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Writing Yehud:
Textuality and Power under Persian Rule

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Abstract

Writing Yehud: Textuality and Power under Persian Rule

By Cameron B. R. Howard

This dissertation investigates the phenomenon of "hypertextuality"—that is, being prolifically textual—in Chronicles, Ezra-Nehemiah, and Esther. These books, which share a Persian-period origin, exhibit a preoccupation with the authority of written texts, a preoccupation shared by the Persian imperium. Chronicles includes lengthy lists of genealogical material and repeatedly provides citations for what are ostensibly its written source texts. Interpolated lists, letters, decrees, and genealogies constitute one-third of the book of Ezra-Nehemiah, and much of the remainder of the narrative exhibits a bureaucratic prose style. The power of writing forms a dominant motif in the book of Esther. Using literary- and form-critical methods, the dissertation traces a pronounced interest in textual authority through the three books and relates that authority to the books' Persian context.

This project is framed by a premise of postcolonial studies: that the practices of domination wrought by imperialist ventures ineluctably affect all aspects of life in a colony, including its cultural output. The hypertextuality shared by Chronicles, Ezra-Nehemiah, and Esther represents a literary reaction to the historical reality of Persian rule over Judah. The treasury and fortification tablets found in the ruins of Persepolis attest to the many documents in multiple languages required for every governmental transaction in the Persian Empire. The Persian royal inscriptions demonstrate that the Persian kings commissioned and distributed texts, particularly genealogical ones, to provide propagandistic justifications for their rule. Literary accounts from Greek historians and the Hebrew Bible testify to the Persian kings' reputation as prolific text-creators, with the authority of royal texts sometimes surpassing the authority of the kings themselves. In their literary styles, Chronicles, Ezra-Nehemiah, and Esther serve as ciphers for Persia's own obsession with bureaucratic text-production. These biblical books deploy one of the empire's preferred modes of power to shape the identity of the post-exilic Judean and Diaspora communities; at the same time, that use of the empire's strategies endorses and reinforces those strategies. Thus, these three narratives capitulate to empire even as they also resist it.

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I am perennially grateful to my parents, Tom and Emma Richardson, who, in addition to providing a lifetime of unflagging support, have taught me to see the beauty in a well-written sentence.

My husband Cader and my son Isaac bring joy and laughter to each new day we share together. They have both endured much to see me through to the end of this project, yet they have never expressed anything but love and encouragement. The completion of this dissertation would not have been possible without Cader’s partnership, and Isaac’s exuberance provided the motivation to see the project through. I dedicate this work to them.

Writing Yehud: Textuality and Power under Persian Rule

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CHAPTER 1

Reading Across History and Literature

Nations, like narratives, lose their origins in the myths of time and only fully realize their horizons in the mind's eye.[1]

Introduction

One of the chief ironies in the history of interpretation of the Bible is that a book so often wielded as an instrument of imperialism was composed by a perpetually colonized people. Egypt, Assyria, Babylonia, Persia, Greece, and Rome all ruled over ancient Israel and Judah in greater or lesser durations from Israel's earliest days as a national entity. Until the dominance of the Babylonian empire around the turn of the sixth century B.C.E., Israel and then Judah alone maintained a relative military and monarchic sovereignty by tribute and political alignment with the imperial powers that alternately pressed upon them from east and west. After a series of conquests and deportations by Babylonia ended with the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.E., Judah became just another territorial holding of the Babylonian empire, its leadership exiled, and its Temple, once the centerpiece of its religious life and cultural identity, destroyed.

The advent of Persian rule in 539 BC.E. marked a new era in Judah's relationship with empire. Persia's imperial strategy encouraged or even required the flourishing of

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[1] H. Bhabha, "Introduction: Narrating the Nation," in *Nation and Narration* (ed. H. Bhabha; London: Routledge, 1990), 1-7.

local culture, religion, and law.[2] A concomitant provision of that strategy for Judah was the repatriation of the Babylonian exiles, a process that instituted a new struggle for power and identity between those returning from exile and those who had remained in the land. Thus, the residents of Judah, now known as the Persian province Yehud, re-envisioned its community according to the new colonial paradigms established by its Persian rulers. Under Persian rule, Yehud had to work out a new identity that involved the paradoxical concept of mandatory self-expression; the community needed to clarify its own traditions while affirming the inexorable reality of Persian hegemony.

Ancient Persia is commonly referred to as the first "world empire," unmatched in size and organization by any nations or regional empires that preceded it.[3] Yet, ancient

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[2] Persia differed from its imperial forebears in cultivating images of royal generosity marked by grateful subjects rather than overwhelming military subjugation. M. C. Root, *The King and Kingship in Achaemenid Art: Essays on the Creation of an Iconography of Empire* (AI 19; Leiden: Brill, 1979), surveys Persian imperial iconography, demonstrating that its kingship imagery promoted notions of cosmic order and benevolent rulership. The Cyrus Cylinder (*ANET*, 315-16), in which Cyrus presents himself as deliverer of the Babylonian people on behalf of the god Marduk, provides the clearest inscriptional evidence of Persian endorsement and appropriation of local religion to serve the ideological goals of the empire. The Hebrew presentation of the Edict of Cyrus in the Hebrew Bible (2 Chr 36:22-23; Ezra 1:2-4) similarly describes Cyrus as a tool of Yahweh to enable the return of exiles to Jerusalem and the rebuilding of the temple there, again invoking a local deity and encouraging repatriation and re-establishment of local religion. The so-called "Passover Papyrus" (J. M. Lindenberger, *Ancient Aramaic and Hebrew Letters* [2nd ed.; ed. by K. H. Richards; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003], 65-66) from the Jewish garrison at Elephantine in Egypt describes royal permission for the celebration of the Festival of Unleavened Bread, further demonstrating that the Persians did not require the people of their colonies to desist from their own religious practices and adopt Persian ones. Peter Frei, in P. Frei and K. Koch, *Reichsidee und Reichsorganisation im Perserreich* (OBO 55; Fribourg: Universitätsverlag, 1984), holds that the Passover Papyrus is part of a larger body of evidence demonstrating that the Persians required their provinces to write and enforce local law, thus making the Pentateuch a product of Persian imperial authorization. See A. Kuhrt, *The Persian Empire* (London: Routledge, 2010), for a compendium of primary-source documents relating to the Persian Empire, including relevant excerpts from Greek historians and additional inscriptional and documentary evidence.

[3] E.g., Kuhrt, *The Persian Empire*, 1, and G. Windfuhr, "Saith Darius: Dialectic, Numbers, Time and Space at Behistun (DB, Old Persian version)," in *Continuity and Change: Proceedings of the Last Achaemenid History Workshop* (AH 8; H. Sancisi-Weerdenburg, A. Kuhrt, and M. C. Root, eds.; Leiden: Nederlands Instituut voor Het Nabije Oosten, 1994), 265-281. W. Schniedewind, *How the Bible Became a Book: The Textualization of Ancient Israel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 65 calls

Persia itself lacks an extant corpus of national literature dating from the era of the Achaemenid kings. Thanks to both the archaeological record and accounts of Persia in other contemporaneous sources, there is no shortage of historical data about the Achaemenid Empire; nonetheless, the empire itself left no narrative account of its rise, reign, or fall. The only extant first-hand accounts of Persian rule from the Persian themselves are the few dozen royal inscriptions scattered around Persia's former colonies and in the ruins of imperial palaces. In his monumental history of the Persian Empire, which remains the most thorough and authoritative account of the Achaemenid era to date, Pierre Briant reflects on the dearth of Persian narrative history: "The Great Kings and the Persians thus left the control of their historical memory to others. Here is an extraordinary situation: one must reconstruct the narrative thread of Achaemenid history from the writings of their subjects and their enemies—hence the power and authority long ascribed to the Greek authors."[4]

The absence of a narrative history from the Persian Empire does not mean, however, that the Persian kings objected to writing things down. The hundreds of cuneiform tablets found in the ruins of Persepolis attest to an imperial collection of written receipts of sales, treasury inventories, and even cultic instructions, and additional evidence of Persia's colonial bureaucracy survives in the finds from the Jewish garrison at Elephantine. In *The Persian Wars*, Herodotus portrays Persia as having a nearly farcical reliance on written decrees.[5] That same hint of parody emerges in the biblical

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Assyria "the first in a series of expanding world empires," viewing it, rather than Persia, as the trendsetter in ancient imperial domination.

[4] P. Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander: A History of the Persian Empire* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2002), 7.

[5] See, for example, the execution of Oroetes via the reading of three consecutive scrolls in Herodotus, *Hist.,* 3.128.

book of Esther, when Queen Vashti's refusal to appear at the King Ahasuerus' banquet leads to an unalterable imperial decree to inspire all wives to submit to their husbands (Esth1:10-22). In the same book, the vast records of daily events at the Persian court provide suitable soporific reading for the king (Esth 6:1). The surfeit of written bureaucratic minutiae, coupled with the plentiful lore that remembers the Persians as decree-makers and record-keepers, suggests that prolific documentation was a hallmark, if not an outright ruling strategy, of the Persian Empire. Persia was a "hypertextual" entity, obsessed over the production of records, gripped by a bureaucratic furor, and generally engaged in writing to excess.[6]

Persia's zeal for documentation coincided with increased textual production in its colonies. Many scholars agree that the period of Persian rule over Judah was one of the most productive in the formation of what we now know as the Hebrew Bible, even if the details of that formation remain contested.[7] The Pentateuch, for example, appears to have

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[6] Throughout this dissertation, I will use the word "hypertextuality" to mean "the phenomenon of being *prolifically textual*," a definition that is, as far as I am presently aware, a coinage. Narratologist G. Genette, *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 5, uses the term to designate "any relationship uniting a text B (which I shall call the *hypertext*) to an earlier text A (I shall, of course, call it the *hypotext*), upon which it is grafted in a manner that is not that of commentary." Genette's use of the term arises in the context of ongoing discussions in literary theory over the phenomenon of intertextuality, which seeks out the nature of relationships between texts. Genette's definition aligns in the realm of theory with the usage of "hypertext" in the realm of digital technologies, where hypertexts are digital texts connected to other digital texts via "hyperlinks," which usually transport the reader between texts with one click of the mouse on the World Wide Web. Though this is not the usage of the term I am employing in the present study, the idea that one text produces and connects to another does inhere in the self-perpetuating Persian bureaucratic system (cf. ch. 2, below).

[7] In *How the Bible Became a Book*, Schniedewind argues against the notion of the Persian period as an era of textual composition, proposing instead that much of the Hebrew Bible was written between the eighth and sixth centuries B.C.E. He looks to the rise of the Assyrian empire as catalyst for the rise of widespread literacy in ancient Israel, as well as for the creation of a highly textual culture in that era. The democratization of textual production and preservation in the flourishing of the Judean monarchy was swiftly halted in the Babylonian exile, and the Persian period similarly was not conducive to textual production. Schniedewind sees the Persian era as largely a time of redaction and of literary preservation, rather than composition. He does, however, affirm a Persian-era date for the composition of the three narratives that form the focus of this dissertation (Ezra-Nehemiah, Chronicles, and Esther), and his

received its final form in the Persian period. [8] Nor was literary development limited to the later stages of canonization. The prophetic texts of Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi and Trito-Isaiah were produced during the Persian period.[9] Chronicles, Ezra-Nehemiah, and Esther are all biblical narratives with a Persian-period provenance, having arisen during Persian rule and having received their final forms no later than the early Hellenistic era.

In addition to their Persian-period origins, the three narratives of Chronicles, Ezra-Nehemiah, and Esther share a preoccupation with the authority of written texts. Chronicles makes reference to multiple texts as the sources for deeds of prophets and kings untold in the Chronicler's work, such as "the book of the kings of Israel and Judah" (1 Chr 9:1; 2 Chr 27:7, 35:26-27, 36:8) and "the words of Nathan the prophet" (2 Chr 9:29). Chronicles also includes long lists of genealogies as part of the fabric of its narrative, forming most of the first nine chapters of the book. Ezra-Nehemiah cites seven epistolary exchanges between the Persian king and his subjects in Yehud, accords authority for the constitution of the post-exilic community to books of genealogies, and recounts the public authority attributed to the book of the law of Moses in Yehud. The theme of writing pervades the book of Esther and drives many of the plot's celebrated

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recognition of the deep influence of imperial government on textual production is consonant with the assertion of this project, namely, that these three narratives composed during the Persian era reflect the Persian Empire's interest in and modes of deployment of textual authority.

[8] For a summary of the debate over formation of the Pentateuch during the Persian period, see Jean-Louis Ska, *Introduction to Reading the Pentateuch* (Trans. Pascale Dominique; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 217-229.

[9] Haggai and Zechariah are both dated internally to the reign of Darius (Hag 1:1; Zech 1:1; see C. L. Meyers and E. M. Meyers, *Haggai, Zechariah 1-8* [AB 25B; Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1987], xl-lxiii.) Malachi shares concerns with Ezra-Nehemiah over ritual, tithing, and the priesthood and uses the term פחה, referring to the local governors of the Persian period. See D. L. Petersen, *Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi: A Commentary* (OTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995), 5-6. For the dating of Trito-Isaiah, see B. Strawn, "'A World under Control': Isaiah 60 and the Apadana Reliefs from Persepolis," in *Approaching Yehud: New Approaches to the Study of the Persian Period* (SemeiaSt 50; J. Berquist, ed.; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), 85-116.

"reversals." Mordecai's personal fate changes from imminent death to royal power according to the king's bedtime reading; in the same way, the fate of all Jews in Persia changes when Esther and Mordecai receive permission from the king to "write as you please with regard to the Jews" (8:8 NRSV).[10]

No other set of texts in the Hebrew Bible displays such concentrated concern for the written word as the locus of social, religious, and political power as this set of Persian-period narratives. While many commentators have noted each book's interest in textual authority, the nature and implications of that authority have remained largely unexamined. In addition, no study has investigated the phenomenon of textual authority across these three texts, which are linked by their Persian-period provenance. In this dissertation, I will examine the appeal to the written word in Ezra-Nehemiah, Chronicles, and Esther in light of their Persian imperial context. I begin from the premise that has formed the core of postcolonial studies, namely that the practices of domination wrought by imperialist ventures have an ineluctable effect on every facet of life in its colonies and among the people who inhabit them. Therefore, the way Yehud told its stories—fiction and non-fiction, stories of the past and stories of the present—necessarily was shaped by Achaemenid styles of governance.

I propose that the obsession with textuality present in the Hebrew Bible's Persian-period narrative corpus is a literary reaction to the historical reality of Yehud's political status as a territory colonized by the Persian Empire. In their literary styles, which feature the interpolation of other texts into their narratives and a thematic concentration on writing and written texts, Chronicles, Ezra-Nehemiah, and Esther serve as ciphers for

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[10] All biblical translations will be my own unless otherwise indicated, as here.

Persia’s own obsession with bureaucratic text-production. The Yehudite authors of these narratives appropriated the value Persia gave to writing and used it to tell the stories of their own community. An examination of the deployment of textuality in Persian-period biblical narrative will show that none of those three books offers either straightforward capitulation or resistance to Persia’s imperial hegemony. Instead, the adoption of the imperial value of hypertextuality reflects an assertion of Jewish identity that stands both in deference to Persian political power and in defiance of it.

Dating

Chronicles, Ezra-Nehemiah, and Esther were all composed toward the end of the Persian period (539-333 B.C.E.) or at the beginning of the Hellenistic period in Judah’s history. The criteria used to date each book will be discussed in more detail in the chapters that follow. However, in a study that draws correlations between Persian rule and the manner of those books’ composition, the possibility that any of them may have reached their final forms when Persia was no longer the regnant imperial power requires some reflection. What does it do to claims of Persian influence on the manner of composition if any of these books were written during the Hellenistic period?

The Persian Empire did not cease to influence Yehud immediately upon Alexander’s conquest of the region in 333 B.C.E., nor did Hellenism only begin to impact Judea at that same moment. Proposing historical influence need not require that dates of literary composition – even of “purely” written works, which generally have a shorter period of gestation than works generating from oral material – line up rigidly with the dates of the rise and fall of various imperial powers. Gary Knoppers addresses this fluidity of influence in his commentary on Chronicles, calling on scholars to stop drawing

such a rigid distinction between eras of influence. He emphasizes that the archaeological record provides evidence for contact between Greece and the southern Levant well before the fourth century.[11] At the same time, Pierre Briant underscores the pronounced continuity between the Persian Empire and the early decades of Macedonian rule. When Alexander took over Persia's territories, he left in place the Persian systems of satrapies and of tribute – both of which generated remarkable amounts of "paperwork." In fact, Alexander's embrace of Persian ruling practices has earned him the designation, "the last of the Achaemenids."[12]

The onset of Ptolemaic rule in Judea after Alexander's death would not have brought dramatic differences to Judeans' experience of imperial government. While the Ptolemies brought several Hellenistic titles and structures with their method of governance, including the *polis* as designation for cities, the *strategos* as military governor, and the *hyparchiai* as administrative districts, they still relied heavily on the existing structures of local government in both urban and rural areas.[13] Moreover, there is no substantial evidence for the implementation of these Greek paradigms until the mid-third century.[14] Nor did the Ptolemies make active attempts at Hellenizing the population; Persian practices that allowed the flourishing of local cultural and religion were not significantly altered, making the Ptolemies "the least aggressive culturally of all the Hellenistic dynasties."[15] Even when the Seleucids took control over Judea in 198 B.C.E.,

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[11] G. Knoppers, *I Chronicles 1-9: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 12; New York: Doubleday, 2003), 103.

[12] P. Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 873-876.

[13] R. S. Bagnall, "Palestine, Administration of (Ptolemaic)," *ABD* 5:90-92; W. S. McCullough, *The History and Literature of the Palestinian Jews from Cyrus to Herod: 550 BC to 4 BC* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1975), 86-91.

[14] Bagnall, *ABD* 5:91.

[15] W. S. McCullough, *The History and Literature of the Palestinian Jews*, 89-90. P. Machinist, "The First Coins of Judah and Samaria: Numismatics and History in the Achaemenid and Early Hellenistic

their early policies again relied significantly on local governmental structures put in place by the Achaemenids.[16] While each successive ruler implemented gradual changes in the administration of Judea, the average Judean's experience of these shifts in leadership would have involved more continuity than difference well into the Hellenistic period.

The Persian Empire was unmatched by all its predecessors in the breadth of its territory and the administrative tools it set in place to rule it. Even as it borrowed strategies from previous Mesopotamian empires, it combined them with its own innovations to institute a new standard for imperial rule.[17] For a region like Judah, which experienced the rise and fall of so many empires through its history, the experience of foreign rule would have been constantly in development as one power receded and another grew: an accretion of characteristics rather than a drastic change in perception. Persia's bureaucratic innovations contributed a sense of obsessive textuality to ancient

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Periods," in *Continuity and Change: Proceedings of the Last Achaemenid History Workshop* (AH 8; H. Sancisi-Weerdenburg, A. Kuhrt, and M. C. Root, eds.; Leiden: Nederlands Instituut voor Het Nabije Oosten, 1994), 365-380, conducts a detailed study of Judean coinage from the late Achaemenid into the Ptolemaic period showing that the use of "Judah" on Ptolemaic Judean coins points to the continuation of local languages, scripts, and traditions, even though the coins also reflect a centrally-standardized monetary system .

[16] S. Sherwin-White and A. Kuhrt, *From Samarkhand to Sardis: A New Approach to the Seleucid Empire* (London: Duckworth, 1993), 1-39. See also A. Kuhrt and S. Sherwin-White, "The Transition from Achaemenid to Seleucid Rule in Babylonia: Revolution or Evolution?" in *Continuity and Change: Proceedings of the Last Achaemenid History Workshop* (AH 8; H. Sancisi-Weerdenburg, A. Kuhrt, and M. C. Root, eds.; Leiden: Nederlands Instituut voor Het Nabije Oosten, 1994), 311-327, for a case-study of continuity from Achaemenid to Seleucid rule in Babylonia. Kuhrt and Sherwin-White note that "administrative structures continued largely unchanged from the Achaemenid period" (327), that the Persian precedent of multilingualism continued (325-326), and that the Selecuids combined "Mesopotamian and Achaemenid imperial and cultural forms to articulate their kingship in Babylonia" (326).

[17] Ibid. See also H. Sancisi-Weerdenburg, "The Quest for an Elusive Empire," in *Achaemenid History IV: Centre and Periphery* (Leiden: Nederlands Instituut Voor Het Nabije Oosten, 1990): 263-274. Sancisi-Weerdenburg emphasizes that many previous evaluations of Persian art, royal propaganda, etc. were based on a notion of the superiority of classical Greek culture and failed to regard the Persian ability to combine cultural styles as an innovation of its own merit.

Judah's cumulative experience of imperialism. Achaemenid policies permanently shaped Judah's experience of empire, even long after the Persians ceased to rule.

Textuality in Post-Exilic Judah

The last three decades have seen a flourishing of interest in the Persian period within biblical studies. A good deal of that interest has centered on the question of the Persian Empire's involvement in the development of the Pentateuch. Peter Frei has articulated the regnant theory proposing "imperial authorization" of the Torah and its statutes.[18] Though Frei's argument remains highly contested in biblical scholarship, it continues to loom over the field.[19] It requires scholars to consider ways in which Persia may have intervened directly in the process of text-formation in Yehud, either by requiring the production of a local legal code, endorsing the ordinances contained within the Torah, or, at the least, allowing the text's propagation within the Jewish colony. Even scholars who downplay the extent of Persia's direct involvement in the formation of the Pentateuch still acknowledge that the reach of the empire was deep enough into work of its colonies to have required approval of religious law by the local imperial establishment.[20]

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[18] See P. Frei and K. Koch, *Reichsidee und Reichsorganisation im Perserreich* (OBO 55; Fribourg: Universitätsverlag, 1984), for the initial, detailed articulation of the theory, and P. Frei, "Persian Imperial Authorization: A Summary," in *Persia and Torah: The Theory of Imperial Authorization of the Pentateuch* (ed. J. W. Watts; SBLSymS; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2001), 5-40, for summaries of both the theory itself and the timeline over which it has been presented and published.

[19] The *Persia and Torah* volume cited in the note above provides an excellent collection of reevaluations of Frei's theory by, for the most part, American scholars, and the notes in those essays themselves provide a thorough rehearsal of the reception of the theory in European scholarship.

[20] E.g., J. L. Ska, " 'Persian Imperial Authorization': Some Question Marks," in *Persia and Torah: The Theory of Imperial Authorization of the Pentateuch* (ed. J. W. Watts; SBLSymS; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2001), 161-182. I hold that Persia would have kept a watchful eye on these local

The notion that Persia may have mandated the scripting of legal texts in Judah is compelling in part because it would make sense of what can otherwise seem like a remarkably *laissez-faire* approach to colonial governance. Persia's imperial project was unlike any of the militaristic expansionist enterprises that preceded it. The African and Mesopotamian "empires" of the 2nd and 1st millennia B.C.E. utilized military force not only to conquer new territories, but also to keep them in check, utilizing such strategies as torture, exile, and genocide.[21] Persia's imperial success was certainly, first and foremost, also a matter of military success, but it preferred systems of tax and tribute, administered through local political and religious structures, to maintain a hold on its colonies. The colonies do seem to have noticed this shift in strategy; it is the empire's ostensibly permissive policies of repatriation and provision for local religion, after all, that are cited in the Hebrew Bible's moments of effusive praise for Persian kings.[22] The degree of Persia's actual involvement in the legal matters of its colonies cannot be determined here. What does remain at issue, however, is in what ways the ever-ominous, ever-threatening pressure of imperial power may have shaped Yehudite textuality. This is not a question of legal norms or the intricacies of Persia's systems of governance. This is a question of local perception of the empire, of propaganda and ideology, of cultural

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regulations and may even have encouraged their development and codification , but I would not draw a stronger connection between the imperium and local law than that general sense of "watchfulness."

[21] J. Berquist, *Judaism in Persia's Shadow: A Social and Historical Approach* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 240 n. 2. It can be argued that it is precisely Persia's use of administrative innovations to govern an unprecedented breadth of territory that sets it apart as the world's true "empire," rather than just another successful military force.

[22] E.g., Isa 44:24-45:10. Given the highly charged ideological space between empire and colony, the notion of "effusive praise" must be approached with caution. Berquist, *Judaism in Persia's Shadow,* 29, offers the cautionary note that while the process of repatriation was begun under Cyrus, the distribution of resources for community re-formation appears to have been a gradual process; life in Palestine did not immediately see a drastic change under Cyrus' rule. See also A. Kuhrt, "The Cyrus Cylinder and Achaemenid Imperial Policy," *JSOT* 25 (1983): 83-97.

formation – of the way history and politics shape the *way* texts are written, not just *which* texts are written.

There is a sense in which "textuality," when conceived of broadly, is at the heart of all of biblical scholarship. The Hebrew Bible is, after all, thoroughly textual: one larger text comprising collections of smaller texts. The nuance of textuality that I wish to highlight in this dissertation, however, centers on the activity of writing, by means of which tangible written texts are produced. This is not an issue of tracing the oral traditions that lie behind written texts, nor of reflecting upon the abstract narratives sometimes conceived of as "texts" in the vocabulary of literary theory. In the current study, "textuality" refers to the production and use of physical, scripted texts.[23] Inasmuch as "hypertextual" means, for the purposes of this dissertation, "prolifically textual," it necessarily implies copious production of and preoccupation with written texts.

Two recent studies highlight the rhetorical and ideological dimensions of textuality, narrowly conceived, in post-exilic Judah. Katherine Stott has surveyed the appearances of written documents in both the Hebrew Bible and classical Greek historiography, with a particular concentration on the phenomenon of source-citation. Her goal is to compare the literary contexts of the citations, thus moving the discussion surrounding them from whether they actually existed to their possible rhetorical functions, regardless of their historicity. Stott observes the phenomenon of source-citation in the Hebrew Bible exclusively in Kings, Chronicles, Ezra, and Esther, though she does not comment upon the close chronology of the latter three texts.[24] She first notes

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[23] So, too, D. Carr, *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart: Origins of Scripture and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 12.

[24] K. Stott, *Why Did They Write This Way?: Reflections on References to Written Documents in the Hebrew Bible and Ancient Literature* (LHBOTS 492; New York: T&T Clark, 2008), focuses on explicit citations rather than quoted documents whose citation is not acknowledged. This means genealogies and

that the Bible's proclivity for citation is an innovation from earlier ancient Near Eastern literature, which may depend on sources but do not explicitly cite them.[25] Comparing the Greek and biblical corpuses, Stott observes that the Greek authors primarily cite oral sources, rarely relying on written texts, while citations in the Hebrew Bible refer to written sources. When Greek historians do cite texts, they may not necessarily be ones that were actually used; sources claimed do not necessarily align with sources used. Especially in the case of texts such as monumental inscriptions, Greek historians use those written records as confirmation for their historical claims, rather than presenting them as a source from which they drew information.

Stott concludes that the "common and devoted concern to cite sources" among biblical texts is a phenomenon unique to the Hebrew Bible compared to other contemporaneous literature, since citations are nonexistent in ancient Near Eastern texts and inconsistently deployed in classical historiography.[26] Her primary goal is to make the comparisons and, in so doing, to open new possibilities for analysis outside the issue of historicity. Stott stops short of drawing any definitive conclusions about why the Hebrew Bible may have used source citations in the ways that it does. She does, however, affirm that the phenomenon of source-citation in the Hebrew Bible is as much, if not more so, a rhetorical device than a historical one.

Stott's work has two immediate implications for the present study. First, in its survey of citations across the biblical corpus, Stott's work confirms that an explicitly

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administrative lists are excluded from her evaluation of "source" documents, which must explain the omission of Nehemiah from her discussions. Nonetheless, the explicit search of written genealogical records in Nehemiah (e.g., Neh 7:64) would appear to be consistent with the corpus she is investigating, even though she does not address it.

[25] Stott, *Why Did They Write This Way,* 10-12.

[26] Ibid., 15.

articulated dependence upon written texts is primarily concentrated in the Bible's Persian-period narratives. Second, in its examination of the phenomenon of textual dependency in other ancient Near Eastern and Greek histories, it demonstrates that the Persian-period narratives' deployment of written texts is unique. When Greek texts do cite sources, they do so in a manner very different from the biblical texts. Even if one were to posit a dependency of the biblical texts on Greek historiography, it must be acknowledged that the biblical texts are doing a "new thing" with the device of source-citation.[27]

David Carr has also recently conducted an important study of textuality in the Hebrew Bible, one that is focused on textual production as an educational process in the ancient world. Carr examines scribal traditions in ancient Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece, and Israel, noting that literacy remained the purview of elites in each of those cultures until the Hellenistic period. Carr finds that scribal education functioned not simply for the production of texts, but for the social formation of students, steeping them in the cultural and religious traditions of their society. Memorization and oral performance remained as important for that formation as the skills of reading and writing. When education became more broadly available during Hellenistic rule of the ancient Near East, Hellenistic Judaism used the enculturating undercurrent of the scribal tradition to shape a "resistant counterliteracy" in the face of Seleucid persecutions and accompanying the rise of the Hasmonean dynasty.[28] That literacy, for which the Hebrew Bible formed the curriculum, was more broad-reaching across the population than the previous modes of education

[27] Stott, *Why Did They Write This Way*, 13-14, is reluctant to assign any direction of dependency, or even direct relationship at all, between the Greek and biblical materials. Instead, she wishes to raise points of parallel in hopes that observations about the former might spawn new insights on the latter.

[28] Carr, *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart*, 287.

focused around religious institutions. Carr borrows a common term from post-colonial studies to describe this new mode of textuality as " a highly *hybrid* construction that reflected forms of Greek culture even as it—initially—opposed that culture" (emphasis mine).[29]

It should be emphasized that my concern in this dissertation is not with the details of the scribal milieu that may lie behind the biblical books. I affirm that textual production in Yehud was necessarily conducted by an elite or group of elites—perhaps even in conjunction with the empire's own scribes[30]—caught in a liminal space between leading their own community and serving the empire.[31] I do not seek out the identity of the authors beyond this general affirmation. Nevertheless, Carr's work on scribal education is particularly significant for this project. Carr asserts that textuality in post-exilic Judah was a fundamentally ideological enterprise. That enterprise was aimed at sculpting Jewish identity in opposition to, yet utilizing similar modes as, the reigning empire. Although Carr focuses on the Hellenistic era and texts arising from it, his reflections on the "hybridity" of post-exilic Jewish textuality provide an important example of how the relationship between empire and colony deeply affected the colony's textual production.

Both Stott and Carr look to Greece for their comparative material to put in conversation with post-exilic Judean textuality. Much of the Greek historiography upon which Stott draws dates from or describes the Persian era, but her concern is with literary parallels, not the political circumstances under which those parallels arose. Carr, too,

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[29] Ibid., 253.

[30] J. L. Berquist, "Postcolonialism and Imperial Motives," in *The Postcolonial Biblical Reader* (ed. R. S. Sugirtharajah; Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2006), 78-95.

[31] Cf. Berquist, "Postcolonialism and Imperial Motives," 90-91.

largely leaves the Achaemenid era outside the scope of his study. Given the lack of extant Persian narratives and the relative dearth of information on Persian educational practices from this era, the more frequent turns to the Hellenistic world are not surprising. Yet, the Persians instituted the imperial system that provided the earliest catalyst for text-production in post-exilic Judah. As Berquist emphasizes:

> When Alexander conquered the Persian Empire and brought a new Hellenistic organization and mind-set to much of the known western and eastern worlds, the new Greek rulers inherited a functioning administrative system and ruled over peoples whose social character had been shaped by Persian control. Much of Greece's influence in the centuries after Persia's defeat expanded upon the Persian influences already in place and assumed the Persian styles of imperial presence.[32]

The flourishing of local scribal culture and the ideological messages that saturated it could not have taken place without the pioneering, "permissive" policies established by the Achaemenid kings. I propose that there is much to be mined from the administrative textual legacy of the Persian Empire, even in the absence of narrative parallels. Stott has established the innovation present in the Hebrew Bible's patterns of source-citation, and Carr has established the persistent use of textuality as mode of inculturation across the ancient Near East from pre-exilic through post-exilic times. My aim now is to investigate the intersection of these two projects, as well as to move beyond them: How did the unique modes of source-citation in Persian-period biblical narrative reflect the imperial political circumstances in which those narratives arose?

Method

In this dissertation, I approach the biblical text at the intersection of literature and

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[32] Berquist, *Judaism in Persia's Shadow,* 233.

history, using what can most broadly be called "cultural criticism." I affirm the narrative integrity of the text, i.e., that the text in its received form, regardless of its compositional history, makes meaning, possess literary merit, and is itself worthy of study. At the same time, I affirm the historical relevance of the text, i.e., that the text communicates something about the historical circumstances in which it arose. In biblical criticism, these two general approaches – historical and literary – conventionally have stood in opposition.[33] Historical critics have searched for "seams" that betray the composite nature of the biblical texts, while literary critics have evaluated the artistry of each text as a whole. In recent decades, cultural critics have begun to build bridges between these two approaches, especially through sociological, anthropological, and ideological methodologies, and the rubric of cultural criticism continues to provide a space through which new methods connecting historical and literary approaches can emerge.

In a series of essays collected in his book, *Decolonizing Biblical Studies*, Fernando Segovia articulates with clarity the nature of cultural criticism in contrast to historical and literary methodologies.[34] Segovia sees a series of shifts in biblical criticism over time, from the dominance of historical criticism to the rise of literary criticism to the emergence of cultural criticism and cultural studies. Though each approach has appeared subsequent to the one before it, none has replaced any others, but instead has offered challenges to entrenched assumptions and added diversity to the interpretive conversations in the field. Segovia defines these four "umbrella" approaches in terms of

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[33] The opposition between these approaches should not, of course, be overdrawn. They are not mutually exclusive, not does their "opposition" necessarily indicate animosity between their practitioners. Indeed, both approaches have made and continue to make invaluable contributions to biblical studies. Nevertheless, the two approaches do present distinct orientations to the subject, and setting them at two opposing poles is both reasonable and heuristically effective.

[34] F. Segovia, *Decolonizing Biblical Studies: A View from the Margins* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000). Segovia, a New Testament scholar, has written extensively on method in biblical studies.

the text as "means" or "medium." Historical criticism views the text as "means, with an emphasis on the signified—the text as a means to the author who composed it or the world in which it was composed."[35] Exemplary methods of historical criticism include source criticism,[36] which seeks out the separate documentary strands woven together to form a biblical text (esp. the Pentateuch); redaction criticism, which focuses on the moment(s) of editing that formed separate sources into a single text; and form criticism, which attends to the various genres of biblical texts, exploring how those genres would have been used in their original, ancient settings. As Segovia emphasizes, historical-critical methods focus on the *aporias* of a text, its lapses indicative of constituent parts, rather than the wholeness of the text. Its goal is to read vertically, excavating the text's layers to unearth the historical circumstances behind it.[37]

If historical criticism reads vertically or stratigraphically, then literary criticism reads horizontally, from beginning to end rather than down into the historical past. Literary criticism views the text as "medium, with an emphasis on the signifier—the text as a message from author to readers, with an emphasis on the principles governing the formal aspects of this communication."[38] The individual methods falling under the

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[35] Ibid., 8.

[36] Before the rise of literary criticism as an approach that reads a text as a whole, "literary criticism" was often used to refer to source criticism. Throughout this dissertation, "literary criticism" will refer to an umbrella approach that is contrasted with historical-critical approaches and will never be used as a synonym for source criticism. See J. Barton, *Reading the Old Testament: Method in Biblical Studies* (rev. and enl. ed.; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 20-29.

[37] J. Barton, *The Nature of Biblical Criticism* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007), 20 n.20, counters Segovia with the idea that the ruptures in the text identified by historical criticism were discovered precisely because those interpreters tried to read the text as a literary whole. Nonetheless, I think the development of historical-critical approaches in the biblical studies field has, over the course of its development, tended to make the seeking out of aporias its primary end, not a happenstance of its literary efforts. For Barton's additional critiques of Segovia's methodological evaluations, see p. 103 n.73 and p. 169 of *The Nature of Biblical Criticism*.

[38] Segovia, *Decolonizing Biblical Studies*, 8.

literary-critical umbrella are practically innumerable, "highly dependent on the particular theoretical grounding in question," as Segovia notes.[39] Narrative criticism and rhetorical criticism, for example, have all flourished as literary methods within biblical studies. Literary criticism of the Bible has also absorbed methods from the study of the literature in general, especially literary theory in its multitude of forms – structuralism, post-structuralism, New Criticism, etc. All the methods under the umbrella of "literary criticism" study the "final form" of the text, reading it as it has been received rather than searching for its "original" form.

Cultural criticism views the text "as both medium and means, but with a much greater emphasis on the signified than on the signifier—the text as a message from author to readers within a given context, with an emphasis on the codes or principles governing the sociocultural aspects of such communication; hence, the text as a means to that world in which it was produced."[40] Cultural criticism, then, provides a way to engage both the text's literary wholeness and its historical context. The language of *encoding* becomes especially important to this process, as the critic attempts to "decode" the message(s) of the text to elucidate the sociocultural context in which it arose. Methods falling under this approach include sociological criticism and anthropological criticism, and Segovia highlights neo-Marxist interpretations among them as having been particularly influential.[41]

Segovia describes a fourth model emerging on the heels of cultural criticism and closely related to it, a model he alternately terms "cultural studies" and "ideological criticism." Inasmuch as cultural criticism forged mergers between the historical- and

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[39] Ibid., 17.
[40] Ibid., 9.
[41] Ibid., 24-29.

literary-critical paradigms, ideological criticism folds cultural criticism itself into the mix, requiring re-evaluation of all three approaches in light of the role of the reader. Carol Newsom says of ideological criticism that "at its heart is a concern for the relation between language (and other forms of symbolic representation) and power. All cultural constructions, no matter how natural or commonsensical they present themselves, are understood as encoding the interests of some elements of a society."[42] Ideological criticism allows for understanding the text as medium, means, or a combination of the two, since it "approaches the text as a construct, insofar as meaning is taken to reside not in the author of the text or the world behind the text (as postulated by both historical criticism and cultural criticism) or in the text as such (as postulated by literary criticism of the text-dominant variety) but in the encounter or interchange between text and reader."[43] That is, the "text" that is the object of study is changing, not static, since it is constructed in the moment of the encounter between the text and each contextualized, "flesh-and-blood" reader. Under this approach, the social, political, and historical circumstances of the reader are just as important as the social, political, and historical circumstances of the text. Examples of cultural studies or ideological criticism include womanist, feminist, African-American, liberationist, and post-colonial readings. It should be emphasized, however, that ideological criticism asserts the locatedness of *all* readers, no matter which approach they are using, and challenges critics to acknowledge their own social locations.

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[42] C. A. Newsom, "Reflections on Ideological Criticism and Postcritical Perspectives," in *Method Matters: Essays on the Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Honor of David L. Petersen* (ed. J. M. LeMon and K. H. Richards; SBLRBL 56; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009), 541-560.

[43] Segovia, *Decolonizing Biblical Studies*, 42.

This dissertation both aligns with and is influenced by Segovia's evaluation of the regnant approaches in biblical studies, and it fits best under the "cultural criticism" approach that Segovia outlines. The dissertation attempts to access the historical and, especially, socio-political conditions surrounding the production of biblical texts during the Persian Empire's rule over Judah. In that way, it shares similar goals with historical criticism. At the same time, it undertakes that project by reading biblical narratives in their totality, analyzing their genres and narrative features as a way to access those conditions. In its blending of elements of both historical-critical and literary-critical approaches – its appreciation of the text as both means and medium – this dissertation engages in cultural criticism. It proposes that the deployment and discussion of written texts in Chronicles, Ezra-Nehemiah, and Esther is *a literary reaction to the historical reality* of Persian hegemony. It is driven by the notion that the socio-political context within which a text arises is necessarily encoded in that text. For Persian-period biblical narratives, then, the reality of Persia's imperial domination of Yehud is woven into their very fabric.

While situated under the broad rubric of cultural criticism, this dissertation utilizes methodologies traditionally assigned either to the literary or historical categories, namely narrative criticism and form criticism, respectively. As a literary-critical method, narrative criticism reads biblical texts in their final, received forms. It is attentive to the fundamental elements of narrative, including plot, characterization, time, space, structure and point of view, examining how they work together to make meaning in a text. Narrative criticism is itself a subdivision of poetics, which "aims to find the building

blocks of literature and the rules by which they are assembled."[44] The literary study of the Hebrew Bible was brought to the fore with Robert Alter's 1981 book, *The Art of Biblical Narrative,* and began to be systematized as a poetics of Hebrew Bible narrative in Meir Sternberg's 1985 work, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative.*[45] Several important introductory texts have taken up the work of developing a biblical poetics, and the literary study of the Hebrew Bible in general continues to thrive.[46]

Adele Berlin observes, "If we know *how* texts mean, we are in a better position to discover *what* a particular text means."[47] I contend that Chronicles, Ezra-Nehemiah, and Esther use written documents both structurally and thematically to comment on Yehud's relationship with Persia as imperial entity; that is, they use written documents to make meaning, and that meaning is, in part, a commentary on imperial power. The notion of documentation is woven into the fabric of the narrative, and written documents themselves become some of the very building blocks of the narratives. Therefore, I will deploy the tools of narrative criticism in this study, examining the use of written texts in these books according to their functions within and among the books' narrative elements.

Although form criticism focuses on the literary phenomenon of genre, it stands squarely within the historical-critical approach because of its concomitant interest in a

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[44] Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 15.

[45] R. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* ([New York]: Basic Books, 1981); M. Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (ISBL; Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987).

[46] For detailed introductions to narrative criticism of the Hebrew Bible, see S. Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible* (JSOTSup 70; Bible and Lit. 17; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2000);; J. Fokkelman, *Reading Biblical Narrative: An Introductory Guide* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox; Leiderdorp, The Netherlands: Deo Publishing, 1999); D. M. Gunn and D. N. Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible* (OBS; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993). Also influential on the present study is M. Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (2nd ed.; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), which gives a more generalized and self-consciously structuralist introduction to the study of narrative in literature.

