eve Do to Help? And Other Readerly Questions to the Old Testament*. Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990.

Collins, John J. "The Court-Tales in Daniel and the Development of Apocalyptic." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 94 (1975): 218-234.

Crawford, Sidnie W. "4QTales of the Persian Court (4Q550^{a-e}) and Its Relation to Biblical Royal Courtier Tales, Especially Esther, Daniel, and Joseph." Pages 121- in *The Bible as Book: The Hebrew Bible and the Judaean Desert Discoveries*. Edited by E. D. Herbert and E. Tov. London: The British Library & Oak Knoll Press, 2002.

Crenshaw, James L. "Method in Determining Wisdom Influence upon 'Historical' Literature." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 88 (1969):129-142.

Cross, F. M. "Reconstruction of the Judean Restoration." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 94 (1975): 4-18.

Demsky, Aaron. "Who Came First, Ezra or Nehemiah? The Synchronistic Approach." *Hebrew Union College Annual* 65 (1994):1-19.

Dobbs-Allsopp, F.W. *Weep, O Daughter of Zion: A Study of the City-Lament Genre in the Hebrew Bible*. *Biblica et Orientalia* 44. Rome: Pontifical Institute, 1993.

Dobbs-Allsopp, F. W. "Darwinism, Genre Theory, and City Laments." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 120 (2000):625-630.

Duff, David. Introduction to "Transformations of Genre," by Alastair Fowler. Page 232 in *Modern Genre Theory*. Edited by David Duff. London: Longman, 2000.

Duggan, Michael W. *The Covenant Renewal in Ezra-Nehemiah, (Neh 7:72b-10:40): An Exegetical, Literary, and Theological Study*. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2001.

Edelman, Diana. *The Origins of the "Second" Temple: Persian Imperial Policy and the Rebuilding of Jerusalem.* London: Equinox, 2005.

Edelman, "Seeing Double: Tobiah the Ammonite as an Encrypted Character."*Revue Biblique* 113 (2006): 570-584.

Eissfeldt, Otto. *The Old Testament; An Introduction, including the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, and the Works of Similar Type from Qumran: The History of the formation of the Old Testament*. Translated by P. R. Ackroyd. New York: Harper and Row,1965.

Emerton, J. A. "Did Ezra Go to Jerusalem in 428 BC?" *Journal of Theological Studies* 17 (1966): 1-19.

Emerton, J. A. Review of Ulrich Kellermann, *Nehemia*, in *Journal of Theological Studies* 23 (1972): 171-185.

Eskenazi, Tamara C. *In an Age of Prose: A Literary Approach to Ezra-Nehemiah*. Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series 36. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988.

Eskenazi, Tamara C. "Current Perspectives on Ezra-Nehemiah," *Currents in Research: Biblical Studies* 2 (1994): 25-42.

Eskenazi, "Implications for and from Ezra-Nehemiah" Pages 20-34 in "In Conversation with W. M. Schniedewind, *How the Bible Became a Book: The Textualization of Ancient Israel* (Cambridge, 2003)." Edited by Gary N. Knoppers. *Journal of Hebrew Scriptrures* 5: Article 18 (2005).

Finkelstein, Israel. "Archaeology and the List of Returnees in the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah," *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* 140 (2008): 7-16.

Finkelstein, Israel. "Jerusalem in the Persian (and Early Hellenistic) Period and the Wall of Nehemiah" *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 32 (2008): 501-520.

Fishbane, Michael. *Biblical interpretation in Ancient Israel*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1985.

Fishelov, David. *Metaphors of Genre: The Role of Analogies in Genre Theory.* University Park, Penn.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993.

Fohrer, Georg. *Introduction to the Old Testament*. Translated by D. E. Green. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1968.

Fowler, Alastair. *Kinds of Literature: An Introduction to the Theory of Genres and Modes*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982.

Fried, Lisbeth. *The Priest and the Great King: Temple-Palace Relations in the Persian Empire*. Biblical and Judaic Studies from the University of California, San Diego 10. Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2004.

Frood, Elizabeth. *Biographical Texts from Ramessid Egypt.* Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007.

Frow, John. *Genre.* London and New York: Routledge, 2006.

Gottwald, Norman K. "The Expropriated and the Expropriators in Nehemiah 5." Pages 1-19 in *Concepts of Class in Ancient Israel*. Edited by Mark R Sneed. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999.