[47] Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation*, 17.

text's *Sitz im Leben*: how that genre may have functioned in its original context. Biblical form criticism as pioneered by Hermann Gunkel was particularly interested in oral forms, i.e., how different types of speech functioned in the social institutions of the ancient Israelite community. By contrast, study of the constituent forms within Chronicles, Ezra-Nehemiah, and Esther necessarily engages genres that were created as written forms and operated as such within Yehudite society. Forms such as letters and census lists are unlikely to have had a "preliterary" life in the same way that "legends" or "sagas" may have.[48] Nonetheless, form criticism's analysis of genres as "[dynamic] patterns…oriented toward a function" [49] makes it an appropriate lens through which to view the various written documents in the Bible's Persian-period narratives. Form-critical insights will be particularly important for analyzing the types of texts interpolated into the books of Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah.

While pursuing the socio-political context of Persian-period biblical narrative through both literary and historical methods means this dissertation is well-situated within cultural criticism, the current project is also deeply conversant with post-colonial criticism, an approach belonging to the cultural studies/ideological criticism paradigm.[50] Central to the current study is the assumption that the peculiar dynamics created by the entity of "empire" shape the way a community understands – and, therefore, writes about – itself. If one is to say that the reading and writing – i.e., text-production – going on *within* Chronicles, Ezra-Nehemiah, and Esther is necessarily affected by the prevailing political conditions of their era, one must also acknowledge that such influence goes on

[48] Cf. G. M. Tucker, *Form Criticism of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971), 17-21.

[49] M. Buss, "Form Criticism," *DBI* 1:406-413.

[50] In addition to his cogent methodological reflections, Segovia is also a fitting conversation partner for this project because of his orientation as a post-colonial biblical critic.

in the reading and writing *about* Chronicles, Ezra-Nehemiah, and Esther. My own multiple identity-markers – among them being female, white, American, and a practicing Protestant Christian, as well as being enrolled in a major research university in the United States – affect the way I read these texts. As is so often the case, both the opportunity for hindsight and the critical observations of others will perhaps reveal to me in the future the effects of those influences better than what I currently can process for myself. Nonetheless, the critical self-awareness I do possess alerts me to the fact that I am neither "colonized" nor "subaltern." I can claim no personal ties, historical or current, to such an identity. In fact, I must acknowledge that I have benefited, however inadvertently, from colonial ventures. As R.S. Sugirtharajah has said of contributors to one of his volumes, I am "part of the current empire but sensitive to its predatory nature."[51]

Post-colonial criticism as a broader discipline originates from the work of people colonized by the modern European imperial projects of the past 500 years. Sugirtharajah offers a definition of postcolonialism as "a reactive resistance discourse of the colonized who critically interrogate dominant knowledge systems in order to recover the past from the Western slander and misinformation of the colonial period, and who also continue to interrogate neo-colonizing tendencies after the declaration of independence."[52] Since postcolonialism is, at its heart, an identity project of the colonized, I cannot truly engage in the ideological-critical pursuits of postcolonialism. At the same time, postcolonialism has begun to "direct the gaze"[53] of biblical studies onto the category of imperialism and its effects on both the composition and reception of the Bible. As Sugirtharajah declares,

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[51] R.S. Sugirtharajah, "Introduction," in *The Postcolonial Biblical Reader* (ed. R.S. Sugirtharajah; Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2006), 1-2.

[52] R.S. Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 13.

[53] Cf. the deployment of this phrase in Berquist, "Postcolonialism and Imperial Motives," 79.

"The greatest single aim of postcolonial biblical criticism is to situate colonialism at the centre of the Bible and biblical interpretation."[54] A critic sensitive to the contributions of postcolonial thought insists that the violent—be it physically, ideologically, or both—power relationship between colonizer and colonized lies at the heart of any literary, historiographical, educational, artistic, or cultural enterprise that emerges from an imperial context. By positing Yehud's subordination to Persia *qua* empire as the driving force behind its preoccupation with written authority, I am necessarily venturing into postcolonial discourse.[55]

Jon Berquist highlights three distinct ways in which postcolonialism can contribute to the study of Yehud. The first is to "emphasize the imperial modes of domination."[56] The fact of Persia's domination must never be casually dismissed; instead, "postcolonialism must always focus on the ways in which the populace becomes the colonized, to reproduce the economic relationships of extraction and oppression over multiple generations."[57] Yehud did not experience Persian bureaucracy as a benign

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[54] Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Criticism*, 25.

[55] Within the larger field of postcolonial studies, "postcolonialism" itself has become a problematic term. Segovia picks up on the field's ambivalence with the term, agreeing that its implications are too narrow for "all that the sphere of the geopolitical implies and entails" (Segovia, *Decolonizing Biblical Studies*, 134-135). It is fraught with questions about whether the world is really "post-" anything, and it continues to "view the reality and experience of the periphery…with reference to the center." Though he maintains the blanket term for the approach as "postcolonial biblical criticism," Sugitharajah is careful to note the distinction between "imperialism" and "colonialism," quoting Edward Said's definitions of the two: "The term 'imperialism' means the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan center ruling a distant territory; 'colonialism,' which is almost always a consequence of imperialism, is the implanting of settlements on distant territory" (Sugirtharajah, *The Postcolonial Biblical Reader*, 16). Given that the current study does not involve modern European colonialism and that my own identity is not with the "colonized," a more fitting category for this dissertation might be "imperial studies." Even so, I will employ the term "postcolonial" to refer to the political and ideological focus of this study; it remains the dominant term in the field, and I lack the hermeneutical privilege to impose an alternative (cf. Segovia, *Decolonizing Biblical Studies*, 16-17).

[56] Berquist, "Postcolonialism and Imperial Motives," 85.

[57] Ibid.

abstraction; as a colonized people, Yehud's lived experience of Achaemenid administration featured taxation, tribute, and servitude—in other words, "resource extraction," a variant form of systematic violence. The second effect of postcolonialism Berquist sees on the study of Yehud is one I have already emphasized above: "the colonial experience will be crucial to everything that occurs within Yehud."[58] No part of life in Yehud remains unaffected by Persia's imperialist structures – including, as I claim, Yehud's textual production. Empire is a totalizing force. Finally, Berquist highlights postcolonialism's contribution to an awareness of ideological conflicts within Yehud, something sociological approaches have often understated, if not ignored. In my examination of textuality in Persian-period biblical narrative, I will maintain these three emphases as the lenses through which I conduct my cultural-critical study.

Postcolonial Biblical Scholarship and the Persian Period

Any discussion of the current state of postcolonial biblical scholarship should begin with R. S. Sugirtharajah, who has provided significant leadership for biblical studies' engagement with postcolonial discourse. His many publications, several of which have been cited above, have addressed the theoretical framework of postcolonialism for biblical interpretation, as well as the use of the Bible in modern imperial projects.[59] His leadership has brought attention to the work of many postcolonial biblical scholars, especially those from developing nations and from identity-groups underrepresented in

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[58] Ibid.

[59] In addition to *Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation* and *The Postcolonial Biblical Reader*, both cited above, some of Sugirtharajah's representative works include *Postcolonial Reconfigurations: An Alternative Way of Reading the Bible and Doing Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2003); *The Bible and Empire: Postcolonial Explorations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); and *Troublesome Texts: The Bible in Colonial and Contemporary Culture* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2008).

the field; *Voices from the Margin*, the collection of essays edited by Sugirtharajah and first published in 1991, is now in its third edition and remains a centerpiece of postcolonial biblical interpretation.

The 2006 publication of *The Postcolonial Biblical Reader*, also edited by Sugirtharajah, brings together the work of scholars studying both the use of the Bible in empire and, most relevant for the current project, the concept of empire in the Bible. The distribution of the volume's essays among Hebrew Bible and New Testament topics reflects the privileging of New Testament texts in the nascent field of postcolonial biblical studies. Three essays address issues of theory and methodology, nine essays center around New Testament texts, and two essays address the general use of the Bible as a whole in colonial contexts. Only six of the book's twenty essays focus specifically on Hebrew Bible texts, and most of those deal with the reception of the books in modern imperial and post-colonial contexts rather than the notions of empire within the Hebrew Bible. Scholarship on the Roman Empire and, therefore, the New Testament does indeed dominate the study of empire in the Bible.[60] That scholarly orientation is perhaps not surprising given the ample historical evidence available on that era, as well as the explicit engagements with, oppression from, and resistance to Roman authorities described in New Testament texts. Within Hebrew Bible scholarship itself, postcolonial engagement

[60] Recent monographs engaging the New Testament its relationship to the Roman Empire include W. Carter, *The Roman Empire and the New Testament: An Essential Guide* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2006); C. I. D. Joy, *Mark and Its Subalterns: A Hermeneutical Paradigm for a Postcolonial Context* (London: Equinox, 2008); J. Rieger, *Christ and Empire: From Paul to Postcolonial Times* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007). S. D. Moore, *Empire and Apocalypse: Postcolonialism and the New Testament* (BMW 12; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2006), is particularly attentive to post-colonial theory, especially the work of Bhabha. In addition to these monographs, a recent postcolonial commentary on the New Testament is also significant: F. Segovia and R.S. Sugirtharajah, eds., *A Postcolonial Commentary on the New Testament Writings* (BP 13; London: T&T Clark, 2007). Attention to imperialism in the Hellenistic era has also begun to flourish, but necessarily focuses on texts outside the canon, so that that attention has unfortunately not often seeped back into Hebrew Bible studies.

with any Hebrew Bible texts is relatively rare, and postcolonial engagement with Persian-period biblical texts is quite scant.[61]

In the same way that Sugirtharajah has provided leadership for postcolonial biblical studies broadly conceived, Jon Berquist has supplied the field with the most sustained attention to Persia *qua* empire and Yehud *qua* colony. Therefore, Berquist's work is foundational for this dissertation. In his 1995 book, *Judaism in Persia's Shadow*, Berquist deploys sociological resources to answer the question, "How did Judah's transformation into Yehud, the Persian colony, affect its ideology, its self-understanding, its religion, and its rhetoric, and how did this new form of religion work both to maintain and to oppose the society in which it took this shape?"[62] Berquist moves chronologically through the history of the empire, relating the political and social realities of the period to the literature produced by colonial Yehud during that era. He highlights the bureaucratic nature of the Persian imperial administration and emphasizes that such an administration necessarily feeds its own interests through the exploitation of the lands and peoples under

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[61] In addition to the work of J. Berquist, described below, three books offer notable exceptions to the relative paucity of post-colonial engagements with notions of empire within the Hebrew Bible. M. G. Brett, *Genesis: Procreation and the Politics of Identity* (OTR; London: Routledge, 2000), reads the book of Genesis as an editorial product of the Persian period, in which the editor "is contesting the privileged grasp of colonial power…" (23), reflecting a hybrid subjectivity *a la* Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994). U. Y. Kim, *Decolonizing Josiah: Toward a Postcolonial Reading of the Deuteronomistic History* (BMW 5; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2005), also engages Bhabha's notion of hybridity, seeing the biblical as an assertion of identity against Neo-Assyrian imperialism rather than a re-assertion of the Israelite state. Kim's work is particularly effective in critiquing Western colonialist paradigms that infuse biblical criticism and thereby affect the field's approach to the Deuteronomistic History. Finally, the essay collection *Approaching Yehud: New Approaches to the Study of the Persian Period* (J. Berquist, ed.; SemeiaSt 50; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), demonstrates that biblical studies is beginning to adopt an orientation to the Persian period that, if not "postcolonial" per se, is nonetheless more attentive to the issues that the paradigm of "empire" might bring to Persian-period studies. Julia M. O'Brien, one of the respondents in the volume, concludes that the essays provide a "repeated, dogged insistence that Persian-period texts cannot be read apart from the ideological and material dimensions of the empire in which they were created. At least here, it is clear that Berquist is right that our paradigm for interpreting this period has shifted from that of exile-to-restoration to life under/with empire" (214).

[62] Berquist, *Judaism in Persia's Shadow*, iv.

its power, no matter how benign it may seem on the surface. Local self-governance and religious and cultural autonomy could be realized, but only within the boundaries prescribed by the empire, which had the ultimate control over Yehud's existence. Berquist sums up the ways in which Yehud worked out its own communal identity within these parameters: "Thus colonial Yehud took advantage of the Persian system of administration to create its own distinctive temple system as a dominant social institution, to establish the training of sages with distinctive traditions as a significant social influence, and to canonize large portions of still-extant scripture."[63] Though the empire marked the parameters of local development, Yehud found ways to forge its own identity and preserve its own traditions in spite of—and sometimes because of—those imperial boundaries.

Berquist continues his sociological engagement with Yehud, but this time with a more explicitly postcolonial perspective, in his contribution to *The Postcolonial Biblical Reader*. He reflects upon Persian oversight of textual production in Yehud, positing that a canon promulgated by the Persian Empire would have necessarily served the interests of the empire, justifying Yehud's status as colony. The result, concludes Berquist, is that canon remains a contested, not normative, space in both its ancient production and its modern interpretation.[64] Put differently, the canon is less a "measuring rod" than the place at which readers work out what should be measured, and how. "Postcolonialism and Imperial Motives" and *Judaism in Persia's Shadow* together represent exemplary treatment of the influence of the Achaemenid imperial context on the social, political, and religious formation of Yehud, particularly as reflected in the biblical texts arising from

[63] Ibid., 233.
[64] Berquist, "Postcolonialism and Imperial Motives," 92-93.

that period. This dissertation builds on Berquist's work, pursuing the question of how the literary stylings of Persian-period biblical narrative provide their own unique sites for contesting Yehudite identity under the ineluctable forces of empire.

This dissertation follows Berquist's lead in taking the exploitative imperial-colonial relationship between Persia and Yehud as the centripetal force acting on the latter's cultural production. In the development of its religious and social institutions, Yehud pulled away from the totalizing powers of the empire, while the empire constantly pulled those institutions back toward itself. The narratives of Chronicles, Ezra-Nehemiah, and Esther are three cultural products that illustrate vividly this clash of forces. Through the stories they tell, these three texts chart out an identity for Yehud based on autonomy and sovereignty. Through the ways that they prioritize the authority of written documents in the construction of their narratives, they reflect an appropriation and redeployment of the empire's value of administrative textuality. This means of working toward an autonomous identity ironically tethers Yehud forever to its imperial overlords, marking its texts with an indelible feature of Persian discourse: the authority of the written administrative text.

Amid the stark distinctions being made between "empire" and "colony," "Persia" and "Yehud," it is imperative to remember that the dynamic between the empire and its colonies does not constitute the only relevant relationship of power and oppression, center and periphery. Though a significant portion of its population—particularly those with money, skills, and status—was exiled from the land by Babylonia, it is an egregious prioritizing of the center over the periphery only to align the socio-political history of Judah with its people who moved out of and back into the land. As Berquist writes:

> Yehud experienced its political establishment through the activity of Persia's imperial expansion and administration, but the community maintained and transformed itself through the dynamics of internal social formation. From this perspective, there is no "exile" (absence of people from the land) followed by "restoration" (a failed goal of return to self-rule in the old fashion, by elites who come from Babylonia). Instead, there are only shifts in the level and nature of political organization. Imperial political goals shaped Yehud in an attempt to create a new sense of identity suitable for a colony, but these external pressures combined with internal factors of continuity and opposition.[65]

A distinctive benefit of cultural-critical methodologies for postcolonial biblical studies is the ability to restore perspective on the whole of Yehudite society, including those represented vocally in the text and those whose voices have been silenced by the text. Yehud's own subalterns may be glimpsed only briefly and representatively: the natives and settlers who remained in the land during the exile, the "foreign" wives.[66] Textual production in Judah was undertaken and overseen by a "local elite," who, in the employment of the imperial government, were subject to the pull of the interests of both empire and colony. While the textual output of that elite reflects an attempt to forge a new community both within and against the realities of Persian hegemony, it should not be assumed to represent "the" monolithic and ultimately authoritative Jewish identity.

This dissertation is writing about writing about writing. It is, perhaps even twice-over, a metacritical exercise, one that participates in the very activity it wishes to analyze. One result of this type of undertaking, regardless of methodological or ideological intent, is to turn the critical lens back around toward the critic, her own readers, and the social locations they all inhabit. Acknowledgment of the role and locatedness of the reader means that a project like this necessarily contributes not only to the knowledge of the

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[65] Berquist, *Judaism in Persia's Shadow*, 10.

[66] I also note that the Persian Queen Vashti, though not *yehudi*, becomes, via her banishment and exscription at the end of Esth 1, subaltern.

past, but also to an understanding of the present. Indeed, as Berquist asserts, "The goal of postcolonial study…is to create interpretations that illuminate the colonial and colonizing tendencies of the text's production and subsequent interpretations, while at the same time to suggest contemporary interpretations that have an effect of decolonizing the present world (including the world of biblical scholarship)."[67] Thus, historical distance collapses; reading and writing Yehud becomes reading and writing twenty-first-century biblical scholarship on Yehud. In Bal's words, "…emphasizing writing as a central theme in the narrative is impossible without relating writing to power; and thus the anthropological critique of writing as the beginning of history comes within sight. In other words, an analysis of writing historicizes both itself and historicism."[68] Thus, in this dissertation I seek to make a contribution to the field of biblical studies not only by adding to conversations on the relationship between biblical texts and the Persian Empire, but also by reading in a way that is both rigorous and unabashedly "ideological." My own place in and experience of history causes me to name imperialization as a totalizing and destructive force, not merely an "objective" fact of history, and it is with this negative value assigned to the notion of "empire" that I approach this study.

Outline of Chapters

This dissertation will first establish the milieu of Persia's administrative fixation on writing and then examine the reflection of that phenomenon in Chronicles, Ezra-Nehemiah, and Esther in turn. Chapter 2 surveys the evidence for Persian hypertextuality using both archaeological and literary sources. Old Persian inscriptions and the Persepolis

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[67] Berquist, "Postcolonialism and Imperial Motives," 87-88.
[68] Bal, "Lots of Writing," 85.

Fortification and Treasury Tablets provide evidence originating within the Persian Empire itself, while Greek historiography and biblical narrative contribute portraits of Persian administrative excess from the perspective of the empire's subjects. Chapter 3 focuses on Chronicles, giving particular attention to the presence of genealogies and source citations in that book. Ezra-Nehemiah provides the focus for chapter 4, which proceeds genre-by-genre through the letters, decrees, genealogies, and lists in that book, finally reflecting on the place of Torah as the fundamental authoritative document for the community. Chapter 5 traces the motif of writing through the book of Esther, where that motif lampoons the power of the empire even as it longs to be a part of it. Finally, chapter 6 offers a brief summary of and concluding reflections on the current project.

CHAPTER 2

Writing and Textuality in the Persian Empire

Introduction

Persia's armies were powerful and effective, famously conquering lands and peoples "from Egypt to India" by the time of the rule of Darius I. However, military conquest of a vast territory was not enough to make Persia a successful empire. In order to maintain its control over such a large area and its highly diverse populations, the Persian kings needed to win the "hearts and minds" of the people they conquered. To this end, the Achaemenids paired policies tolerant of local religion with a public, propagandistic image of their imperial rule as an orderly, beneficent kingdom. This process began full-force with Cyrus and flourished into a "complete ideological programme" by the time of Darius and Xerxes.[1] As important as military strategies were for stretching the boundaries of the empire, political and ideological strategies were essential for maintaining the empire's control over its subject peoples.

Margaret Cool Root has shown how the Persian kings promulgated their imperial ideology through their artistic tradition. The heroic figure of the king, identifiable as

[1] H. Sancisi-Weerdenburg, "The Quest for an Elusive Empire," 263.

royalty but not as one specific king, appears to fight, rule, and worship with a calm superiority. He is lifted up by his conquered peoples, who appear unfettered, paying virtually voluntary homage. His image conveys power, but a power that is so absolute that the king's beneficence toward his subjects will not compromise it. In every image, writes Root, "the empire has already been acquired and organized into a smoothly functioning, harmonious cosmos."[2] Neither foreign power nor any internal revolt can shake the control the king has on his empire. From giant reliefs on rock-faces to images on tiny coins, Achaemenid art attempts to project a sense of cosmic order onto even the most mundane details of imperial life.

Alongside its artistic tradition, the Persian Empire leaves behind a textual tradition that allows today's readers to glimpse both the ideological ideal of the kings and the routine realities of life inside the imperial government. This is not a "literary" tradition, in the sense of collected narratives that might articulate imperial ideology and reality through stories and histories; instead, it is a material record, a collection of archaeological evidence that testifies to the strategic importance of written texts for maintaining Achaemenid power. Two elements in the archaeological record constitute this textual tradition: royal inscriptions and bureaucratic records. These elements emerged from within the empire itself. The royal inscriptions, like royal art, are products of the Persian kings and their propaganda machines, while the bureaucratic records reflect the day-to-day workings of multiple levels of the imperial government.

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[2] M. C. Root, *The King and Kingship in Achaemenid Art: Essays on the Creation of an Iconography of Empire* (AI 19; Leiden: Brill, 1979), 311. For an additional overview of Persia's propagandistic vision of grateful subjects enjoying the *pax Persica as* conveyed in Achaemenid art, see B. Strawn, "'A World under Control,'" 87-101.

Persia was not the first empire in the Near East to keep records of its daily affairs. Archives of administrative documents date to the time of the earliest Sumerian writing, and the tens of thousands of documents surviving from second-millennium Assyria and Babylonia suggest that writing was an integral part of everyday business in ancient Mesopotamia.[3] Royal inscriptions were also standard fare in Assyrian propaganda; in fact, the Persians themselves owe much to the Assyrians and Babylonians for models of royal inscriptions. Cyrus the Great in particular appears to have modeled his famous Cylinder upon the royal inscriptions of Assurbanipal.[4] Although situated in the traditions of previous ancient Near Eastern ruling powers, Persia took textual production to new heights, gaining a reputation for hyper-documentation marveled at by its observers and its subjects alike.

Just as inscriptions and bureaucratic records provide evidence for Persian textuality from within the Empire's centers of power, non-Persian literary sources also speak to Persia's zeal for writing and record-keeping as strategies for Achaemenid imperial control. Greek historians have delivered the most prolific extant accounts of the Persian Empire and its careful management, while biblical writers have crafted stories in which the Persian interest in documentation is asserted and then parodied. Though the minutiae of historical details in the Greek and biblical narratives may be of dubious historical value, their references to the primacy of written texts in the Persian setting accumulate into a well-corroborated portrait of Persian textuality.

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[3] K. R. Veenhof, "Cuneiform Archives: An Introduction," in *Cuneiform Archives and Libraries* (Leiden: Nederlands Historisch-Archaeologisch Instituut Te Istanbul, 1986), 1-36.

[4] Cf. J. Harmatta, "The Literary Patterns of the Babylonian Edict of Cyrus," *Acta Antiqua* 19 (1971): 217-231. See also Wilson, *Genealogy and History in the Biblical World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), 56-136, and Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 43-44.

In this chapter I will survey Persian textuality from sources inside and outside the loci of Achaemenid power. First I will give an overview of what I am calling Persia's "textual tradition": its royal inscriptions and its bureaucratic records. Then I will turn to Persia's reputation for remarkable imperial organization and hyper-documentation as attested in Greek and biblical sources. Taken together, these sets of evidence – Persian and non-Persian, material and literary – will show that the Persian Empire employed writing to promulgate its ideology and to organize its imperial structure, both of which were strategies for maintaining control of its territories. These strategies, which scripted the cosmic and the mundane alike, thus cultivated hyper-documentation as a hallmark of Persian rule.

Material Evidence for Persian Textuality

Achaemenid Royal Inscriptions

Several dozen royal inscriptions in various states of fragmentation are extant. The largest concentration of inscriptions belongs to Darius I (Darius the Great), who ruled from 521-486 B.C.E. The second-largest group is attributed to Xerxes (486-465); the remainder of the inscriptions dates after Xerxes, with those ostensibly authored by kings predating Darius now thought to have been added later, perhaps at Darius' insistence.[5] The inscriptions are written in Old Persian, a cuneiform language that borrows

[5] Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 63; Root, *The King and Kingship in Achaemenid Art*, 54-55.The authenticity of many of these supposedly earliest inscriptions is in doubt, especially those that attribute an Achaemenid lineage to Cyrus the Great. See D. Stronach, "Of Cyrus, Darius and Alexander: A New Look at the 'Epitaphs' of Cyrus the Great," in *Variatio Delectat: Iran und der Westen* (ed. R. Dittmann et al.; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2000): 681-701. The Cyrus Cylinder, though an authentic product of the Persian king Cyrus the Great, is not counted among the Achaemenid inscriptions; it is written in Akkadian and predates the Old Persian inscriptional corpus. Nonetheless, it is an important element in the evaluation of Achaemenid writing and is discussed in ch. 4 below.

significantly from Aramaic and whose only examples from the era of the royal inscriptions are the inscriptions themselves.[6] In the Behistun Inscription, Darius claims to have commissioned the Old Persian script himself for the sake of writing the inscriptions. The surviving evidence indeed suggests that Old Persian was the written language preferred by, and perhaps even reserved for, the Persian kings and their inscriptions; no attestations of the language survive outside a royal provenance. Aramaic continued as the *lingua franca* for administrative tasks throughout Persian-held lands, while Elamite was the language of the royal archives at Persepolis, a detail that reflects the Persians' adoption of Elamite archival practices.[7] The Persians, famous for their tolerance and even encouragement of local culture and practice, never required their subjects to adopt the Old Persian language or to adopt Persian rituals or religion.

While Old Persian can be classified as a royal, inscriptional language, the Achaemenid inscriptions themselves are not confined solely to the Old Persian tongue. Most of the original Achaemenid royal inscriptions are trilingual: Akkadian and Elamite translations were erected alongside the Old Persian versions. Moreover, translations of the inscriptions into Aramaic, Egyptian, Greek, and Lycian have been found throughout the empire.[8] The tendency of the Achaemenids to present their inscriptions in multiple languages testifies to the kings' understanding of the diversity of the empire. The persistence of local languages would have been an unavoidable consequence of policies allowing the flourishing of local culture, and by publishing their own documents in

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[6] R. Kent, *Old Persian: Grammar, Texts, Lexicon* (2nd rev. ed.; AOS 33; New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1953), 8-9.

[7] M. Brosius, "Ancient Archives and Concepts of Record-Keeping," in *Ancient Archives and Archival Traditions: Concepts of Record-Keeping in the Ancient World* (ed. Maria Brosius; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003): 1-16.

[8] Root, *The King and Kingship in Achaemenid Art*, 309.

several languages, the Persian kings endorsed that multilingualism. Multilingualism as a policy necessarily would have increased textual output in all areas of imperial documentation, not just royal inscriptions, as will be shown again below in a discussion of the administrative tablets from Persepolis; more languages means more copies in more translations. Thus, this most basic of the ruling strategies of the Achaemenids made the production of "extra" texts inevitable, already requiring more copies of standard documents than an empire operating under monolingual rule.

The trilingual inscriptions also reflect the kings' desire to have their texts read and understood, rather than tucked away for posterity. In fact, there is evidence that even the Old Persian foundation charters, traditionally buried underneath kings' building projects, were meant to be distributed and read widely. Margaret Root describes the foundation charter of Darius' palace at Susa as one such text:

> …the excavators found fragments of many copies of all three language versions on clay tablets, marble tablets, and on the glazed tiles of the frieze of the great hall of the palace. Furthermore, a recently discovered Elamite copy of DSf is preserved well enough to determine that the marble tablet was inscribed only on four faces. The two parallel lateral faces were left uninscribed and were perforated by holes for a rod—thus enabling the heavy tablet to be rotated and read easily on all inscribed surfaces.[9]

Writing was not merely a way for the king to insure his legacy would outlast him and his buildings; it was a way to communicate the extent of his power and greatness to the world around him.

The most public and most famous of the Achaemenid inscriptions is the massive Behistun Inscription of Darius the Great (DB), circa 519 B.C.E. Its five columns of text (four are original, the fifth was added later) loom 225 feet above a busy travel route

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[9] Root, *The King and Kingship in Achaemenid Art*, 8.

between Susa and Babylon; travelers along the road would not have missed its presence, even though it is unlikely that anyone could have approached the steep cliff closely enough in order to read the inscription. The text relates Darius' account of killing the allegedly false king Gaumata, perpetrator of "the Lie," and justifies Darius' own claim to the throne. It also enumerates all the lands and peoples that Darius has conquered and that sit under Persian rule. The inscription complements an adjoining relief illustrating the events narrated in the inscription, though with some discrepancies between the two.

Another of the more prominent sets of Achaemenid inscriptions stands at the entrance to Darius' tomb at Naqš-i Rustam. There Darius provides an apologia for his life and conquests, describing himself as purveyor of the right over "the Lie" and as the chosen recipient of Ahuramazda's good favor. The tomb inscriptions are accompanied by a carving of Darius and three attendants at an altar, above which is a depiction of Ahuramazda as a winged disk. A third famous set of Darius' inscriptions stands on stelae near the Suez Canal. One of the stelae contains a trilingual inscription on one side and a longer, Egyptian version on the other, preserving the precedent of Old Persian, Elamite, and Akkadian translations while also catering to its primarily Egyptian audience.

Not all of the royal inscriptions have such lengthy texts, such lavishly detailed presentations, or such prominent locations. In addition to a few freestanding tablets, declarations of royal oversight and ownership adorn entrances to palaces, garments of royal statues, and even doorknobs and dishes in the kings' residences. A one-line inscription, reading, "Stone window-frame, made in the house of King Darius," appears eighteen times on a single window-cornice in Darius' palace at Persepolis (DPc).[10] The

[10] All translations of the Persian royal inscriptions, as well as their numbering and identification system, are taken from Kent, *Old Persian Grammar*.

dispersal of inscriptions across tableaux both lofty and ordinary speaks to the Persian kings' eagerness to "make their mark" – a textual mark – on all facets of their kingdom.

Despite their very different lengths and locations, the Achaemenid royal inscriptions include similar content marked by formulaic elements. The opening lines of nearly all of the royal inscriptions exhibit at least one, and often both, of the following components: a statement extolling the greatness of Ahuramazda and a detailed identification of the king providing his genealogy and/or enumerating his titles. The opening lines of the Naqš-i Rustam tomb demonstrate the typical pattern:

> A great god is Ahuramazda, who created this earth, who created yonder sky, who created man, who created happiness for man, who made Darius king, one king of many, one lord of many.
>
> I am Darius the Great King, King of Kings, King of countries containing all kinds of men, King in this great earth far and wide, son of Hystaspes, an Achaemenian, a Persian, son of a Persian, an Aryan, having Aryan lineage. (DNa §1-2)

These introductory phrases emphasize themes that persist throughout the rest of this inscription and across the inscriptional corpus: the greatness of Ahuramazda and the favor he has shown the king; the proper genealogy and bloodline of the reigning king; the singularity of the king's rule; and the diversity of the king's subject peoples. The inscriptions serve an overt legitimizing function, providing religious and ethnic

justifications for the one king's reign over the many to all passers-by.[11]

The genealogical presentations featured in the Achaemenid inscriptions have their origin in the anxiety of Darius I over his own familial roots. Of all the Persian kings, Darius was the most prolific commissioner of inscriptions, and it is no wonder: he had a lot of explaining to do. He took the throne by killing Gaumata, who he claimed had secretly murdered and then posed as Smerdis, brother of Cambyses, son of Cyrus the Great and rightful heir to the throne. Darius, then, is not a member of Cyrus' family line; in fact, as the Cyrus Cylinder indicates, Cyrus considered Teispes the head of his lineage, rather than Teispes' father Achaemenes, whom Darius made eponymous ancestor of the Achaemenids. In the Behistun inscription, Darius conjures a detailed genealogy that manages to make Achaemenes the royal ancestor of choice, thus including himself in the great family of kings and aligning himself with Cyrus and his imperial accomplishments.[12] It appears likely that the inscriptions of Cyrus the Great at Pasargadae, reading "Cyrus the Great King, an Achaemenian," were forged at Darius'

[11] The religion of the Achaemenids remains difficult to identify with precision; debate continues over whether the Achaemenid kings can be described accurately as Zoroastrians. The details of that debate, as well as the realities of the Persian kings' day-to-day religious life, lie outside the scope of this study. What is particularly relevant, however, is the consistent acknowledgment of Ahuramazda's special favor by the kings within their inscriptions. In nearly every paragraph of his Behistun Inscription, for example, Darius relates that his accomplishments are "by the favor of Ahuramazda" or because "Ahuramazda bore me aid." On gold and silver plates at Persepolis, Darius describes the extent of the countries that "Ahuramazda the greatest of the gods bestowed upon me" and invokes Ahuramazda's protection for his house (DPh). Artaxerxes II and Artaxerxes III expand their invocations to include Anaitis and Mithras alongside Ahuramazda, but the religious element persists (cf. A^2Sa, A^2Sd, A^2Ha A^2Hb, A^3Pa.). An enduring function of the royal inscriptions, then, is to situate the king as the recipient of Ahuramazda's great favor.

[12] For a succinct and accessible summary of Darius' genealogical sleight-of-hand, see B. Lincoln, *Religion, Empire, and Torture: The Case of Achaemenian Persia With a Postscript on Abu Ghraib* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 3-5. See also Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 110-113.

behest.[13] A legitimate lineage becomes a matter of unparalleled urgency with Darius, and inscriptions become his primary means of establishing and publicizing such a lineage.

Darius having set the precedent for heavily genealogical inscriptions among the Persian kings, his successors merely followed suit. Xerxes, Darius' son, was particularly eager to recognize the building feats of Darius and then to identify his own additions. Later kings adopted Darius' precedents in a more perfunctory and less regular manner, but the inscriptional tradition of emphasizing ancestry did persist. A fragment from pillars at Persepolis is typical of Xerxes' inscriptions: "Saith Xerxes the Great King: By the favor of Ahuramazda this palace Darius the King built, who was my father. Me may Ahuramazda together with the gods protect, and what was built by me, and what was built by my father Darius the King, that also may Ahuramazda together with the gods protect" (XPc). Yet even a simple, one-line, bilingual inscription identifying a statue of Xerxes at Persepolis emphasizes the lineage and ethnicity of the king in order to identify him fully: "Xerxes, son of King Darius, an Achaemenian" (XPk). Genealogy thus remained an ineluctable characteristic of the royal inscriptions throughout the era of Achaemenid rule, but it was Darius who first determined the pattern. Darius' investment in the efficacy of written texts to convey his chosen message set the tone for Achaemenid textuality.

I believe that Darius relied upon written texts as an accompaniment to and sometimes substitute for artistic renderings because the legitimacy of his genealogy was a message that he could not communicate effectively through images alone. His artisans

[13] There are multiple forms of evidence pointing to the Cyrus inscriptions at Pasargadae as Darius-era forgeries, including the existence of an Old Persian version when Darius claims to have introduced the OP script, and the fact that the palace on which the inscriptions are found was not finished during the time of Cyrus. Stronach maintains that it was Persian practice to add inscriptions and reliefs at the end of construction, not before a structure's completion. See Stronach, "Of Cyrus, Darius and Alexander," 685-92.

could depict his ethnic heritage through representative Persian dress or features. Hair and dress also could identify the many peoples of his conquered lands, as they do the bound captives in the Behistun relief. Even the reciprocal admiration between Darius and Ahuramazda appears with some clarity in multiple instances of art from the era of the Achaemenid kings. Yet, tracing the lineage of Darius back to Achaemenes—not to mention the repeated heralding of Achaemenes over Teispes as the great Persian ancestor—required a linguistic specificity that images could not achieve. While his skill as a horseman, the power of his armies, and even the extent of his kingdom could be conveyed through reliefs, seals, coins, and the like, the particularities of his family tree could not. By commissioning a script for the Persians' own language, Darius further preserved his appearance of ethnic legitimacy, even as he communicated that message in translation across the languages of his subject peoples.

This is not say that, for either ancients or moderns, text is always a more effective means of communication than art. The image of the king spearing a lion on thousands upon thousands of imperial coins conveys the king's virility in a way that simply stating that "the king is powerful" does not. In the same manner, the repetition of the family names – "son of Hystaspes, grandson of Arsames, an Achaemenian" – across dozens of inscriptions (counting only the surviving ones) drives home Darius' lineage in a way that a cliff-face full of the family portraits of his ancestors never could. Darius needed the written word to etch into posterity the story of his accession in a way palatable to those who might otherwise attempt to overthrow him.

That Darius and his descendant kings trusted the written word to add nuance otherwise left ambiguous by art is further supported by the abundance of explanatory captions accompanying Persian reliefs. On the relief at Darius' tomb at Naqš-i Rustam,

small inscriptions beneath the spear-bearers and throne-bearers give their names and/or ethnicities. For example, “Gobryas, a Patischorian, spear-bearer of Darius the King” (DNc) appears in the three inscriptional languages with the spear-bearer figure. Attached to the thronebearers are statements such as, “This is the Persian” (DN I), “This is the Elamite” (DN III), and “This is the Scythian with the pointed cap” (DN XV). Similar captions, most now broken or illegible in parts, appear under the throne-bearers in the Behistun relief: e.g., “This is Nidintu-Bel... ; I am king in Babylon” (DBd). These labels eliminate the need for the viewer to interpret the figures represented, and thus eliminate the possibility that a viewer might interpret the figures in ways other than that intended by the king. Even an object that appears to be a doorknob at Persepolis bears the inscription, “Doorknob of precious stone, made in the house of Darius the King” (DPi). Those who came across that doorknob would mistake neither its purpose nor the one who commissioned it.[14]

I have stated that Achaemenid kings, especially Darius, deployed Old Persian inscriptions in the service of legitimating their claim to rule over the empire. For those propagandistic claims to have been effective, though, royal inscriptions had to be accessible to some degree to the imperial populace. Copies of some of the inscriptions were translated into additional languages and distributed throughout the empire, a fact indicated by the discovery of pieces of copies of the Behistun Inscription in Babylon and at the Jewish garrison at Elephantine in Egypt. The readership of the inscriptions, then,

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[14] Herzfeld (cited in E. Schmidt, *Persepolis* [3 vols.; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953], 50 n. 11) and Kent, *Old Persian Grammar,* 137, call the inscribed object in question a “doorknob.” Schmidt, *Persepolis* (vol. 2 of 3; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), 50, proposes an alternate identification of the object as a “wall peg” because of similarities with uninscribed wall pegs from Assur. Whether doorknob or wall peg, even this tiny detail asserted its royal Persian provenance – in three languages, no less.

was not limited to those who encountered the originals *in situ*. Moreover, the Aramaic copy from Elephantine shows that, at least in the case of the Behistun Inscription, readership was also not limited by time. Cowley dates the extant Aramaic copy from ca. 420 B.C.E., a century after the composition of the original trilingual inscription.[15] It appears that local scribes recopied the text, perhaps by imperial mandate, or perhaps as a simple scribal exercise; either way, the inscription remained accessible to a population separated temporally and geographically from the original text.

Nevertheless, accessibility to texts still does not guarantee a readership, especially since literacy across the empire probably remained a privilege of the relatively few. Although data for determining literacy rates in the ancient world, including the Persian Empire, is notoriously sparse, it is unlikely that literacy was pervasive across the Empire.[16] Susan Niditch has demonstrated that scholars tend to assume a much more widespread ancient literacy than was perhaps the case. She has shown that "literacy" in the ancient Near East, and in ancient Israel in particular, cannot be measured effectively using the standards of our modern print-literate culture. Rather than drawing a marked contrast between "literate" and "illiterate" people, or between "oral" and "written" traditions, Niditch suggests evaluating ancient Near Eastern literacy on an oral-literate continuum. She revisits the evidence for widespread literacy in ancient Israel, particularly texts from the Hebrew Bible, showing that those texts in fact reflect a heavily oral mentality, rather than a purely literate one. Epigraphic evidence from ancient Israel shows that scribes were available to read and write for anyone who required their services for letter-writing, military correspondence, or business transactions, but the literacy level

[15] A. Cowley, *Aramaic Papyri of the Fifth Century B.C.* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1923), 249.

[16] D. M. Lewis, "The Persepolis Tablets: Speech, Seal and Script," in *Literacy and Power in the Ancient World* (A. K. Bowman and G. Woolf, eds.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994): 17-32.

of the population as a whole was likely very low.[17] The very presence of a scribal class in Israel and Judah as well as in Mesopotamia indicates that literacy was reserved for a certain sector of society rather than the population as a whole.[18] There is no reason to suspect that any significant portion of the Persian Empire deviated from this scribal-class pattern.

How, then, could writing emerge as a hallmark of the Persian Empire if so many of its subjects could not read? One need not have been a reader of Old Persian, Elamite, Akkadian, or anything at all in order to have comprehended the value of the written word in era of the great kings. The mere presence of the grandest royal inscriptions (e.g., Behistun and the Naqš-i Rustam tombs) looming over the populace lent an iconic value to the texts and reliefs alike. Niditch observes that "in the late biblical period...people would be quite familiar with writing and its various uses in their culture and yet that the concept of writing as infused with the otherworldly, special, and unfamiliar remained appealing and strong."[19] The royal inscriptions were at the nexus of the strange and the familiar on the oral-literate continuum. The smaller inscriptions in the royal residences would have produced a similar effect in their observers, who saw the constant production of trilingual lines of text scrawled on walls, furniture, and artwork all around the Persian capitals. Alongside the intrigue that comes with the prominence and ubiquity of the royal inscriptions, the influence of their authorship must not be neglected. The mere presence of the inscriptions as a *royal* genre imbued written words with power. Kings, after all, were the only ones who had the money and power to commission such massive projects

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[17] S. Niditch, *Oral World and Written Word: Ancient Israelite Literature* (LAI; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996).

[18] P. R. Davies, *Scribes and Schools: The Canonization of the Hebrew Scriptures* (LAI; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998), 15.

[19] Niditch, *Oral World and Written Word*, 80.

as Behistun and the tombs at Naqš-i Rustam; the inscriptions' authorship and their import would hardly have been in question to any who encountered them.