Gnirs, Andrea. "Biographies." Pages 1.184-189 in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*. Edited by D. B. Redford. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.

Grabbe, Lester. *Ezra-Nehemiah*. London; New York: Routledge, 1998.

Grabbe, Lester. *A History of the Jews and Judaism in the Second Temple Period.* Vol. 1 of *Yehud: A History of the Persian Province of Judah.* Library of Second Temple Studies 47. New York: T & T Clark, 2004.

Grabbe, Lester. "The 'Persian Documents' in the Book of Ezra: Are They Authentic?" Pages 531-570 in *Judah and the Judeans in the Persian Period.* Edited by O. Lipschits and M. Oeming. Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2006.

Green, Barbara. *How Are the Mighty Fallen?: A Dialogical Study of King Saul in 1 Samuel*. Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement 365. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003.

Gruen, Erich. *Diaspora: Jews amidst Greeks and Romans.* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002.

Gunneweg, Antonius H. J. *Nehemia*. Gutersloh: G. Mohn, 1987.

Heise, Jens. *Erinnern und Gedenken: Aspekte der biographischen Inschriften der ägyptischen Spätzeit*. Orbis biblicus et orientalis 226. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007.

Helmlin, Steven. *The Success and Failure of Fredric Jameson: Writing, the Sublime, and the Dialectic of Critique*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001.

Michael Helzer, "The Flogging and Plucking of Beards," *Archäologische Mitteilungen aus Iran* 28 (1995-1996):305-307.

Herman, David. *Story Logic: Problems and Possibilities of Narrative*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002.

Hirsch, E. D. *Validity in Interpretation*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967.

Hoglund, Kenneth. *Achaemenid Imperial Administration in Syria-Palestine and the Missions of Ezra and Nehemiah*. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992.

Humphreys, W. Lee. "A Life-Style for Diaspora: A Study of the Tales of Esther and Daniel," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 92 (1973): 211-223.

Hurowitz, Victor. *I Have Built You an Exalted House: Temple Building in the Bible in Light of Mesopotamian and Northwest Semitic Writings.* Journal for the Study of the Old Testament 115. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992.

Jameson, Fredric. *The Political Unconscious*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981.

Japhet, Sara. *From the Rivers of Babylon to the Highlands of Judah: Collected Studies on the Restoration Period.* Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2006.

Japhet, Sara. "'History' and 'Literature' in the Persian Period: The Restoration of the Temple."Pages 152-168 in *From the Rivers of Babylon to the Highlands of Judah: Collected Studies on the Restoration Period*. Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2006.

Jauss, "Theory of Genres and Medieval Literature," pages 127-147 in *Modern Genre Theory*, edited by David Duff. London: Longman, 2000.

Johnson, Sara R. "Novelistic Elements in Esther: Persian or Hellenistic, Jewish or Greek?" *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 67 (2005): 571-589.

Karrer, Christiane. *Ringen um die Verfassung Judas: Eine Studie zu den theologisch-politischen Verstellungen im Esra-Nehemia-Buch.* Beiheft zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 308. Berlin; New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2000.

Kellermann, Ulrich. *Nehemia: Quellen, Überlieferung und Geschichte*. Beiheft zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 102. Berlin: Töpelmann, 1967.

Kim, Hyun C. P. "Form Criticism in Dialogue with Other Criticisms: Building the Multidimensional Structures of Texts and Concepts." Pages 85-105 in *The Changing Face of Form Criticism for the Twenty-First Century*. Edited by M. Sweeney and E. Ben Zvi. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2003.

Klein, Ralph W. "Were Joshua, Zerubbabel, and Nehemiah Contemporaries? A Response to Diana Edelman's Proposed Late Date for the Second Temple," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 127 (2008): 697-701.

Knierim, Rolf. "Old Testament Form Criticism Reconsidered," *Interpretation* 27 (1973): 435-438.

Knierim, Rolf and M. Sweeney. Editors' Introduction of *1 Samuel,* by Antony F. Campbell. Forms of the Old Testament Literature. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003.

Knoppers, Gary. "Sources, Revisions, and Editions: The Lists of Jerusalem's Residents in MT and LXX Nehemiah 11 and 1 Chronicles 9." *Text* 20 (2000):141-168.

Knoppers, Gary. *1 Chronicles 1-9: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary.* Anchor Bible 12. New York: Doubleday, 2004.