On the question of royal inscriptions *qua* texts, the Behistun Inscription persists as an enigmatic case. Although the Behistun Inscription was distributed throughout the empire in translation(s), the "original" hewn inscription was at such a distance from the road that it could not be read even by literate people. The placement of the inscription underscores Darius' desire to communicate a generalized message of authority, even as its circulation in copied form underscores the king's desire to have the text of the inscription read by his subjects. While the inscription's content provides a reasoned case for Darius' rulership, the mere fact of the massive inscription asserts Darius' raw power. As Donald Polaski puts it, "Behistun also re-presents the person of the emperor as text, making his voice both unalterable and capable of being heard throughout the empire."[20] The Behistun Inscription, as both paradigm for and enigma among the Achaemenid royal inscriptions, laid out the standard for textuality and power in the Persian Empire. Having been established as a favorite tool of the powerful in Achaemenid Persia, the written word itself became a powerful tool, no matter who wielded it.

Bureaucratic Records

The Achaemenid royal inscriptions, which speak to the enduring cosmic power of the king, the legitimacy of his rule, and the immaculate order of his empire, constitute one of two significant sets of extant Achaemenid texts. The other set is a combination of

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[20] D. C. Polaski, "What Mean These Stones?" in *Approaching Yehud: New Approaches to the Study of the Persian Period* (ed. Jon L. Berquist; SemeiaSt 50; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), 48. Polaski also sees in the inaccessibility of the Behistun Inscription the valorization of the very act of copying "as an essential social practice, a practice of power" (39).

two collections found in the ruins of Persepolis, the Persian capital built by Darius: the Persepolis Treasury Tablets and the Persepolis Fortification Tablets, all administrative documents. Whereas the inscriptions provide royal propaganda on a grand scale, the thousands of tablets discovered among the ruins at Persepolis provide a glimpse into what Briant calls "the nitpicky, 'paper-shuffling' nature of the administrative system established to supervise production and storage."[21] Though a handful of other administrative texts from the Achaemenid era has been discovered across the reaches of the empire, the two caches of documents at Persepolis are large enough to allow systematic analysis and to draw reasonable conclusions about the habits of the Achaemenid bureaucracy. The following examination of Persian administrative texts will center around the Persepolis finds, but will also attend to the influence of other Persian-period documents, such as Elamite documents from Susa and the Aramaic papyri from the Jewish garrison at Elephantine.

The presence of well-stocked archives for an ancient Near Eastern empire is not in itself remarkable. Ancient Mesopotamia has yielded thousands upon thousands of archival records, and while the use of clay tablets rather than more perishable materials has given Assyria and Babylonia an archaeological edge, evidence for archives of texts exists for many ancient Near Eastern civilizations.[22] It is neither the simple survival of Achaemenid administrative records nor their number that testifies to the importance of the written text in Persian imperial administration; the tablets from the fortification walls and treasury at Persepolis illuminate the extent of Persia's written bureaucracy because of

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[21] Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander,* 424.

[22] A few notable archival finds showing the geographical and chronological diversity of ancient Near Eastern archives include Ebla, Umma, Kanish, Minoan Crete, and Elephantine. See M. Brosius, ed., *Ancient Archives and Archival Traditions,* for a survey of these and other ancient archives.

their content. Analysis of these texts reveals a complex, multilingual, and often redundant system for keeping track of money and rations. These texts show only a sliver of the inner workings of the Persian Empire, and as the records themselves attest, similar caches of thousands upon thousands of documents must have been located at governmental centers across the lands under Achaemenid rulership.

The Persepolis Fortification Tablets date from the thirteenth through twenty-eighth regnal years of Darius I (509-494 B.C.E.). Over 30,000 tablets and fragments were discovered in the northeastern corner of the fortification wall of the Persepolis Terrace. It has long been assumed that once the records were no longer needed, the discarded tablets were stuffed into the fortification wall to shore it up, but scholars of ancient archives are now beginning to question that assumption, opening the possibility that the Fortification records were meant to be stored indefinitely.[23] Though fewer than 2,200 of the Persepolis Fortification Tablets have been published thus far, it is apparent that most of the tablets record the transfer of commodities among imperial storehouses or the disbursement of commodities as payment or rations to individuals.

In the southeastern corner of the Persepolis Terrace, excavators discovered over 750 tablets and fragments in a set of rooms that appear to have served as a royal treasury from which monetary payments to government workers were disbursed. These Persepolis Treasury Tablets date from the thirty-second year of Darius' reign through the ninth year of Artaxerxes I (492-458 B.C.E.). All but one of the tablets from the treasury collection is written in Elamite, with only a single Akkadian tablet having survived in the treasury

[23] Brosius, "Reconstructing an Archive: Account and Journal Texts from Persepolis," in *Ancient Archives and Archival Traditions: Concepts of Record-Keeping in the Ancient World* (ed. Maria Brosius; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 264-283; Lewis, "The Persepolis Tablets: Speech, Seal and Script," 20-21.

ruins. The majority of the tablets from the fortification find are also in Elamite, though a group of a few hundred Aramaic tablets was discovered, along with a Greek tablet, two Akkadian tablets, and what is perhaps a Phrygian tablet.[24]

Hallock and Cameron point out that many more Aramaic texts, likely written on parchment, papyrus, or perhaps leather, may have been used in some relationship with the cuneiform tablets, as the presence of sealings and strings attached to the clay tablets indicates. The clay tablets were tied to sealings with strings, and the sealings probably surrounded parchment or papyrus rolls, which were destroyed in the conflagration that demolished Persepolis.[25] The evidence for at least two kinds of writing materials in the archives further attests to the multilingualism of the empire, since Aramaic lent itself to writing with ink on a flat surface, while pressing a wedged stylus into clay tablets was the preferred method for writing cuneiform scripts. The Achaemenids inherited the use of Aramaic in administrative tasks from the Assyrian and Babylonian imperial governments that preceded them. At the same time, the preponderance of Elamite texts in the Persepolis collections implies that the Achaemenids adopted Elamite archival practices and employed Elamite administrators to carry them out. [26] Finally, they brought to government their own Old Persian language, which appears to have remained a primarily oral language, since the only attestations of the script are in the royal inscriptions. Add to this the practically innumerable languages and dialects of local communities falling under the empire's rule, and a linguistic multiplicity among Achaemenid texts appears all but inevitable.

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[24] R. T. Hallock, *Persepolis Fortification Tablets* (OIP 92; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969); G. G. Cameron, *Persepolis Treasury Tablets* (OIP 65; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948).

[25] Cameron, *Persepolis Treasury Tablets*, 24-31; Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 422.

[26] Brosius, "Ancient Archives and Concepts of Record-Keeping," 13.

In his analysis of the Treasury corpus, Cameron proposes the following potential workflow for a payment from the Treasury:

> A verbal statement was dictated by the officer in charge of the workmen, translated into Aramaic, and written in Aramaic on parchment or papyrus. This document was probably rolled up, sealed, and forwarded to the Treasury office. There the seal would be broken and the text read. The accountants, however, were Elamites who needed a translation of the approved text into their own tongue in order to keep straight their records. This translation, therefore, was prepared by one of the Treasury officials, who frequently cast it in the form of a letter from himself to the treasurer and who always affixed his personal (official) seal to the tablet proper. Payment of the order could now be authorized by the treasurer or his assistant, but after the monies had been paid it was necessary to retain both versions. As the original, more important copy, the parchment was again rolled up or folded over, encircled with a clay ring, and sealed to authenticate it. Strings dangling from the sealing were then tied to strings protruding from the tablet, and both original and (translated) copy were filed away together for later examination or reference. The transaction was at an end.[27]

Cameron's hypothesis shows how the imperial policy of multilingualism necessarily generated copies upon copies of administrative documents. Accounts, administrators, and scribes, all with different linguistic skills, needed to be able to communicate with one another and to keep well-ordered the records that the empire so coveted. Because the records from the Persepolis Treasury show that the Treasury dealt almost exclusively with transactions relevant to Parsa,[28] the Persian homeland, Cameron's notion that initial verbal records were dictated in Old Persian and then translated into Aramaic and Elamite seems appropriate. It is also reasonable, however, to imagine that records dictated at other locations in the empire were dictated directly in Aramaic, which still remained the *lingua franca*.

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[27] Cameron, *Persepolis Treasury Tablets*, 30-31.
[28] Cameron, *Persepolis Treasury Tablets*, 11-12.

The presence of so many Persian loanwords of an administrative nature in Aramaic underscores the point that textual production, particularly in the form of record-keeping, was a peculiarly Persian obsession. In the discussion of his proposed Treasury workflow, Cameron hypothesizes that scribes charged with translating Old Persian dictations into Aramaic were forced to transliterate Old Persian words for which Aramaic had no equivalent.[29] Indeed, the multilingual administrative context was surely fertile ground for the transfer of vocabulary across languages, even if that transfer did not occur precisely because of the pressures of dictation. The Aramaic portions of the Hebrew Bible preserve three Persian loanwords that broaden the semantic range of Aramaic to describe administrative documents with greater specificity. These words, which add nuance to the Aramaic administrative lexicon, demonstrate that Aramaic had no need for these types of bureaucratic specificity until the onset of Persian rule.

נשתון, which derives from Old Persian *ništā-*, "enjoin, command," appears in both the book of Ezra and in the Aramaic papyri from Elephantine.[30] נשתון is usually translated as "letter" in Ezra, while Cowley opts for the even more general "written document." However, Aramaic already had another, more-frequently-used word for "letter": אגרה. In the extra-biblical corpus, the index to Cowley's *Aramaic Papyri* alone lists fifteen occurrences of אגרה, always translatable as "letter." The narrative in Ezra uses אגרה, meaning simply "letter," to label two of the seven pieces of correspondence to and from the Persian king interpolated into that book. נשתון is the narrative's word for three of the texts (Ezra 4:18, 4:23, 5:5). נשתון also appears in Hebrew (as an Aramaic loan-word) in

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[29] Ibid., 30.

[30] Kent, *Old Persian Grammar*, 210; "נִשְׁתְּוָן," *HALOT* 2:1935.

Ezra 4:7 to designate the letter from Bishlam to Artaxerxes,[31] as well as in Ezra 7:11 as the narrative's name for Artaxerxes' epistolary instructions to Ezra. In contrast to the generalized usage of אגרה, נשתון connotes correspondence that carries some official import. אגרה, then, is a broader term reflecting simply the mode of communication—a "mailed" letter as opposed to a face-to-face encounter or messenger—while נשתון more specifically reflects the official content of the letter as well as the governmental status of the sender(s). Therefore, while "letter" is a suitable translation for אגרה, נשתון is best translated as the qualified "*official* letter."

Another key term governing the Ezra correspondence is פתגם, which appears in the same form in both Hebrew and Aramaic as a Persian loanword.[32] פתגם is found in Ezra 4:17 (Artaxerxes to Rehum et al.) and 5:7 (Tattenai et al. to Darius) with the verb שלח, indicating a piece of written correspondence that was sent—mailed—like a letter. Not every פתגם is necessarily mailed, but its appearance with שלח allows for that possibility. Ezra 6:11 uses פתגם as a synonym for Darius' decree (טעם), thus weighting פתגם with official import. Two Hebrew texts in which פתגם also appears support the nuance of "official document." In Esther 1:20, פתגם is equivalent to a "royal word" (דבר־מלכות, 1:19) to be issued by the king.[33] Qohelet 8:11 uses פתגם to describe a declaration, report, or action, presumably official, that should deter potential perpetrators from evil deeds; the verse reads, "Because a report (פתגם) of an evil deed is not made

[31] This letter is merely referred to in Ezra, and its text is not included. I follow Blenkinsopp and the Tanakh in translating the last word of 4:7, ארמית, as an indicator of the language of what follows, with כתב functioning as a gloss on נשתון. Cf. Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah: A Commentary* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1988), 109-110.

[32] "פִּתְגָם," *HALOT* 2:1961.

[33] In this first chapter of Esther, ספרים communicate the פתגם through the lands of the empire.

quickly, the heart of human beings is filled to do evil." In Tattenai's letter to Darius, פתגם also describes the response from the elders of Yehud to Tattenai's investigating commission (Ezra 5:11). The use of the verb תוב ("return" in the Haphel), coupled with the fact that all other uses of פתגם in the Hebrew Bible connote a written document, implies that the elders responded to the commission by returning a *written* report of their authorization for rebuilding the Jerusalem temple. In Esther, Qohelet, and Ezra 6:11, then, פתגם is an official written document that is also *public*, one intended for a widespread audience. The nuance of "public," while not unequivocally present in Ezra 4:17 and 5:7, is still consistent with the context of those passages and a viable translation of פתגם. Like נשתון, the Persian-derived פתגם provides yet another lexeme representing an official written document, implying that Persian rule brought a wider range of written texts that required a broader administrative lexicon.

A third Persian loanword, פרשגן (פתשגן in Hebrew), appears four times in Ezra: twice with אגרה (4:11, 5:6) and twice with נשתון (4:23, 7:11). The Old Persian root of פתגם[34] indicates that the word means some sort of *copy* or *reproduction* of a document. The three Hebrew incidences of פתשגן in the Bible, all from Esther (Esther 3:14, 4:8, 8:13), emphasize that these copies are written, since in each case the copy is of a "writing" (כתב) that is disseminated throughout the empire. In three of Ezra's four cases (4:11, 5:6, 7:11) פרשגן describes the text of a letter that is interpolated into the narrative, thus explaining how the texts were available for inclusion in Ezra, if, indeed, the originals had been sent. The word's fourth usage (Ezra 4:23) also implies the existence of multiple

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[34] "פַּרְשֶׁגֶן," *HALOT* 2:1960. Proposals for the form of the root include **patičayana,* copy; *patičagna*, answer; **patičagna*, repetition, reproduction. Kent, *Old Persian Grammar*, 194: the Old Persian particle *patiy*, which can occur in adverbial, prepositional, and prefixed forms, implies some sort of repetition (adv.: "thereto, again").

copies, though in this instance even the letter's intended recipients (Rehum, Shimshai et al.) receive a פרשגן. It appears that Aramaic had to appropriate a word from Old Persian to accommodate the new trend of intensive textual reproduction initiated under Persian rule.

I have shown how the tablets from Persepolis attest to the multilingualism of the Persian Empire, as well as how the Persian obsession with hyper-documentation was woven into the very fabric of the Empire's administrative languages. I now turn to the content of the Persepolis tablets for insights into how the Persian bureaucracy functioned on a day-to-day basis.

Travel-ration texts from the Persepolis Fortification group corroborate descriptions from Herodotus and Xenophon of a complex, effective system of communication across the empire.[35] These texts indicate that government travelers received one day's rations at a time, supporting the Greek historians' claim that supply posts were placed one day's journey apart, though a day's journey was probably calculated at a walking pace rather than at the speed of a galloping horse. Hallock concludes that most of these travelers went on foot and accompanied animals laden with materials. Persia's specialized "fast messengers," however, rode horses that were kept available at each supply station, thus making it likely that a messenger utilized more than one horse in a given day.[36] Through the system of messengers, the Persian Empire had the means to convey texts across great distances at a considerable speed. At the same time, that very means of conveyance required its own set of "paperwork"; messengers

[35] For a discussion of Herodotus' and Xenophon's descriptions of the Persian postal system, see below.

[36] Hallock, *Persepolis Fortification Tablets*, 6.

would have borne their own ration orders in addition to the communiqués they delivered. Hallock describes this additional layer of textual bureaucracy:

> The travel-ration texts also, by their very existence, imply an elaborate system for the transfer of credits. The texts were inscribed at the supply station and sent to Persepolis. There, evidently, the commodities dispensed were credited to the account of the supplier and debited to the account of the official who had provided the travelers with a "sealed document" (*halmi*) or "authorization" (*miyatukkaš*).[37]

Even the postal system's horses generated ration texts.[38] The collection of travel-ration documents among the Persepolis Fortification Tablets shows that Persia had indeed developed a successful method to send written texts across the vast reaches of its empire. That method allowed the Achaemenid rulers to rely on texts to convey their authority throughout their imperial holdings, even as it constantly generated more texts as travelers, including royal messengers, required the production of authorizing documents and ration distribution records.

Hallock's original analysis of the fortification texts identified two primary types, as mentioned above: texts that recorded the transfer of commodities – what Hallock calls "large operations" – and those that recorded the distribution of commodities to individuals. Gerassimos Aperghis identifies a third category into which he redistributes 25% of the fortification texts. Aperghis describes the texts of this category as "receipts at storehouses of commodities supplied by producers…linked with both royal estates and holdings of Persian nobles and commoners."[39] He asserts that these commodities were

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[37] Ibid., 6, 40.

[38] See PF 1672, PF 2061, and PF 2062, which detail rations given to "express horses" (*pirradaziš*).

[39] G. G. Aperghis, "The Persepolis Fortification Texts—Another Look," in *Studies in Persian History: Essays in Memory of David M. Lewis* (M. Brosius and A. Kuhrt, eds.; AH XI; Leiden: Nederlands Instituut voor Het Nabije Oosten, 1998), 35-62.

received into the storehouses as payment for taxes on Persians, a concept that has not often been entertained in studies of the tablets, thanks in part to Herodotus' assertions that ethnic Persians were not subject to the taxation exacted across the rest of the empire.[40] Aperghis proposes that the term *kurmin*, key to Hallock's analysis, is best translated as "supplied by" rather than "entrusted to," thus making Persian nobles and commoners alike the providers of commodities rather than only the recipients of them.

In addition to its cogent reconsideration of how ethnic Persians may have contributed to royal storehouses, Aperghis' study reinforces the notion that texts were produced in duplicate or even triplicate at multiple points in a commodity's journey from field to storehouse to its ultimate recipient. Having supplied a storehouse with an animal or other commodity, a producer received a receipt, a "sealed document" (*harmi*) like the authorization for travel-rations discussed above. The local storehouse would have generated its own paperwork to record the transaction, and then it would have sent a copy of that report to the central archive at Persepolis: "So, we have a least one tablet-receipt for the producer, one to be sent to Persepolis (and eventually found in the Fortification archive) and perhaps one to be kept at the storehouse for its own records."[41] When the storehouse redistributed that commodity, yet another set of texts would have been generated; every withdrawal required a written authorization and then was written in a record, and so the "paper trail" continued. Meanwhile, the copies at Persepolis were kept on file and then periodically compiled into so-called "journal texts," which tallied expenditures over longer periods of time.[42]

All of this written work would certainly have required the government to employ

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[40] Ibid., 35, 59; Herodotus, *Hist.*, 3.97.
[41] Aperghis, "The Persepolis Fortification Texts," 53.
[42] Brosius, "Reconstructing an Archive: Account and Journal Texts from Persepolis," 278-280.

a multitude of scribes, and the Persepolis Fortification Tablets in fact list the disbursement of rations to scribes alongside travelling messengers and other government workers. Like the postal system, the scribal system both enabled and perpetuated the Persian bureaucracy. Because of their own need for rations, government scribes engendered texts in addition to writing them. Dozens of scribes, most described in groups as “Babylonian scribes” or, more specifically, “Babylonian scribes writing on parchment,” are apportioned rations in the Fortification texts. The reference to parchment makes it probable that these scribes wrote in Aramaic. The rations vary according to a system of rank, which, as Lewis points out, may also indicate that some scribes had administrative duties beyond copying texts or taking dictation.[43] Along with Babylonian scribes, a group of twenty-nine Persian scribes (called “boys,” designating group, not age) also receives rations for their work copying texts at Pittanan.[44] The language of their scribal work as either Aramaic or Elamite is not designated.[45]

In addition to affirming the presence of abundant scribes because of rations disbursed to them, the Fortification texts provide evidence about scribes because the texts themselves were, of course, written by scribes. Around forty-eight scribes can be identified by name in the Fortification texts, having identified themselves in the last lines of the tablets they inscribed.[46] For example, PF1807, in which wine rations are distributed to Babylonian scribes assigned by the official Parnaka, includes the note, “Takmaziya wrote (the text).” Some texts also include information about one who “communicated the message” after the scribe’s identification, as well as the involvement of a third figure in

[43] Lewis, “The Persepolis Tablets: Speech, Seal and Script,” 25.
[44] PF 871, 1137; Lewis, “The Persepolis Tablets: Speech, Seal and Script,” 26.
[45] Hallock, *Persepolis Fortification Tablets*, 30.
[46] Lewis, “The Persepolis Tablets: Speech, Seal and Script,” 26-28.

the text's transmission: "Hintamukka wrote (the text). Kamezza communicated the message. He received the *dumme* from Hitibel."[47] The meaning of Elamite *dumme* is uncertain; Hallock tentatively proposes "instructions."[48] Regardless of the precise meaning of *dumme*, these subscripts on Fortification texts show the people-power required of Persia's written bureaucracy. An official dictated the text; a scribe wrote the text; another worker communicated the text; yet another worker transmitted or transferred the *dumme*. To the multitudes of workers serving in these capacities – including both ethnic Persians and other subject peoples, such as the Babylonian scribes – Persia's penchant for documentation could have been no clearer than in those archival contexts in which the workers themselves participated.

The sampling of administrative texts preserved at Persepolis indicates that each step of every transaction in the Persian economy required the production of at least two documents, though probably more. With all of this record-keeping came a highly effective organizational system, but one that fed an ever-growing dependency on written texts for the system's survival. The written word became an effective tool for imperial administration in large part by Persia's efficient system for transmitting documents across the empire, but that very system in turn created the need for more documents, such as written authorizations for the disbursement of rations to mail carriers and scribes, as the empire employed and conscripted the service of innumerable administrative workers. The use of multiple languages in imperial record-keeping further stimulated the production of multiple copies of documents. The phenomenon of multilingualism also reveals that the

[47] Although this pattern appears in dozens of texts, these identical lines featuring the same three figures appear in PF 1813-1815 and PF 1817-1826. These multiple additional figures associated with the communication of a message appear only in tablets dictated by Persepolis officials at the highest levels of authority. Cf. Lewis, "The Persepolis Tablets: Speech, Seal and Script," 26.

[48] Hallock, *Persepolis Fortification Tablets*, 683.

administrative demands of the Persian rulers forced Aramaic to borrow sufficient administrative lexemes from Old Persian, a fact that underscores the novelty of administrative depth Persia brought to a language that had already served a major imperial power. An evaluation of the surviving administrative records from the Achaemenid Empire has shown that the Persian bureaucracy spun in a perpetual cycle of textuality.

Whereas the Persepolis tablets show how Persian hypertextuality invaded the day-to-day operations of the Empire, the Achaemenid royal inscriptions show how the Persian kings, beginning with Darius I, employed written texts in the service of their propagandistic messages. The inscriptions proved a particularly facile way to outline the kings' Achaemenid heritage and, particularly in Darius' case, to legitimate his claim to the throne. The distribution of some inscriptions throughout the empire ensured a widespread readership; the grand scale of the major inscriptions and the ubiquity of the minor ones exhibited the king's power and emphasized the iconic value of written texts. Persia's royal inscriptions and highly textual administration together projected an obsessive interest with the written word, with the power inherent in written texts, and with the ability of written texts to undergird the power centers of the empire. I now turn to texts from Persia's subjects to see how this obsession with textuality was perceived by the inhabitants of the empire.

The Mystique of Persian Hyper-Textuality

I have noted that no history of Achaemenid rule written from an ancient Persian perspective survives, nor is any known ever to have existed. As Briant remarks, "The

Great Kings and the Persians thus left the control of their historical memory to others. Here is an extraordinary situation: one must reconstruct the narrative thread of Achaemenid history from the writings of their subjects and their enemies....”[49] Chief among those extant sources are the works of Greek historians, especially Herodotus, Ctesias, and Xenophon, as well as several biblical texts, including Esther and Dan 6. Each of these works narrates scenes set in the era of Achaemenid rule, but via different genres. The Greek sources, as well as Ezra-Nehemiah, generally present themselves as narrative histories; they purport to convey details of actual events during Persian rule. Xenophon’s *Cyropaedia* orients its historiography around the biography of Cyrus the Great, but remains a history nonetheless. Esther and Dan 6, on the other hand, though set in the Persian court, are more clearly narrative fictions – a novella and short story, respectively – employing an omniscient narrative voice.

Neither history nor fiction — be it from Persia, its colonies, or its foes — can provide us with a wholly reliable picture of Achaemenid imperial rule. Narrative fiction by its very nature seeks to tell a story, not to convey a set of facts. At the same time, no historiography is purely “objective”; historians, located in particular times, places and political climates, betray their own perspectives and motivations in the ways they choose to present the events they are recording. The Greek accounts of the Persian Empire are especially notorious for their thinly veiled biases against the Persians and even against each other; Ctesias, for example refutes many points of Herodotus’ history outright, even calling him a liar.[50] Aperghis’ work on the Persepolis Fortification Tablets, discussed above, has shown that Herodotus may simply have been incorrect in his perception that

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[49] Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 7.

[50] Photius, *The Bibliotheca* (ed. N. G. Wilson; London: Duckworth, 1994), 55. Ctesias’ work survives only secondarily, epitomized and quoted in other sources.

Persians were not required to pay taxes.[51] The Greek "histories," then, like any other history, cannot simply be equated with "facts."

Despite their potential pitfalls, the histories and stories of the Persian Empire from Greek and biblical sources alike remain useful collections of information about ancient Persia and, in particular, about writing as a Persian imperial strategy. Persia's interest in the written word and reputation for wielding it as an instrument of imperial power emerge from the multifarious tales of military strategy, political intrigue, and court wisdom, even when the finer details of those accounts remain dubious. The result is a portrait of imperial textuality well-corroborated among the Greek histories, among the biblical materials, and across both collections.

Greek Sources

Greek texts have been well-plumbed for any materials that may inform our knowledge of Achaemenid history; Briant has done a particularly masterful and thorough job of this. Here I wish only to highlight portions of the Greek materials that most directly impact the study of the role of writing in Achaemenid Persia. These texts are drawn from the works of Greek historians who lived and wrote during the era of Achaemenid rule: Herodotus, Xenophon, and Ctesias.

Both Herodotus and Xenophon testify to the speed and facility with which letters could travel from one end of the empire to the other. Postal stations were positioned according to the distance a horse could run without collapse, and couriers traveled day or night, in all types of weather, to deliver their messages. Xenophon proclaims the Persian

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[51] Herodotus, *Hist.*, 3.97.

postal system "the fastest overland travelling on earth."[52] Likewise, Herodotus declares that "there is nothing mortal that accomplishes a course more swiftly than do these messengers, by the Persians' skilful contrivance."[53] Xenophon attributes the invention of the Persian postal system to Cyrus the Great, as one of the ways Cyrus found to control his burgeoning empire. Xenophon's observation is astute; regardless of which Persian king deserves credit for overseeing the system, the speed by which written communiqués were conveyed across the empire is indeed evidence of the importance the transmission of texts held for the empire's management. I have shown previously that the Persepolis Fortification Tablets provide material evidence to substantiate the Greek historians' observations of the Persian postal service. The everyday operations of the empire depended upon the swift movement of written documents across long distances; within those documents were orders both mundane and extraordinary from the king and his officials. As a messenger rode across the Persian Empire holding a written order sealed with the king's seal, he clutched imperial power in his hands.

Perhaps the most dramatic of the Greek evidence for Persia's reliance on written texts is Herodotus' account of the execution of Oroetes. Bagaeus, chosen to do the will of the king, has many letters written and sealed with the seal of the king. Bagaeus brings the letters to the company of Oroetes at Sardis for his scribe, "one of the royal scribes who attend all governors," to read aloud in front of Oroetes' spearmen:

> Seeing that they [the spearmen] paid great regard to the rolls and yet more to what was written therein, he gave another, wherein were these words: "Persians! King Darius forbids you to be Oroetes' guard," which when the guard heard they lowered their spears before him. When Bagaeus saw that they obeyed the letter thus far, he took heart and gave the last roll to the

[52] Xenophon, *Cyr.*, 8.6.17.
[53] Herodotus, *Hist.*, 8.98.

> scribe, wherein were these words: "King Darius charges the Persians in Sardis to kill Oroetes. Hearing this the spearmen drew their scimitars and killed Oroetes forthwith.[54]

Readers learn from Herodotus here that scribes were appointed to governors, an unsurprising fact given the administrative tasks required of the local leaders. The presence of the scribe and his role as the reader of the letters in front of the assembled company implies a limited expectation of literacy; the scribe seems to have read to the guards not just out of expediency, but out of necessity. Most remarkable, though, is the authority the guards ascribe to the rolls. Bagaeus himself was unsure of the guards' allegiance to a written communiqué from the king until he could observe it. Each successive letter is a deeper test not simply of the guards' allegiance to the king, but to their allegiance to the king *as represented by his texts.* For Oroetes' guards, illiteracy proved no impediment to paying "great regard to the rolls and yet more to what was written therein." The text takes on an iconic function in ancient Persia, holding authority even for those who cannot – or do not – read its contents themselves, the same phenomenon Niditch identifies in the ancient Israelite context. Herodotus' account here, like his and Xenophon's depictions of Persia's messenger system, show how in Persia the written word served as a metonym for the king's power.

The work of Ctesias provides one more insight, albeit an indirect one, into the circumstances of textuality in ancient Persia. Ctesias served as the personal physician to Artaxerxes II during his contests with his brother, Cyrus the Younger, who was trying to take the Persian throne; by way of perspective, Xenophon's *Anabasis* recounts that same campaign as a member of the Greek force enlisted by Cyrus. Although Ctesias' *Persica*

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[54] Herodotus, *Hist.*, 3.128.

has not survived independently, portions of it are epitomized or preserved in the work of later Greek authors, chiefly Photius and Diodorus Siculus. Ctesias' accounts are notoriously unreliable even among the Greek sources, transmitting, as Briant puts it, "nothing but a slanted view dominated by the tortuous machinations of wicked princesses and the murky conspiracies of crafty eunuchs."[55] Nonetheless, we find a kernel of interest for our purposes in Ctesias' claim to have drawn from the *βασιλικῶν διφθερῶν*, literally, "royal skins," as a source for his work.

These "skins"–surely referring to animal hide used as a writing surface–are where, according to Ctesias, "the Persians in accordance with a certain law of theirs kept an account of their ancient affairs."[56] Whether such written histories of Persia existed, or, if they did, whether Ctesias had access to them, remains suspect. Briant rightly notes that "there is not another shred of evidence of such Persian historical archives, aside from a late and suspect tradition that attributes their destruction to Alexander."[57] It is important, however, to distinguish Persia's potential *historical* tradition from its *archival* one. The process of archiving records—one that Ctesias implies may even have been part of Persian law—is certainly well-attested in the archaeological record, as I have shown, and Ctesias' vague phrase "ancient affairs" (παλαιὰς πράξεις) by no means must equate to a narrative history. In Ezra 6:1 Darius issues a search in the archives (בית ספריא) for a record of a decree, and the book of Esther implies that details of Persian court life were recorded on an ongoing basis (Esth 2:23), a comment providing the closest parallel to Ctesias' reference to royal archives. When considered with other accumulated evidence, then, Ctesias provides readers with another indication that the Persian Empire placed

[55] Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 7.
[56] Diodorus Siculus, *WH*, 2.32.4.
[57] Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 6.

unprecedented value in written records – so much so that Ctesias is led to write that record-keeping of royal affairs was a legal obligation.

Biblical Sources

The book of Esther and the sixth chapter of the book Daniel are two of the very few pieces of literature outside of the Greek corpus that are set in the Persian court. The stories share the genre of the Jewish court story, in which a Jew serves in the court of a foreign king and distinguishes himself (or, in the case of Esther, herself) by his wisdom and righteousness. Although court legends can be identified in literature from outside of Yehud, including Egypt (*Onkhsheshonq*) and Greece (Herodotus), Lawrence Wills has shown that "the genre was vastly more popular and developed as a genre in the Persian-ruled lands of the ancient Near East than elsewhere."[58] Wills postulates that the importance placed on the court by the Persian Empire, especially as reflected in the centrality of the court in art surviving from the Achaemenid era, made ancient Persia a fertile place for the flourishing of the court story genre.[59] The conscription of scribes from subject peoples into the empire's administrative work, described above in our discussion of the Persepolis tablets, underscores the possibility that these court stories arose from the tales—or perhaps even the scribal hand—of actual courtiers serving close to the foreign king and his government. It is reasonable to assume, then, that the details of Persian court life depicted with such vibrancy in Esther and Daniel are rooted in the experiences of their storytellers, witnesses to Achaemenid rule.[60]

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[58] L. M. Wills, *The Jew in the Court of the Foreign King: Ancient Jewish Court Legends* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990): 198-99.

[59] Ibid., 40.

[60] J. J. Collins, *Daniel* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 272-273, cites the "sympathetic portrayal of the gentile king" in Daniel 6 as evidence that the story must have arisen before

In the book of Esther, the Persian king Ahasuerus (i.e., Xerxes) exercises his power through writing. The king writes a “royal word” (דבר־מלכות) into the law removing Vashti’s queenship from her (1:19), and he sends out letters throughout the empire that declare each man master in his house and require him to speak his own language, hoping to ward off any chaos or contempt for husbands that might be generated by Vashti’s insubordination (1:16-22). Eunuchs shuttle messages to and from the king, a practice affirmed by Herodotus (1:12, 15; 4:4, 5).[61] When the king gives Haman permission to initiate the destruction of all Jews in Persia (3:10-12), the king hands over his signet ring, thus handing over power to write the royal decree (3:8-14). Royal decrees, once written and sealed with the king’s seal, are irrevocable (1:19, 8:8). After Haman’s execution, Ahasuerus gives the signet ring to Mordecai, transferring his power and enabling Mordecai and Esther to write “according to what is good in your eyes” (כתוב בעיניכם) and “in the name of the king” (בשם המלך) (8:8). These scenes of the exercise and transfer of power convey a perception of Persian rule that sees authority concentrated in the act of writing; the one who can *write* for the king—not simply speak for him—controls the fate of an entire people.

The book of Esther describes the Persian king’s writing as multilingual and widely distributed. Three different decrees from the king are sent out “to every province according to its script and every people according to its tongue” (מדינה ומדינה ככתבה ועם ועם כלשנו) (1:22, 3:12, 8:9). This practice of widespread distribution aligns with Darius’s claim in the Behistun Inscription, “Afterwards this inscription I sent off everywhere among the provinces” (DB §70 4.91-92), as well as with the discovery of copies of the

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the Maccabean period. The utter lack of Greek vocabulary in the MT book of Esther similarly argues for a pre-Hellenistic date for that story.

[61] Herodotus, *Hist.,* 3.77 and 3.130.

Behistun Inscription in various locations in the empire. Multilingualism, affirmed as an Achaemenid value by the dozens of extant trilingual royal inscriptions, appears in Esther as a hallmark of Persian royal decrees. The existence of a copy of the Behistun Inscription in Aramaic, a language not attested in the original incarnations of any of the inscriptions, helps to corroborate the multilingual nature of royal communiqués.

In Esther, writing effects change within the court, not just out in the provinces. Accounts of palace life are "written in the book of daily affairs before the king" (ויכתב בספר דברי הימים לפני המלך) (2:23), and the king's subsequent consultation of that book initiates Haman's downfall (6:1). The notion that all details of life in the Susa palace are recorded underscores the ubiquity of textuality in the book of Esther's portrayal of Persia. That the king would turn to that text as treatment for insomnia injects the portrayal of Persian textuality with humor and reminds readers that no room in the Persian palace, not even the king's bedroom, is without its texts. Something so mundane as the daily palace report turns the entire narrative, underscoring the way the book of Esther sees the act of writing woven into the fabric of life under Persian rule.

The title character of the book of Daniel appears in stories set during the rules of Babylonian and Persian kings. As a member of the king's court and, in Dan 6, as a head satrap under Darius, Daniel distinguishes himself by his "extraordinary spirit" (5:12, 6:4), a spirit that is said to be a "spirit of gods" (4:5, 6, 15; 5:11, 14). The wisdom that accompanies his remarkable spirit enables Daniel to be not only a literal reader, but also an interpreter of texts and dreams alike. Writing appears in Daniel, as in Esther, as a prominent theme of the book: God grants the four youths at Nebuchadnezzar's court knowledge of "everything written and wise" (בכל־ספר וחכמה) (1:17); a disembodied hand scribbles on the wall at Belshazzar's banquet (5:5); Daniel writes down his dreams (7:1);

Daniel finds “in the books” (בספרים) the years appointed for the destruction of Jerusalem (9:2); those people found “written in the book” (כתוב בספר) are promised deliverance from the coming “time of distress” (12:1).[62]

Despite the importance accorded to writing in the book of Daniel, it is ultimately Daniel’s access to esoteric knowledge that sets him apart from the other wise men in the king’s court. He is the one who can interpret dreams and visions, be they the kings’ or his own. When confronted by the writing on the wall, King Belshazzar asks for someone who can both read the writing *and* tell him the interpretation (5:7, 8, 17); King Nebuchadnezzar, refusing to reveal the contents of his dream to his wise men, insists that the Chaldeans both tell him his own dream *and* give the interpretation (2:5). These parallel pairs—reading a text and interpreting it, discerning the king’s dream and interpreting it—underscore that *literacy* is not the sought-after skill in Daniel; instead, the book values access to hidden knowledge, which may or may not present itself through writing. The apocalyptic knowledge of Dan 7-12, though sometimes described as being contained in books (9:2; 12:1, 4), nevertheless requires *understanding* (root בין) (9:2, 10:1), not simply literacy, in order to be apprehended. Unlike Esther, then, the book of Daniel prioritizes esoteric knowledge over the written word itself.

Nevertheless, the portrayal of the Persian king’s relationship to writing in the book of Daniel remains remarkably similar to the obsession with texts mocked in the book of Esther. Nebuchadnezzar, a Babylonian king, issues decrees in Daniel just like any other imperial rulers might. Nebuchadnezzar declares that those Chaldeans unable to

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[62] D. C. Polaski, “Mene, Mene, Tekel, Parsin: Writing and Resistance in Daniel 5 and 6,” *JBL* 123.4 (2004): 649-669, posits an “ideology of writing” in the book of Daniel. While Polaski is correct to note the prominence of writing as a theme in the book, I believe he conflates the book’s emphases on writing and on privileged knowledge. It is the latter that provides the stronger basis for a true “ideology.”

tell him his dream and its interpretations will be dismembered and their houses destroyed (2:5). In the following chapter, Nebuchadnezzar decrees via his herald that all his imperial subjects who hear the appointed instruments are to fall down and worship the statue he has erected, or otherwise be burned alive (3:3-6). After witnessing the survival of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the furnace, Nebuchadnezzar issues a new decree forbidding blasphemy against the men's god, again at the peril of homelessness and dismemberment (3:29). Finally, a decree from Nebuchadnezzar summons the wise men of Babylon to interpret another of his dreams (4:6). None of these decrees from the Babylonian king is specified as a *written* proclamation; in fact, in Dan 3 it is even the oral nature of the proclamation, delivered by herald, which is emphasized. In Dan 5, Belshazzar, himself under a "decree" (טעם) of wine, issues all of his orders via calls and proclamations, not written edicts.

In contrast to all of these Babylonian decrees, Persian decrees in Daniel are expressly *written* documents.[63] The satraps conspiring against Daniel ask Darius to

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[63] Daniel 5:30-6:1 identifies the successor to the "Chaldean King Belshazzar" as "Darius the Mede." This identification of Darius is historically problematic on several counts. The Persian kingdom, not the Median, followed the Neo-Babylonian ("Chaldean") empire. Cyrus II was the first king of the Persian Empire, having defeated the Medes in 550 B.C.E. and the Babylonians in 539 B.C.E. Cambyses followed Cyrus, and then Darius I became king of Persia in 522 B.C.E. There is no historical record of a king known as "Darius the Mede," even though the book of Daniel refers to this figure again at both 9:1 and 11:1. However, Darius I of Persia is named by Herodotus, *Hist.*, 3.89, as the historical figure who established the Persian system of satrapies. Collins, *Daniel*, 264, holds that the "original" story of Daniel in the lions' den "undoubtedly referred to Darius I of Persia," while the historical framework, including Darius' identification as "Mede," was added by a redactor to reflect the second kingdom (i.e., between Babylonia and Persia) in the four-kingdoms schema of Dan 2 (cf. Collins, *Daniel*, 29-37). That Media was expected to succeed the Babylonian Empire is reflected in prophecies of Jeremiah (51:11, 28) and Isaiah (13:17).Thus, identifying Darius as a Mede allowed for consistency with prior prophecy and with the four-kingdoms schema of the book of Daniel, but the core of the Dan 6 story can be said confidently to reflect a Persian milieu, even before one considers its many tropes consistent with other portrayals of Persian government. For additional evaluations of the identity of Darius the Mede, see L. Hartman and A. Di Lella, *The Book of Daniel* (AB 23; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1978), 29-42, and H. H. Rowley, *Darius the Mede and the Four World Empires in the Book of Daniel: A Historical Study of Contemporary Theories* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1959). Rowley maintains Media's place in the four-kingdoms schema

"establish the decree and write a document" (תקים אסרא ותרשם שתבא) calling for anyone who prays to anyone other than the king for thirty days to be thrown into a den of lions (6:8-9). It is Darius' *writing* of the document that gives it its power, for the text describes Daniel continuing his prayers even though (or, perhaps, precisely because) he knows that the document has been written (ידע די־רשיםכתבא) (6:11). It is not that Daniel has heard the decree of the king, or even that he knows that a rule has been established; rather, he knows that the king's word takes force when it has been written down. Once written, the king's decree cannot be revoked, as the king himself acknowledges (6:13). Darius adds the same stamp of irrevocability to the den of lions that he would add to any of his written texts: the seal of his signet ring. Together with the seals of his nobles, Darius' seal over the mouth of the lions' den punctuates the irreversible nature of his own decree and, thus, of Daniel's fate. When Daniel survives his night with the lions, the king writes "to all peoples, nations, and tongues in all the earth," issuing a decree that orders them to fear Daniel's god (6:26-27).

Darius' power to command in this story is not limited to writing; he sometimes simply speaks (אמר), and his will is done, as when he commands Daniel's accusers and their families to be thrown into the lions' den (6:25; cf. 6:17, 6:24). Yet, throughout the book of Daniel, Darius stands out as the only king who specifically employs writing in the service of his rule. As in the book of Esther, writing from the Persian king becomes a

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but holds that Darius the Mede is a conflation and distortion of traditions associated with Cyrus the Great and Darius the Great of Persia. For more on the historical relationship between the Medes and the Persians, see Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 13-28. For the conflation of "Medes" and "Persians" in Greek sources, see C. Tuplin, "Persians as Medes," in *Continuity and Change: Proceedings of the Last Achaemenid History Workshop* (AH 8; ed. by H. Sancisi-Weerdenburg, A. Kuhrt, and M. C. Root; Leiden: Nederlands Instituut voor Het Nabije Oosten, 1994), 235-256.

law that is absolutely irrevocable.[64] Once inscribed, the written word takes on its own power, a power that exceeds even the authority that the king himself embodies. It is significant that this imperial reliance on the power of texts is a characteristic of the *Persian* king in Daniel. The text presents both Nebuchadnezzar and Darius as emperors – i.e., as kings who address all "peoples, nations, and tongues" (עממיא אמיא ולשניא) as their subjects. Only Darius, though, has his authority superseded by his own signature. Like Esther, the book of Daniel portrays the Persian Empire as a kingdom that invests unparalleled authority in the written word.

Conclusions

The picture of Persian rule painted by the biblical books of Daniel and Esther is of an empire so invested in textual authority that the king's word, once written down, takes on power that surpasses that of the king himself. These stories from the Hebrew Bible affirm Achaemenid multilingualism as attested in royal inscriptions and the Persepolis tablets. The king's seal, marker of his written documents, appears in both Esther and Daniel as metonym for the king's inalterable authority, just as it does in the Persepolis Fortification Texts. The Greek sources provide similar echoes of the Persian material evidence, attesting to the remarkable efficiency of the Persian messenger system and providing anecdotal accounts of simple governmental duties turned into complex textual

[64] Collins, *Daniel*, 273 n. 89, cites the ostensible irrevocability of Persian law in Dan 6 as a marker of the author's confusion about certain details of Darius I's government. While it is indeed likely that the author of Daniel lived later in the Persian period than the time of Darius' rule, it is reasonable to assume in conjunction with the book of Esther that some sense of finality was associated with a written imperial order. The irrevocability of Persian law shows up in these stories as a trope, and suggesting it may be a hyperbole born from experience.

exercises. Theopompus of Chios even lists papyrus alongside weaponry as an indispensable staple for equipping Persian armies![65]

The literary evidence of the Greek and biblical sources shows how a reputation for hyper-textuality persisted in the historical and literary imaginations of Persia's subject peoples. The material record from Achaemenid Persia testifies to a Persian obsession with documentation from inside the Persian ruling class, demonstrating how the Great Kings turned to writing to communicate both detailed justifications for and iconic representations of their imperial power. Persia's textual tradition began simply as a way effectively to organize its rule; inscriptions served, like artistic representations, as propaganda, while its administrative practices helped organize the business of the empire across its vast territories. What that tradition became, however, was the hallmark of Persian imperial rule. When Persia's subjects wrote of their experience of empire, they wrote of the influence of Persia's written edicts alongside the might of its military forces. For biblical texts with a Persian provenance, including Chronicles, Ezra-Nehemiah, and Esther, the mystique of Persian hyper-textuality became more than just an historical backdrop for the biblical stories. These books appropriated hyper-textuality as a strategy for acquiring and retaining power, and they worked that strategy into the very fabric of their narratives. It is to these texts that I now turn.

[65] *FGrH* 115 F 263; Lewis, "The Persepolis Tablets: Speech, Seal and Script," 20.

CHAPTER 3

Writing and Written Texts in Chronicles

Introduction

Susan Niditch rightly calls the book of Chronicles the Hebrew Bible's "one fairly certain example of composition in a literate mode, the use of a manuscript to produce another written work...."[1] Its narrative has been crafted by stitching together, glossing, or even reworking copious citations from a variety of sources, chief among them a source closely resembling a large chunk of the Deuteronomistic History. Some of the Chronicler's sources are credited in the text, while others are left to the reader to discern. The abundance of source material employed in Chronicles drives the conclusion that the book has an inherently written, not oral, nature. This patchwork of borrowed pieces of texts, supplemented with the Chronicler's own historiographical voice, forms a new, original creation, one with its own perspective on the history of Israel from the era of the first human beings until the Babylonian exile.

The post-exilic provenance of Chronicles is well established. To be sure, Chronicles makes use pre-exilic and exilic sources; nevertheless, Chronicles as a whole is

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[1] S. Niditch, *Oral World and Written Word*, 127.

almost irrefutably a post-exilic product. The book's language is rife with the markers of Late Biblical Hebrew, suggesting a date of composition in at least the post-exilic era, understood broadly.[2] The Chronicler appears to know both the Pentateuch and the Deuteronomistic History in their canonical forms, as well as Zechariah, including Zech 1:1-8, which dates to the early post-exilic period.[3] The number of descendants of David listed in 1 Chr 3 suggests, mathematically speaking, that the Chronicler is providing a lineage that extends after the exile, putting the Chronicler himself as late as or later than those last descendants.[4] The book ends with an acknowledgement of the rule of Persia (1 Chr 36:20), as well as a portion of the edict of Cyrus, written out in fuller form at the beginning of Ezra. Objections to some of these separate pieces of evidence can be raised, particularly on redaction-critical grounds; the edict of Cyrus, for example, seems loosely tacked onto the end of the book and could be an addition by a later hand. Nevertheless, taken together, this collection of data testifies persuasively to the post-exilic dating of Chronicles.

Pinpointing exactly where in the post-exilic era the dating of Chronicles should be situated is less clear than establishing the book's general lateness among biblical texts. The use of so much different source material inevitably means that different sections of the text date from different times, further complicating efforts to pinpoint "*the* date" of the book's composition. The anachronistic use of the Persian *daric* at 1 Chronicles 29:7 suggests a date in at least the fifth century B.C.E., since the *daric* appears to have been

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[2] S. Japhet, *I & II Chronicles: A Commentary* (OTL; Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1993), 25; R. Polzin, *Late Biblical Hebrew: Toward an Historical Typology of Biblical Hebrew Prose* (Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1976).

[3] Ibid., 27; L. Allen, "The First and Second Book of Chronicles," in *The New Interpreter's Bible: Old Testament Survey* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2005), 136-143. The Chronicler also cites Zechariah 4:10 at 2 Chronicles 16:9; cf. R. Klein, "Chronicles, Book of, 1-2," *ABD* 1:992-1002.

[4] Japhet, *I & II Chronicles,* 26.

introduced by Darius in the late 6th century; redaction critics, however, are quick to point out that such detailed internal evidence could be explained away by later editorial additions or glosses. Knoppers turns to extra-biblical citations of Chronicles in the second and first centuries B.C.E. as evidence that the text of the book was already well established by that time, and he factors in 100-200 years for migration and translation of the text from its Hebrew, Judean context to its Greek versions in the Diaspora.[5] Japhet finds the most likely date for Chronicles to be the early Hellenistic period, in the late fourth century B.C.E. [6] Knoppers date Chronicles in the late fourth or early third century B.C.E., placing the book's composition in the era of transition between the Persian and Hellenistic empires; Albertz, too, looks to an early Hellenistic date (330-250 B.C.E).[7] Klein prefers an earlier fourth-century date, in the "first half of the fourth century BCE, before the end of the Persian period and the arrival of Alexander the Great."[8]

Dating Chronicles also goes hand-in-hand with establishing its relationship to Ezra-Nehemiah. The verbatim inclusion of Ezra-Nehemiah's presentation of the Edict of Cyrus (Ezra 1:1-3) at the end of 2 Chronicles (2 Chr 36:32-33) suggests first of all that Chronicles must date from after 539 B.C.E., the first year of the reign of Cyrus the Great. More pointedly, the quotation implies some link, be it historical, literary, or both,

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[5] Knoppers, *I Chronicles 1-9*, 105-111.

[6] Japhet, *I & II Chronicles*, 23-28.

[7] R. Albertz, *A History of Israelite Religion in the Old Testament Period* (trans. John Bowden; 2 vols.; London: SCM Press, 1994), 2:545; Knoppers, *I Chronicles 1-9*, 116.

[8] Klein, *1 Chronicles: A Commentary* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006), 16. Schniedewind, *How the Bible Became a Book*, 235 n. 3, also puts Chr squarely at the end of the Persian period. P. Ackroyd, *The Chronicler in His Age* (JSOTSup 101; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1991), 8-86 and 344-359, dates "the Chronicler" to the Persian period, taking the identity of the Chronicler to be either the common author of Ezra-Nehemiah and Chronicles or a "guiding hand" that shaped them together. P. Dirksen, *I Chronicles* (HCOD; Leuven: Peeters, 2005), 5-6, prefers to date Chronicles to the first half of the fourth century, using calculations based on the genealogical material, as well as the observation that Chronicles betrays no turmoil that might be associated with the transition from Persian to Greek rule. However, as I have pointed out in ch. 1, the transition between the two empires would not necessarily have been deeply, nor immediately, felt.

between the books.[9] Biblical scholarship has long attributed the link to a common authorship. Rabbinic commentary on Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah credited the books' authorship to Ezra. Beginning in the early 19th century with the work of Leopold Zunz, biblical scholarship began to attribute the books to the work of "the Chronicler," a single hand who authored Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah as a continuous history of Judah into the era of Persian rule.[10] The work of Williamson and Japhet has been at the fore of the more recent trend to see Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah as completely separate works sharing no common authorship. Critics of the common-authorship hypothesis present particularly compelling evidence by outlining the contrasting themes and interests of the two books. [11] For example, Chronicles gives pronounced attention to the Davidic monarchy and spurns the northern kingdom, while Ezra-Nehemiah neither lingers on the Davidic line nor engages the politics behind the divided monarchy. Similarly, Chronicles looks to all twelve tribes for the identity of the people of Israel, while Ezra-Nehemiah names only Judah and Benjamin as the ancestral lines. Furthermore, Chronicles highlights the role of prophets in Israel and Judah, while Ezra-Nehemiah hardly refers to prophecy at all.[12]

These and more thematic inconsistencies between Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah, coupled with linguistic and stylistic divergences, lead me to affirm the conclusions of Japhet, Williamson, and the emerging scholarly consensus that Chronicles

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[9] Japhet, *I & II Chronicles,* 27.

[10] L. Zunz, *Die gottesdienstlichen Vorträge der Juden, historisch entwickelt* (Berlin: A. Asher, 1832).

[11] For a full summary of thematic evidence against common authorship drawn from Williamson and Japhet's work, see R. Klein, "Chronicles, Book of, 1-2," 993.

[12] Ezra 5:1 and 6:14 refer to Haggai and Zechariah as prophets whose prophesying aids the restoration effort, while Nehemiah names Shemaiah, Noadiah, and their cohort as prophets who sought to intimidate Nehemiah and impede the wall-building (Neh 6:10-14). Nehemiah is also accused of inciting prophets to call him king (Neh 6:7).

and Ezra-Nehemiah do not share common authorship.[13] The temporal relationship between the books, however, is less clear-cut. Certainly the chronology within the books is straightforward: Ezra-Nehemiah picks up right where Chronicles leaves off, at the issuing of the edict of Cyrus. Given the difficulty in dating both books, but particularly Chronicles, with any real precision, one cannot say with any great confidence whether Chronicles or Ezra-Nehemiah was written first. For the purposes of this project, I simply affirm that the two texts are roughly contemporaneous, both dating from the transition period from Persian to Hellenistic rule, approximately the second half of the fourth century through the first half of the third century.

Scholars seeking to situate Chronicles squarely into the Persian period can point to the lack of Hellenisms in the language of the book as evidence for an earlier post-exilic date. Japhet, on the other hand, flags this dearth as a potentially problematic criterion by which to date the book, since clear evidence of Persian influence also seems scant. Japhet claims, "Contrary to Ezra-Nehemiah, no trace of the Persian administrative system is evidenced in Chronicles."[14] I contend that the citation-heavy, "patchwork" nature of Chronicles is itself a reflection of the Chronicler's engagement with the Persian administrative system. While literacy generally became more accessible and ubiquitous as the first millennium waned, Chronicles' interest in written texts does not suggest simply an overall ancient Near Eastern *Zeitgeist* for the written over the oral arising in the post-exilic era. Instead, Chronicles echoes the new, uniquely Persian textuality initiated by the Achaemenid Empire, particularly via the book's pronounced interest in

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[13] J. Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah,* remains a particularly notable scholarly voice promoting common authorship for Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah.

[14] Japhet, *I & II Chronicles,* 25.; H.G.M. Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah* (WBC 16. Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1985), xxi-xxxv; Knoppers, *1 Chronicles1-9*, 72-89.

genealogies and the diversity of its source citations. I make no psychologizing claims about the intentionality of this process on the part of the Chronicler; instead, I see in the text he produced an effective—though not necessarily calculated—deployment of written texts to undergird his own work with authority. In other words, the book of Chronicles reflects a Yehudian appropriation of the textual values propagated by the Persian Empire.

Interpretive Approaches

The Chronicler's repeated appeals to and uses of sources have especially encouraged redaction-critical approaches to the study of the book.[15] Chronicles' echoing of Samuel-Kings[16] provides an obvious starting point for this method, while the book's quotation of the Pentateuch, Ezra-Nehemiah, and prophetic material fuels these reading strategies. Repeated references to annals of kings and prophets encourage a parsing of the text to identify kernels "original" to Chronicles. The lengthy genealogical prologue, which changes so abruptly to narrative at 1 Chr 10, suggests that the genealogies could form a separate composition affixed to the narrative core. The inclusion of the Cyrus edict at the end of the book can seem similarly detachable. In fact, it is the "written-ness" of Chronicles – the deliberate reworking of other written texts into a new one – that makes the tools of redaction criticism such useful instruments for the study of this book. Later incarnations of Chronicles, specifically in 1 Esdras and the Septuagint's

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[15] For a detailed overview of redaction-critical work on Chronicles, see S. L. McKenzie, "The Chronicler as Redactor," in *The Chronicler as Author: Studies in Text and Texture* (JSOTSup 263; ed. M. P. Graham and S. L. McKenzie; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1999), 70-90.

[16] For a tabular summary of parallels and divergences between Samuel-Kings and Chronicles, see Klein, *1 Chronicles*, 32-37. For an example of detailed analysis of the two texts to illuminate literary and historiographical motivations behind the Chronicler's work, see I. Kalimi, *The Reshaping of Ancient Israelite History in Chronicles* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2005).

Paraleipomena, layer additional evidence for text-critical theories about the sources behind the Chronicler's work.

Many of these text- and redaction-critical proposals provide compelling recreations of the composition history of Chronicles; nevertheless, the final product stands alone as a unique, autonomous narrative with its own politics, theology, and literary merit. Moreover, the process of composition by compilation is itself a literary strategy, one that I propose reflects the values of the bureaucratic imperial culture initiated by the Achaemenid dynasty. The book of Chronicles was indeed constructed in large part by the redacting of multiple sources, some of which can be discerned in the book's current form, and some of which cannot. However, my concern here is not with the *details* of that redactional process, but rather with the *nature* of that process. In his use of and appeal to written sources, the Chronicler, whom I understand to be the author-redactor responsible for the final form of Chronicles, harnesses the authority accorded to written forms by the Persian Empire. I see behind Chronicles not a stack of redactional layers from many different times, as one might propose for the Pentateuch, but rather the work of one purposeful compiler who took textual material from different eras and hands and stitched it all together for a new function. Moreover, the Chronicler did not necessarily attempt to join that textual material in a "seamless" fashion; the book of Chronicles preserves its written sources *qua* discernible chunks of texts, thereby invoking the authority and power of the written word as propagated by the Achaemenid leadership.[17]

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[17] The *written* nature of his sources also sets the Chronicler's project apart from the redactor(s) of the Pentateuch. Very little if any of an oral stratum can be discerned in Chronicles. At the same time, however, it would be worthwhile to ask in future projects how the redaction of the Pentateuch might partake in some of this same invocation of the power and authority of the written word. D. C. Polaski,

In a recent article examining kingship in Chronicles, Helen Dixon proposes that the Chronicler invokes images of Achaemenid kingship proliferated by the empire's artistic propaganda in his presentation of Solomon as an ideal king.[18] Dixon focuses specifically on 2 Chr 6:13, in which Solomon stands on a custom-built bronze platform (כיור) at the dedication of the Temple. This detail is not present in the otherwise closely parallel scene in 1 Kgs 8. Dixon surveys images of Achaemenid kingship on coins and seals as well as lion's paw throne fragments, which closely parallel images of thrones on reliefs at Persepolis. She suggests that the Chronicler invokes the recurring iconographic image of the Achaemenid "King on High" in his climactic scene of the dedication of the Temple in 2 Chr 6, thereby associating for his readers this Persian-era symbol of royal power with the Israelite monarchy. Thus, concludes, Dixon, "…the Chronicler's writings are much more than a retelling of history: he reshapes the image of Israel's ideal king; distances the symbolic and metaphorical 'throne of YHWH' from any physical throne; and infuses the apical scene of Solomon's Temple dedication with imagery that would resonate with a contemporary audience."[19]

Brent Strawn also turns to Achaemenid artistic renderings of kingship to illuminate a Persian-period biblical text.[20] Strawn sees in Isaiah 60 a convergence of a peaceful theophany, portraits of voluntary tribute processions, and solar imagery, all of

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"What Mean These Stones?", begins to draw similar comparisons (though not necessarily from a redaction-critical perspective) between iconic texts in Joshua and Darius the Great's Behistun Inscription.

[18] H. Dixon, "Writing Persepolis in Judah: Achaemenid Kingship in Chronicles," in *Images and Prophecy in the Ancient Eastern Mediterranean* (ed. M. Nissinen and Charles E. Carter; FRLANT 233; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009), 163-194. Dixon acknowledges Chronicles' emphasis on David but asserts that Solomon is even more idealized than his father, in that he fulfills the work begun with David (esp. regarding Temple construction) and does so without the violence that prevents David from being allowed to build the Temple.

[19] Dixon, "Writing Persepolis in Judah," 188.

[20] Strawn, "'A World under Control,'" 85-116.

which are features of Persian artistic propaganda and are largely distinct from forced and violent pre-Persian images of military subjugation. He proposes that Isaiah 60 particularly reflects the Apanda reliefs from Persepolis; even if one cannot call the relationship "dependence," the evidence indicates at least a "'connection' or 'relationship' between Isa 60 and the Apadana."[21] Thus, the historical reality of Persian imperialism, particularly as communicated by its iconography, is reflected in a Persian-period biblical text.

These two articles by Dixon and Strong are important steps toward discerning ways that the Achaemenid provenance of biblical texts may have influenced the books' historical and literary presentations. Despite the fact that Chronicles tells the story of pre-exilic Israel, its post-exilic, Persian imperial context can be discerned in the manner in which it tells that story. Whereas Dixon and Strawn look at the effects of Persia's *artistic* propaganda on Chronicles and Trito-Isaiah, respectively, I will examine the Chronicler's invocation of the *textual* authority valued by the Persian king, focusing specifically on the Chronicler's use of genealogies and source citations. By retelling the story of the Israelite monarchy using Persian resonances, the Chronicler asserts the grandeur of Israelite kingship on par with Achaemenid royalty. The result is at once to affirm Persian power and yet also to appropriate it for the Chronicler's own historical vision.

Genealogies

The Genealogical Prologue

Martin Noth has drawn a sharp line between what is known as the "genealogical

[21] Ibid., 114.

prologue" to Chronicles and the more straightforwardly narrative material that constitutes the rest of the book, remarking that outside of 1 Chr 1, these introductory chapters are "a confused and secondary mass of rank textual growth."[22] The separation between the genealogies and the remainder of the text certainly seems stark. Chapter 9 closes by listing the sons of Azel, thus ending a Levite genealogy. Chapter 10 then picks up with a narrative account of the Philistine assault on Israel that kills Saul and his sons, and the intensely genealogical rhythms of the first nine chapters are never revisited. This abrupt shift in genre has led some scholars to attribute the prologue to a different hand from the rest of the book, as well as to downplay the significance of the genealogical material to the book of Chronicles as a whole. In addition to noting a break between the so-called prologue and the rest of Chronicles, scholars have also pointed out the composite nature of the prologue itself. De Vries' form-critical assessment of the book, for example, notes the presence of multiple genres in the prologue that are all "genealogical" in nature but are not exclusively "genealogies" per se.[23]

On the other hand, scholars who see the genealogical prologue as a unified whole may also see the prologue as a key to understanding the entire book of Chronicles. Oeming, for example, sees the hand of one composer (or school) in the genealogical material, and he characterizes the prologue as a *proleptisches Summarium*: a reader finds in 1 Chr 1-9 the same themes and theological impulses that are reflected in the rest of Chronicles, so that by reading the genealogical material a reader is then ready to interpret accurately the entire book of Chronicles. For Oeming, then, the author of 1 Chr 1-9 is also necessarily the author of the rest of Chronicles, since the prologue is a purposeful

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[22] M. Noth, *The Chronicler's History* (trans. H.G.M. Williamson; JSOTSup 50; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1987), 42. See also Knoppers, *I Chronicles 1-9*, 254 n. 8.

[23] S. J. DeVries, *1and 2 Chronicles* (FOTL 11; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989).

preface to the remainder of the book.[24]

The variety of views on how to relate the dense genealogical introduction to the book of Chronicles as a whole testifies to the complexity of both the prologue and the text as a whole. More relevant for the current project than the parsing of what may differentiate a true “genealogy” from “genealogical material” is the notion that Chronicles 1-9 itself may have come together from a variety of different genealogical sources and has been integrated into a literary whole by the author of Chronicles.

Functions of Genealogies

Genealogies have a dubious reputation among many readers in the modern world. Genealogies often appear simply to be lists of names, written compilations of historical data. While they may point a researcher compiling her own family history to her ancestral geography or to discoveries of long-lost family members, genealogies in today’s society essentially function as tools for historical research. Biblical genealogies carry an especially clichéd status as some of the least interesting material in the canon, often characterized as stumbling blocks on the casual reader’s journey through the Bible from “beginning to end.” Yet a genealogy, while certainly containing stores of rich historical information, also functions as a living genre, one indispensable to the success of a community. Pre-literate kinship societies, for example, used oral genealogies to track both real and socially-constructed family ties. Many of the biblical genealogies, such as those scattered throughout the Primeval History, also have their roots in an oral world.[25]

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[24] M. Oeming, *Das wahre Israel: die “Genealogische Vorhalle” 1 Chronik 1-9* (BWA(N)T; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1979).

[25] For an example of the oral background of biblical genealogies see, Wilson, *Genealogy and History,* 137-198. Wilson traces the form and function of the genealogies in Gen 4 and Gen 5 and their

Through an analysis of anthropological data, Robert Wilson demonstrates that genealogies are not maintained because of primarily historiographical impulses, but rather because of sociological ones.[26] Genealogies serve the cohesion and upkeep of a society by legitimating social roles, such as authorizing political power or establishing families' places within religious leadership and creative guilds. Those functions are clearly visible in biblical genealogies. The genealogy of Adam in Gen 4, for example, assigns vocational skills to each line of the sons of Lamech: Jabal is the ancestor of nomads, Jubal the ancestor of musicians, and Tubal-Cain the ancestor of metalsmiths (Gen 4:20-22). Similarly, the Levitical genealogy of Exod 6 establishes the family line charged with ancient Israel's priestly duties. While sociological functions of genealogies do not exclude them from possible historical value, the creation of historiographic literature is not a primary motivator for creating and perpetuating genealogical lists.[27]

In addition to highlighting sociological functions over historiographical ones, Wilson also distinguishes between oral and written genealogies. The oral genealogy is by nature a fluid genre. It can change unintentionally because of the limitations of human memorization; in fact, omitting or substituting names in an oral genealogy should be considered a normal process, one that, though at odds with standards of modern historical fact-finding, is the mark of a living, functioning genealogy. Genealogies also can be altered purposefully to fit a society's changing needs. Wilson gives an example from the anthropological work of Meyer Fortes, whose accounts of Tallensi lineage sacrifice show how

> a man who was not a lineage member was temporarily assigned to a

relationship to narrative, assuming oral layers of genealogies whose functions are altered when they are written down.

[26] Wilson, *Genealogy and History*, 37-55.

[27] Ibid., 199-200.

> lineage so that he could participate in the sacrifice. The logic behind this move was this: Only lineage members participate in the sacrifice; this man was participating in the sacrifice; therefore he must be a lineage member. When this deduction was made a temporary change was made in the lineage genealogy in order to include him.[28]

Once genealogies are written down, their fluidity is constricted, and some may cease to exercise a social function, particularly when that fluidity is necessary to meet the changing needs of the community. At the same time, other genealogies, such as king lists, may take on even more power when the potential for change becomes limited. The more ossified such a list becomes, the less danger exists that an opponent might be able to present alternatives to the lineage or usurp the throne and then rework the lineage to justify his own rule.

Finally, Wilson emphasizes the distinction between linear genealogies, which map only one "vertical" line of descent from an ancestor, and segmented genealogies, which present multiple lines of descent from an ancestor, giving segmented genealogies a "horizontal" perspective in addition to their verticality. Because of their added complexity, segmented genealogies tend to be shorter, particularly in their oral forms, while linear genealogies may extend over tens of generations. Here again king lists stand out as genealogies that take on potency in the linear form, since the advantage of length allows kings to trace their ancestry back to the founders of their culture or, in some cases, even back to divine beings.[29]

The depth and complexity of the genealogical material in 1 Chr 1-9 show how writing can make the oral genre of the genealogy, usually either a long line of "begats" or a shorter presentation of branching family relationships, into an intricate literary

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[28] Ibid., 28.
[29] Ibid., 56-136.

enterprise. The chapters employ, to use Wilson's terminology, both linear and segmented forms, often woven together so that it is difficult to determine where one form ends and another begins. Although 1 Chr 1-9 mixes elements of linear genealogies with segmented ones—likely a consequence of merging multiple genealogical sources—I consider the passage as a whole to be a segmented genealogy because of the persistent attention to horizontal branches of the family tree. This continuous doubling back on itself—listing the descendants of one brother and then returning to the brother's generation to list the descendants of another child—is yet another way that Chronicles exhibits a genealogical complexity unmatched by any other biblical material.

Genealogical terminology

The Hebrew Bible employs two terms to describe its genealogical material: the plural noun תולדות and the root יחש, the latter most often manifested as a Hitpael denominative. Though the two words share similar contexts, usually appearing among lists of names in family relationships, an investigation of their usages shows that they are not mere synonyms and that the Chronicler did not regard them as such. Apart from nine occurrences in Chronicles and one occurrence in the book of Ruth, uses of תולדות are concentrated in the Pentateuch. The word is used to introduce genealogies throughout Genesis, and the genealogies themselves divide the narrative into sections, suggesting it was likely a redactional tool.[30] Built off the Semitic root ילד (to bear, beget), תולדות has

[30] Source criticism of the Pentateuch suggests that the *tôlĕdôt* formula (אלה תולדות) is a Priestly device used to structure the narrative, sometimes with a genealogy following it (e.g., Gen 10:1), but sometimes without one (e.g., Gen 6:9). That the formula appears at Gen 2:4b to describe creation rather than a family lineage makes the notion of the toledot as the structural device of a redactor particularly compelling. F. M. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973), 301-305, maintains that P is a non-narrative source, while G. von Rad, *Genesis* (rev. ed.; OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972), 70, maintains its narrative

parallels in Akkadian, Syriac, Ethiopic, each of which carries a similar meaning of "lineage," "descendants," "begetting," etc.[31] It implies a manner of ordering descendants, a method of accounting for the members of an ancestral line. Though there may have been toledot "books," as Gen 5:1 (ספר תולדת) implies, the term also refers more broadly to familial lineage, whether written or not.

By contrast, the root יחש, which is commonly translated in the Hithpael as "to enroll oneself in a genealogy," has no obvious antecedents in Semitic languages or any other neighboring tongues. In the Hebrew Bible, the root is attested only in Ezra-Nehemiah, and Chronicles, appearing twenty-one times across those books.[32] As far as the evidence shows, the root יחש is an invention of the Persian era, for the Persian era. As opposed to תולדות , which implies a general style or manner of ordering by ancestral lineage, every indication says that יחש denotes a specific written genre. Nehemiah finds "the book of the pedigree" (ספר היחש) when he undertakes his own genealogical registration (להתיחש) of the people (Neh 7:5). Families who cannot show their registration

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coherence, having evolved from a scant collection of genealogies and theological reflections into a more complex narrative. Both agree, however, that there may have been an "original" *tôlĕdôt* book, such as the ספר תולדת referred to at Gen 5:1. Westermann, *Genesis 1-11: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1984), 6-18, proposes that the Genesis genealogies "grew out of narratives, gradually freed themselves, became ever more formal, and survived finally as lists of names" (10). This connection with narrative is more evident in J, which weaves narratives together with genealogical material, while P uses a more systematic, linear genealogical format, having been in possession of actual genealogical sources. תולדות, then, *can* refer to a written text—perhaps an ancient source text such as a collection of genealogies—but does not necessarily imply a written text in all of its appearances. R. Alter, *Genesis: Translation and Commentary* (New York: Norton, 1996), 22-23, in his commitment to a literary-critical approach, notes the use of the formula as a section-divider but does not theorize about its source or redactional history. For a particularly cogent presentation of the function of *tôlĕdôt* formulae in Genesis and summary of scholarship on the formula, see B. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 145-157.

[31] *HALOT* 1:411-2.

[32] Ezra 2:62; 8:1, 3; Neh 7:5 (twice), 64; 1 Chr 4:33; 5:1, 7, 17; 7:5, 7, 9, 40; 9:1, 22; 2 Chr 12:15; 31:16, 17, 18, 19.

in the lineage (המתיחשים), portrayed here as a written document to be searched, are excluded from the priesthood (Ezra 2:62; Neh 7:64). The Chronicler also uses יחשׂ in ways that imply written documents. In fact, the root seems to describe some of the source material behind the Chronicler's genealogy. The geographical review of the Judeans in 1 Chr 4 remarks that "they kept a genealogical enrollment for themselves" (1 Chr 4:33); that is, they kept track – presumably in some written from – of their ancestral lineage. The warriors from the families of Isaachar, all 87,000 of them, are enrolled by genealogy, again implying an ongoing process of record-keeping (1 Chr 7:5). The Chronicler provides a gloss at 1 Chr 5:1-2 to explain why Reuben is "not enrolled in the genealogy according to the birthright" (להתיהש לבכרה). As Wilson's work has shown, an oral genealogy could make this exception to the genealogical order without incident; oral genealogies can be altered to fit changing sociological needs. When the genealogy was written down and thereby became solidified, changes that appeared out-of-the ordinary had to be justified. All of these examples show the Chronicler's recourse to some written text, citing it explicitly, thereby explaining why he has all of these details and thereby lending authority to his own composition.

The Chronicler knows תולדות, and he uses it nine times in his work, twice directly juxtaposed with יחש (1 Chr 5:7; 7:9). That juxtaposition of the two genealogical terms further emphasizes a difference between them – that is, the families are listed "in a genealogical enrollment according to their lineages" (למשפחתיו בהתיחש לתלדותם) (1 Chr 5:7). יחש refers to the written record, while תולדות describes the manner in which the names are ordered. The difference between the two terms highlights the way in which the Chronicler is using his genealogical material in an innovative manner. By invoking the explicitly written genre, he emphasizes the permanence and accuracy of the records and

therefore the reliability of his own genealogical presentation. The emergence of the root יחש, known only in these texts with a Persian provenance, underscores the importance newly accorded to written genealogical records.

Achaemenid Parallels

Genealogies are an invention neither of the Chronicler nor the Achaemenids. King lists and similar genealogical forms are attested throughout the ancient Near East. Wilson notes that Egyptian genealogies, extant from the beginning of the first millennium B.C.E., are particularly numerous during the Persian period, a fact that speaks further to the abundant deployment of genealogical forms throughout the Empire under Achaemenid rule.[33] Yet parallels to the length, complexity, and mix of segmented and linear types in the genealogical prologue to Chronicles are rare to non-existent. Knoppers finds the closest matches to 1 Chr 1-9 in Greek genealogies, such as those by Hecateus of Miletus or Acusilaus of Argos.[34] The Greek material stands out over related ancient Near Eastern material as a match with Chronicles because of its more substantial length and its combination of linear and segmented genealogical forms. Knoppers also shows how Hellanicus' *Troika* uses genealogies "as a prelude to a longer narrative history of a given period or war," especially to aid in identifying and characterizing the heroes in the subsequent story.[35] Particularly prominent among the parallels, however, are the similarities between the supplemental narrative material in the Chronicles genealogies and the same kinds of material found in Greek genealogies. Knoppers has identified multiple reasons for the inclusion of these addenda in the Greek forms. First are the

[33] Wilson, *Genealogy and History,* 125.
[34] Ibid., 255.
[35] Ibid., 259-260.

legitimating nature and national scope of the genealogies:

> Because the Greek genealogies were composed of names that were significant and designed to support the nation's traditions and speculations, it is not surprising that they were interlaced with digressions and narrative comments explaining what particular groups did, what battles they fought, or where their descendants settled.[36]

If the existing oral traditions were contradictory or disconnected, genealogies could be used to smooth out discrepancies or to fuse traditions together into a larger whole. In this way, the genealogy serves the needs of the narrative digressions. Knoppers also notes that those same narratives can be at the service of genealogies, particularly when timetables within the lineages become indistinct. In those cases, "narrative digressions help to define the vague chronology inherent within the genealogies themselves."[37]

It is impossible to know exactly what literary material from outside of Judah the Chronicler may have been able to access. Knoppers makes no claim to direct borrowing by the Chronicler from Greek or any other material; instead, he points out that even if the genealogical material in Chronicles is unique within the Hebrew Bible, it is not a complete anomaly in the Chronicler's ancient cultural milieu. In addition to parallels with the Greek material, supplementary comments like those noted in 1 Chr 1-9 can be found in Sumerian and Assyrian king lists[38] and Safaitic inscriptions.[39] While fifth-century Greek material such as Hellanicus' work is closest to 1 Chr 1-9 in chronology as well as substance, the temporal relationship between the works does not on its own suggest direct borrowing. Even if one dates Chronicles to the early Hellenistic period (ca. 300 B.C.E.),

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[36] Knoppers, *1 Chronicles 1-9*, 256.
[37] Ibid., 257.
[38] Ibid., 256; Wilson, *Genealogy and History,* 135-136.
[39] M. Johnson, *The Biblical Genealogies, with Special Reference to the Setting of the Genealogies of Jesus* (SNTSMS 8; London: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 61-63.

when the Alexandrian Empire exercised control over Judah, contact with classical Greek genealogical literature by this time is still by no means guaranteed.

Despite the ambiguity involved in proposing historical connections based on literary similarities, there is one point of cross-cultural contact for which a degree of direct influence on Chronicles can be posited with some confidence: Achaemenid imperial rule over Judah. I have already discussed the evidence from Babylon and Egypt showing that the Persian kings distributed copies of some of their royal inscriptions throughout the territories they ruled. Given this Achaemenid practice of widely publicizing the word of the king, it is reasonable to assume that inhabitants of Persian colonies—particularly literate ones—had some familiarity with the patterns of imperial writing. In a majority of the extant Old Persian inscriptions, the king begins the inscription with up to three forms of self-identification: his name; one or more of his titles, including “Great King,” “King of Kings,” and “King in Persia”; and his dynastic identity as a Achaemenian, often presented in genealogical form, especially through a linear genealogy that traces his ancestry back to Achaemenes. Forms of this pattern are attested in inscriptions of Cyrus, Darius, Xerxes I, Artaxerxes I, Darius II, Artaxerxes II, and Artaxerxes III, with dates of rulership spanning from 559 – 338 B.C.E.[40] Most of these inscriptions exist in a trilingual format, reflecting Persia’s awareness of the diversity of its empire and its desire to communicate effectively throughout its territories. By no means were all of these extant inscriptions accessible to a large segment of the ruled population; many of the inscriptions survived in the ruins of imperial palaces, etched into shattered doorframes or on the robes of broken statues, unlikely to have been

[40] An inscription claiming to date from the rule of Ariaramnes, grandson of Achaemenes, also contains this pattern, but the inscription is almost certainly inauthentic. See discussion of the falsified inscription in chapter 2 above.

replicated and distributed. Nor were the Persians innovators in the ancient Near East by including genealogies in their royal inscriptions; the genre is well attested in ancient Mesopotamia.[41] Yet the consistent deployment of genealogies in this sampling of the Persian kings' public documents reveals the cadences of Persian imperial discourse, and that is a discourse unswervingly committed to genealogical legitimation.

Darius' Behistun Inscription serves as a helpful example of a Persian colonist's potential encounter with imperial genealogical discourse because of its prominent public location on a major travel route,[42] its known distribution to Persian colonies, and its inclusion of all three elements of the self-identification pattern:

> I am Darius the Great King, King of Kings, King in Persia, King of countries, son of Hystaspes, grandson of Arsames, an Achaemenian. Saith Darius the King: My father was Hystaspes; Hystaspes' father was Arsames; Arsames' father was Ariaramnes; Ariaramnes' father was Teispes; Teispes' father was Achaemenes. Saith Darius the King: For this reason we are called Achaemenians. From long ago we have been noble. From long ago our family had been kings. Saith Darius the King: VIII of our family (there are) who were kings afore; I am the ninth; IX in succession we have been kings. (DB 1.1-11)

These opening lines of the Behistun Inscription showcase the interest Darius has in establishing and legitimating his authority. Darius' titles emphasize the greatness and extent of his reign, and the subsequent linear genealogy traces his ancestry to Achaemenes, father of the Achaemenid royal dynasty. The notion of an unbroken line of royal succession stretching back to "long ago" is important to Darius' understanding of

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[41] Cf. Wilson, *Genealogy and History,* 56-136.

[42] As I have noted in ch. 2, the actual text of the Behistun Inscription is largely illegible from the road. The fact of its existence, along with some inference of its text thanks to the accompanying relief, would have constituted the whole of a passer-by's encounter with the inscription. Nonetheless, the content of the text itself becomes relevant in a colonist's encounter with imperial discourse because of the text's known distribution through the empire.

legitimate kingship; he repeats the history of his family's nobility over and over again. Darius also has more reason than some Achaemenid kings to devote energy to establishing his own genealogical line. He rose to power by overthrowing Gaumata, who he alleges was posing as Smerdis, brother of Cambyses. It remains a mystery, however, whether Darius actually overthrew Gaumata or invented Gaumata as a scapegoat because Darius either murdered Smerdis himself or seized power after his death.[43] In any case, not only are the circumstances of Darius' ascension to the kingship suspicious, but he is not of Cyrus and Cambyses' line, so he must prove to the world—and especially to the Persians—that he descends from the proper Achaemenid family tree. The Behistun Inscription is replete with details meant to legitimate Darius' kingship, and his own genealogy forms the backbone of those arguments.

Wilson identifies political legitimation as the primary function of royal inscriptional genealogies across the ancient Near East, and the Persian inscriptions provide no exceptions. Nor is legitimation limited to monarchic identities; justifying social roles, be they for musicians or blacksmiths, is a common function of genealogies across times and cultures, as Wilson's work shows well. It is reasonable, then, to suspect some sort of social-role justification at the heart of Chronicles' extensive genealogies, especially with the shadow of Persian inscriptional patterns looming over this biblical book. But Johnson provides an important corrective to the tendency in scholarship to assume "legitimation" as the sole motivation behind the Chronicler's genealogy. Johnson asks, "Who is being 'legitimated' in 1 Chronicles, where the bulk of the material is placed in pre-exilic times and where are found lists of nine or ten tribes which were

[43] Cf. Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 99-106.

extinct in the Chronicler's day?"[44]

In contrast to a royal genealogy, the Chronicler's work does not seek *self*-legitimation or self-identification; otherwise the elusive details behind the Chronicler's identity would inspire much less scholarly speculation! Instead, the Chronicler adopts a third-person narrator's perspective, listing the lineage of the people of Israel from the first human to the inhabitants of the post-exilic community, and occasionally elaborating slightly upon their identities. Never does this narrator show his own place in this lineage. Yet, this is no exercise in mere historiography. Wilson's conclusion that the genealogy is not first and foremost an historical genre has already affirmed that the "genealogical prologue" of Chronicles communicates something besides raw data for the familial lineage of the people of Israel. This genealogy illustrates the legitimacy of the Judean monarchy, particularly as *David's* monarchic line. As Johnson states,

> ...the whole is intended as a panegyric on David, whose ancestors and kinsmen—Hezronites—outshone all others in number, whose descendants sat on the throne of Judah, and, above all else in the Chronicler's view, who was even more than Moses responsible for the divinely ordained temple cultus. One gains the impression from these genealogies that things will never be quite the same again as they were in the days of David when the people of God were complete, dwelling in "all the land of Israel," being ruled over by David, the servant of Yahweh.[45]

Johnson's identification of genealogies' interest in David, his family, and his cultic organization is insightful. Yet, the Chronicler engages in something more than mere nostalgia in this process. Under the shadow of the Great Kings of Persia, the Chronicler is providing for David what the king did not leave for himself: a genealogical claim for rulership that can be traced back all the way to the first human on earth. The

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[44] Johnson, *The Biblical Genealogies*, 76.
[45] Ibid.

invocation of this lineage sets up an effective counter-claim to the bold imperialism the Achaemenids have inscribed on the land. Yehud, too, has had great kings – perhaps the *greatest* king. Yehud, too, has had a monarchy ordained by the great God. Although Davidic leadership has not won out politically in Yehud's current imperial subjugation, David's legacy lives on in the organization of the temple cult. In presenting this genealogy to his Judean readership, the Chronicler draws on a legitimating strategy of the Persians to remind his own community of their royal lineage.