Knoppers, Gary. "Nehemiah and Sanballat: The Enemy Without or Within?" Pages 305-322 in *Judah and the Judeans in the Fourth Century B.C.E.* Edited by O. Lipschits, G. N. Knoppers, and R. Albertz. Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2007.

Koch, Klaus. *The Growth of the Biblical Tradition: The Form-Critical Method*. Translated by S. M. Cupitt. New York: Scribner, 1969.

Koch, Klaus. "Ezra and the Origins of Judaism," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 19 (1974): 173-197.

Kratz, Reinhard. *The Composition of the Narrative Books of the Old Testament.* Translated by J. Bowden. New York: T & T Clark, 2005.

Lindenberger, James M. *The Aramaic Proverbs of Ahiqar*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983.

Lipschits, Oded. "Literary and Ideological Aspects of Nehemiah 11." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 121 (2002): 423-440.

Lipschits, Oded. *The Fall and Rise of Jerusalem*. Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbranuns, 2005.

Liverani, Mario. "The Deeds of Ancient Mesopotamian Kings." Pages 2353-2366 in *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East.* Edited by J. Sasson. 4 vols. New York, 1995.

Longman, Tremper III. *Fictional Akkadian Autobiography.* Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1991.

Longman, Tremper III. "Israelite Genres in their Ancient Near Eastern Context." Pages 177-195 in *The Changing Face of Form Criticism for the Twenty-First Century*. Edited by M. Sweeney and E. Ben Zvi. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2003.

MacDonald, Nathan. *Not Bread Alone: The Uses of Food in the Old Testament*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008.

Madsen, Deborah. *Rereading Allegory: A Narrative Approach to Genre.* New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994.

Magen, Yitzhak, Haggai Misgav and Levana Tsfania. *Mount Gerizim Excavations. Volume I: The Aramaic, Hebrew and Samaritan Inscriptions.* Judea and Samaria Publications 2. Jerusalem: Israel Antiquities Authority, 2004.

Mandolfo, Carleen. *Daughter Zion Talks Back to the Prophets: A Dialogic Theology of the Book of Lamentations.* Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007.

Marcus, David. *Biblia Hebraica. Quinta editionecum apparatu critico novis curis elaborato. 20. Ezra and Nehemiah.* Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006.

McKenzie, Stephen L. and John M. Berridge, "Johanan." Pages 880-882 in *Anchor Bible Dictionary.* Vol 3. Edited by D. N. Freedman. New York.

Melugin, Roy. "Recent Form Criticism Revisited in an Age of Reader Response." Pages 46-64 in *The Changing Face of Form Criticism for the Twenty-First Century.* Edited by M. Sweeney and E. Ben Zvi. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2003.

Meyers, Carol L. and Eric M. Meyers. *Haggai, Zechariah 1-8: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary.* Anchor Bible 25B. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1987.

Michalowski, Piotr. "Commemoration, Writing, and Genre in Ancient Mesopotamia." Pages 69-90 in *The Limits of Historiography: Genre and Narrative in Ancient Historical Texts.* Edited by C. S. Kraus. Leiden; Boston: Brill, 1999.

Michalowski, Piotr. "Sailing to Babylon, Reading the Dark Side of the Moon." Pages 177-193 in *The Study of the Ancient Near East in the Twenty-First Century: The William Foxwell Albright Centennial Conference*. Edited by J. S. Cooper and G. M. Schwartz. Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1996.

Miller, James M. and John H. Hayes. *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah.* Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006.

Miller, Margaret. *Athens and Persia in the Fifth Century BC: A Study in Cultural Receptivity.* New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

Mary E. Mills, "Household and Table: Diasporic Boundaries in Daniel and Esther," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 68 (2006): 408-420

Misch, Georg. *A History of Autobiography in Antiquity.* Vol. 1. Translated by E. W. Dickes. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1950.

Mitchell, Christine. "Power, *Eros*, and Biblical Genres." Pages 31-42 in *Bakhtin and Genre Theory in Biblical Studies*. Edited by R. Boer. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007.

Mowinckel, Sigumund. “Die vorderasiatischen Königs- und Fürsteninschriften.” Pages 278-322. in *Eucharisterion. Studien zur Religion und Literatur des Alten Testaments.* Edited by H. Schmidt. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1923.

Mowinckel, Sigumund. *Studien zu dem Buche Ezra-Nehemiah*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1964.

Muilenburg, James. "Form Criticism and Beyond," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 88 (1969): 1-18.