Other Genealogies in Chronicles

Genealogical material in Chronicles is not limited to the book's first nine chapters. Many of the lists incorporated into the body of the book are also ordered according to family lineages, as they enumerate the members of families who have been appointed charge over certain societal tasks.[46] Levites, to whom David gives charge of temple worship, are ordered into divisions according to their patrilineal identities (1 Chr 24:6-24). In the same way, the temple's gatekeepers are listed by family group: fathers, sons, and brothers (1 Chr 26).[47] Even in lists where complete familial accounts are not given, the use of the twelve-tribe system to identify and order the people of Israel and Judah throughout the book of Chronicles carries with it an inherent genealogical element. The lists of warriors who fight alongside David are a prime example of this: the

[46] I exclude from this reckoning the simple use of a father's name as a simple distinguishing marker, as in modern surnames–this Eliel vs. that Eliel—common throughout the Hebrew Bible and the ancient Near East.

[47] Noth, *The Chronicler's History*, 33, regards these lists of temple personnel (1 Chr 23-27) as a secondary addition by a redactor, in order "to trace back to David the origins of the late post-exilic divisions of the various cultic servants." Whether one assigns their composition to "the Chronicler" or a later (for Noth, 3rd century) redactor, the effect is the same: to utilize genealogy to establish social roles and to connect those roles with Israelite—i.e., Davidic—kingship.

Chronicler presents the names of those great warriors in groupings by ancestral house (1 Chr 12:1-22).

Even beyond these genealogical echoes that resonate throughout the book of Chronicles, I suggest that the entirety of Chronicles is a genealogy of sorts. By tracing the Judean monarchic lineage all the way back to Adam, the Chronicler is establishing an ancestral claim for the leadership of Israel that reaches as far back as possible, to God's creation of the world. Even Darius himself does not claim such a lineage. Moreover, by specifying how the twelve tribes fit into the history and order of the Israelite (i.e., all the people of Israel) community, the Chronicler sets up a national familial identity in the midst of foreign rule. The Chronicler's readers in Yehud are reminded not only of the history of their leadership, but also of their places in the community that is Yehud. The book of Chronicles does not necessarily set this community in antithesis to the ruling imperial powers, but rather forges a way for the citizens of Yehud to reclaim a common sense of both ancestry and purpose. In this way, the entire book of Chronicles serves the genealogical purposes that Wilson outlines, namely, to order the society and to define each family's roles within it.

Citations of Annals

In both Kings and Chronicles, accounts of the lives and exploits of the kings of Israel and Judah end with appeals to annals and other books where the reader might look for additional detail. Kings consistently names two books as sources for further reading: the "Book of the Annals belonging to the Kings of Israel" (ספר דברי הימים למלכי ישראל) and the "Book of the Annals belonging to the Kings of Judah (ספר דברי הימים למלכי יהודה). In fact, stories of every king receive a coda pointing to one of these two books, with the

exceptions of Solomon, who has his own book of records (ספר דברי שלמה), and David, for whom no reference to a book is made. Chronicles, on the other hand, refers to at least a dozen different books that detail the lives of the Judean kings; in keeping with the Chronicler's overwhelming interest in the southern kingdom, no northern king receives such a reference. The following chart shows where those citations occur and the names given for the books.

Citations of Annals in the Book of Chronicles

	Information contained in the cited text	Name of text(s) cited	Translation
1 Chr 9:1	Enrollment (הִתְיַחְשׂוּ) of all Israel	סֵפֶר מַלְכֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וִיהוּדָה	the book of the kings of Israel and Judah
1 Chr 27:24	Numbers of Israelites under age 20 (*not* written in the book)	בְּמִסְפַּר דִּבְרֵי־הַיָּמִים לַמֶּלֶךְ דָּוִיד	the accounting book of the annals belonging to King David
1 Chr 29:29-30	the deeds of King David the first and the last	דִּבְרֵי שְׁמוּאֵל הָרֹאֶה דִּבְרֵי נָתָן הַנָּבִיא דִּבְרֵי גָּד הַחֹזֶה	the words of Samuel the Seer the words of Nathan the Prophet the words of Gad the Seer
2 Chr 9:29	the rest of the deeds of Solomon, the first and the last	דִּבְרֵי נָתָן הַנָּבִיא נְבוּאַת אֲחִיָּה הַשִּׁילוֹנִי חֲזוֹת יֶעְדּוֹ הַחֹזֶה עַל־יָרָבְעָם בֶּן־נְבָט	the words of Nathan the Prophet the prophecy of Ahijah the Shilonite the visions of Iddo the seer concerning Jeroboam son of Nebat
2 Chr 12:15	the deeds of Rehoboam, the first and the last	דִּבְרֵי שְׁמַעְיָה הַנָּבִיא וְעִדּוֹ הַחֹזֶה	the words of Shemaiah the prophet and Iddo the Seer
2 Chr 13:22	the rest of the deeds of Abijah, and his ways and his deeds	מִדְרַשׁ הַנָּבִיא עִדּוֹ	the *midrash* of the prophet Iddo
2 Chr 16:11	the deeds of Asa, the first and the last	סֵפֶר הַמְּלָכִים לִיהוּדָה וְיִשְׂרָאֵל	the book of the kings belonging to Judah and Israel
2 Chr 20:34	the rest of the acts of Jeshoshophat, the first and the last	דִּבְרֵי יֵהוּא בֶן־חֲנָנִי אֲשֶׁר הֹעֲלָה עַל־סֵפֶר מַלְכֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל	the words of Jehu, son of Hanani, which were taken up concerning the book of the kings of Israel
2 Chr 24:27	[Joash's] sons and the multitude of pronouncements against him and the establishment of the house of God	מִדְרַשׁ סֵפֶר הַמְּלָכִים	the *midrash* of the book of the kings

2 Chr 25:26	the rest of the deeds of Amaziah, the first and the last	סֵפֶר מַלְכֵי־יְהוּדָה וְיִשְׂרָאֵל	the book of the kings of Judah and Israel
2 Chr 26:22	the rest of the deeds of Uzziah, the first and the last	כָּתַב יְשַׁעְיָהוּ בֶן־אָמוֹץ הַנָּבִיא	Isaiah, son of Amoz, the prophet, recorded
2 Chr 27:7	the rest of the deeds of Jotham, and all his wars and his deeds	סֵפֶר מַלְכֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל וִיהוּדָה	the book of the kings of Israel and Judah
2 Chr 28:26	the rest of [Ahaz's] deeds, and all his ways, the first and the last	סֵפֶר מַלְכֵי־יְהוּדָה וְיִשְׂרָאֵל	the book of the kings of Judah and Israel
2 Chr 32:32	the rest of the deeds of Hezekiah, and his faithful acts	חזון יְשַׁעְיָהוּ בֶן־אָמוֹץ הַנָּבִיא עַל־סֵפֶר מַלְכֵי־יְהוּדָה וְיִשְׂרָאֵל	the vision of Isaiah, son of Amoz, the prophet, concerning the book of the kings of Judah and Israel
2 Chr 33:18	the rest of the deeds of Manasseh, and his prayer to his God, and the words of the seers who were speaking to him in the name of Yahweh, the God of Israel	דִּבְרֵי מַלְכֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל	the deeds of the kings of Israel
2 Chr 35:26-27	the rest of the deeds of Josiah, and his faithful acts in accordance with what is written in the instruction of Yahweh, and his deeds, the first and the last	סֵפֶר מַלְכֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל וִיהוּדָה	the book of the kings of Israel and Judah
2 Chr 36:8	the rest of the deeds of Jehoiakim, and his abominations that he did, and what was found against him	סֵפֶר מַלְכֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל וִיהוּדָה	the book of the kings of Israel and Judah

None of the records or annals cited by the Chronicler exactly matches any of the three books mentioned in Kings. In his coda on Manasseh, the Chronicler cites "the deeds of the kings of Israel" (דברי מלכי ישרל), but that title still does not line up with the precise repetitions of ספר דברי הימים למלכי ישראל throughout Kings. More frequent are the Chronicler's references to "the Book of the Kings of Israel and Judah," although sometimes the names of the two kingdoms are transposed. Missing from nearly all of the Chronicler's citations is the temporal reference (הימים) that connotes more precisely an accounting of the day-by-day acts of the kings in question. In addition to being at variance with the book titles in Kings, many titles in Chronicles vary in syntax and word order among themselves. This again contrasts with the remarkable consistency of the two primary books referenced in Kings, which employ the same format every time, save for the difference in kingdom. In Chronicles, for example, the deeds of Asa appear in "the book of the kings belonging to Israel and Judah" (ספר המלכים ליהודה וישראל) (2 Chr 16:11), while the deeds of Jotham appear in "the book of the kings of Israel and Judah" (ספר מלכי־ישראל ויהודה) (2 Chr 27:7). The former employs a short construct chain with a prepositional phrase, while the latter title wholly comprises a construct chain. Though these differences appear minor, especially in English translation, they raise several important questions about the Chronicler's relationship to his sources. Are these monikers for the source books titles of actual sources from which the Chronicler drew? If so, do the minor variations in title imply that each and every variant indicates a different source book? If not, why would the Chronicler employ such variant titles? Did the Chronicler know more sources than the Deuteronomistic Historian did?

The Chronicler's titular diversity does not end at renderings of ספר המלכים. He directs the reader not only to annals of kings, but also to the works of prophets and seers:

Samuel, Nathan, Gad, Ahijah, Iddo, Shemaiah, and Isaiah. Notably, none of the prophets or seers cited in Chronicles has a "book" (ספר); instead, they have visions (חזות), words or accounts (דבר), or a prophecy (נבואת). The prophet Iddo even has a midrash (מדרש), a genre also associated with a book of kings (2 Chr 24:27).[48] Despite the avoidance of the word ספר to describe the prophetic accounts, these other terms still denote *written* texts, as the persistent use of כתובים makes clear. The references to prophets also indicate that prophecies, which, like genealogies, have their roots in an oral genre, have a well-established tradition of written accounts by the time of the Chronicler.[49] The multiplicity of titles for the prophetic accounts again prompts questions of their historicity: are these the precise titles of actual works to which the Chronicler had access, or is he instead referring generally to text-types he knows *should* exist in association with these figures?

A few of the citations in Chronicles exhibit even further complexity in their titles, providing additional insights into the nature of these "sources" and the Chronicler's use of them. In the list of military divisions in 1 Chronicles 27, the Chronicler laments the unfinished census work of Joab, whose failure to complete a count of the Israelites under

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[48] References to the prophet Iddo's text(s) appear three times in Chronicles, each under a different moniker: visions (חזות, 2 Chr 9:29), words (דברי, 2 Chr 12:15), and midrash (מדרש, 2 Chr 13:22). Japhet, *I & II Chronicles*, 682-683, takes this variety of titles as an indicator of the sources' questionable historicity, finding it unlikely that the same figure would have composed so many different works.

[49] J. Blenkinsopp, *A History of Prophecy in Israel* (rev. and enl. ed.; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 222-240, sees in Chr the roles of pre-exilic prophecy taken up by the Temple leadership, esp. the Levitical musicians, in worship. See also D. L. Petersen, *Late Israelite Prophecy: Studies in Deutero-Prophetic Literature and in Chronicles* (SBLMS 23; Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1977). Blenkinsopp also sees in the source citations attributed to prophets a reinterpretation by the Chronicler of pre-exilic prophecy to include the role of "historian" for the prophet. W. Schniedewind, *The Word of God in Transition: From Prophet to Exegete in the Second Temple Period* (JSOTSup 197; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995), demonstrates that the Chronicler draws a distinction between prophets, figures charged with interpreting historical events for the monarchy (thus the citations of their "historical" texts in Chr), and "inspired messengers," who deliver exhortations to the people on how they should act. Thus, Schniedewind resists the notion that Levites take on a prophetic role in Chronicles. See also W. Schniedewind, "Prophets and Prophecy in the Books of Chronicles," in *The Chronicler as Historian* (ed. M. P. Graham, K. G. Hoglund, and S. L. McKenzie; JSOTSup 238; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1997), 204-224.

twenty years old brought God's anger upon Israel (1 Chr 27:24). This desired count "did not go upon the accounting book of the Annals of King David" (ולא עלה המספר במספר דברי־הימים למלך דויד) (1 Chr 27:24). I have translated מספר here as "accounting book," not necessarily to imply that an entirely different book existed for these Davidic census efforts, but to underscore the written nature of the count, imagined here as at least a separate section in King David's Annals, if not a different source altogether. It is first notable that Kings, which so faithfully refers its readers to the annals of the kings of Israel or Judah for each monarch, provides no such association for King David. The Chronicler, on the other hand, cites four such texts for David: this book of annals, plus accounts from Samuel the Seer, Nathan the Prophet, and Gad the Seer (1 Chr 29:29-30). This quadrupling of source citations for David is in keeping with the emphasis the Chronicler puts on David throughout the book. Moreover, the association of Annals with census and inventory numbers infuses the Annals with a sense of bureaucratic record-keeping rather than story-telling or history-writing. These Annals are not so much grand tales of monarchic gallantry as blow-by-blow reckonings of the king's administration. At 1 Chronicles 9:1, the Book of the Kings of Israel and Judah is listed as the repository for the census numbers that did make it into an accounting book, as opposed to the aborted count of Joab. It is no wonder that Ahasuerus, the Persian King Xerxes in the book of Esther, calls for his own annals to be read aloud as a cure for his insomnia (Esth 6:1)! The comprehensive, detail-oriented nature of the Judean chronicles implies similarly tedious content.

Another source title with added complexity involves the records of the acts of Jehoshophat (2 Chr 20:34). The record is said to be "among the Words of Jehu, son of Hanani, which was taken up (עלה) concerning the Book of the Kings of Israel.". The

singular form of the verb עלה implies that “The Words of Jehu” is a single entity, that is, a collection of writings (“words”), supporting the understanding of “The Words of X” as a single work or book in all of these titles. Most translations consider the relationship between the Words of Jehu and the Book of the Kings to be a supplementary one: Jehu’s work was included as part of the larger Book of the Kings of Israel. However, one could also translate על here as “concerning,” implying that Jehu’s work is some sort of commentary on the Book of the Kings. Since twice the Chronicler cites *midrashim* – once belonging to the prophet Iddo (2 Chr 13:22), and once on the Book of the Kings (2 Chr 24:27) – the sense of commentary seems reasonable. The same is true with the deeds of Hezekiah, found “in the vision of Isaiah son of Amoz, the prophet, concerning the Book of the Kings of Judah and Israel (בחזרן ישעיהו בן־אמוץ הנביא על־ספר מלכי־יהודה וישראל) (2 Chr 32:32). The relationship between the two works is marked by על, which could imply either the inclusion of the vision within the Book of the Kings, or that the vision in some way comments upon the records contained in the Book. Either understanding of the relationships between the works in these two examples underscores the multiplicity and the diversity of source citations the Chronicler calls upon. The Chronicler draws on a wide breadth of texts to undergird the authority of his own work.

Though the titles of the source citations vary significantly between Kings and Chronicles and among the Chronicles citations themselves, the placement of the citations is generally consistent. In both Kings and Chronicles, a source citation follows the author’s chosen details about a particular king in a formulaic coda wrapping up each account. After the source citation and the description of what the source contains, the text generally remarks about the king’s burial and then his successor: e.g., “Hezekiah lay with his ancestors, and he was buried on the ascent of the children of David. All Judah and the

inhabitants of Jerusalem gave to him honor upon his death. Manasseh, his son, succeeded him" (2 Chr 32:33). The parallel passage in Kings, though more succinct, follows the same general pattern: "Hezekiah lay with his fathers, and his son Manasseh succeeded him" (2 Kgs 20:21). Inasmuch as the Chronicler diverts from and adds to the citations presented by his Deuteronomic source, he remains stylistically conservative, generally following the formula outlined by his predecessor.

In this balance between tradition and innovation, the Chronicler is able to give a doubled edge to his appeal to textual authority. By following the same placement and general content of his Deuteronomistic source, the Chronicler invokes the authority that that earlier text has already gained. As Knoppers points out, "The Chronicler is heir to and interpreter of a variety of older texts. Living in the late Achaemenid or early Hellenistic period, he feels it necessary to authorize his own position and those of major characters in his work by recourse to prestigious older writings."[50] His quotation of the Deuteronomistic History, alongside his faithful representation of the format of source citations that that text utilizes, shows his knowledge of and place within his local tradition. At the same time, his expansion of the source citations to include the work of prophets alongside the records of kings, his invocation of multiple written genres, and his use of variant titles that imply multiple texts of similar names all work together to expand his base of authority. The administrative nature of much of that material echoes the extensive bureaucratic note-taking present in the Persepolis Tablets, where every movement of the king's officials required paperwork in triplicate. The Chronicler's source citations pair the obsessive record-keeping of the Achaemenid Empire with a

[50] Knoppers, *1 Chronicles*, 1:92.

reverence for the text-patterns of his own tradition; together, this appeal to elements old and new, foreign and native, provides an effective foundation of authority to the Chronicler's own work.

Conclusions

To read Chronicles alongside Samuel-Kings is to see the Chronicler's agenda in relief. The Chronicler's divergences from the established story of Samuel-Kings pop out from the page to reveal the ideological fundaments of his retelling of the history of Israel. He values centralized worship in the Jerusalem temple and the Levites' role within it; he betrays a profound disappointment in the division of the kingdom, yet he does not hesitate to note the apostasies that brought about the demise of both north and south, though generally with a less favorable view of the northern kingdom; he is deeply committed to the notion of the Davidic monarchic line and to David and Solomon as ideal kings.

These themes can be traced through the book of Chronicles, revealing the Chronicler's program as a literary, historical, and theological enterprise.[51] At the same time, the *manner* of the book's composition, which involves appropriating and reworking numerous written sources into a new, original text, is not merely another literary maneuver: it is also a *political* enterprise. For the book of Chronicles, this process is more than simply redaction; by preserving and invoking a host of other written texts in his own

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[51] Hence the set of essay collections published by Sheffield and T&T Clark and centered on the Chronicler's tripartite identity of storyteller, historian, and theologian: *The Chronicler as Author: Studies in Text and Texture* (ed. M. P. Graham and S. L. McKenzie; JSOTSup 263; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1999); *The Chronicler as Historian* (ed. M. P. Graham, K. G. Hoglund, and S. L. McKenzie; JSOTSup238; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1997); and *The Chronicler as Theologian* (ed. M. P. Graham, S. L. McKenzie, and G. N. Knoppers; JSOTSup 371; London: T&T Clark, 2003)

work, Chronicles marks a new and unique historiographical method, one reflective of its historical moment. The Chronicler appropriates the written word, one of the primary values of the Persian Empire, in ways that provide support for the fact of his own project and justification for the claims he makes within it. The textuality touted by the empire is not, however, just about any written document, but instead focuses on genealogical claims and administrative detail.

The Chronicler picks up on the genealogical values of Persia by crafting a genealogy that stretches back to the first human, and then by echoing those genealogical themes throughout the rest of the book. He draws on written genealogical records and underscores the textuality of the genre, deploying a favorite tool of the Persian Empire for his own purposes. Those purposes are to emphasize the chosenness and efficacy of Davidic rule in the history of Israel and to continue to shape a fully reconstituted community in Yehud, even as it continues to live under imperial rule. By echoing and expanding on the source citations he inherits from the Samuel-Kings tradition, the Chronicler further employs the valued tools of Persia to lend credence to his own project. Those source citations, which prioritize bureaucratic records over scintillating stories, undergird the Chronicler's details and set him in a tradition of transmitting written records even as he reimagines those records into a story that promotes his own theological and historical vision.

The retelling of history in Chronicles provides connections between the present and the past. Like any good storyteller, the Chronicler reimagines the stories of "then" by connecting them with the values of "now." The portrait of kingship his audience currently knows is one in which the monarch justifies his reign through publicly distributed genealogies and values administrative precision carried out through written texts. I must

emphasize that the Chronicler does not re-present the Davidic monarchs in the image of Persia's Great King, with all the trappings of that cultural and political milieu;[52] this is a history for, by, and of Yehud, thoroughly centered on Jerusalem as religious and monarchic center.[53] Instead, the Chronicler places his own narrative on the foundation of written records—genealogies, administrative lists, written records and chronicles—which are his era's sure signs of power. The result is a subtle but effective rhetorical strategy that appeals to his Yehudite-Judean audience, for whom the shadow of the imperium is an ever-present reality. The currency of the empire—textuality—affirms the authority of the Chronicler's work, yet that work yields a vision of *Israelite* kingship that orders and sustains the local community long after the monarchy has passed away.

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[52] The argument of Dixon, "Writing Persepolis in Judah," which sees the Persian King on High in the Chronicler's addition of Solomon's bronze platform at 2 Chr 6:13, remains compelling, but its very general resemblance to the Persian image also highlights the subtlety with which any direct echoes of Persian kingship in the portraits of David and Solomon may have been deployed.

[53] For an analysis of Chronicles' presentation of Jerusalem as central for worship, sacrifice, pilgrimage, and economics, see M. Knowles, *Centrality Practiced: Jerusalem in the Religious Practice of Yehud and the Diaspora in the Persian Period* (SBLABS 16; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006), 32-38, 64-65, 91-92, 114-119. J. D. Newsome, "Toward a New Understanding of the Chronicler and His Purposes," *JBL* 94.2 (1975): 201-217, remarks that "the Chronicler writes almost as if no other people but the Jerusalem community were in existence."

Chapter 4

Writing and Written Texts in Ezra-Nehemiah

Introduction

No less than one-third of the content of Ezra-Nehemiah is constituted by the texts of other documents interpolated into the book. Debates have long raged between scholars over whether or not these documents are "historical" or "authentic" or "reliable." Did they ever exist as actual documents outside of the Ezra-Nehemiah narrative, and, if so, to what extent can they be used to inform our understanding of Persian-period? Commentators have also seized upon the documents as clues to the redaction history of the book, often regarding the compilation of source documents as the first step in book's multi-layered compositional process. These two approaches—i.e., historical-critical and redaction-critical—have dominated recent scholarly apprehension of the texts-within-the-text of Ezra-Nehemiah. Biblical scholars have sought to exploit the full potential of these documents as "sources": that is, as pieces that can be separated in whatever way from the narrative as a whole.

Tamara Eskenazi opened a new trajectory for Ezra-Nehemiah studies when she undertook an exclusively literary investigation of the book. In the 1988 monograph *In An*

Age of Prose and the 1989 article "From Text to Actuality," Eskenazi analyzes Ezra-Nehemiah as a narrative in its MT form.[1] She prioritizes the integrity of Ezra-Nehemiah and the story it communicates, rather than seeing only a collection of historical sources loosely assembled around a piecemeal narrative. Through that literary reading, Eskenazi identifies three primary themes in Ezra-Nehemiah: "[a shift of] focus from leaders to the community as a whole," "[an expansion of] the concept of the house of God from temple to city," and "the primacy of the written text over the oral as source of authority."[2] Together, these three themes "deemphasize the heroic and affirm the prosaic."[3]

Eskenazi's literary analysis of Ezra-Nehemiah has established that written texts are central to that book's apprehension of the life of the restoration community. Her reading demonstrates that Ezra-Nehemiah regards written texts as ultimately authoritative and, moreover, that the book shows the actualization of such texts in the life of the community—that is, executing what their content enjoins. Eskenazi charts the structure of Ezra-Nehemiah using Claude Bremond's three elements of story: potentiality (objective defined), process of actualization (steps taken), and success (objective reached). She identifies the story's potentiality in Ezra 1:1-4, "decree to the community to build the house of God"; the process of actualization in Ezra 1:5-Neh 7:72,[4] "the community builds the house of God according to the decree"; and success in Neh 8:1-

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[1] T. C. Eskenazi, *In An Age of Prose: A Literary Approach to Ezra-Nehemiah* (SBLMS 36; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988); "Ezra-Nehemiah: From Text to Actuality," in *Signs and Wonders: Biblical Texts in Literary Focus* (ed. J. Cheryl Exum; SemeiaSt; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1989): 165-197. *In An Age of Prose* gives a more comprehensive literary reading of Ezra-Nehemiah, addressing the role of written texts as one of three primary themes, while "Ezra-Nehemiah: From Text to Actuality" focuses expressly on the theme of "the actualization of the written text in the life of the community."

[2] Eskenazi, *In an Age of Prose*, 2.

[3] Ibid.

[4] All citations of Nehemiah in this dissertation use the Hebrew versification.

13:31, where "the community dedicates the house of God according to Torah."[5] Each of these major structuring elements aligns with a different written document providing the authorization for the movement in the story. At the same time, additional documents operate within each unit both to complicate and to move along the process of restoration.

Eskenazi's analysis has been widely acknowledged as insightful and groundbreaking, and her evaluation of the book's themes—especially the centrality of written textual authority—has rarely gone uncited in subsequent publications. Nonetheless, the methods by which a majority of those scholars approach the book has remained the same, focusing on issues of historicity or redaction.[6] There hovers an implicit sense that the literary reading of Ezra-Nehemiah has been done: done so well, in fact, that the field can return to its many unsettled questions about how Ezra-Nehemiah came to be, and how it may inform Persian-period history. There is little need to pursue literary efforts further, it would seem.

Questions addressing how insights gleaned from literary investigations might inform historical-critical evaluations have remained missing from these methodological lines. Though that dearth can be felt in the study of many portions of the Hebrew Bible canon, it is particularly acute in Ezra-Nehemiah criticism, where a nonsensical chronology, abrupt shifts between third- and first-person narrative voice, and those ubiquitous "source" documents can make even the most ardent canonical critics surrender to at least a glimmer of diachronic analysis. To be sure, investigating the text's redaction history, which is itself both an historical and a literary enterprise, can yield important

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[5] Eskenazi, "Ezra-Nehemiah: From Text to Actuality," 172.

[6] One notable exception is the rhetorical approach of G. F. Davies, *Ezra and Nehemiah* (BO; Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1999).

discoveries about the text's socio-cultural milieu.[7] The question remains, though: What does it mean for the study of Persian-period history that Ezra-Nehemiah is so enamored with textual authority? Why is the book so replete with other texts? Eskenazi herself acknowledges that "[t]his drive toward textualization may be rooted in the Persian context," but she does not pursue the point.[8]

In this chapter I seek to chart the ways in which Ezra-Nehemiah encodes its relationship to the Persian Empire within its literary form and content, particularly through its emphasis on written documentation. I will study the phenomenon of documentation genre by genre, with concomitant attention to the ordering of events within the narrative. Ezra-Nehemiah flows, both chronologically and narratively, from the process of return to the forging of the reconstituted Judean community. The former stage depends most directly on permission and resources from the Persian king, while the latter involves internal political struggles worked out under empire's shadow, where the king's power over the colony is a distant yet ever-present reality. It is to be expected, then, that account of the return will exhibit a good deal of Judean appropriation of Persian modes of power: responding to Persia's hypertextuality in kind, returning letter for letter and appealing to archived documents as sources of authority. In fact, that sense of the authority of documents persists throughout the entire text of Ezra-Nehemiah. As the identity of the community begins to take shape, however, the Judean leadership appropriates and modifies Persian hypertextuality for its own uses. The Judean

[7] J. Wright, *Rebuilding Identity: The Nehemiah Memoir and Its Earliest Readers* (BZAW 348; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2004), provides an excellent example of this. Wright traces the development of the text of Ezra-Nehemiah, pinpointing an early, brief form of Nehemiah's report of building the wall as Ezra-Nehemiah's earliest element. As the layers of redaction build over time, the emphases of Ezra-Nehemiah shift, moving back and forth between Nehemiah's interest in the wall and Torah and Ezra's priestly interests centered on the Temple.

[8] Eskenazi, *In an Age of Prose*, 190-191.

community of Ezra-Nehemiah seizes on imperial means of power to carve out its own modes of resistance, developing the book itself into a counter-archive.

1 Esdras

Ezra-Nehemiah appears in two forms in the Septuagint: Esdras b, which is essentially equivalent to the MT version of Ezra-Nehemiah, and Esdras a, or 1 Esdras, which precedes Esdras b in the LXX. First Esdras begins with an account of the last kings of Judah, roughly equivalent to 2 Chr 35-36. It then includes the traditional text of Ezra, ending with Ezra's reading of the law, which is drawn from Neh 7:72-8:12. Although the Greek text of 1 Esdras contains several minor variants from its MT parallels, its only prominent departure from the MT book of Ezra is the inclusion of the Story of the Three Youths at 1 Esd 3-4. First Esdras dates to the mid- to late-second century B.C.E. and thus is a Hellenistic re-presentation of the return to Jerusalem after the exile.[9] The Story of the Three Youths may have circulated independently before being added to the Chronicles-Ezra-Nehemiah materials to form 1 Esdras, though Z. Talshir emphasizes that the story is the *raison d'être* of 1 Esdras, meaning that 1 Esdras itself never existed without the Story of the Three Youths.[10] The story serves the book's larger concern with downplaying the role of Nehemiah and highlighting Zerubbabel's place in the restoration of Jerusalem.[11]

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[9] For overviews of the background of 1 Esdras and its Hebrew Bible parallels, see R. J. Coggins and M. A. Knibb, *The First and Second Books of Esdras* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 1-7, and J. M. Myers, *I and II Esdras* (AB; Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1974), 1-19.

[10] Z. Talshir, *I Esdras: From Origin to Translation*, (SBLSCSS 47; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1999), 58-109. Talshir believes the Story may have combined known wisdom elements but that the story itself was composed specifically for 1 Esdras.

[11] Ibid., 46-57; cf. Eskenazi, *In An Age of Prose*, 155-174. Eskenazi gives particular attention to Zerubbabel's Davidic ancestry, lifting it up as a centerpiece of 1 Esdras. Talshir rightly cautions against over-emphasizing the Davidic element, since no additional emphasis is given to Zerubbabel's ancestry and the existing references themselves are not particularly persistent.

While my concern is primarily with the MT texts, which date from the Persian or early Hellenistic period, a comparison of 1 Esdras with MT Ezra highlights the emphasis on textual authority that inheres in the Persian composition and that is then diluted in the 1 Esdras redaction.

In the Story of the Three Youths (1 Esd 3-4), three bodyguards to Persia's King Darius devise a contest among themselves to determine who is wisest. Each guard writes down what thing they think is strongest and puts the answer under the pillow of the sleeping king. When Darius awakes, he evaluates each statement and grants a reward to the third guard, Zerubbabel, the only guard identified by name in the story. The first guard says that wine is strongest, the second guard says the king is strongest, and Zerubbabel declares that women are strongest, yet truth is strongest of all. Impressed with his answer, the king decides to grant whatever Zerubbabel asks, "even beyond what is written" (1 Esd 4:42 NRSV). Zerubbabel implores Darius to remember a vow he made upon becoming king to restore Jerusalem and its Temple. The king assents, and he sends Zerubbabel and any Jews who wish to go to Jerusalem, along with orders for money and supplies for the restoration effort.

Darius gives his orders by means of letter-writing (1 Esd 4:47-57), which is certainly in keeping with the Persian methods of pronouncing imperial decrees via written documents, a practice that would have remained in place during Hellenistic rule. So, too, do the bodyguards write their answers to the riddle, which appears to facilitate their access to the sleeping king. Nonetheless, writing is not the focus of this episode. As this chapter will continue to show, Ezra-Nehemiah presents much of the restoration effort as a consequence of documentary authority; the return is made possible because all the right documents are in the right places. However, the Story of the Three Youths

interrupts the pattern of documentary authority. By showcasing Zerubbabel's wisdom and initiative, the story returns some agency for the mobilization of the return back into the hands of the Jews themselves, and specifically to the figure of Zerubbabel. Zerubbabel does not appeal to Darius on the basis of fulfilling what had been written in the past; the archives need not be searched. Instead, Zerubbabel invokes a vow Darius ostensibly made when he took the throne. Talshir has argued that the primary function of the Story of the Three Youths is to highlight Zerubbabel's role in the restoration effort, and that the Ezra story's chronology is adjusted in 1 Esdras to accommodate this new emphasis.[12] At the same time, the presence of the story in the midst of the Ezra narrative also dilutes the surrounding narrative's emphasis on the power of textuality. Wisdom and leadership—perhaps specifically Davidic leadership, given Zerubbabel's lineage—are valued in the Story of the Three Youths; writing appears only as incidental, extraneous to the core of the story.[13]

The Story of the Three Youths is a Hellenistic addition to a Hellenistic re-presentation of Ezra with selections added from Chronicles and Nehemiah. Its choice of "the strongest thing" as the focus of the riddle borrows a Hellenistic motif,[14] but its emphasis on truth and on God as purveyor of truth lauds a value of Persian, Greek, and Jewish culture alike.[15] This emphasis contrasts with the authority of text conveyed by MT Ezra-Nehemiah and Chronicles. Thus, reading 1 Esdras and MT Ezra-Nehemiah together

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[12] Talshir, *I Esdras*, 108-109. Ezra2:1-4:5, which describes Zerubbabel's leadership of the returnees, is moved after the Story of the Three Youths, while 4:6-24 is juxtaposed with Ezra 1 to keep material that does not mention Zerubbabel together. L. Grabbe, review of Z. Talshir, *I Esdras, JJS* 47.2 (2002): 343-345, strongly contests Talshir's claim that the Zerubbabel story is the reason for the composition of 1 Esdras.

[13] For more on Zerubbabel as paradigmatic "wise courtier" in the traditions of Joseph, Esther, and Daniel, see L. Wills, *The Jew in the Court of a Foreign King.*

[14] Myers, *I and II Esdras*, 54.

[15] Ibid., 53-57; Talshir, *I Esdras*, 73-76.

highlights the latter's emphasis on textuality as an imperial value, an emphasis that is diluted by the unique rearrangement that is 1 Esdras.

Prose Style

Listing the documents in Ezra-Nehemiah is not as straightforward a project as it might seem. Many documents form easily identifiable sections within the book, and yet those sections are not readily extricated from the fabric of the narrative. While some texts are incorporated whole-cloth into the book, other documents vital to the movement of the plot are referred to but not quoted. Still other texts are quoted inside other documents. Several passages, especially lists of nouns, read as if they are quoted from some source document but are not identified as such. Finally, the prose style of Ezra-Nehemiah itself is so thickly administrative in places that it blurs the line between narrative and bureaucratic form.

Four primary genres of written materials can be identified in Ezra-Nehemiah: royal decrees, letters, genealogies, and lists. Yet, given the complications presented by the book's own hypertextuality, written documents in Ezra-Nehemiah do not align neatly into clear-cut generic categories. The multi-genred, hypertextual flavor of the documents in Ezra-Nehemiah spills over into the book's narration as well. In his sociolinguistic analysis of the bilingual character of Ezra-Nehemiah, Frank Polak shows how the Hebrew narrative portions of Ezra-Nehemiah themselves take on the administrative linguistic style of eastern Aramaic, the primary record-keeping language of the Achaemenid empire.[16] Polak begins by noting differences between the administrative or

[16] F. Polak, "Sociolinguistics and the Judean Speech Community in the Achaemenid Empire," in *Judah and the Judeans in the Persian Period* (O. Lipschits and M. Oeming, eds.; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2006): 589-628.

eastern Aramaic used in the imperial correspondence in Ezra 4-6 and the popular or western Aramaic employed by the narrator's voice in the same chapters. At the same time, the syntax of the letters reflects an eastern style, characteristic of Akkadian and its influence on Aramaic in the administrative regions of the Persian Empire, which sets the object before the predicate. Polak notes parallels between this phenomenon in the Ezra letters and in Aramaic documents from Egypt in the Achaemenid period. The narrative elements of Ezra 4-6, by contrast, follow the standard western Aramaic syntax of setting the object after the predicate.[17]

Having established this dichotomy between the two styles of Aramaic in Ezra-Nehemiah, Polak turns to the Hebrew of the book, investigating how the effects of the preponderance of Aramaic language-learning and speaking in the Achaemenid era are reflected in the text's written Hebrew. Of particular note for this dissertation is the book's propensity for using "long noun groups, particularly indicating the participants in the action."[18] Interpolated documents constitute around one-third of all the material in Ezra-Nehemiah, yet even the remaining two-thirds is not straightforwardly narrative. Strings of three, four, or often many more nouns serve as subjects and objects throughout the book.[19] Polak points to examples in Ezra 3:2 and 10:15, where "[t]he extensive reciting of the participants [in the action] almost turns into a list."[20] The scene in which Ezra reads the Torah (Neh 8) is also full of list-like detail, as in v. 4: "The scribe Ezra stood on a wooden platform that had been made for the purpose; and beside him stood Mattithiah,

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[17] Polak, "Sociolinguistics and the Judean Speech Community," 591-596.

[18] Ibid., 600.

[19] Verses in Ezra-Nehemiah that put four or more nouns in a series outside of an outright list or genealogy include Ezra 1:6, 9-11; 2:2, 70; 3:4-5, 9; 4:7; 6:17; 7:7; 8:16, 18-20, 26-7, 35, 9:1; Neh 2:16, 4:1, 10; 5:11; 7:72; 8:4, 7, 15; 9:4, 5, 8; 10:29, 34; 12:32-36, 38-39, 41-42, 44; 13:15-16.

[20] Ibid. The verse is erroneously cited in the article as Ezra 3:1.

Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiah, Maaseiah on his right hand; and Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hash-baddanah, Zechariah, and Meshullam on his left hand." Examples such as these abound in the ostensibly narrative portions of Ezra-Nehemiah.[21] Comparing this style to Achaemenid-era administrative documents, Polak asserts, "Such detailed specification, though rare in Classical biblical narrative, is the norm in the opening of real estate contracts and other documents from the Achaemenid Period."[22] Polak goes on to name hypotaxis, clauses with two or more syntactic arguments, long noun groups, and subordinate clauses as additional characteristics shared between extant administrative documents and the prose of Ezra-Nehemiah, concluding that "the characteristic biblical prose style of the Achaemenid Period was at home in the official scribal chancery."[23]

Polak's findings show that the bureaucratic ethos cultivated by the Persian Empire inheres in the very fabric of the Hebrew narrative of Ezra-Nehemiah. As this chapter proceeds through the book via its documentary genres, it is important to recognize that the book's administrative impulses are not limited to these forms, but in fact permeate the narrative that links the forms together.

Decrees

In English, the word "decree" can connote a general sense of authoritative command, encompassing any sort of directive. The Aramaic portions of both Ezra and Daniel use a specialized vocabulary for "decree" that implies a narrower definition not

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[21] E.g., Ezra 7:7, 24; Neh 8:16, 24-27. See additional examples in Polak, "Sociolinguistics and the Judean Speech Community," 600 n. 56 and 57.

[22] Ibid., 600.

[23] Ibid., 602.

wholly conveyed by that English translation. The Aramaic "decree" more often refers to a specific genre, especially a royal genre. The use of Aramaic as the imperial administrative language helps to explain the concentrated appearance of this official genre in Ezra's Aramaic chapters. The most commonly used word for "command" or "decree" is the Aramaic noun טעם, which appears twenty-one times in Ezra, a particularly dense concentration considering the limited amount of Aramaic material in the book. In fourteen of those twenty-one appearances, טעם is the object of שים, forming the idiom, "to make a decree." The same is true for four of the nine occurrences of the noun in the book of Daniel.[24] Kutscher identified שים טעם in passive constructions with a specified agent (e.g., Dan 3:10, 29; 4:3) as a *passivum majestatis* originating from Old Persian.[25] Building on Kutscher's work, John Makujina has argued that the idiom in both its active and passive constructions reflects an Old Persian origin.[26] An Old Persian background for this phrase further emphasizes its royal—particularly of *Persian* royalty—provenance. No particular mode of distribution inheres in the טעם, nor is it necessarily always written; Artaxerxes makes a decree for the historical annals to be searched for information about Judah, and there is no indication in the text that that was necessarily a written decree (Ezra 4:19).[27] A decree is simply put, placed, or made. It is not the way the content of a

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[24] שים טעם as an idiom for "to make a decree" appears at Daniel 3:10, 29; 4:3; 6:27. Daniel 3:12 and 6:14 also use a construction based on שים טעם, but with a sense of "take into consideration" or "pay heed," an expression usually requiring an indirect object (e.g., "they do not heed you").

[25] E. Y. Kutscher, "Two 'Passive' Constructions in Aramaic in Light of Persian," in *Proceedings of the International Conference on Semitic Studies, Held in Jerusalem, 19-23 July, 1965* (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1969), 148-151.

[26] J. Makujina, "On the Possible Old Persian Origin of the Aramaic שִׂים טְעֵם, 'to Issue a Decree,'" *HUCA* 68 (1997): 1-9. Makujina identifies the phrase as an Old Persian calque, most likely for the OP verb *ništā-*, but without excluding the possibility of either *framā-* or *θah-* as the OP parallels. For additional discussion of the performative nature of the idiom, see T. Li, *The Verbal System of the Aramaic of Daniel: an Explanation in the Context of Grammaticalization* (SAIS 8; Leiden: Brill, 2009), 25-27.

[27] Cf. Dan 5:2.

decree is communicated through the empire that makes it טעם, but rather the authority with which it is uttered.

טעם does occur seven times in Ezra outside of the שים טעם idiom. Three times it is part of the title of Rehum (בעל־טעם), whose administrative post would have required him to issue orders on behalf of the king.[28] Therefore a literal translation of the title, such as "Lord of [the] Decree," is appropriate.[29] Ezra 5:5 uses טעם in the general sense of a "report," but because the word does not appear in conjunction with שים טעם, the usage does not conflict with the sense of authority conveyed by the idiom. Finally, there are two usages of טעם in which the narrative links the decrees of the king with decrees of God. In the first, טעם appears twice, once for God and once for the emperor: "They built and they finished by the decree of the God of Israel and by the decree of Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes, king of Persia" (6:14b). The last instance of טעם in the narrative comes within Artaxerxes' own decree concerning Ezra's return. The king makes a decree (שים טעם) that "anything from a decree of the God of heaven will be done earnestly for the house of the God of heaven…" (7:23). Neither of these two references to a decree of God appears in the idiomatic expression שים טעם; nonetheless, the theological force of these passages certainly recalls the generally authoritative nuance of טעם.

This analysis reveals that in Ezra-Nehemiah, the idiom שים טעם conveys an official command issued by the Persian king. Like a message or letter, this decree may indeed be written down and distributed throughout the kingdom, but the performative, authoritative force of the idiom sets the טעם apart from any regular correspondence *per se*. Outside of its idiomatic sense, טעם can mean simply a command or decree (not

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[28] Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 112.

[29] NRSV translates the title as "royal deputy," Tanakh as "commissioner," NIV as "commanding officer," KJV as "chancellor," NKJV as "commander."

necessarily imperial). Some uses of טעם specify that it is a written document, while others imply it is not, and still others are ambiguous on the point. Finally, some written orders issued by the king are not called by the Aramaic noun טעם, nor is an equivalent Hebrew noun or verbal idiom used. For the purposes of this dissertation, I count as "decrees" those official commands issued by the Persian kings, of which most (though not all) are described in Ezra-Nehemiah with the Aramaic idiom שים טעם).[30] If a decree may be written but is not specified as such in the text, I will also treat it here. These criteria yield ten decrees, all of which occur in Ezra: the edict of Cyrus in two versions (counted as one decree; Ezra 1:1-4 and 6:2-5; 5:3, 9, 13, 17); Artaxerxes' call for a search in the annals (4:19); Rehum and Shimshai's cessation order (4:21); Darius' call for an archival search (6:1); Darius' provisioning for the rebuilding effort (6:8-10); Darius' decree forbidding alteration of his report (6:11-12); two decrees by Artaxerxes relating to Ezra's return (7:12-20, 21-26); and two commands of God (6:14 and 7:23), which are paralleled with the degree-making authority of the Persian kings.

Decrees and Letters in Ezra 1-7

The edict of Cyrus serves as a Janus door linking the books of Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah. As the final word of Chronicles, the edict closes off a period of decline and exile with a note of hope; as the introduction to Ezra, it opens a new era of Israelite history under Persian rule. The edict appears in a third iteration at Ezra 6:2-5, quoted in Aramaic as part of Darius' reply to Tattenai. None of the versions of the edict match each other exactly. Only minor textual variants exist between 2 Chr 36:22-23 and Ezra 1:2-3,

[30] By "official," I mean those sorts of commands that would have some effect on the execution of the government; that is, I do not consider every potential royal demand –e.g., "bring me my supper" – "official" simply because it is uttered by the king.

but Ezra 1:4 continues the decree past the boundaries of the version in 2 Chronicles, adding a call for contributions for the Temple. The Aramaic version of the edict in Ezra 6:3-5 differs markedly from both Hebrew versions in its content. In the Hebrew editions, Cyrus cites the influence of Yahweh on his spirit as he calls for the return of the exiles to Jerusalem and for the rebuilding of the Temple. The Aramaic version of the decree lacks any religious commentary and contains no instructions for a return, but it elaborates on the instructions for the Temple by specifying its dimensions and building materials. The Aramaic version is described with the idiom שים טעם, while the Hebrew version does not appear to be governed by notably distinct lexemes.

The Hebrew and Aramaic versions of the Cyrus proclamation have a rough formal equivalent outside the Hebrew Bible only in the Cyrus cylinder. The repatriation of exiles as a Persian imperial policy is attested only by the sources from Yehud, though there is little reason to doubt the historicity of the return to Judah.[31] Yet the endorsement of local religion and culture does indeed appear to be an Achaemenid policy initiated by Cyrus. Scholars share a broad consensus that the rhetorical strategy reflected in the Hebrew versions of Cyrus' edict, in which Cyrus invokes the blessing of the local god, is historically plausible, given the similar religious rhetoric of the Cyrus cylinder.[32] The existence of the Cyrus cylinder also provides evidence that arguments for the Persian

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[31] Exile had been an effective political strategy throughout the ancient Near Eastern world, and the Persians themselves used exile when they found it expedient. Thanks to positive portrayals of Persia in the Hebrew Bible and in the ancient Persians' own propaganda (e.g., the Cyrus cylinder), the popular portrait of the Achaemenid kings, esp. Cyrus, as deeply beneficent and tolerant has perhaps been overstated. For one investigation of the historiography of Cyrus' invasion of Babylon, see D. Vanderhooft, "Cyrus II, Liberator or Conqueror? Ancient Historiography concerning Cyrus in Babylon," in *Judah and the Judeans in the Persian Period* (ed. O. Lipschits and M. Oeming; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 351-372. See also A. Kuhrt, "The Cyrus Cylinder and Achaemenid Imperial Policy," 94-95.

[32] "Cyrus," trans. by A. Leo Oppenheim (*ANET*, 315-316); Kuhrt, "The Cyrus Cylinder," 92-95; Lincoln, *Religion, Empire, and Torture*, 36-43.

leader's relationships with local gods were written down, rather than simply circulating by herald or popular word-of-mouth. While Darius deserves credit for cultivating Persia's use of the written word into an obsession, Cyrus himself had already made effective use of that medium to win the "hearts and minds" of the peoples he conquered.

Eskenazi suggests that, as the opening to Ezra-Nehemiah, the edict of Cyrus "sound[s] the themes that will be played in a variety of rhythms and keys throughout the book."[33] These four opening verses constitute the entire "potentiality" section of the book's three-fold structure. In Eskenazi's view, the edict establishes the importance of documentary authority and the rising leadership of the whole community rather than that of individuals from it. In addition, the edict provides the objective—i.e., building the house of God—that is fulfilled and then celebrated over the course of the book. The notion that temple-building as ordered in Ezra 1 constitutes the focus of the book's entire plot is problematic, as Clines has noted, particularly since later sections of Ezra-Nehemiah address wall-building and law-giving as separate, subsequent goals of the restoration project.[34] Yet those early verses—especially, in fact, the opening verse itself—are heavily freighted, setting the tone for the unfolding relationship between Persia and Yehud.

The first words of Ezra-Nehemiah date Cyrus' edict to the first year of his reign and, by doing so, provide an entirely new temporal orientation for the narrative; ובשנת אחת לכורש is the בראשית of the post-exilic era. Persia and Judah stand together with their toes behind the starting line of a new historical moment. Timekeeping begins anew with a

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[33] Eskenazi, "From Text to Actuality," 173.

[34] Clines, "The Force of the Text: A Response to Tamara C. Eskenazi's 'Ezra Nehemiah: From Text to Actuality.," in *Signs and Wonders: Biblical Texts in Literary Focus* (ed. J. Cheryl Exum; SemSt; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1989), 199-215.

fresh line of rulers, foreign kings whose fate is nonetheless intertwined with the fate of the Judeans at the outset of their kingship. Because of both its dating and its scope, this introduction also communicates the priority of Judah in the eyes of the new Persian leadership. The call for the people of Yahweh to go up to Jerusalem becomes one of Cyrus' very first acts, indicating that Judah holds a place of significance in Cyrus' ruling strategy from the very beginning. Moreover, that call goes out "in all his kingdom" (בכל־מלכותו), which, while calling in Jews from across the Diaspora, also serves to make known Cyrus' relationship with Yehud throughout the empire. Cyrus' concern for Yehud is immediate and universally broadcast.

The introductory verse at Ezra 1:1 specifies that Cyrus' decree was proclaimed both orally and in writing (במכתב). The written nature of the decree will be especially important to the success of the archival search in Ezra 4; from the very beginning of the story, the reader knows that a written document has been put into circulation, so that the protagonists need not rely on hearsay for their authorization. It is notable that the *written* nature of the edict does not stand out as especially authoritative in this opening line. In fact, the verse prioritizes other sources of authority, presenting the fact that the decree was "in writing" almost as an afterthought. The permit to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple is authoritative because it is issued by Cyrus. Cyrus issues it, in turn, because Yahweh stirs his spirit, which itself is a fulfillment of prophecy.[35] The edict does not here carry weight simply because it is written; its authority stems from its royal and divine

[35] Though the text here refers to the "word of Yahweh from the mouth of Jeremiah" (Ezra 1:1), Jeremiah himself is associated with both written and oral prophecy. If Ezra 1:1 is read as a fulfillment of Jeremiah's "seventy years" prophecy (cf. Grabbe, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 11), then one can look to either Jer 25:11-12 or Jer 29:10-14. The latter version of the prophecy occurs in a letter Jeremiah sends from Jerusalem to Babylon (Jer 29:1), thus having Cyrus fulfill a written prophecy and deepening the emphasis on written texts from the outset of the book.

origins. Nevertheless, the text makes a special point of affirming the existence of a written copy, thus foreshadowing the book's plot and theme alike.

In addition to appearing as a text twice within Ezra-Nehemiah, Cyrus' decree resonates throughout Ezra's depiction of the building process. When the people give money and provisions to builders and suppliers in order to start work on the temple, the text specifies that those arrangements were made "according to the authorization of King Cyrus of Persia that was upon them" (Ezra 3:7).[36] When Judah's "enemies" ask to join in the building effort, the returnees reject their request, saying, "We alone will build for Yahweh, the God of Israel, as the king, Cyrus, King of Persia, has commanded us" (Ezra 4:1-3). The edict serves as a touchstone for the work of the community and, consequently, for the movement of the plot. Cyrus' decree directs the actions of the returnees. Moreover, as Eskenazi points out, the people wield the decree as a means for defining the boundaries of the community: "The claim of 'merely following orders' functions both as a justification for building the house of God and, at the same time, a means for exclusion from the people of God. In this fashion, the decree buttresses and defines both the house of God and the composition of the people."[37] The Cyrus decree becomes, for the returned exiles, a work cited, a text interpreted on behalf of the claims they assert. By letting the authority of Cyrus' edict direct the work and identity of their community, the returnees begin to appropriate the administrative power of the empire for their own purposes.

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[36] Given the context of funding arrangements, the "first thing" may refer to the financial support given to the returnees from the royal treasury according to the Aramaic version of the edict – hence the NRSV's translation "grant."

[37] Eskenazi, "From Text to Actuality," 177.

After years of providing continuous opposition, the *’am-hā’āretz* use the official means of the empire to try to thwart further the returnees building plans.[38] They write an accusation (שטנה) against the Judeans in the form of a letter, which will be discussed in more detail below.[39] Rehum and Shimshai, the primary authors of the letter, call on the king—Artaxerxes here, though the chronology is difficult to match with the historical line of Persian kings—to search his royal archives for information about Jerusalem. The *’am-hā’āretz* claim that the king is sure to find evidence that the inhabitants of Jerusalem have long been troublemakers. In response to the letter’s accusations, King Artaxerxes issues a decree for such a search to be undertaken. The results are as Judah’s adversaries predicted: “Jerusalem has had mighty kings who ruled over the whole province Beyond the River, to whom tribute, custom, and toll were paid” (4:20 NRSV). This discovery leads Artaxerxes to take action in true Achaemenid style: by decree-making. Remarkably, the king instructs Rehum and Shimshai themselves to make a decree. It is difficult to imagine in what way the king’s instructing his governmental employees to issue a decree

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[38] Scholars have long identified the poor and powerless who had remained in the land at the time of the Babylonian exile with the “people of the land” (עם־הארץ) who mount a campaign of harassment against the “people of Judah” (Ezra 4:4). L. S. Fried, “The *‘am hā’āres* in Ezra 4:4 and Persian Administration,” in *Judah and the Judeans in the Persian Period* (ed. O. Lipschits and M. Oeming; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2006): 123-145, has recently made a compelling argument that the עם־הארץ were in fact Persian, landed aristocracy who served as the satrapal officials of Beyond the River, meaning they were neither poor nor ethnically Judean. Therefore, I have avoided using the term “people of the land” to describe the native, subaltern population of Yehud, whose utter namelessness now further underscores their attempted exscription from Yehud’s narrative history.

[39] שטנה, a *hapax legomenon*, appears to be related to the root שטנה, adversary. Its appearance with כתב suggests that it could specify a particular written genre. At the same time, the text seems to indicate that what is written is a letter, and that שטנה may simply characterize the contents of that letter. This passage (4:6-10) is particularly convoluted, and is impossible to say with certainty whether the accusation and the letter are or are not the same document. Given the absence of any other evidence that the שטנה was its own genre, I treat the designation שטנה as a commentary on the content of the letter.

differs from his doing the issuing himself; however, the final condition of Artaxerxes' order proves even more remarkable. Rehum and Shimshai's decree is to stand "until a decree is issued from me" (4:21). We have already seen the perception of irrevocability that official proclamations carry throughout the Hebrew Bible, especially in the book of Esther. Furthermore, the decrees issued by Darius in Ezra 6 will stipulate that any attempt to alter those edicts will result in destruction of personal property and even in death. The kings' decrees purport to be the last word in Persian law. Yet Artaxerxes allows an "out" to Rehum and Shimshai's order. It is as if a decree issued by agents of the king, but not directly from the king himself, may still be overruled by a royal proclamation. Even more remarkable is the idea that Artaxerxes allows quite generously for the possibility that he will want to change his mind regarding the building of the Jerusalem temple.

The presentation of Artaxerxes' decrees is not simply a duplication of historical documents, but rather a carefully crafted commentary on Persia's imperial power. By putting Artaxerxes' decree for cessation of the building project in the hands of Rehum and Shimshai rather than Artaxerxes himself, the narrative never allows Artaxerxes to oppose the project completely. Furthermore, Artaxerxes leaves open the possibility that he himself will make a decree to reverse the stop-work order. At the same time, Artaxerxes is still himself subject to the power of the written word. The archival search reveals what it reveals, without contradiction: ancient documents say Jerusalem is dangerous, so Artaxerxes must take action accordingly. The relationship between king and decree is complicated, not one-sided; written documents do not take precedence over the king's orders, and yet the king's power cannot wholly tamp the authority of existing documentation.

Nowhere in Artaxerxes' investigation in Ezra 4:7-24 does he stumble upon the decree from the first year of Cyrus' reign. However, the Cyrus edict is invoked again in Ezra 5 and 6 when Tattenai and his compatriots begin to interrogate the Judeans about the authority with which they have undertaken the building project. They ask, "Who made a decree to you (שים טעם) to build this house and to complete this structure?" (Ezra 5:3) Their question assumes that authority rests on the issuance of a written decree (שים טעם). The Judeans' response to Tattenai is presented as part of the report Tattenai sends to Darius (5:13). The community narrates its story of exile, specifying that God "gave them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, a Chaldean, and he destroyed this house and exiled the people to Babylon. But in the first year of Cyrus, King of Babylon, King Cyrus made a decree to finish this house of God" (Ezra 5:12-13). Notably, this reference to the decree does not call Cyrus "King of Persia," but rather, "King of Babylon," thus underscoring that he has replaced Nebuchadnezzar as the one wielding power over that nation. The Judeans' narrative moves Tattenai to request that Darius search in the archives in Babylon for a copy of Cyrus' decree. Tattenai's request again assumes a "paper trail": if the Judeans are telling the truth, and Cyrus did in fact issue a decree, then a copy of that decree should be accessible in the archives.

Tattenai's request generates another decree: Darius makes a decree that the archives in Babylon should be searched (6:1). The text does not say specifically that this decree is written, but, as the above analysis has shown, the "official decree" using the שים טעם idiom most often refers to a written document. Darius' search yields a record (דכרונה) of Cyrus' decree in Aramaic, known to be the *lingua franca* of the empire and one of the record-keeping languages of historical Persia. The record is not merely a copy of the decree, but rather contains a bit of introductory commentary, dating the decree and

verifying its official provenance (שים טעם). The text of the decree aligns with what the Judeans, via Tattenai's report, have claimed Cyrus to have decreed: not for all of God's people to go up, as in the Hebrew version (1:3), but rather for the house to be rebuilt and for the temple vessels removed by Nebuchadnezzar to be returned (6:3-5).

The discovery of the decree is sufficient proof for Darius, who instructs Tattenai, Shethar-bozenai, and their associates to leave the Judeans to their work. This discovery of Cyrus' decree generates yet another decree: Darius orders that funds for building and supplying the temple be extracted from the tribute of the province of Beyond the River. Darius decrees and then announces that he has decreed. Moreover, within the uttering of this decree, he issues his third decree of the narrative, this one forbidding the alteration of the larger tribute decree (6:11).[40] The word referring back to Darius' tribute decree is פתגם, not טעם. פתגם appears to be roughly synonymous with טעם here. Yet the fact that טעם is not itself used, coupled with more generalized usages of פתגם elsewhere,[41] suggests that Darius forbids alteration of any of the report he sends back to Tattenai's cohort. Finally, Darius ends his reply to Tattenai by reiterating the force of his command: "I Darius have made a decree; let it be done with all diligence" (6:12).[42] This final occurence of שים טעם in this section can be read as the second half of an inclusio, bracketing off either Darius' tribute decree or his decree forbidding alteration that follows

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[40] The repetition of שים טעם, along with the addition of new content for a decree, indicate that a new decree is being drafted, rather than that the tribute decree is being amended.

[41] In Esther 1:20, פתגם is equivalent to a "royal word" (דבר־מלכות, 1:19) to be issued by the king. Written documents (ספרים) communicate the פתגם through the lands of the empire. Qohelet 8:11 uses פתגם to describe a declaration, report, or action, presumably official, that should deter potential perpetrators from evil deeds: "Because a report (פתגם) of an evil deed is not made quickly, the heart of human beings is filled to do evil."

[42] "All diligence" follows the NRSV.

it. Regardless, the statement punctuates the narrative's portrayal of the Persian kings as prolific decree-makers and provides the final word that makes possible the completion of work on the Jerusalem Temple.

Ezra 6:14 declares that the construction of the temple was finished "by decree (טַעַם) of the God of Israel and by decree (טְעֵם) of Cyrus, Darius, and King Artaxerxes of Persia." The collapse of time evident in the deployment of documents throughout the book is again evident here: though rescripted in different ways by three different kings from three different eras, one edict has remained the authoritative word.[43] This verse also echoes the divine oversight outlined in the initial presentation of the edict of Cyrus but largely muted until now. The same root (טעם) is used for both the decree of God and the decree of the kings, but the MT points the two words differently. The vocalization טַעַם matches the one use of the word in a Hebrew passage of the MT (Jonah 3:7), while טְעֵם is the standard Aramaic vocalization. The same phenomenon appears at Ezra 7:23, where Artaxerxes declares, "Anything that is from a decree (טַעַם) of the God of heaven, let it be done zealously for the house of the God of heaven...." The decree (טַעַם) of the God of heaven contrasts with the two decrees (טְעֵם) Artaxerxes is himself issuing.

HALOT proposes two possibilities for the divergent vocalizations of טעם: they reflect either a "simple Hebraism" or a purposeful differentiation between the work of God and the work of human beings, probably of Masoretic origin.[44] Yet, either way, the

[43] The idea that Artaxerxes' decree in Ezra 4 has contributed to the success of the rebuilding effort is puzzling here and does suggest redaction-critical problems, namely that the decree(s) of Ezra 7 is out-of-order, especially since Artaxerxes' reign followed both Cyrus' and Darius'.

[44] "טְעֵם," *HALOT* 2:1885. The Aramaic and Hebrew nouns derive from Akkadian *ṭēmu*, command or decree, further reflecting the influence of the eastern administrative tradition on the vocabulary of the Persian administration (Cf. *HALOT* 1:377). It might be possible to read into the different pointings a contrast between a Hebraic theocentric bent and an Aramaic administrative one; however, the use of the same root, coupled with the fact that the MT pointings in general so significantly postdate the consonantal

use of the two vocalizations for the same noun emphasizes at once both the continuity and the difference between the decrees of God and of the king. The syntax of the phrase at 6:14 underscores difference: the kings are lumped together as one, but the command of God stands out first, on its own. The same is true for the juxtaposition of the nouns in Artaxerxes' letter to Ezra: Artaxerxes himself makes a decree that all decrees of the God of heaven should be undertaken zealously (7:21, 23). At the same time, both God and the kings issue an authoritative, official command (טעם); the same root in an unpointed text renders them lexically equivalent. God is differentiated from the Persian kings, but God has the same *modus operandi*. Ezra-Nehemiah's summary of the Temple-building effort shows God wielding the same implement of power that the Persian kings do: an official decree that, if not specifically written, certainly evokes the authority of the written genre.

Artaxerxes' two decrees within his letter to Ezra grant authorization for the title character's return trip to Jerusalem, for his recruitment of volunteers to return with him, for his procurement of resources and sacrifices for the Temple from the royal treasury, for his appointment of judges, and for the just punishment of all who disobey the law of God or king (Ezra 7:11-26). Each edict is prefaced with the performative utterance, "I decree" (ומני שים טעם). The text of the two decrees is subsumed in a letter from the king, a copy of which Ezra clutches as he travels to Jerusalem from Babylon, even as he holds the law of his God in his hand (7:14). Within the empire, God's law is not authoritative on its own; it must be sanctioned by the king's command. At the same time, by issuing decrees endorsing the authority of the law of God, Artaxerxes relinquishes some of the authority of the empire. Unlike in the earlier decree attributed to him, Artaxerxes leaves

text, tempers the possibility that a stark theological contrast is being drawn in the Persian-era text. Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 128, and Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 72 n.14b, concur with the assessment that the divergent points are a Masoretic device to differentiate between divine and human command.

himself no "out," no statement that hedges his bets (4:21). The law of God and the law of the king are to be followed at the same risk of penalty (7:26). In the decrees that Artaxerxes puts into the hands of Ezra, the laws of God and king are given a tenuous parity.

Faced with a plethora of royal proclamations, the Judeans hold fast to the first word of this new era. Ezra-Nehemiah takes care to establish the primacy of the edict of Cyrus, and throughout its presentation of the challenges and triumphs over the course of the Temple-building project, it is that edict that ultimately governs its history. The building of the Temple may not be, as Eskenazi describes it, the key "potentiality" actualized over the entire Ezra-Nehemiah narrative. Yet the edict of Cyrus, which first authorizes the building of the Temple, certainly establishes the importance of royal decrees from the outset of the narrative, and without it none of the work described in Ezra-Nehemiah could be accomplished. As Gordon Davies notes, Ezra 1:1-6 "sets in motion the rhetorical machine of the entire book."[45]

By Ezra 7, the text has already laid out the last of the imperial decrees. The book of Ezra-Nehemiah itself, though, still has much to recount, and its "rhetorical machine" has much to communicate. In the same way that the edict of Cyrus provides a hinge between the Chronicler's pre-exilic history and Ezra's post-exilic account of the return to Judah, Artaxerxes' double-edict closes off the era in which the imperial powers remain intimately involved in the fashioning of the restoration community. It then opens a new era in which the Judeans must decide how to manage their own community, even as the dominance of the empire casts a shadow over all of their ostensible autonomy.

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[45] G. F. Davies, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 17.

Artaxerxes' mandates to Ezra do not transfer power from the former to the latter; instead, they establish a new layer of bureaucracy. This new bureaucracy is more than just a labyrinth of "red tape": it is a stratum of colonial leadership, pressed between its imperial overlords and its authochtonous citizens, compelled to exercise a dubious freedom in compulsory self-governance, even as it ultimately answers to the machinations of the empire. In response, the community leadership exercises authority through the mode whose power it has already experienced: the written word.

Letters

Ezra-Nehemiah includes the text of seven letters. Five are letters to and from the Persian king: Rehum, Shimshai, et al. to Artaxerxes (Ezra 4:11-16); Artaxerxes to Rehum, Shimshai, et al. (Ezra 4:17-22); Tattenai, Shethar-bozenai, et al. to Darius (Ezra 5:7-17); Darius to Tattenai, Shethar-bozenai, et al. (Ezra 6:6-12); and Artaxerxes to Ezra (Ezra 7:11-26). All of these letters are written in Aramaic and are concentrated in chs. 4-7 of Ezra. Nehemiah 6 includes quotations from a letter to the Judeans from Sanballat (Neh 6:6-7), as well as Nehemiah's reply (Neh 6:8). Nehemiah also refers to letters whose text is not worked into the book but whose existence either enables or inhibits the progress of the restoration effort. Nehemiah asks for and receives letters from the King Darius guaranteeing safe passage and donations of lumber on his return trip to Jerusalem (Neh 2:7-9). He and his compatriots also exchange several letters with Sanballat and Tobiah, in what the narrative identifies as efforts at intimidation on Sanballat and Tobiah's part (6:3-5, 17-19).

Formal Characteristics of the Letters

While none of the Aramaic letters nor the Sanballat correspondence appears in an obviously complete form in the book, many show characteristics of Aramaic correspondence known from extra-biblical evidence. The extent to which the letters in Ezra-Nehemiah follow known epistolary forms is important for the present study because those forms can help delineate where certain written documents begin and end. Decrees and letters overlap extensively in the book, and comparisons with extant documents will help delineate between the two. I will briefly examine the structure of each letter included in Ezra-Nehemiah, discussing the ways each does or does not participate in the Aramaic letter form broadly conceived.[46]

J. Fitzmyer identifies five parts of the Aramaic letter: *praescriptio*, initial greeting, secondary greetings, body, and concluding statement.[47] He limits *praescriptio* "to indicate solely the names of the sender and the addressee" rather than including the greeting as well, "because the greeting is sometimes absent in the extant Aramaic letters or else is formulated in various elaborate ways that call for a distinct discussion of the

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[46] D. Schwiderski, *Handbuch des nordwestsemitischen Briefformulars: Ein Beitrag zur Echtheitsfrage der aramäischen Briefe des Esrabuches* (BZAW 295; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2000), has produced a comprehensive study of Northwest Semitic letter forms from the 9th century B.C.E. to the 2nd century C.E. in order to investigate the authenticity of the letters in Ezra 1-7. He concludes that the letters resemble more closely the letter forms from the Hellenistic-Roman era than the Old and Imperial Aramaic corpus; therefore, the letters are inauthentic, a fabrication of the Hellenistic era. Schwiderski's investigation is extremely precise and nuanced, and therein lies both its strength and its weakness. It is so attentive to variations in form that conclusions about the Ezra correspondence are drawn from only 11 Hellenistic-Roman-era letters with differences as small as a missing preposition. Given the very limited corpus of extant letters Schwiderski examines, coupled with the minor nature of the variants he identifies (in what is already a relatively fluid genre), I am unconvinced that these differences constitute true variations in form over time. Moreover, in this project I am not seeking to determine whether the letters may have had actual historical counterparts used as sources for the narrative. Therefore, for the purposes of this dissertation, the broader formal categories offered by Fitzmyer and Lindenberger remain more useful.

[47] Fitzmyer, "Aramaic Epistolography," *Semeia* 22 (1981): 25-27.

initial greeting."[48] The *praescriptio* is occasionally omitted altogether.[49] While official letters forego an initial greeting more often than formal ones, many letters employ שלם as a greeting following the *praescriptio*. Another option for the initial greeting is a ברך formula, but that does not appear in the Ezra letters. Secondary greetings are also absent from the Ezra corpus. Fitzmyer notes that שלם is also a standard part of the concluding statement when it appears, though Lindenberger stresses that many Aramaic letters forego a closing, while no extant Hebrew or Canaanite letters preserve any kind of obvious conclusion, formulaic or otherwise.[50]

Drawing on both Hebrew and Aramaic letters, Lindenberger outlines a similar structure grouped into three large sections: the opening, which includes an initial address (Fitzmyer's *praescriptio*) and/or an initial greeting; the body; and the closing, which may have concluding formulas, the mention of a scribe, and/or a date.[51] Both scholars also include the external address from a papyrus scroll as a separate category, but not as an integral part of the structure of the letter's text itself. Fitzmyer and Lindenberger also note that one letter may leave out any of the separate elements, so the absence of one or more of the recognized characteristics does not automatically exclude a text from the letter form. For this reason, Lindenberger's broader groupings of opening, body, and closing are helpful in that they do not dwell on what may be incidental differences in structure, while Fitmyer's specificity, particularly in distinguishing between *praescriptio*, initial greeting, and secondary greetings, adds nuance to the analysis when multiple parts of an opening are present. I will employ both sets of terminology in my examination of

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[48] Ibid., 30.

[49] Ibid., 31.

[50] Fitzmyer, "Aramaic Epistolography," 36, and James M. Lindenberger, *Ancient Aramaic and Hebrew Letters* (2nd ed.; SBLWAW 14; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 9.

[51] Lindenberger, *Ancient Aramaic and Hebrew Letters*, 7.

the Ezra letters.

Rehum, Shimshai, et al. to Artaxerxes (4:11-16): The opening of this piece of correspondence is particularly difficult to discern, as there seem to be either multiple narrative introductions or multiple *praescriptiones,* depending on how one divides the verses. The beginning of the narrative introduction translates easily: "Rehum, Lord of Decrees, and Shimshai the scribe wrote a letter against Jerusalem to Artaxerxes, king of Persia, as follows" (4:8). The next two verses introduce the confusion: "Then Rehum, Lord of Decrees, Shimshai the scribe, and the rest of their associates, the judges…and the rest of the peoples…כענת" (4:9-10). No explicit verb governs these two verses. Is there a second letter, or a secondary introduction? The introductory material continues: "This is a copy of the letter that they sent to him: to King Artaxerxes; your servants, the people of Beyond the River; וכענת" (4:11).

The connecting word כענת contributes to this conundrum. In the MT, כענת ends vv. 10 and 11, but *BHS* notes suggest the deletion of כענת at the end of v. 10 and for the כענת at v. 11 to be read with v. 12. כענת once was regarded as an Aramaic form of "etcetera," but now can be "compared to English 'stop' in telegrams."[52] It often follows the initial greeting, is translated by "and now," and "either introduces the body of the message or is repeated in the course of it as a sort of message divider; it marks logical breaks in the letter…."[53] It should not, however, follow the *praescriptio*, which is the element that vv. 9-10 most resembles. Williamson agrees that the word is "out of place" here, attributing it to a possible case of dittography.[54] Deleting כענת from v. 10 does

[52] Fitzmyer, "Aramaic Epistolography," 35.

[53] Ibid.

[54] Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 55 n. 10.c. Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 110, also believes the word belongs to v. 11.

allow the כענת at the end of v. 11 to introduce what is obviously the body of the letter at v. 12. The question remains, though: do vv. 9-10 provide a poorly redacted second introduction, or do they represent a particular part of a letter's structure?

Blenkinsopp suggests that the duplicated names come from the interpolation of the scroll's external address into the letter's text.[55] Two problems challenge this proposition. The first, which Blenkinsopp acknowledges, is the lack of address among all the senders; how would the messenger know to whom the letter should be delivered? Secondly, even if one could explain the lack of a specified recipient, the list of senders lacks מן, a convention of the external address.[56] An editorial interjection is perhaps the most likely option.[57] Regardless of its origin, the list of senders in vv. 9-10 breaks from the known forms of a letter's internal structure in order to provide an exhaustive list of all the persons and peoples aligned against the Judeans.

The actual text of the letter does contain elements of the conventional form. A *praescriptio*—"to King Artaxerxes"—is easily discernible in v. 11b, as is the body in vv. 12-16 (especially given the suggested textual emendation of the BHS). The remainder of v. 11b—"your servants, the men of Beyond-the-River"—contains neither the מן of the sender in a *praescriptio* nor a word of greeting such as ברך or שלם. Here Lindenberger's broader structural categories are helpful, since this phrase is clearly part of the "opening," even though a more precise categorization proves elusive. The letter has no closing, which is not particularly unusual when compared with the inconsistent use of closings in either the biblical or extra-biblical corpus; none of the letters in Ezra-Nehemiah exhibits a

[55] Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 112.

[56] Fitzmyer, "Aramaic Epistolography," 38.

[57] This is also Williamson's suggestion, remarking that "our author has been uncharacteristically awkward in copying the full list of senders from some other part of the letter," and that the author added v. 11a in an attempt to mitigate that awkwardness and provide clarity. Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 62.

formal closing.

Artaxerxes' reply to Rehum, Shimshai, et al. (4:17-22): This text follows the letter form very closely. Ezra 4:17 contains a *praescriptio* and initial greeting following Fitzmyer's fifth form: "To X, (greeting)."[58] The initial greeting is the simple שלם. The body of the letter is set off with כענת. There is no formal closing. The letter narrates the giving of a decree commanding an archival search, and it orders the recipients to issue a decree stopping the rebuilding of Jerusalem. The actual text of a decree, however, is not interpolated into the letter.

Tattenai et al. to Darius (5:7-17): Again the basic elements of a letter can be clearly identified. A hearty greeting—"All peace!"—follows the *praescriptio* (5:7b), which again is in Fitzmyer's fifth form. Although כענת does not appear, the body is easily identified. Included within the body is the text of yet another document, the Judeans' פתגם (formal written reply) of 5:11. The Judeans' response is presented with no formal conventions of a letter, thus reinforcing the probability that the פתגם is not a letter *per se*. Tattenai's letter has no formal closing.

The reprise of Cyrus' edict (6:2-5) and Darius' reply to Tattenai et al. (6:6-12): This passage eschews all introductory conventions of the letter form. A search of King Darius' royal archives turns up a record of the text of Cyrus' decree. This is not a פרשגן, a word which may in fact apply specifically to a duplicate of *correspondence*. Instead, this record is דכרון, an entry in the official archives of the empire. The narrative recites the text of the decree (טעם) and then switches immediately into some form of communication from Darius to Tattenai and his colleagues. This new text is some sort of

[58] Fitzmyer, "Aramaic Epistolography," 35.

unspecified form of royal communiqué, as the narrative's vague phrase די־שלח implies (6:13). The king's first-person address to Tattenai's group in vv. 6-7 contains no indication, via formal or lexical cues, of the operative mode of communication. Ezra 6:8-12 is governed by the idiom שים טעם, which, as we have already seen, emphasizes imperial authority and does not require any particular mode of communication. Ezra 6:11 also refers to Darius' decree as פתגם, which underscores (albeit somewhat tenuously) the written and public nature of the document. The presence of the verb שלח and the noun פתגם does indicate that this passage could be some sort of written missive. However, it cannot be said with any certainty that this passage is a "letter" *per se*; the ambiguities in structure and terminology leave open the possibility of a different mode of communication.

Artaxerxes to Ezra (7:11-26): Here the formal conventions of the Aramaic letter are again regnant, but they give way to the issuance of a decree. The letter begins with a full *praescriptio*, complete with extensive titles for sender and recipient, though there is no initial greeting. The body is introduced by כענת. There is no formal closing. The primary purpose of this letter is to convey decrees (טעם); no text appears between כענת and the שים טעם idiom. The idiom appears twice (7:13, 21), thus enabling the two decrees to govern the entire letter. This final piece of imperial correspondence in Ezra-Nehemiah conflates the letter and decree forms.

Letters in Nehemiah (Neh 6:6-8): The Hebrew letters quoted in Nehemiah use none of the conventions of either Hebrew or Aramaic letter forms. Instead, ostensible excerpts from the body of the letters are included as part of Nehemiah's first-person narration. The narrator Nehemiah relays the relevant information from the text of the letters to supplement his storytelling.

In this examination of the letter forms in Ezra-Nehemiah, I have shown that the Aramaic correspondence with the Persian kings in Ezra 4-7 often aligns closely with known Aramaic letter forms. The places in which the letters deviate from those forms serve only to strengthen the importance of textuality in the book. The muddled introduction to the letter from Rehum adds an additional layer of administrative specificity by providing a thorough listing of the adversaries of Judah, presented here as signatories to the letter of accusation: “Rehum the royal deputy, Shimshai the scribe, and the rest of their associates, the judges, the envoys, the officials, the Persians, the people of Erech, the Babylonians, the people of Susa, that is, the Elamites, and the rest of the nations whom the great and noble Osnappar deported and settled in the cities of Samaria and in the rest of the province Beyond the River” (4:9-10 NRSV). By presenting a broad-reaching list of leaders and peoples as letter-writers, the text codifies their opposition in an official document. The names and nations on the list become certified enemies of Judah, not just passing nuisances, as the letter itself becomes a permanent record of all those who opposed the restoration effort.

The conflation of the letter form, a widely accessible genre, with the decree form, the genre of imperial power, similarly underscores the richness of textuality’s power in Ezra-Nehemiah. All written documents hold real power, regardless of their genre. Letters grant direct access to the king. The king himself uses the same format for corresponding with his subjects. Royal decrees can be issued inside letters, so that it becomes unclear where one genre begins and the other ends, as long as the order is written down. The Persian imperial bureaucracy as depicted in Ezra-Nehemiah does not put power in specific forms as much as it does written texts in general. To be sure, the king’s authority is ostensibly the most powerful and the most important in the empire. Yet that authority is

both conveyed and manipulated by written texts. The kings represented by the Ezra-Nehemiah correspondence do not make decisions based on their own apprehension of a situation, nor on the suggestions of advisors; they act on the basis of texts sent to and found by them. Letters, then, provide a way for those outside the royal inner circle to manipulate imperial politics. If the king sees a document supporting a position, he supports its directive unblinkingly.

Content of the Letters

Rehum and Shimshai's letter requests that the king search "in the book of records" (בספר־דכרניא), where he will discover accounts of rebellion in Jerusalem's past that may suggest present danger to the empire. These governmental officials appeal to written historical accounts to incite fear in the king, which proves to be an effective strategy for stopping progress on the rebuilding effort. The story of what Jerusalem *was* determines what the city *will be*; the written record allows the past to direct the future, here and throughout Ezra-Nehemiah. As Eskenazi remarks, "What we observe are documents within documents, extending their influence back and forth in time."[59]

In responding to his petitioners, Artaxerxes reports the issuance of one decree and orders the issuance of a second. The first decree directs the archival search suggested by Rehum and Shimshai. The findings of the search fulfill the expectations of Jerusalem's accusers: a history of rebellion and revolt. The former power of Jerusalem threatens the present power of the Persian king, despite the fact that Persia holds an overwhelming

[59] Eskenazi, "From Text to Actuality," 177. Clines, "The Force of the Text," 201, picking up on these observations, notes the problematic chronology of the Artaxerxes correspondence, musing that, "in its interlacing of times it can affirm that Artaxerxes *will* find, from investigating the *past* history of Jerusalem, that it *is* a rebellious city, and will, if he allows the *past* to have influence on the *present*, properly protect his *future* (Ezra 4:15-16)."

military and political advantage. The threat comes, not from a parallel show of force in Jerusalem's past, but precisely from Jerusalem's continuing status as a colonized state. The king cites Jerusalem's kings as regional powers to whom tributes were paid (4:20), but that power is rooted in Jerusalem's identity as conquered, not conquerer: "This city, from the distant past, has risen against kings..." (4:19). In the progress of the restoration effort, the archival evidence of Jerusalem's past is a hindrance, requiring stoppage of the building project. In the overall movement of Ezra-Nehemiah, however, the notion that the city is full of troublemakers does not damage Judah's reputation. Instead, it asserts Judah's subversive power: Judah is a danger to empires.

Despite this threat, Artaxerxes does not issue an eternal, unchangeable order to stop the work in Jerusalem forever. He orders Rehum and Shimshai to issue a work-stoppage decree that will be in effect "until I make a decree" (עד־מני טעמא יתשם) (Ezra 4:21).[60] The notion of one decree nullifying another resonates with the portrait of ostensibly irrevocable decrees in Esther, where the king's order for the destruction of the Jews (Esth 3:14) is revoked by the issuance of a decree authorizing the Jews to destroy their attackers (Esth 8:13). Artaxerxes' notation leaves an "out" for both himself and the narrative: nothing will get in the way of his written order except another written order, which he reserves the right to make.

Like the letters exchanged between Rehum and Shimshai and King Artaxerxes, the correspondence of Tattenai and his associates with King Darius involves an archival search and spawns decrees. Tattenai wants verification that the Judeans are, as they claim, working under a decree from King Cyrus. The Judeans appear not to have their

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[60] Although the two officials are ordered to do the actual issuing of the decree, rather than the king himself, the force behind the decree still rests ultimately with the king, who, by ordering Rehum and Shimshai to issue the decree, has essentially issued the decree himself.

own copy of the decree; instead, they must rely on the accuracy and comprehensiveness of the royal archives. Though Babylon disappoints, the archive at Ecbatana does not. A record (דכרונה), of Cyrus' decree concerning Judah is found there. Darius accedes to the directive of Cyrus, yet supplements with decrees of his own, providing supplies for the rebuilding effort and promising capital punishment and destruction of family property to any who might interfere. Like Artaxerxes, Darius allows the past to direct the future; the authority of his (alleged) ancestor directs his own decision-making. His new actions only validate and intensify the decision made long ago by Cyrus.

The last of the Aramaic letters interpolated into Ezra-Nehemiah is the missive sent from Artaxerxes to Ezra (Ezra 7:12-26). Aside from its formal introductory material, the letter is all decree. The two forms are conflated into one pivotal document, granting Ezra the power and resources to lead exiled Judeans back to their homeland and to execute the law of God and the law of the king there. I have already demonstrated how the Artaxerxes correspondence marks the end of the imperial decrees and the beginning of a new era of Judean quasi-self-governance. I have also shown how the genres of decree and letter are closely intertwined in the Ezra-Nehemiah narrative. When the imperial decrees end, so does the steady stream of letters that has been featured in the book.

Letters do not, however, altogether cease to wield power, either in the world of the narrative or in the narrative itself. Like Ezra, Nehemiah has his own break with imperial intimacy via epistolary grants. He asks the king, identified again here as Artaxerxes, for permission to return to and rebuild Jerusalem, which he describes with a genealogical nod as "the city of the graves of my fathers" (Neh 2:3, 5). Having been granted that wish by the king, he continues to ask for the king's help to provide him with

a clear road for the journey and ample supplies for rebuilding the gate and wall of the city. Notably, Nehemiah does not ask directly for safe passage and a grant of lumber; he asks for *letters* that will grant those things (Neh 2:7-8). He knows that the authority of the king is transferred via written document. When he departs with the letters, he holds the king's power in his hand.