Müller, Hans-Peter. "Die weisheitliche Lehrerzählung im Alten Testament und in seiner Umwelt." *Die Welt des Orients* 9 (1977): 77-98.

Myers, Jacob M. *Ezra; Nehemiah.* Anchor Bible 14. Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1965.

Newsom, Carol. *The Book of Job: A Contest of Moral Imaginations*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.

Newson, Carol. "Spying out the Land: A Report from Genology." Pages 19-30 in *Bakhtin and Genre Theory in Biblical Studies*. Edited by R. Boer. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007.

Nickelsburg, G. W. *Resurrection, Immortality, and Eternal Life in Intertestamental Judaism*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972.

Niditch, Susan and Robert Doran. "The Success Story of the Wise Courtier: A Formal Approach." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 92 (1977): 179-193..

Odell, Margaret. "Ezekiel Saw What He Said He Saw: Genres, Forms, and the Vision of Ezekiel 1." Pages 162-176 in *The Changing Face of Form Criticism for the Twenty-First Century*. Edited by M. Sweeney and E. Ben Zvi. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2003.

Otto, Eberhard. *Die biographischen Inschriften der âgyptischen Spätzeit: ihre geistesgeschichtliche und literarische Bedeutung*. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1954.

Pakkala, Juha. *Ezra the Scribe: The Development of Ezra 7-10 and Nehemiah 8*. Berlin: Walter de Guryter, 2004.

Pichon, C. "La Prohibition des Mariages mixte par Nêhêmie (XIII 23-31)." *Vetus Testamentum* 47 (1997): 168-199.

Polaski, Donald. "Nehemiah: Subject of the Empire, Subject of Writing," unpublished paper.

Polzin, Robert. *Late Biblical Hebrew*: *Toward an Historical Typology of Biblical Hebrew Prose*. Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1976.

Porter, J .R. "Son or Grandson (Ezra X. 6)?" *Journal of Theological Studies* 17 (1966): 54-67.

Prince, Gerald. *Dictionary of Narratology*. 2nd ed. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003.

von Rad, Gerhard. “Die Nehemia-Denkschrift.” *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 76 (1964): 176-187.

von Rad, Gerhard. "The Joseph Narrative and Ancient Wisdom." Pages 292-300 in *The Problem of the Pentateuch and Other Essays.* Edited by G. von Rad. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966.

Redford, Donald. *A Study of the Biblical Story of Joseph*. Leiden: Brill, 1970.

Reinmuth, Titus. *Der Bericht Nehemias: Zur literarischen Eigenart traditionsgeschichtlichten Prägung und innerbiblischen Rezeption des Ich-Berichts Nehemias.* Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2002.

Rosenthal, Ludwig. "Die Josephgeschichte, met den Büchern Ester und Daniel verglichen." *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 15 (1895): 278-284.

Rosmarin, Adena. *The Power of Genre*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985.

Rowley, H. H. *The Servant of the Lord and Other Essays on the Old Testament.* Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1965.

Rudnig, Thilo A. *David's Thron: redaktionkritische Studien zur Geschichte von Thronnachfolge Davids*. Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 358. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2006.

Schaper, Joachim. "The Temple Treasury Committee in the Times of Nehemiah and Ezra." *Vetus Testamentum* 47 (1997): 200-206.

Schaper, Joachim. *Priester und Leviten im achämenidischen Juda : Studien zur Kult- und Sozialgeschichte Israels in persischer Zeit.* Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000.

Schmitt, Armin. *Wende des Lebens: Untersuchungen zu einem Situations-Motiv der Bibel*. Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 237. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1996.

Schottroff, Willy. *'Gedenken' im alten Orient und im alten Testament: Die Wurzel Zakar im semitischen Sprachkreis*. Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1964.

Schunck, Klaus-Dietrich. *Nehemia.* Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1998.

Scolnic, Benjamin. *Chronology and Pappynomy: A List of the Judean High Priests of the Persian Period.* Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999.

Ska, Jean Louis. *Introduction to Reading the Pentateuch*. Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2006.

Sinding, Michael. "After Definitions: Genre, Categories, and Cognitive Science." *Genre* 35 (2002).

Sinding, Michael. "Beyond Essence (or, Getting over 'There'): Cognitive and Dialectical Theories of Genre." *Semiotica* 149 (2004): 377-395.