As the wall nears completion, Nehemiah begins to receive invitations from Sanballat and Geshem to meet them out from the city. The first four of these unsuccessful invitations are delivered via messenger; the text does not specify whether the messages are written or oral (6:2-4). The fifth message, though, arrives as an open letter (אגרת פתוחה, Neh 6:5). Sanballat and Geshem invoke, like Rehum and his cohorts, Jerusalem's potential for rebellion, adding threatening accusations of sedition to their attempts to lure him into a meeting (Neh 6:6). Threats by post continue when Tobiah, having heard Nehemiah's denunciations via letters exchanged with those held by oath with him, begins to send harassing letters to Nehemiah (Neh 6:19). Malicious correspondence becomes a weapon in the arsenal of Judah's detractors. In the Persian Empire, even intimidation has turned bureaucratic.

Letters in Ezra-Nehemiah are transmitters of power. They pass the authority of the king from one person to the next. Yet, in the world of the narrative, they also undermine the king's power. They show him as malleable, easily subject to the suggestions of his officials dispatched in his kingdom. What those officials advise, the king carries out; the documents they predict he will find, he does indeed find, for both the ill and the good of the Judeans. By supplementing the characterization of the king, the letters themselves hold authority within the book of Ezra-Nehemiah. They reveal to the reader that the documents, not the king, hold the real power, so that, by appropriating

written documents for their own uses, the Judeans are seizing, at least in part, the power of the king.

Genealogies

Ezra-Nehemiah contains few standard genealogies of any significant length. Instead, the book is peppered with brief, two-generational genealogies among its many lists of personal names, such as “Nehemiah son of Hacaliah” (Neh 1:1) or “Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel” (Neh 12:1). These genealogies in the midst of lists are occasionally drawn out to more generations, such as “Zechariah son of Jonathan son of Sheaiah son of Mattaniah son of Micaiah son of Zaccur son of Asaph” (Neh 12:35). The most prominent of the standard genealogies belongs to Ezra himself (Ezra 7:1-5), tracing his ancestry to Aaron. Yet, despite an overall lack of formal genealogies, Ezra-Nehemiah is absolutely rife with “genealogical material”: passages accounting for individuals by reference to their family lineage. The census of the returnees at Ezra 2:1-67 is organized according to ancestors, with the implication that returnees were required to prove that they were of Israelite descent in order to make the return trip. Nehemiah claims to find the “book of the genealogy” (or “book of the pedigree,” ספר היחש) of the first returnees, and the Ezra 2 list of returnees is found in it and republished at Neh 7:6-68. Again, this list is not itself formally a genealogy, but the information in it is certainly “genealogical,” as the numbers of returnees are grouped by common ancestors. In the same way, family lineage is the organizing principle of the list of exiles returning with Ezra at Ezra 8:1-15, the list of laborers in Neh 3, and the list of Jerusalem’s inhabitants in Neh 11.

The heavily genealogical flavor of Ezra-Nehemiah testifies to the book’s anxiety over the community’s social boundaries. As instruments for the legitimation of social roles, genealogies are a means of defining and preserving the boundaries of social groups;

each person's place in the society is determined by his (or, occasionally, her) lineage.[61] When the exiles returned to Judah, they did not find an empty land in need of repopulation. Instead, they faced the challenge of asserting their claims to and rulership of the land among the claims of the people who had never left it. Moreover, even those returning from Diaspora were making bold claims for their places within the religious life of Yehud. The leadership needed a benchmark, a process, a criterion against which to judge who is in and who is out. The community as described in Ezra-Nehemiah does not merely settle on genealogy, which can be either an oral or written account of family lineage. The exiles turn to the המתיחשים, expressly *written* records of ancestry. Those who claimed a place in the priesthood, for example, but did not find their names in the records, were deemed impure (ויגאלו) and denied that place (Ezra 2:62; Neh 7:64).[62] What allows a person membership in the community is not the ability to recite his own lineage, nor even to impress his inquisitor with his knowledge of the history of Israel or the requirements of the job he seeks; the appearance of one's name *inscribed in the community's genealogical register* determines his future.

The use of genealogical material in Ezra-Nehemiah showcases the book's hypertextual, Achaemenid context not so much in the existence of genealogies as a mechanism of social order, but rather in the utilization of written genealogies as a tool of administrative organization. In chapters 2 and 3, I described how the Achaemenid rulers used genealogies in hopes of quelling any murmurs doubting the legitimacy of their

[61] Wilson, *Genealogy and History,* 38-45.

[62] Notably, the text does imply that returnees claiming priestly status may regain the opportunity to eat the holy food, even if their names are not found, if a valid priest with Urim and Thummim were to arrive (Ezra 2:63; Neh 7:65). This caveat reveals that even in this new, highly textual world, there is still room for divination. Cf. Wright, "Seeking, Finding and Writing in Ezra-Nehemiah," in *Unity and Disunity in Ezra-Nehemiah: Redaction, Rhetoric, and Reader* (ed. M. J. Boda and P. L. Redditt; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2008), 277-304.

kingship. They publicized these genealogical claims through their propagandistic inscriptions, some of which were distributed in multiple languages throughout the empire. I suggest, however, that the imperial influence on Ezra-Nehemiah's genealogies rests most deeply in the adoption of a bureaucratic procedure to manage the manifold genealogies of an entire community. In the previous chapter, I discussed how the Chronicler combined multiple written genealogical sources to develop his lengthy genealogical prologue. In Chronicles, the notion that actual genealogies existed as the Chronicler's sources is a redaction-critical inference based on the composite style of the prologue. Ezra-Nehemiah, on the other hand, "cites" its genealogical sources, making explicit reference to written genealogical documents (Ezra 2:62; Neh 7:5, 64). The book also eschews subtlety regarding its interests in legitimation; the narrative reports without chagrin the systematic exclusion of those whose names are not written in the book. What is elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible an artful storytelling genre with implicit commentary about social ordering is in Ezra-Nehemiah a coldly managerial tool.[63]

The genealogical material in Ezra-Nehemiah reflects less the Persian interest in genealogies and more the Persian interest in record-keeping. The narrative wields one genealogy, however, for which its literary subtlety trumps an administrative aloofness. Ezra's genealogy showcases his Aaronic pedigree. It is a linear genealogy, tracing a single line of descent from Aaron down to Ezra. The historical accuracy of the genealogy is dubious, especially considering that there simply are not enough generations accounted

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[63] Genealogies in Genesis, for example, are woven through the narratives and provide commentary on the characters and their ancestors: e.g., Gen 5:28, which names Lamech as the father of Noah, gives an excursus on the etiology of Noah's name. Besides technical variations between the genealogies in Ezra-Nehemiah and elsewhere, the genealogies in Ezra-Nehemiah simply exhibit a more frank, no-nonsense, technical style.

for between Aaron and his alleged fifth-century descendant.[64] As I have maintained, however, genealogies serve not so much to provide historical information as to legitimate social roles. For Ezra, this genealogy qualifies him for the priesthood—for the high priesthood, in fact. Yet, Ezra is not just a priest. He is also “a scribe skilled in the law of Moses” (7:6) and “the priest, the scribe, the scribe of the words of the commandments of Yahweh and his statutes concerning Israel” (7:11). Artaxerxes addresses his letter to “Ezra the priest, scribe of the law of the God of heaven” (7:12). The juxtaposition of these two different social roles—priest and scribe—serves to equate them, or, at the least, to accord them similar status and purpose. As Blenkinsopp notes, the genealogy “convey[s] the message that Ezra’s function with respect to the law and the cult continued that of the preexilic priesthood.”[65] That function is now a scribal one; Ezra is a writer and reader of texts, especially the Torah. In this context of Temple-building, where priestly work is so highly valued, the designation of Ezra as priest legitimates his Temple work, even if that work occurs in new, scribal modes. Therefore, Ezra’s genealogy legitimates not only Ezra in his role as priest-scribe, but also the social role of the scribe itself. In this new, highly textual era, the work of reader and writer is made as valid and important as the work of a high priest.

Lists

A study of the lists in Ezra-Nehemiah again underscores the indistinct lines between genres in the book. In the discussion above of Polak’s sociolinguistic analysis of Ezra-Nehemiah, I have demonstrated that the prose of the Ezra-Nehemiah narrative

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[64] Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 136; Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 91-92.
[65] Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah,* 136.

incorporates lists of nouns time and time again into the fabric of the narrative. In many places in Ezra-Nehemiah the distinction between list and narrative prose becomes blurred, usually around groups of four or more nouns. In addition, I have shown that many of the lists in Ezra-Nehemiah, while not themselves genealogies, nevertheless have "genealogy" as their structuring principle. Given these caveats, making a meta-list of all the lists in Ezra-Nehemiah would require drawing arbitrary boundaries where genres now overlap. Nevertheless, among these strings of nouns, certain passages stand out as substantial, recognizable catalogs organized around single themes: in other words, some lists deserve particular attention.

Ezra 2 and Nehemiah 7 provide essentially identical rosters of census data, organized by family, of the exiles who returned to Jerusalem with Zerubbabel. Commentators often regard this repetition as a clue to the complicated redaction history of the book. In her literary reading, Eskenazi identifies this duplicated list as "the major structuring device of Ezra-Nehemiah."[66] The two iterations of the list form an inclusio, Eskenazi says, that emphasizes the identity and wholeness of the Judean community, forming them into an עם. Nehemiah 7 brings the returnees from Ezra 2 into the dedicatory celebrations described in the final chapters of the book, effectively collapsing time between the beginning of the restoration and its consummation. That effect recalls the similar collapse of time enabled by the archival searches in Ezra 4-6.[67] Written records allow the past perpetually to affect the present.

The Ezra 2 version of the roster is presented as a "first run"; the text refers to no other copies of the list. The Nehemiah 7 list, on the other hand is acknowledged as a

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[66] Eskenazi, *In An Age of Prose*, 88.
[67] Ibid., 88-95.

repeat; Nehemiah purports to have found it written in the "book of the pedigree" (ספר היחש), which he has consulted as he prepares to enroll all the people according to their family lineage (לחתיחש). Searching inside the book, Nehemiah finds a record of another search inside another genealogical registration; the narrative stacks up records like so many nesting dolls.

Ezra 8:1-14 records another enrollment-by-pedigree of returning exiles (התיחש העלים). The list begins Ezra's account of his return in the wake of Artaxerxes' mandate, and it sets the tone for the return to be a thoroughly administrative affair. Having taken a census of the returnees accompanying him, Ezra then reviews the census for omissions, finding that no Levites are represented (Ezra 8:15). After taking measures to rectify that omission, Ezra proceeds to disburse money and Temple vessels into the charge of the priests and Levites. When the party arrives in Jerusalem, the money and vessels are again counted and weighed, and "every total was written" (Ezra 8:34). The close account-keeping ensures that not one item has been lost in the move. More than that, though, the lists and accounts in Ezra 8 show Ezra embodying the dual priest-scribe role that his genealogy and his imperial mandate claim for him. Ezra's scribal duties are as much accountant as they are erudite scholar. By embarking on the return in such an orderly, well-documented way, Ezra introduces the administrative values prized by his imperial overlords into this new era of Temple worship.

In the same way that letters to and from the king stand out as the most prominent written texts in Ezra, lists stand out as the genre of choice within Nehemiah. In addition to the strings of nouns characteristic of its narrative style, I identify six full-fledged lists: Neh 3:1-32; 7:6-71; 10:1-27; 11:3-36; and 12:1-26. Nehemiah 3:1-32 records the names, parentage, and building tasks of those men who worked on the construction of the wall.

The report describes, in intimate detail, the company of laborers who built the wall, section by section by section. The catalog is not simply an administrative formality; by creating a list of workers via the coordinating conjunction plus prepositional phrase, "and beside them" (lit. "and against their hand," ועל־ידם), the document illustrates with its syntax the long line of builders stretched out along the length of the wall, one next to the other next to the other next to the other. The wall takes shape in the mind of the reader as she makes her way down the list of names. This list shows vividly to what literary effect an otherwise banal genre has been deployed. Ezra-Nehemiah remains a well-crafted story even as it becomes a documentary repository.

Nehemiah 7:6-71 reproduces the genealogical list of Ezra 2 and has been discussed above. However, it is important to note the ways in which two other lists are appended to this list, both here and at Ezra 2, outside of genealogical patterns. Nehemiah 7:66-69 (// Ezra 2:64-67) gives a total count of the people and their animals. Nehemiah 7:70-71 (// Ezra 2:68-29) reports the amounts of monetary gifts collected from the heads of the ancestral houses listed in the genealogy. Finally, the genealogical list ends with a note that "the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, some of the people, the temple servants, and all Israel settled in their cities" (Neh 7:72a // Ezra 2:70). These three shorter, additional lists are added to the end of the larger genealogical list; again the narrative stacks and folds together a bevy of administrative records.

The listing continues at Neh 10:1-27, where the community makes a written oath to adhere to the Torah of Yahweh as given to Moses. It is difficult to discern whether the covenantal stipulations outlined at Neh 10:31-40 are integrated into the narrative as an ostensible quotation from the actual document or rather as a summary of the document's content. Either way, the text makes it clear that Yehudite leaders "swear an oath and

write [it]" (Neh 10:1). This commitment to Torah is made in writing, rendering it official and permanent. By writing their names on the sealed document, the signatories give a written document power over their lives. Whereas written texts had continually held implicit governance over the colonized community, here the community ascribes explicit authority to written text – one particular written text. It is a text given, not by a present or past Persian emperor, nor by any imperial officials, but rather by Moses, servant of God. To be sure, the Persian powers still have the ultimate political power over the Judean community. They are, in fact, the force that authorized—and, by authorizing, commanded—that the Judeans return to their homeland to rebuild their city. Nevertheless, Neh 9-10 presents the people's entry into the law as an act of freewill, contrition, and joy. While the written word remains the medium of authority, its administration has now shifted away from concentrated imperial oversight.

The two lists joined back-to-back in Neh 11:3-12:25 constitute the last major lists in Ezra-Nehemiah. The first, Neh 11:3-36, details the geographical dispersion of the Judean leadership throughout Jerusalem and Judah. Nehemiah 12:1-25 enumerates the priests and Levites who went up with Zerubbabel and Jeshua. These two lists, like an overwhelming majority of the lists in Ezra-Nehemiah, involve proper names. They inventory people and families and their roles in (or out of) the new Judean community. In fact, genealogically-organized lists are the only genre that appears throughout the book of Ezra-Nehemiah, rather than being concentrated, like letters and documents and even the Torah, in one section of the book or another.

On the one hand, all of this record-keeping smacks of bureaucratic excess, of unnecessary duplication and of record-keeping for the sake of record-keeping. On the other hand, by the time a reader reaches the end of Ezra-Nehemiah, that reader

understands the importance archives now hold for Judah. It was, after all, the presence of a record of Cyrus' edict in the royal archive at Ecbatana—surely an extra, seemingly extraneous copy, since Babylon was the logical place to communicate with the Judean exiles—that staved off threats to the completion of the Jerusalem Temple. It was the community's own genealogical records that verified the identity of priests—and excluded the unverified—for a profession passed down in families from generation through generation. Having one's name written in a book means survival, inclusion, restoration. The listing of names in the text of Ezra-Nehemiah proves to be more than a managerial obsession: it is an investment in the future, a hedge against any later attempts to rend the new community.

The Book of the Law

On the one hand, the law (תורה) in Ezra-Nehemiah is a normative conceptual structure: a set of guidelines given by Yahweh for regulating the life of the community. King Artaxerxes sends Ezra, a devoted student of this law, to Jerusalem to teach and enforce the law, a compilation of statutes (חק) and ordinances (משפט) (Ezra 7:10). On the other hand, the law in Ezra-Nehemiah is a book (ספר), a tangible object as notable for its written form as for its content. In his letter to Ezra, Artaxerxes refers to "the law of your God, which is in your hand" (Ezra 7:14), a phrase that reinforces the notion that the law is not simply a set of ideas in Ezra's head, but a concrete object that must be carried into Yehud.

The physicality of the book of the law is most dramatically depicted in the climactic scene at the Water Gate (Neh 7:73b-8:18). The assembled crowds ask Ezra to bring "the book of the law of Moses, which Yahweh had given to Israel" (Neh 8:1). In a

particularly dramatic moment, Ezra opens the scroll in front of the crowds, who are then moved to worship:

> And Ezra opened the book before the eyes of all the people, for he was above all the people, and as he opened it, all the people stood up. And Ezra blessed Yahweh, the great God, and all the people answered, "Amen, Amen," raising their hands. And they bowed down and worshiped Yahweh, their faces to the ground. (Neh 8:5-6)

The iconic value of the text stands out starkly here. Ezra and his book stand elevated above the assembly. The opening of the book—the accessing of the written text—moves the people to worship. Something about the medium of the text itself is mysterious, *powerful*.

In a society where literacy remains the exception rather than the norm, the written word can take on iconic value.[68] Niditch remarks that "…the social setting assumed for Nehemiah 8 is still very much within the world of orality."[69] Just as the Behistun inscription looms above the road, illegible yet exuding royal authority, so, too, do Ezra and his book loom high above the people at the Water Gate, representing the authority of God. The spatial map of the scene makes it quite clear that the book and its reader remain set apart from the people, who "remained in their places" while Ezra read high above them (8:7). Nonetheless, the book of the law is not only iconic here. The text is both read and interpreted aloud; Ezra reads, and the Levites circulate among them with their interpretation (8:7). The concentrated effort by the Levites to disseminate interpretation of the law shows a dedication to making the norms of the law known to the community,

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[68] Niditch, *Oral World and Written Word,* 57, 106.

[69] Ibid., 106. Cf. Wright, "Seeking, Finding, and Writing in Ezra-Nehemiah," 282-3 n. 18, who emphasizes that "In Ezra-Nehemiah, textuality does not replace orality."

which is convicted by its words (8:9).[70] Even as the *physical* book remains inaccessible and awe-inspiring, its *content* is purposefully made accessible to the assembled residents of Yehud.

In the scene at the Water Gate, the presence of the Persian king has faded into the background, and the law stands starkly in the foreground. It is the moment when a written text becomes the primary constitutive force for the Yehudite community. It is the moment that the people become convicted of its authority, so that they might subsequently sign on to its statutes (Neh 9:38-10:39), thus marking the community's move to self-administration. I have already shown that documents arising from within the imperial power structure can sometimes take on authority that surpasses the authority of the king himself. The question regarding the Torah, then, is whether this document, which emerges from the world of the colonized, can ever supplant the power of the empire.

The answer that arises from Ezra-Nehemiah is *no.* Artaxerxes' letter to Ezra (Ezra 7) makes clear that both the physical return of the Torah to Jerusalem and the implementation of its statues as law in Yehud are made possible by the king himself. No matter how abundant the funding for the restoration, no matter how freely the king endorses the law's content, no matter how zealously the king vows to provide for the Temple (Ezra 7:23), the law of Yehud's God is always circumscribed within the power of the king. The law of God and the law of the king may be yoked (7:26), but it is the king who allows this—even commands this—to be so. As Wright concludes, "In deciding how

[70] Eskenazi, *In An Age of Prose*, 98-100, and Wright, "Seeking, Finding, and Writing in Ezra-Nehemiah," 300, both see in Neh 8-9 a movement from leadership by a select few prominent figures to the empowerment of the community as a whole.[70] Wright particularly draws attention to the agency of the assembled people, who, on the first day of the month, are read to (8:7), and by the twenty-fourth day of the month are reading the book of the law themselves (9:3).

to proceed with the restoration … the Judeans follow the example of the Persian kings and submit themselves to the absolute authority of their written traditions."[71] The influence of the Achaemenid imperial structure, then, remains inescapable. It provides the impetus for turning to the Torah as the rule of the community. The empire has thus made an indelible mark on the administration of the colony, one that is destined to remain even after the Persian Empire has fallen away. In shaping its own community for self-governance, Yehud appropriates the regnant modes of imperial power, an act which serves at once both to empower them for community formation and to inscribe the mark of empire forever upon their self-conception.

Conclusions

By containing within itself decrees, letters, genealogies, and lists, the book of Ezra-Nehemiah itself becomes an archive, a repository of documents. It is a repository, however, that tells a story: the story of the reconstitution of the post-exilic Judean community under the shadow of the Persian Empire. As the book opens, the empire's own authority takes center stage. Decrees and letters from the Achaemenid kings define the story's progress. The kings' texts give way to lists and genealogical records originating from within the returnee community. Still, throughout the shifts in the story's dynamics of power, the authority of written texts remains constant. Documents are the preferred mode of authority for colonizer and colonized alike. Having observed the ways in which the Persians wielded the written word as a means of imperial control, the

[71] Wright, "Seeking, Finding, and Writing in Ezra-Nehemiah," 303.

leadership of Judah adopts that same mode, at once both mimicking the empire and appropriating its forms to define its own community.

Though the precise boundaries that separate each genre from its surrounding narrative are sometimes unclear, the different types of documents included in the book do convey unique information about the community of Yehud and its apprehension of and relationship with its imperial overseers. The king communicates the royal will via official decrees, but sometimes the decrees themselves direct the king. Decrees and other records are kept in royal archives across the empire, and what is found in them determines the king's course of action. The letters to and from the Persian kings portray them as accessible and open to suggestion; yet, to hold a decree or letter from the king is to hold the king's power in one's hand. In short, the empire values written documents as equal to—and sometimes greater than—the authority of the king himself.

While decrees and letters reflect Yehud's direct engagement with the Persian political system, lists and genealogies are primarily the purview of the returnee community. They reflect the administrative impulses of the empire, but they are employed in the self-governance and self-identity of the community. By wielding genealogical lists and "found" books, both Ezra and Nehemiah assert themselves as leaders, the ones who control documents. Their scribal work makes possible and is as important as the exercise of priestly duties. They utilize their scribal efforts to define the insiders and outsiders of the community. Once thus defined, the Judean community pledges itself—in writing—to be ruled by a written document: the Torah. Because the Torah is a written document, the community's accession to it is in keeping with the values of imperial authority. At the same time, its Mosaic origin predates the Persian Empire entirely, and in this world of collapsing time, the past, well-documented, takes

precedence over the present. Gone are any acknowledgments of the king's authority as coequal with God's; nevertheless, the Judeans did require the king's permission in order to set the laws of God above him. The transfer of power is always incomplete. Ezra-Nehemiah consistently portrays the relationship between the Judean returnees and the Persian Empire in this complex, muddied view: the community asserts itself against the empire's authority, even as the empire always retains an ultimate, shadowy power. Yet, no matter what, in this give and take between colonizer and colonized, power is always transferred, seized, and negotiated through written documents.

CHAPTER 5

Writing as Motif in the Book of Esther

By reading the text as about reading-writing, one is led to reflect upon all the issues intricated with it: gender, power, and the state, genocide and otherness, submission and agency. In short, upon history.[1]

If colonialism takes power in the name of history, it repeatedly exercises its authority through the figures of farce.[2]

Introduction

The book of Esther is a masterfully crafted piece of narrative art. Its literary complexity is manifested in the story's structures and substructures, its deftly woven tropes and motifs, and its dexterous deployment of irony, among other features.[3] The

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[1] M. Bal, "Lots of Writing," *Semeia* 54 (1991):74-102.

[2] H. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 122.

[3] See S. B. Berg, *The Book of Esther: Motifs, Themes and Structure* (SBLDS 44; Missoula: Scholars Press, 1979), for an early, paradigmatic study of the literary features of Esther. As the title suggests, Berg focuses her analysis around motifs and themes. Building on Y. T. Radday, "Chiasm in Joshua, Judges, and Others," *LB* 3 (1973): 6-13, Berg also posits a symmetrical, chiastic structure for the book. Most later commentaries have followed similar approaches to Berg's, prioritizing literary-critical over historical-critical approaches. See Levenson, *Esther,* and Beal, *Esther.* D. J.A. Clines, *The Esther Scroll: The Story of the Story* (JSOTSS 30; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1984), 30-38, highlights the literary art

book is not without its contributions to the historical study of the Persian period; as this investigation has already shown, the book of Esther's framework of Persian hypertextuality is consistent with surviving extra-biblical historiographical and archaeological portraits. Nonetheless, the historicity of the events narrated in Esther has been all but completely dismissed. Mordecai is said to have experienced the 597 deportation from Judah, meaning he would be well over 100 years old during Xerxes' reign; Xerxes' queen was named Amestris, not Vashti or Esther; the list goes on.[4] Its deeply comic sentiments further betray its fictions.[5] Esther is a cohesive novella; it may even be called an historical novella, given its attention to the historical detail of its Persian setting, but it is not historiographical.[6]

As the present study has borne out, the broad genre-categories of "history" and "literature" are not easily disentangled. Given, however, that Esther shows such clear affinities for being "literature" over "history," what can it communicate about the politics of empire in the Persian period of biblical history? Postcolonial criticism holds that the reality of imperial power relationships "inevitably affects and colors, directly or

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of Esth 1-8 in order to make a redaction-critical argument against the cohesiveness of Esth 9-10 with its preceding chapters, claiming Esth 9-10 shows "distinctly inferior narrative artistry."

[4] For a comprehensive list of historical improbabilities, as well as the historical plausibilities, see D. Clines, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther* (NCBC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 256-263.

[5] A. Berlin, "The Book of Esther and Ancient Storytelling," *JBL* 120 (2001), 3-14, reminds readers that "Historiography is not a comic genre, and Esther is very comic." For representative discussions of comedic elements in Esther, see B. Jones, "Two Misconceptions about the Book of Esther," *CBQ* 39.2 (1977):171-181; K. M. O'Connor, "Humor, Turnabouts and Survival in the Book of Esther," in *Are We Amused? Humor About Women in the Biblical Worlds* (ed. A. Brenner; London: T & T Clark, 2003), 52-64; Y. Radday, "Esther with Humor," in *On Humor and the Comic in the Hebrew Bible* (ed. Y. Radday and A. Brenner; JSOTSup 92; BL 23; Sheffield: Almond Press, 1990), 295-314; Z. Weisman, *Political Satire in the Bible* (SemS 32; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998), 162. See also Clines, *The Esther Scroll: The Story of the Story* (JSOTSup 30; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1984), 31-33.

[6] As Berlin, "The Book of Esther and Ancient Storytelling," 4, points out, "Realistic fiction is just as fictional as nonrealistic fiction." Berlin goes on to note that Esther is not as much realistic as "conventional," using motifs common to stories about the Persian Empire in Greek literature from the 5th-4th centuries B.C.E.

indirectly, the entire artistic production of center and margins, of dominant and subaltern, including their respective literary productions."[7] Even a text so thoroughly "fictional" as the book of Esther cannot help but encode the political realities marking its time of composition. Given Esther's overtly historical-political setting in the Persian court, it does not appear to try to avoid that encoding. The goal of this chapter, then, is to begin to decode the ways this novella reveals an attitude about the imperial center of power from the perspective of the periphery, beyond simply being an entertaining comedy that solicits a few laughs at the king's expense.

Unlike Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah, Esther is not set in the Judean homeland. It arises less directly from an experience of *colonization* and more from an experience of *Diaspora*, of clinging to an ethnic identity while making a life away from the land-center of that identity.[8] Esther's physical distance from Judah is concomitant with a conceptual distance from the history the land holds; as Beal notes, "In Esther the Jew's link with historical roots is also the point of rupture from those roots: the exile, being carried off."[9] That Persia happens also to be ruling the homeland is merely coincidental. Esther is connected to Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah by the era of their authorship, and to Ezra-Nehemiah especially by its direct engagement with the fact of Persian rulership; Esther is not related to either of these books by a shared sense of place. Set in the Persian capital of Susa – especially around and even inside the royal palace itself – the action in Esther is

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[7] Segovia, *Decolonizing Biblical Studies*, 126. T, Beal, *The Book of Hiding: Gender, Ethnicity, Annihilation, and Esther* (London: Routledge, 1997), 112, invokes Jameson's language of text as a "socially symbolic act," whereby the book of Esther "provides insights into Jewish political self-perception in [Diaspora]."

[8] Esther's diaspora setting, particularly inside the foreign court, contributes to its genre-designation as a "Jewish court story," a genre it shares with the biblical stories of Daniel and Joseph, as well as the Story of the Three Youths from 1 Esdras. See Wills, *The Jew in the Court of the Foreign King*.

[9] Beal, *The Book of Hiding*, 112.

proximate to the heart of imperial power. Centered around Yehud, the action in Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah is deeply affected by that power, yet also broadly distant from it.

In Ezra-Nehemiah, *writing* itself is the Judean people's entire experience with imperial power. The king's identity is shaped by his communiqués; imperial authority is mediated by the letters and decrees promulgated in his name. Distance cultivates a mystique around the royal profile. The Jewish heroes of Esther, however, look the empire in the eye. No mystique lingers in their vision. The picture of empire emerging at this close range is one of randomness disguised in the regulated machinations of bureaucracy. Buffoonery is invested with extraordinary power. The king is inept, his decisions arbitrary, his advisors reactionary.

Though Esther's concerns are not specifically with land, nor with the history of Israel and Judah, nor with reconstituting a community on that homeland, the book is just as thoroughly consumed by questions of identity and power as Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah. Diaspora is, after all, a consequence of imperialism: in this case, it is the consequence of Babylonia's deportations of the elite of Judah in the early sixth century B.C.E. As Berlin writes, "The burden of Diaspora stories is to provide Jewish continuity in the face of the overwhelming dislocation of the Jewish community."[10] The issue of "Jewish continuity" is, in other words, an issue of identity. In Esther, as in Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah, questions of identity must be worked out in a world shaped by empire – specifically by the Persian Empire. In this chapter I will show that *writing and the written text* together constitute a central literary motif in the book of Esther. That motif,

[10] Berlin, "The Book of Esther and Ancient Storytelling," 7.

particularly in conjunction with portrayals of spatiality in the book, lampoons the empire's power even as it seeks to situate its Jewish heroes in the midst of it.

For definitional clarity I will invoke one of the early, stage-setting literary studies of Esther of the last few decades. Sandra Beth Berg's 1977 doctoral dissertation on Esther focuses on the structures, motifs, and themes of the biblical book. At the outset of the study Berg draws a careful distinction between the latter two terms, and I will follow her definitions here. Berg uses "motif" for "situations, elements, or ideas which pervade the story, potently recalling or anticipating their earlier and later occurrences." She names banquets, kingship, and obedience/disobedience as the dominant motifs of Esther. A "theme," on the other hand, "is reserved for the message or idea which the author conveyed by his use of the story's motifs." In Berg's view, power, loyalty to the Jewish community, and inviolability and reversal constitute the story's primary themes.[11] I agree with her assessment that "power" is a primary theme of Esther, and I will explore how the motif of writing expands upon and nuances the theme of power—particularly imperial power and its relationship to identity— throughout the book.

Versions of Esther

The existence of three distinct versions of the book of Esther requires some attention to the question of *which* book of Esther is being studied. The Septuagint (LXX) version contains six "additions" not found in the Hebrew MT, and there are several smaller but still significant differences between LXX and MT in the core story as well. The Alpha Text (AT) of Esther, another Greek version, also contains the six additions but is otherwise closer to the MT text, even though in places it varies significantly from both

[11] Berg, *The Book of Esther*, 16-17.

the MT and LXX versions. There is general scholarly consensus that the AT and MT versions share a common Hebrew *Vorlage,* and that the six additions were added to both the AT and the LXX versions.[12] My concern in this dissertation is with the MT book of Esther, which survived in canonical relationship with Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah and which, compared to the lengthier and later LXX translation, is the more "original" version. Nonetheless, attention to the divergent editions of Esther, and particularly to the six additions, provides a revealing contrast to the unique commentary on textuality and empire that the MT version provides.

The six additions to Esther do not represent a single moment of redaction, so that agendas represented by them cannot be regarded as monolithic. Additions A, C, D, and F were likely composed in Hebrew or Aramaic and added to the Hebrew text before its translation into Greek.[13] Among those, additions A and F frame the core story with details of a portentous dream experienced by Mordecai. Addition A describes the content of the dream, while Addition F provides its interpretation, and together they recall the emphasis on revealed knowledge found in the court stories of Joseph and Daniel. Addition A also contains an alternate account of Mordecai's intervention in the eunuchs' assassination plot, also described at Esth 2:21-23. Addition C contains two prayers, one lifted up by Mordecai and the other by Esther, while addition D gives dramatic embellishment to the core text's presentation of Esther's unauthorized approach of the

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[12] See esp. Clines, *The Esther Scroll*, and M. V. Fox, *The Redaction of the Book of Esther: On Reading Composite Texts* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991). For a succinct overview of the ancient versions see Levenson, *Esther,* 27-34. K. De Troyer, *Rewriting the Sacred Text* (SBLTCS 4; Leiden: Brill, 2003), argues against a Hebrew *Vorlage* for AT, and instead proposes that "AT is a reworking of the Old Greek, LXX text of Esther. As such, the AT is an example of a rewritten Greek Bible" (88).

[13] Levenson, *Esther*, 29. For detailed studies of the versions and their redactions, see Clines, *The Esther Scroll*; K. De Troyer, *The End of the Alpha Text of Esther: Translation and Narrative Technique in MT 8:1-17, LXX 8:1-17, and AT 7:14-41* (trans. B. Doyle; SBLSCS 48; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008); M. V. Fox, *The Redaction of the Book of Esther.*

king.

Additions B and E appear to have been composed in Greek and added to the Greek versions after their translation from Hebrew. Each of these two later additions provides the text of a letter referred to in the core text: Addition B contains the king's letter prescribing annihilation of the Jews, and Addition E is the notice that overrides the former letter. The body of each letter contains extended self-reflections by the king on the nature of his rulership and the reasoning behind his decisions, in addition to his calls to action. More remarkable than the content of the letters, which both exhibit "an elevated and somewhat bombastic Greek style," is the way that articulating their contents pulls attention away from the form of the messages and instead draws attention to their rhetorical content.[14] In MT Esther, written texts have authority *qua* written. As Bal notes, "These letters are mirroring as narrative plot elements, not mirroring as texts."[15] The act of writing is independently powerful. Danger to the Jews inheres in the fact of the written edict calling for their destruction; the style in which that edict is scripted is not important. When compared to the MT text, the effect of Additions B and E is to prioritize the details of the letters' content over the broadly authoritative fact of their textuality. The motif of *writing as power* is thus diluted in the Greek versions.

The theological divergences among the ancient versions of Esther also merit attention. Much has been made of MT Esther's silence on overtly theological matters, so that scholarship on the Greek versions similarly has focused on their "God-talk." The six additions, as well as mentions of God in the core of the story, add an explicitly theological tone to the LXX edition.[16] The AT also includes language about God not

[14] Levenson, *Esther*, 113.

[15] Bal, "Lots of Writing," 87.

[16] 2:20, 4:8, 6:1, 6:13. Cf. C. Moore, "Esther, Additions to," *ABD* 2:631.

paralleled in the MT, such as in Mordecai's petitioning of Esther to intervene with the king; there the AT explicitly credits God as the Jews' "help and salvation," whereas the MT speaks of the Jews' help coming from "another quarter" (4:14).[17] This intimation of God's intervention, along with the exercise of religious rituals such as fasting and donning sackcloth and ashes for mourning (4:1-3, 16), implies that Esther is not thoroughly irreligious. Rather, Esther's primary concerns are not theological; they are political. These concerns shift in both the AT and the LXX, which describe different historical-political moments with different authorial motivations. Unlike Chronicles, MT Esther does not worry about God's work in the history of the Israelite people. Unlike Ezra-Nehemiah, MT Esther has no concerns about reestablishing place and means for ritual practice. The lack of theological discussion in MT Esther underscores the book's predominantly political milieu.

Dating

Current scholarly consensus holds that the book of Esther was written either at the end of the Persian period or the beginning of the Hellenistic period, putting its composition in the fourth or third century B.C.E., in the same general era as both Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah.[18] The setting of the book of Esther during the reign of the Persian king Xerxes (486-465) means that the book must date from after those decades. The tone of retrospection taken at the outset of the book implies some time has passed since Xerxes' reign. The use of several Persian loanwords and the accuracy of the Persian proper names used in the book, coupled with an absence of Greek vocabulary,

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[17] AT also adds language about God at 4:16 and 7:2.

[18] Beal, *Esther*, xv; F. Bush, *Ruth, Esther* (WBC 9; Dallas: Word Books, 1996), 295-297; Clines, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, 271-272; Levenson, *Esther,* 23-27.

provide linguistic evidence for a Persian-era date.[19]

A frequent yet puzzling claim used to support the idea that Esther is a pre-Maccabean or even pre-Hellenistic-era composition is the notion that the book displays a positive attitude toward a Gentile king. Levenson, for example, writes of "…the tolerant and non-revolutionary character of the Esther traditions, which see nothing inherently wrong with the phenomenon of Gentile kings ruling Jewish subjects."[20] Compared, perhaps, with the Maccabean era, the Persian period of Judean history certainly enjoyed a more peaceful and generous relationship with the ruling powers. Nonetheless, as this dissertation is attempting to show, the attitudes of the Esther traditions, Ezra-Nehemiah, and even Chronicles are not benignly "non-revolutionary"; they both demonstrate both accommodation and resistance in their adoption of imperial forms. Even so, the remaining evidence for a Persian-period dating of Esther is still quite compelling, and it is the position of this study that the book was composed at the end of the Persian period, or, at the latest, the very beginning of the Hellenistic period.

Writing in Esther Scholarship

The prominence of writing in the book of Esther rarely goes unnoticed by commentators, and it is no wonder: the book is thick with notations about writing and written texts. [21] Scholars are most likely to discuss the frequency of references to writing and text because of the way that writing is involved in the most pivotal of the book's

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[19] See H. S. Gehman, "Notes on the Persian Words in the Book of Esther," *JBL* 43 (1924): 321-328, and A. R. Millard, "The Persian Names in Esther and the Reliability of the Hebrew Text," *JBL* 96 (1977): 481-488.

[20] Levenson, *Esther*, 113. See also Clines, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, 272, and Moore, "Esther, Book of," *ABD* 2:633-643. Moore calls the book's portrait of a Gentile king "not unsympathetic."

[21] Examples of commentators' acknowledgment of the role of writing in the text include Clines, *The Esther Scroll*, 22-24; Z. Weisman, *Political Satire in the Bible,* 162.

many "reversals." Using the power granted to him by the king and symbolized by possession of the king's signet ring, Haman directs the writing of a decree calling for the destruction of the Jews in all the king's provinces (3:7-15). After Esther's intervention at Mordecai's urging (5:1-8; 7:1-8), Haman is executed (7:9-10), and the king gives his signet ring to Mordecai, thus handing over the power to write on the king's behalf (8:2, 8) Mordecai then directs the writing of a new decree in which the Jews are authorized to defend themselves against their aggressors (8:9-14), and the result of their counter-offensive is the widespread destruction of their enemies (9:5-15). Thus, the dominant symbols of royal power are the instruments of writing official documents, and the act of writing marks moments in the text where the direction of the plot is suddenly reversed.

Two readings have given sustained attention to writing in Esther beyond its service to the plot and are therefore particularly influential for the present study.[22] The first is Mieke Bal's 1991 *Semeia* article, "Lots of Writing." Bal conducts a poststructuralist analysis of the text focused on the issue of self-reflection as manifested in the persistence of the theme of writing throughout the narrative. According to Bal, the book of Esther showcases three functions of writing. Its social functions are described in the authority exercised upon, and thereby undermining, society's existing power structures, including state, class, and gender. Ahasuerus' authority, for example, is undermined by his turning to his advisors for the last word on Vashti, robbing him of his royal agency. Writing's narrative function points to the ambivalence of writing's authority. The decree against Vashti, for example, "was meant to fix forever the obedience of wives, hence, male power over women in private and public," and yet

[22] See also a third, more cursory but nonetheless important look at writing in Esther in D. N. Fewell, "Introduction: Writing, Reading, and Relating," in *Reading Between Texts: Intertextuality and the Hebrew Bible* (ed. D. N. Fewell; Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1992), 11-20.

Esther disobeys the king by going to see him without authorization.[23] Finally, writing's semiotic function is itself three-fold: symbolic, indexical, and iconic. It is symbolic in its move from happening to sign, as the Vashti decree again demonstrates: "It is used for law-making, while it embodies the law itself."[24] Writing in Esther is indexical in its materiality: the king's signet ring, for example, connects the king's body to his writing, and yet the connection becomes problematic when he passes the ring to Haman and then to Mordecai. Writing in Esther is iconic, signifying power: annals confirm the past and decrees script the future. Even so, no writing is self-executing; each text requires a reader to receive and act upon it. Together, the three functions of writing embodied in the book of Esther – social, narrative, and semiotic – underscore the ambiguities inherent in the deployment of writing, which is used in service of the king's authority even as it undermines it.

As Bal describes it, Esther is a self-reflective text – that is, it is writing about writing – and, because of that mirroring, ultimately interrogates the subjectivity of the critic. In this way Bal's reading is highly compatible with a postcolonial approach, which, like any of the "ideological" criticisms, maintains a focus on the locatedness and allegiances of all readers. Methodologically speaking, Bal shows that even under the press of deconstructive critical modes, texts remain socio-politically relevant.

Timothy Beal's *The Book of Hiding: Gender, Ethnicity, Annihilation, and Esther*, similarly draws from recent work in literary theory to analyze the notion of "self" in Esther, with particular attention to the construction of "self" and "other" in the story's

[23] Bal, "Lots of Writing," 88.
[24] Ibid., 90.

political and religious milieux.[25] Beal explores the intersections of gender and ethnicity in the book of Esther's constructions of otherness. He shows how attempts to fix the identity of the "other" are continually undermined, making "identity" neither a settled nor settling concept. The problematics of identity present throughout the narrative are exemplified in the person of Esther, who is at once enjoined "to be obedient daughter, to be pleasing wife, to be orphan, to be law-abiding Persian, to be loyal Jew (which demands that she transgress the king's law), to be queen, to be exile, et cetera. Given these multiple injunctions, it is impossible to fix her in a particular social location within an order marked by a particular politics of identity, one based on a system of oppositional differences."[26] The same is true with all of the identities negotiated within the text; the more the prevailing power structures attempt to stabilize them, the more slippery they become. Like Bal's, Beal's work is influential for the present study not only because of its persistent attentiveness to the power of writing in Esther, but also because of its engagement with the highly charged political dimensions of the book.