Sinding, Michael. "*Genera Mixta*: Conceptual Blending and Mixed Genres in *Ulysses*." *New Literary History* 36 (2005): 589-619.

Snyder, John. *Prospects of Power: Tragedy, Satire, the Essay, and the Theory of Genre.* Lexington, Kent.: University Press of Kentucky, 1990.

Soggin, J. A. "Dating the Joseph Story and Other Remarks." In *Joseph: Bibel und Literatur*. Edited by Friedemann W. Golka and Wolfgang Weiss. Oldenburg: Bibliotheks- und Informationssystem der Universität Oldenburg, 2000.

Sparks, Kenton. *Ancient Texts for the Study of the Hebrew Bible: A Guide to the Background Literature*. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2005.

Steck, Odil H. *Old Testament Exegesis: A Guide to the Methodology*. Translated by J. D. Nogalski. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998.

Steiner, Richard C. "Bishlam's Archival Search Report in Nehemiah's Archive: Multiple Introductions and Reverse Chronological Order as Clues to the Origin of the Aramaic Letters in Ezra 4-6," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 125 (2006): 641-685.

Steins, Georg. *Die Chronik als kanonisches Absclußphänomen. Studien zur Entstehung und Theologie von 1/2Chronik.* Winhein: Beltz Athenäum Verlag, 1995.

Sternberg, Meir. *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading.* Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1985.

Stevens, Marty E. *Temples, Tithes, and Taxes: The Temple and the Economic LIfe of Ancient Israel*. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2006.

Sweeney, M. and Ehud Ben Zvi. "Introduction." Pages 1-13 in *The Changing Face of Form Criticism for the Twenty-First Century*. Edited by M. Sweeney and E. Ben Zvi. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2003.

Sweeney, M. "Form Criticism." Pages 58-89 in *To Each Its Own Meaning: An Introduction to Biblical Criticisms and Their Applications*. Edited by S. R. Haynes and S. L. McKenzie. Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox, 1999.

Talmon, Shemaryahu. "Wisdom in the Book of Esther." *Vetus Testamentum* 13 (1963): 419-455.

Talshir, Zipora. *1 Esdras: From Origin to Translation.* Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999.

Talshir, Zipora. "Ezra-Nehemiah and First Esdras: Diagnosis of a Relationship between two Recensions." *Biblica* 81 (2000): 566-573.

Torrey, C. C. *The Composition and Historical Value of Ezra-Nehemiah*. Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 2. Giessen: J. Ricker, 1896.

Tov, Emanuel. *Text-Critical Use of the Septuagint in Biblical Research*. Jerusalem: Simor, 1997.

Tuland, Carl G. "Ezra-Nehemiah or Nehemiah-Ezra?" *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 12 (1974): 47-62.

Uehlinger, Christoph. "'Powerful Persianisms' in Glyptic Iconography of Persian Period Palestine." Pages 134-182 in *The Crisis of Israelite Religion: Transformation of Religious Tradition in Exilic and Post-Exilic Times*. Edited by B. Becking and M. C .A. Korpel. Leiden: Brill, 1999.

Van Leeuwen, Raymond C. "Form Criticism, Wisdom, and Psalms 111-112." Pages 65-84 in *The Changing Face of Form Criticism for the Twenty-First Century*. Edited by M. Sweeney and E. Ben Zvi. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2003.

Van Seters, John. "The Historiography of the Ancient Near East." Pages 2433-2444 in *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*. Edited by J. Sasson. 4 vols. New York, 1995.

Van Seters, John. *The Edited Bible: The Curious History of the "Editor" in Biblical Criticism*. Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2006.

VanderKam, James. *From Joshua to Caiaphas: High Priests after the Exile*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004.

Vanstiphout, Herman L. J. "Some Thoughts on Genre in Mesopotamian Literature." Pages 1-11 in *Keilschriftliche Literaturen: Ausgewählte Vorträge der XXXII. Recontre Assyriologique Internationale. Münster, 8.-12.7.1985*. Edited by K. Hecker and W. Sommerfeld. Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag, 1986.

Vanstiphout, Herman L. J. "The Use(s) of Genre in Mesopotamian Literature: An Afterthought." Archîv Orientální 67 (1999): 703-716.

Vanstiphout, Herman L. J. "'I Can Put Anything in Its Right Place': Generic and Typological Studies as Strategies for the Analysis and Evaluation of Mankind's Oldest Literature." Pages 79-99 in *Aspects of Genre and Type in Pre-Modern Literary Cultures*. Edited by B. Roest and H. Vanstiphout. Groningen: Styx Publications, 1999.

Vernus, Pascal. "Littérature et autobiographie: Les inscriptions de *S3-Mwt* surnommé *Kyky*." *Revue d'egyptologie* 30 (1978): 115-146.

Wahl, Harald M. "Das Motiv des 'Aufstiegs' in der Hofgeschichte: Am Beispiel von Joseph, Esther und Daniel" *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 112 (2000): 59-74.

Waltke, Bruce K. and M. O'Connor. *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax.* Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1990.

Washington, Harold. "Israel's Holy Seed and the Foreign Women of Ezra-Nehemiah," *BibInt* 11 (2003): 427-437.

Wechsler, Michael. "Two Para-Biblical Novellae from Qumran Cave 4: A Reevaluation of 4Q550." *Dead Sea Discoveries* 7 (2000): 130-172.

Weiss, Meir. *The Bible from Within: The Method of Total Interpretation.* Jerusalem: Magness Press, 1984.

Widengren, Geo. "The Persian Period." Pages 489-538 in *Israelite and Judaean History.* Edited by J. H. Hayes and J. M. Miller. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977.

Willi, Thomas. "Zwei Jahrzehnte Forschung an Chronik und Esra-Nehemia." *Theologische Rundschau* 67 (2002): 61-104.

Wills, Lawrence M. *The Jew in the Court of the Foreign King.* Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990.

Wills, Lawrence M. *The Jewish Novel in the Ancient World.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995.

Wills, Lawrence M. *The Quest of the Historical Gospel: Mark, John, and the Origins of the Gospel Genre.* New York: Routledge, 1997.

Wills, Lawrence M. "Response to 'The Genre and Function of the Markan Passion Narrative.'" Pages 504-512 in *George W. E. Nickelsburg in Perspective: An Ongoing Dialogue of Learning*. Edited by J. Neusner and A. J. Avery-Peck. Supplement of the Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Periods 80. Boston: Brill, 2003.

Williamson, Hugh G. M. *Ezra, Nehemiah*. World Biblical Commentary 16. Waco, Tex.: Word, 1985.

Williamson, Hugh G. M. "The Composition of Ezra 1-6." Pages 244-270 in *Studies in Persian Period History and Historiography*. Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004.

Williamson, Hugh G. M."The Belief System of the Book of Nehemiah." Pages 271-281 in *Studies in Persian Period History and Historiography.* Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004.

Wright, J. Stafford. *The Date of Ezra's Coming to Jerusalem*. 2nd ed. London: Tyndale Press, 1958.

Wright, J. W. “Eliashib.” Pages 460-461 in the *Anchor Bible Dictionary.* Vol. 2. Edited by D. N. Freedman. 6 vols. New York, 1992.

Wright, Jacob L. *Rebuilding Identity: The Nehemiah-Memoir and its Earliest Readers.* Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 348; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2004.

Wright. "A New Model for the Composition of Ezra-Nehemiah," in Judah and the Judeans in the fourth century B. C. E. Edited by O. Lipschits, G. N. Knoppers and R. Alberts. Winona Lake, Ind: Eisebrauns, 2007.

Yamauchi, Edwin. "The Reverse Order of Ezra/Nehemiah Reconsidered." *Themelios* 5 (1980): 7-13.

Biography

Sean Richard Burt was born in Pozzuoli, Italy on November 17, 1976. Shortly thereafter, his parents, Richard and Dena Burt, returned to their home in Montana. He spent his childhood in Montana, first in Bozeman, then in Havre. After graduation from high school, he enrolled at Yale College, where he met his future spouse, Julia Bowsher. He earned a B.A. in Religious Studies from Yale in 1999. In 2000, he entered Duke Divinity School, where he graduated magna cum laude with an M.T.S. in 2002 and received an "Excellence in Bible" award from the Divinity School. Sean and Julia were married in the summer of 2002, and that fall, he entered as a doctoral student in the Graduate Program in Religion in the Graduate School at Duke. His daughter, Helen Bowsher Burt, was born in the summer of 2005. He was awarded the Katherine M. Stern Dissertation Year Fellowship for the academic year 2007-2008. As of 2009, Sean resides in Tucson, Arizona, where he is Adjunct Instructor in the Arizona Center for Judaic Studies at the University of Arizona.