These two contributions to Esther studies have covered well many of the exegetical nuances cultivated by the book's foregrounding of writing and written texts. They show above all else the highly tensive nature of writing and the highly ambivalent power it produces. The goal of the present chapter is not to rehearse all the details touched upon by Beal and Bal, but rather to contribute a new focus on the category of "empire" as a paradigm through which the power relationships undergirded by the motif of *writing as power* are filtered. In the section that follows, I will chart where the motif of

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[25] Beal echoes many of his claims from *The Book of Hiding* in *Esther* (BO; Collegeville, Minn: The Liturgical Press, 1999) and prefigures them in "Tracing Esther's Beginnings" in *A Feminist Companion to Esther, Judith and Susanna* (FCB 7; ed. Athalya Brenner; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995).

[26] Beal, *The Book of Hiding*, 100.

writing and the written text appears in the book of Esther, as well as evaluate how that motif intersects with other narrative elements of the book to comment upon the nature of imperial power.

Writing in Esther

The act of writing becomes central to the plot of Esther in the opening scene of Queen Vashti's dismissal (1:10-22). When Vashti refuses to heed the king's order to come to his banquet, the king calls on his officials to consult the law and advise him on the proper punishment for Vashti. Having decided that the royal domestic dispute will cue women across the kingdom to defy their husbands, the officials advise the king to issue a "royal word" (דבר מלכות) expelling the queen from her palace and from her royal office. What happens inside the palace is seen as a threat to life outside the palace. To contradict dissemination of the queen's word (דבר המלכה, 1:18)—that is, the news of her disobedience—this new royal word will be "written in the laws of the Persians and the Medes and will not be altered" (1:19). Via his advisors, the king seeks to control the flow of information between the palace and the populace. With his written edict, Vashti's story will float away as ephemeral gossip, while the new royal law will remain intransient and irrevocable. Writing down the king's order as law gives his pronouncement both legal authority and permanence.

The writing of the law is followed by proclamation of the law, carried out by the distribution of written notices (ספרים) throughout the empire.[27] The notices are sent "to

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[27] The use of ספרים here leaves open the possibility of many written genres – e.g., letters (NRSV) – communicating the king's word. What is most important than the specific translation, however, is the fact that the word stipulates a written genre. Moreover, the speedy and widespread distribution of the ספרים invokes the efficiency of Persia's postal system.

each province according to its script and to each people according to its language" (1:22). I have already pointed to the multilingual nature of these notices as consistent with Persia's reputation for hypertextuality. The notices also contribute to the overall tenor of excess in the book of Esther's characterization of the imperial establishment. What began as a personal conflict between the desires of the king and the will of the queen becomes a political crisis that imperils domestic order throughout the kingdom. The slightest affront to the king's authority leads to the scripting of new legislation and what is essentially an empire-wide "bulk mailing." These actions end a chapter that begins with a prolonged description of the extravagant banquet hosted by the king in his elaborately decorated palace. The 180-day duration of the banquet already seems hyperbolic.[28] Moreover, such a detailed description of scenery as is found in Esther 1:6-7 is virtually unheard of in the rest of Hebrew Bible narrative, which usually exhibits a highly efficient prose style prioritizing direct discourse over outright narration. Biblical narrative also focuses on the movement of the plot rather than other potential narrative elements, making the pause to describe the banquet's setting all the more extraordinary.[29] Thus, even the narrative technique deployed at the very outset of the book underscores the excess of the empire.

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[28] Beal, *Esther*, 2-7; Clines, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, 276.

[29] R. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrativ*, 63-87, analyzes biblical narrative's preference for dialogue—especially direct discourse—over outright narration, emphasizing that the movement of the plot takes priority over conveying any other type of action within the narrative. Alter isolates three functions served by narration that undergird dialogue rather than take priority over it: "the conveying of actions essential to the unfolding of the plot…, "the communication of data ancillary to the plot…," and "the verbatim mirroring, confirming, subverting, or focusing in narration of statements made in direct discourse by the characters" (77). Esther 1:6-7 would fall under the second of these purposes, since it does not at all move that plot along. Yet, as Alter points out, this type of narration usually provides brief expository information, naming and locating characters and their family relationships, and occasionally providing "a succinct moral, social, or physical characterization of the protagonist" (80). This is in contrast, then, to the extended, highly descriptive scene-painting of Esther 1:6-7. Levenson, *Esther,* 1, reflecting on the book of Esther as a whole, also observes that "the book relies more on narration and less on quoted speech than most comparable biblical material."

Though the narrative accords it less detail, the method by which Esther comes to be in the king's palace parallels the method by which Vashti was sent out of it. Advisors tell the king to order the gathering of women into the palace (2:2-4). This advice is "good in the eyes of the king" (2:4), just as the previous advice had been (1:21), and so he acts upon it. Esther is brought to the palace when "the word of the king and his law were proclaimed" (2:8), just as the word of the king prescribing men to rule in their houses had become a law made known in the king's provinces. While references to writing and written texts are muted in the account of Esther's time in the harem, the overall portrait of imperial excess continues. Women of the harem spend twelve months undergoing beauty treatments before entering the presence of the king (2:12). Esther and Mordecai, by contrast, exemplify restraint. Esther refrains from taking any cosmetics with her on her visit to the king save those things Hegai the eunuch tells her to (2:15). On Mordecai's advice, she does not reveal her ethnicity (2:10, 20). Mordecai himself waits patiently outside the gate of the palace, sometimes walking (2:11) and sometimes sitting (2:19), to keep an eye on Esther. Whereas the king acts on impulse and to excess, Mordecai and Esther act thoughtfully and with moderation.

The next reference to a written text appears, at first glance, merely incidental. As Mordecai keeps his vigil outside the gate of the king, he overhears an assassination conspiracy plotted by two of the king's eunuchs (2:21). Mordecai passes word of this plot to Esther, who passes word to the king on his behalf, and the eunuchs are hanged for their plot (2:22-23). Notably, Mordecai and Esther both communicate verbally (נגד and אמר), not via writing. The scene ends with the note, "It was written in the book of the annals (lit., 'words [or events] of the days') before the king" (2:23). Writing in this scene occurs in a passive construction (Niphal of כתב), part of the faceless bureaucratic machinations

of the empire. The narrative's record of this textual moment is not, however, merely an aside; the existence of the record enables one of the book of Esther's great reversals. One night the king has this book read to him when he is unable to sleep, and he takes note of the fact that Mordecai recently saved his life. Without letting Haman know the circumstances of his question, the king asks Haman, "What should be done for a man whom the king […]?" (6:6) Haman assumes the king wants to honor him, and so he outlines a reward that he would find most pleasing. That honor is then bestowed on Mordecai, Haman's nemesis, leading Haman's wife Zeresh to predict that Mordecai's Jewish ethnicity will guarantee his ultimate success over Haman.

Haman's rivalry with Mordecai is "textualized" not only in the reversal of honor made possible by the book of annals, but also in Haman's broader conspiracy against the Jews. Haman devises his plan to annihilate all Jews in the kingdom after being told that Mordecai does not heed the king's command to bow to Haman when he passes. Notably, Haman does not notice this slight on his own. He only witnesses Mordecai's disobedience after the king's gatekeepers alert him to it (3:4), a circumstance consistent with the highly mediated nature of communication in the text's portrait of the kingdom. For this minor affront, Haman seeks major revenge. The text articulates pointedly both the depth of Haman's arrogance and the kingdom's overall confusion of the personal and political with its statement, "It was despicable in [Haman's] eyes to stretch out his hand over Mordecai alone." Upon learning that Mordecai is a Jew, he solicits a decree from the king calling for the destruction of all the Jews in Ahasuerus' kingdom.

After hearing Haman's petition, the king hands over his signet ring to Haman. In that act, the king transfers his power to *write* with all the power of the royal office, since, as the narrative itself will later explain (8:28), any document sealed with the king's seal

will carry ultimate authority.[30] Power over "the money" and "the people" accompanies documentary authority (3:11). A flurry of writing immediately follows this transfer of power. Haman instructs the king's scribes to write an edict "to the king's satraps, and to the governors who were over each province, and to the officials of every people of every province according to its script, and every people according to its tongue. It was written in the name of King Ahasuerus and sealed with the king's signet ring" (3:12). This edict, like the official response to Queen Vashti's action, is multilingual and widely distributed. In fact, the text is even more comprehensive in its description of the distribution of Haman's edict, specifying the multiple types of officials who would be receiving the text.

The text's description of the dissemination of Haman's edict resonates with the hypertextual reputation of Persia. Each satrap, governor, and official in every province receives a written text (ספר) of the order (3:13), and a copy (פתשגן) of the document (כתב) is proclaimed as law in every province (3:14). Couriers deliver the documents rapidly throughout the kingdom. The written texts bring with them panic, while at the same time cultivating a sense of calm within the royal centers of power. Inasmuch as writing couples the fate of the populace to the internal whims of the imperial leadership, writing also inserts a distance, a space of mediation, between the edict's writers and readers. The narrative articulates this detachment poignantly at the end of this scene, when "the king and Haman sat down to drink; but the city of Susa was thrown into confusion" (3:15b NRSV). Haman's fury (3:5,חמה) abates into an evening of jovial imbibing; writing has already caused a reversal. Inside the palace gates is order, outside is chaos, rendered simply by the passing of a written text from one locale to the other.

[30] The importance of the sealed document (*halmi*) in the Persian administrative system is reflected the Persepolis Treasury and Fortification finds, where seals were the "proof" of proper bureaucratic authorization. See Hallock, *Persepolis Fortification Tablets*, 36.

Haman's decree continues to reign over the panicked city through chapters 4 and 5. The only additional mention of a text in those chapters is a written copy of the decree, which Mordecai, via Hathach the eunuch, passes to Esther as part of his plea for her intervention (4:8). Once again, Mordecai and Esther speak, rather than write, their conversation (cf. 2:22). In fact, Haman's decree is the sole textual shadow cast over the action in chapters 6 and 7 as well, with one notable exception. The narrative pauses its macro-story of the imminent danger to the Jews to talk about the micro-drama fueling the rivalry between Haman and Mordecai. As chaos swirls in Susa, the king suffers a bout of insomnia, so he calls for the royal annals to be read in his presence to lull him to sleep (6:1). The portion of the records read to him includes the note previously recorded about Mordecai's thwarting of the eunuchs' assassination plans for the king. The use of the Niphal with מצא at 6:2, producing the passive phrase, "It was found written," emphasizes the written nature of the text's authority over any particular person's agency in discovering or reading the text. The fact that these details have been "found written" – not even that they were read, a necessary corollary to writing – fuels Mordecai's honor. Throughout the book of Esther, even though texts must be read, it is the writing of them that consistently receives narrative priority.

Mordecai's triumph over Haman, foreshadowed in the honors bestowed on him for thwarting the assassination plot, reaches its fullness in the transfer of the king's signet ring to Mordecai (8:2). It is in this moment that the text reports, "Thus Esther set Mordecai over the house of Haman" (8:2b). Esther's banquets and her dangerous requests of the king culminate in transfer of power to Mordecai. The signet ring, once given over to Haman to write the destruction of the Jews, is now given over to Mordecai to rewrite their survival. All is not immediately well, however. Esther still must plead with the king

for the revocation of Haman's letters. The king responds with this reassurance: "You may write concerning the Jews, according to what is good in your eyes, in the name of the king and sealed with the seal of the king. For a text that is written in the name of the king and sealed with the seal of the king cannot be revoked" (8:8).[31]

Irony is rife in this statement. First is the triumph of the reversal, as Ahasuerus had similarly allowed Haman to write "according to what is good in your eyes" (3:11). More remarkable than that, though, is the notion of the irrevocability of a text written in the king's name and sealed with his seal. Revocation (להשיב, 8:8) is precisely what Esther has requested (להשיב, 8:5)! And yet, the king is correct, not just about his decrees, but about writing in general. Writing possesses an inherent permanence.[32] What Esther achieves with her petition is not revocation, nor quite a "reversal"; it is an *overwriting*.[33] The new decree is a palimpsest on which traces of the old appear; there can be no complete erasure.[34] It assumes that the old decree stands: on the thirteenth of Adar, the citizenry of Ahasuerus' kingdom will seek to carry out the order of the king, that is, "to destroy, kill, and annihilate all the Jews, from young to old, children and women…" (3:13). Now, also on the thirteenth of Adar, the Jews will "destroy, kill, and annihilate every army of a people or province attacking them, children and women…" (8:11).

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[31] Attention to the *irrevocability* of written texts is sometimes wrapped up with discussions of Persian law. I wish to avoid a facile equation of the two, for here it is a matter of a *written text* (נכתב), not a vague concept of law, that is irrevocable. Even at 1:19, where explicit reference is made to the irrevocability of the law (דת), it is specifically the *written* law that is irrevocable. See Clines, *The Esther Scroll*, 4-24.

[32] Cf. Niditch, *Oral World and Written Word*, 78-88. The notion that writing is a method of preservation is encapsulated well in Isaiah 30:8: "Go now, write it before them on a tablet, and inscribe it in a book, so that it may be for the time to come as a witness forever" (NRSV).

[33] Cf. Beal, *Esther*, 95-106.

[34] Beal, *The Book of Hiding*, 29, provides a helpful explication of the notion of "palimpsest" from Derrida's work. Beal goes on to invoke the image of the palimpsest for the entire book of Esther, especially in the [non-]erasure of Vashti from the story.

Prefixed to that duplicated language, however, are the infinitives construct "to assemble and to stand for their lives" (8:11); the destruction, killing, and annihilation of the Jews' attackers does not replace their planned offensive, but rather provides for a counter-offensive. The counter-offensive is also supplemented with the phrase, "and to plunder their goods," thus escalating the confrontation, not simply cancelling it out.[35] In the clash of these two competing texts, the power of writing cannot by itself prevail. Even the escalation of the content provides no guarantee of the Jews' success. Just because Mordecai and Esther have written a text does not mean that they will now be triumphant, only that the balance of power has been leveled.[36] Deliverance for the Jews must indeed come from another quarter.

In her article on the book of Esther's "Lots of Writing," Bal emphasizes the delay that reading, which is the necessary completion of writing, brings to writing itself. No matter how powerful writing may be in any given context, it can never quite be self-executing.[37] Even if it possesses iconic power – and in the book of Esther, it surely does – it nonetheless must assume an eventual readership, lest the text's potency be diluted or even eliminated altogether. Behind the notion of "writing as power," which is perpetually reinforced in the book of Esther, lurks the conceptual reality of "reading as power," without which writing may never reach its full force. And yet, as I have discussed above,

[35] Clines, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, 317, 323, points out that Mordecai's edict calls for the destruction of property (8:11), but that in the execution of the edict, the narrative repeats three times that "they did not touch the plunder (9:10, 15, 16). Clines proposes that this could iterate ethical superiority. Clines also draws attention to W. McKane, "A Note on Esther IX and 1 Samuel XV," *JTS* 12 (1961): 60-61, which explores the possibility that the Jews' abstaining from plunder is a deliberate contrast with Saul's failure to keep the ban against Agag, of whom Haman is a descendant. However, as both Clines and McKane affirm, there is no real invocation of the notion of the "ban" (esp. in Mordecai's prescription *for* looting), and Haman's ancestral background is not emphasized in this context.

[36] For a side-by-side comparison of Haman's edict with Mordecai's, see M. V. Fox, *Character and Ideology in the Book of Esther* (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 101-104.

[37] Bal, "Lots of Writing," 86-89; cf. Beal, *The Book of Hiding*, 84.

the reading or hearing of texts does not receive much direct attention in Esther, which focuses indefatigably on the act of *writing*. The circumstance that changes the fate of the Jews is not merely the writing of the counter-edict, nor is quite the reading of the counter-edict; it is the settling of fear (פחד) upon the non-Jewish populace. The narrative refers to the people's fear of the Jews in general and of Mordecai in particular three times in quick succession (8:8, 9:2, 9:3) as the reason the Jews are available to prevail on the thirteenth and then again on the fourteenth of Adar. They do not even touch the plunder[38]; the addition of a few extra infinitives construct to the language of the edict has not changed things. It is, instead, the Jews' almost preternatural rise in esteem and power in the eyes of the rest of the residents of the kingdom that delivers them. This moment provides one of those silent spaces into which theological discussions might begin to sound; the text is wholly silent on the cause of this shift. Whatever the inspiration behind Mordecai's newfound reputation, it undoubtedly accompanies Mordecai's move *inside* the king's palace.

Written texts in the book of Esther mediate between the insular world of the king's palace and his vast kingdom outside of it. Actions inside the royal residence, from the king's banquets to his bedtime reading, shape the scope of life outside it. Writing happens inside the palace, but its effects are felt far outside the king's gate. Even when the motif of written texts fades to the background of the narrative as the actions of the characters take over (esp. Esth. 4-5), the highly mediated nature of the kingdom continues to stand out. It continues to be difficult for anyone outside the royal residence to know

[38] I. Mosala, "The Implications of the Text of Esther," in *The Postcolonial Biblical Reader* (ed. R. S. Sugirtharajah; Malden, Mass.: Blackwell 2006), 131-141, names the Jews' abstinence from looting as "upholding the sanctity of property over the life of people [which] is well known as part of ruling-class ideology." That critique stems from an analysis of the Persian Empire's colonizing strategies as a "feudal-tributary" system. In killing but not looting, says Mosala, the Jews capitulate to the dominant ideology.

what is happening inside of it, even though the events that determine the fate of all the people of the kingdom take place there.

Mordecai's spatial positioning throughout the book illustrates this point.[39] Mordecai spends much of the story seated at the king's gate, at the threshold between the inside and outside of the palace. It is there that he awaits word of Esther's life in the harem, as well as where he overhears the eunuchs' plot to assassinate the king. It is also the place where he has daily encounters with Haman, to whom he will not bow down. When Mordecai learns of Haman's decree, he takes one mournful turn through the city and returns to the entrance of the gate wearing sackcloth and ashes. When the king wishes to honor Mordecai for saving his life, Mordecai takes a triumphant ride through the city and then returns yet again to the gate. After Haman's execution, Moredecai leaves the gate for good, going into the palace before the king (8:1) and thereafter remaining in the king's house (9:4). He goes out from before the king only once more in the narrative, this time for another triumphal procession around the city after the issuance of the counter-decree (8:15-16), a scene that, as Beal points out, stands in stark contrast to the chaos following the issuance of Haman's decree.[40]

Mordecai's presence at the king's threshold gives him a spatial liminality that mirrors his place on a political borderline. His placement cultivates anticipation in the narrative: will he make his way inside the palace with Esther, or will he remain outside, he and his kinsmen doomed? Two contradictory documents about Mordecai duplicate

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[39] Throughout his *Esther* commentary and especially in *The Book of Hiding*, Beal is also acutely aware of the preponderance of spatial language and imagery in Esther, and the reader is encouraged to turn to those works for additional, sustained analyses of space and placement. See also Fox, *Character and Ideology,* 59, and A. LaCocque, *Esther Regina: A Bakhtinian Reading (*RT; Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2008), 22-25.

[40] Beal, *Esther*, 103.

that anticipation: Haman's decree to blot out Mordecai via the genocide of the Jews (3:12-14) makes Mordecai's fate appear to be destruction, while the recording of Mordecai's life-saving deed in the royal annals (2:23) seems to point Mordecai toward an inevitable glory.[41] Mordecai's spatial placement parallels the ambiguity about his future created by the royal texts. In chapter eight this ambiguity is resolved when, "On that day King Ahasuerus gave to Queen Esther the house of Haman, the enemy of the Jews, and Mordecai went before the king, for Esther had revealed what he was to her" (8:1). Mordecai is safely "before the king," inside the palace, and set by Esther over the house of Haman (8:2).[42]

Once he becomes a full-time resident of the palace, Mordecai's writing is not limited to the counter-decree of chapter 8. Inside the palace, he takes on an almost scribal vocation. He writes "[all] these things" (9:20), presumably the events of the thirteenth through fifteenth of Adar, but also perhaps simply all things relevant. Mordecai becomes a new royal recorder, but for the history and future of the Jews, not of the Persian establishment. He is now in charge of scripting his own fate and the fate of his people; as

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[41] Cf. Beal, *The Book of Hiding,* 84.

[42] The stark spatial differentiations between inside and outside the palace gates resonate with psychiatrist and post-colonial thinker Frantz Fanon's reflections on colonial spatiality. He saw the colonial world as highly compartmentalized, contrasting the colonists' towns with the towns of the colonized subjects, which exist according to the principle of "mutual exclusion": the settler's town is bright, clean, and full of well-fed people, while the native's town is dark, dirty, and full of hunger. The juxtaposition of the two spaces builds resentment on the part of the native and paranoia on the part of the colonizer: "The gaze that the colonized subject casts at the colonist's sector is a look of lust, a look of envy. Dreams of possession. Every type of possession: of sitting at the colonist's table and sleeping in his bed, preferably with his wife. The colonized man is an envious man. The colonist is aware of this as he catches the furtive glance, and constantly on his guard, realizes bitterly that: 'They want to take our place.' And it's true there is not one colonized subject who at least once a day does not dream of taking the place of the colonist." F. Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (trans. R. Philcox; New York: Grove Press, 1963), 4-5. While the book of Esther does not convey an outright sense of envy on the part of Mordecai or Esther—in fact, Esther finds herself inside the royal realm by force—Mordecai's ascent into the seat of imperial power after his prolonged gaze on palatial splendor from outside the gate reads like a fulfillment of the settler's fantasy as described by Fanon.

the king's honoring of Mordecai has shown, recording the past can change the future. His letters go out to "all the Jews who are in all King Ahasuerus' provinces, the near ones and the far ones" (9:20b), a more specific audience than "all peoples" who received the previous royal communiqués (1:22, 3:14, 8:13). Mordecai, together with Esther, is now an "insider" in the kingdom, and with insider status has come the power to write, which itself is the power to set the future. Mordecai's texts still need readers: Mordecai's ascension has not suddenly changed the nature of writing and its inherent delay. Nor has Mordecai replaced the king himself. Ahasuerus still presides atop the empire's hierarchy, and he remains responsible for dispensing the authority to write. Yet, through the series of actions undertaken by the promptings of the king's advisors, the text has already shown that to be second in command in Ahasuerus' kingdom is to have primary authority. Mordecai, and with him the whole notion of Jewish identity as presented in Esther, has found a place inside the center of the empire. The imperial structures cannot be changed, but the participants in them can.

References to the act of writing take on a kind of pedantic furor in chapters 8-10. Sixteen of the twenty-six occurrences of the root כתב in the book of Esther are concentrated in these last three chapters of the book. This may be, as Clines suggests, a consequence of a separate redactional moment in the composition history of Esther, since he finds the Purim etiology to be a secondary accretion to the Esther novella.[43] Even if this is so – and Clines' argument is compelling – the effect on the final form of the text is only to underscore the positions to which Esther and Mordecai have risen, and the continuing centrality of writing to them. Most references to writing and written texts in

[43] Clines, *The Esther Scroll*, 50-63.

these final chapters are related to the institution of the Purim festival. Purim is celebrated "on account of all the things written in this letter" (9:26) and "as it was written" (9:27). Esther writes a second letter to confirm the first (9:29),[44] and letters directing the celebration of Purim are sent to all Jews (9:30-31). Finally, the fact of Esther's direction of the celebration of Purim is itself "written in the book" (ונכתב בספר, 9:32). All of this redundant writing, including texts announcing texts that confirm texts that duplicate texts, smacks of farce. Even in the hands of Esther and Mordecai, the imperial modes are ridiculous.[45] Nonetheless, those modes now enable the survival and flourishing of the Jewish people, rather than their annihilation.

The final written text mentioned in the book of Esther occurs in the book's summary "postscript": "All the deeds of [the king's] might and strength, and the full account of the king's putting honor upon him, are they not written upon the book of the annals of the kings of Media and Persia?" (10:2) This statement provides a beautifully ironic echo of the book of Chronicles, where the history contained therein is lent authority by the presumed existence of many such books of annals.[46] In the wake of all

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[44] See Clines, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther,* 329-30, on the grammatical and syntactic difficulties of this verse.

[45] Fox, *Character and Ideology*, 227-8, reads Mordecai and Esther's new authority as more generous, democratic form of rulership than that of Ahasuerus, claiming they "arrive at decisions through a dialectic between leaders and community." Rather than imposing their will dictatorially, "…Mordecai *extracts* the holiday from the people's unprompted activity and turns it into a permanent, official communal rite." While Fox is correct to note that the descriptions of Purim lack references to writing in the king's name or sealing a document with his seal, I am reluctant to read too much difference between the king and Haman's modes of writing and Mordecai and Esther's. The narrative has already emphasized that the king has transferred his signet ring, and thereby his full written authority, to Mordecai (8:2, 8).

[46] Berlin, "The Book of Esther and Ancient Storytelling," 7, connects the elements evoking history-writing (*a la* Kings) in Esther with a desire for the Diaspora community to cultivate ties to the land, literature, and community of preexilic Israel. Such links both provided a sense of Jewish continuity and enriched its perception as authoritative. The *ironic* echo of Chronicles, then, serves at once as both connection and rupture. Diaspora Judaism's stories are recorded in new books, foreign ones, and yet the Jewish leader Mordecai is now both writer and subject of those foreign texts.

that has transpired in the book of Esther, the answer to that rhetorical question is a resounding, “Yes!” That is not to say that such things are recorded in those annals, or even that such a document has ever existed. The rhetorical “yes” is not an affirmation of fact; indeed, a romp through the book’s hyperbolic features, comedic and dramatic alike, has done nothing to shore up any lingering notions about the historicity or even plausibility of the book’s plot. But in the world of the text, Mordecai now has the power to write. He and, metonymically, the Jewish community in Diaspora under Persian rule[47] are empowered to give their own account of the rulership of the empire’s kings.

Bal’s description of Esther as self-reflective text is, then, especially appropriate. By writing a story in which the production of counter-narratives is realized, the hands behind the book of Esther also write one of those counter-narratives. Esther enables and simultaneously provides a commentary on the empire. Its readers through the centuries actualize and re-actualize the scripting of the Persian kingdom as buffoonery through bureaucracy, the personalization of the political, and decisions on matters of life and death rendered by whims. The system is unstable, unpredictable, dangerous. Mordecai’s ascension does not imply these things will change, only that the Jewish people can have power within the system. But, as the totality of Beal’s work emphasizes, the instability inherent in writing, in politics, and in identity is what the book of Esther most triumphantly reveals to its readers.[48]

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[47] Fox, *Character and Ideology*, 226-230, describes the author’s portrayal of the Jewish community in diaspora as “a united body which, though scattered through a gigantic empire, can act as a unit.” This sense of communal power contrasts with the Persian kingship, where “all formal power is invested in the office of king.” Fox’s sense of the emergence of a “democratic” ethos in the book parallels Eskenazi’s (*In an Age of Prose*) identification of a similar movement in Ezra-Nehemiah, in which agency shifts from key leaders to the community as a whole.

[48] Beal, *The Book of Hiding*, 112-6.

Conclusions

Esther is a triumph of fiction over history. Its fictive presentations provide a subversive commentary that lampoons the power-centers of the empire, even as it writes the Jewish community into those centers. I have shown in previous chapters how Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah add an archival flavor to their historiographical and narrative styles, incorporating lists, genealogies, and letters so that the texts themselves become repositories for other texts. By contrast, the book of Esther employs the written text as a motif, weaving together references to texts and documentation into a story that comments poignantly on imperial power. That commentary says that the empire is a farce: arbitrary, unstable, dangerous. And yet, the voice of the book of Esther wants to be a part of it.

Despite the fact that the book of Esther does not possess interpolated texts in the same manner as Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah, references to writing and written texts nonetheless pervade the book. Writers, particularly of administrative texts, possess authority over nothing less than life and death in the kingdom. At the same time, the written texts in Esther are not merely instruments of raw power. They are the mediators of the insular world of the Persian king and the kingdom that sits outside his gates, and their distribution highlights the highly charged spatial arrangements of the kingdom, which themselves encode the kingdom's power relationships. Esther demystifies the iconic power of writing by rejecting any sense of mystique around the king and his government. While writing remains a necessary component of imperial authority, and certainly a necessary mode to mediate between the "inside" and "outside" worlds of the empire, writing in itself does not constitute the totality of power. There remains something inexplicable—perhaps divinity, perhaps luck, perhaps the strength of

communal identity, perhaps individual heroism as manifested in the actions of Mordecai and Esther—that operates to shape the future of the kingdom and the Jewish people's place in it. The identity of that force—like all identities in the book of Esther—remains impossible to fix.

CHAPTER 6

Conclusions: Yehud Writing Persia

Summary of Findings

Persia's imperialistic domination of Yehud shaped the narrative styles of Chronicles, Ezra-Nehemiah, and Esther, which are all products of the Achaemenid era. In this dissertation I have established the empire's preoccupation with written texts and charted the ways in which those three Persian-period biblical narratives appropriate that concern. I have used narrative and form-critical methods to discover how the texts encode Yehud's political reality. My approach is framed by postcolonial studies' premise that the dominating structures of imperialism influence all aspects of a colony's culture. The results have shown that Chronicles, Ezra-Nehemiah, and Esther all appropriate the authority invested in textuality by the Achaemenid power structure. Though each narrative conducts its appropriations in different ways, the end result is an attempt to map out the community's identity in the midst of the socio-political reality that is Persian imperial rule. Each assertion of identity glimmers with resistance, and yet the use of the empire's hypertextuality is less subversive than affirmative of imperial modes.

I began my investigation in ch. 2 by establishing the "hypertextuality" of the Persian Empire, showing that it had an unprecedented interest in and reliance on written texts, particularly texts of an administrative nature. Despite the fact that no narrative histories written from a Persian perspective—if any ever existed—now survive, archaeological evidence attests to the empire's zeal for writing propagandistic and administrative texts. Persia's multilingual royal inscriptions provided genealogical justifications for the kings' claim to the throne, particularly beginning with Darius I, whose own lineage and right to rule were dubious. Some of these inscriptions were translated and distributed throughout the empire, meaning that residents of Persia's colonies had access to them, especially at scribal centers. As the first empire to control such a wide territory, Persia made unprecedented use of bureaucratic measures to manage its colonies. Although military methods were central to its efforts, Persia also heavily employed tribute and taxation as a means of keeping its territories in check. The Persepolis Treasury and Fortification Tablets show that every payment or disbursement produced multiple written documents, creating an ever-burgeoning bureaucratic system dependent on written texts.

Persia's use of and dependency on written texts cultivated its reputation for hypertextuality among its subjects and observers. Greek historiographers attest to Persia's ability to move documents across its territories with speed and efficiency. They also provide anecdotal accounts of the iconic power of texts within the empire. Biblical portrayals of the Persian Empire similarly depict written texts as profoundly powerful, sometimes even more so than the king himself. Royal decrees in Esther are multilingual, distributed throughout the provinces, and irrevocable. The characters with the power to write in the king's name are the characters who control the outcome of the plot. In the

book of Daniel, the Persian king Darius is the only one among all the kings portrayed in the book who makes decrees that are explicitly written. Just as in Esther, those decrees are multilingual, widely distributed, and irrevocable. The archaeological evidence from Persia and the literary evidence from its observers combine to show that Persia had an extraordinary preoccupation with the authority of written documents.

The book of Chronicles served as the focus for ch. 3. With the exception of the edict of Cyrus that ends of the book, Chronicles shows no direct engagement with figures or scenarios from the Persian era. Nonetheless, it betrays its discourse with imperial modes of power by its marked interest in textual authority. Though heavily dependent on the book of Kings or a source shared with it, Chronicles stands starkly apart from Kings in its use of an extended genealogical prologue and its expanded source citations. Genealogies are deployed across societies as tools of social justification, and the genealogies of the Persian kings and in the book of Chronicles provide no exceptions. The Persian kings publicly and persistently trace their Achaemenid lineage to demonstrate their claim to power. The Chronicler offers up a genealogy for David, tracing his lineage back to the first human, and for the twelve tribes of Israel, outlining each family's place in the community.

The other prominent mark of textuality in Chronicles is the book's continuous appeal to source citations, a phenomenon without real parallel in other literatures of its region or era. Though the book of Kings also appeals to similar sources, the sources in Chronicles are more numerous, more varied, and appear more frequently. The Chronicler's echoing of Kings combines with its appeals to pre-exilic historical sources, whether real or invented, thus serving to invoke the authority of the community's tradition while at the same time echoing the record-keeping, textual impulses of the

imperial government. The combined result of the use of genealogies and source citations in the book of Chronicles is to bridge Judean history with its colonial present. While not denying the fact of Yehud's colonial status, Chronicles provides resources for the development of community identity that affirm past sovereignty while invoking the modes of authority operative in its current subjugation.

In ch. 4 I examined the phenomenon of textuality in Ezra-Nehemiah, a book in which at least one-third of its content consists of ostensibly external texts interpolated into the narrative. Those texts represent several different genres, including letters, royal decrees, genealogies, and lists. The genres themselves are fluid rather than rigid, often overlapping in form and content, so that it is difficult to make a clear distinction between them. Decrees are sometimes conveyed by or referred to in letters. Both of these forms of communications from the king alternately authorize and halt Yehud's restoration and rebuilding projects. Occasionally the authority of a written decree appears to outrank the authority of the king himself. The decrees and letters, concentrated in Ezra and therefore in the early stages of Ezra-Nehemiah's extended chronology of the return, show Yehud's direct engagement with the empire.

Lists and genealogies, on the other hand, appear more frequently in Nehemiah and, therefore, in the later stages of the return that Ezra-Nehemiah narrates. These texts are deployed more in the project of community-formation than in any sort of direct relationship with the imperial government. Genealogies (and genealogically-organized lists) serve, as in Chronicles, to define social roles, articulating each returning family's place in Yehud's work. Lists of men married to foreign women help define the boundaries of the community, specifying who may stay inside it and who must leave it. The highly administrative nature of many of the lists, communicating such data as census

numbers and records of offerings, recalls the careful Persian accounting attested in the Persepolis Tablets. Collections of data lend a sense of quantitative precision to an otherwise qualitative project. In the Persian imperial context, where record-keeping is so highly valued, lists provide administrative justifications for community formation, while at the same time contributing an air of authority to the book of Ezra-Nehemiah itself. Letters and decrees are the means by which the Yehudite community accesses imperial power in Ezra-Nehemiah, while genealogies and lists are the means by which its leaders wield power locally.

Whereas both Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah have a clear historiographical flavor, Esther is a more straightforwardly fictional work. Rather than using written texts to provide authority for itself, the book employs writing as a literary motif. Writing is the primary way the empire wields its power, as well as the primary way it communicates its power to the kingdom outside its gates. The transfer of the power to write from Haman to Mordecai and Esther provides the book's central reversal. From its perspective inside the king's gates, the narrative also rids the empire and its texts of any iconic mystiques. The king is exposed as highly suggestible, subject to the every whim of his advisors, failing to comprehend fully the consequences of documents signed in his name. At the same time, even as the narrative lampoons the empire, it carves out a way for its Jewish heroes to wield its authority. They wield that authority for the good of their fellow Diaspora Jews, but not in any attempt to overthrow the empire outright. The book of Esther exposes both the follies of empire and the desires of its subjects to participate in it.

Concluding Reflections

One of the difficulties of using postcolonial approaches to study notions of empire within the Bible is that postcolonialism is, at its heart, a modern, identity-based project. It arose directly from the experiences of colonized and formerly colonized peoples and primarily addresses the paradigms of the European imperial projects of the last 400 years. The importance of identity in postcolonialism has led me to avoid claiming it as my method *per se*, even though I have framed my study using a fundamental postcolonial premise.[1] Yet, its association with *modern* notions of empire provides a similar cause for caution. Even in its most theoretical iterations, postcolonial studies draws on the language, structures, racial dichotomies, technological assumptions, and practices of enculturation that have characterized modern Western imperialism.[2] Although every empire is different, these persistent categories of difference loom large over the historical distance between ancient and modern empires and must be kept at the fore of investigations into empire in the Bible. Nonetheless, I believe postcolonialism still has much to contribute not just to the history of interpretation of the Bible, but to the ways that now, at this historical moment, the Bible can be read anew.

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[1] I can imagine some postcolonial critics naming my appropriation of this frame, no matter how sympathetically conducted, as its own kind of imperialistic methodological move. I am sensitive to that concern; at the same time, ideological criticism at its worst is its own kind of imperializing, totalizing discourse, which silences dialogue by wielding the "tyranny of experience." It is my hope that the adoption of postcolonialism's framework across identity categories within biblical scholarship can mitigate that tyranny.

[2] E. Renan, "What is a nation?" in *Nation and Narration* (ed. Homi Bhabha; London: Routledge, 1990), 8-22, disputes the idea that ancient empires can be thought of in the same ways as nations, which he sees constituted as " a soul, a spiritual principle," of people unified by a common sense of past and purpose. Thus, "The Assyrian Empire, the Persian Empire and the empire of Alexander the Great were not *patries* either. There never were any Assyrian patriots, and the Persian Empire was nothing but a vast feudal structure."

For the current project, postcolonialism has reoriented traditional historical- and literary-critical perspectives, looking for their intersections within the ways biblical narratives encode the political realities of imperial domination. The result has shown that Chronicles, Ezra-Nehemiah, and Esther all share a marked concern with the authority of written texts, which itself was a primary value of the Persian Empire. These three narratives deploy that authority in order to forge new directions in the identity-formation of the Yehudite community. In Chronicles, genealogies and source citations link Yehud's storied past with its colonized present. Ezra-Nehemiah uses decrees and letters to demonstrate "vertical" linkages with the imperial power structures, while using genealogies and lists to assert "horizontal" claims defining the makeup of the community. In the book of Esther, writing is a literary motif that exposes the empire as a farce and yet also exposes the longings of the Yehudite community to participate in its power structures. All three narratives use written texts to make assertions about the identity of the Yehudite community over-against the controlling force of Persian rule. In this sense, the community deploys the values of the empire to resist the empire. At the same time, in their ready embrace of those imperial modes, the narratives preserve the authority of imperial texts themselves. In fact, the project of identity-formation in Yehud is never truly autonomous, never divorced from imperial prescriptions. Persia may not have required its subjects to learn its language or practice its religion, but the bounded permissiveness of its colonial regulations produced its own deft form of hegemony: a guise of autonomy overshadowed by external control.

In postcolonial theory, the favorite term for such a highly contested, deeply complex sense of colonial identity is "hybridity." Cultural hybridity synthesizes imperial and colonial modes and implies capitulation wrought into resistance. It is a word most

readily associated with Homi Bhabha, especially his 1994 book *The Location of Culture*, though the term itself has undergone innumerable re-evaluations within the world of postcolonial studies.[3] I have deliberately avoided the term in this project until now, lest it be read too generally; to conclude that the cultural location of the colonized is vaguely "hybrid" is nothing new. I have preferred instead to extrapolate the means by which hybrid identities are encoded by these texts. Nonetheless, the term aptly describes the cultural formation of Yehud, whose texts offer neither glowing praise for the empire nor stinging criticism of it. Chronicles, Ezra-Nehemiah, and Esther exhibit neither unbridled nostalgic longing for days of yore, nor outright assertion of Judean sovereignty. These texts are about coming to terms with the reality of imperial power without wholly surrendering communal identity to it.

The manner in which the modern world "reads" the Persian Empire is profoundly different than the way in which it reads modern empires and their cultural output. The modern empire—e.g., the British Empire—has traditionally been both writer and reader, churning out the world's "great books" and then providing the criticism that designates them thus. Postcolonial critics re-read the empire's texts, revealing the ways the political and cultural modes of imperialism operate in those texts in even the most unexpected contexts. Literary contributions from the colonized are either newly produced or else recovered, having been in existence but ignored by the imperial readership. These re-readings and recoveries often explicate the nature of the dominating empire-colony relationship, which lies unplumbed in the structures of the narratives.

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[3] For an overview of the term's contested understandings in postcolonial discourse, see A. Prabhu, *Hybridity: Limits, Transformations, Prospects* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2007).

While the biblical narratives from the Persian period are literary contributions arising from the colonized of the ancient world, they have constituted part of the dominant reading tradition from ancient through modern times. The sympathies of the Western reading establishment have listened to the voices of this colonized people for centuries upon centuries. Because of this oddly inverted paradigm, there is a danger in overdrawing the agency of Yehud. There can be a sense that because the text survived, because the story is being told, that the Yehudite community triumphed. This sense is certainly valid; cultural survival is, after all, hard to come by under the totalizing forces of empire. At the same time, Yehud's survival can be blithely attributed to the "generous" policies of Persia, calling for repatriation and the cultivation of local religion. Even discussions of Persian imperial authorization of the Torah, which do make the political relationship Persian and Yehud central to their considerations, fail to acknowledge the subjugation that inheres in such relationships. I believe that postcolonial theories framed honestly by the realities of imperial domination will temper both the sense of triumph attributed to Yehud and the sense of generosity granted to Persia. These texts should not be read as a ready embrace of Persian rule, nor as unequivocal accounts of resistance, but as sites of ambivalence negotiating Persia's hegemony and Yehud's communal self-definition.

Finally, the notion that Persian Empire affected the literary shape of these three biblical narratives raises questions about other contemporaneous texts. If the Pentateuch took shape during this era, how does it encode its attitudes toward Persia in particular and empire in general?[4] Does the Pentateuch, too, appropriate Persia's hypertextuality?

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[4] Mark G. Brett's *Genesis: Procreation and the Politics of Identity*, is oriented around this possibility.

Inversely, could its attitudes toward textual authority inform the dating of its books? *Can one identify a peculiarly Persian-period biblical poetics?* The textual corpus from this era is probably too small to make such a bold declaration. Analysis will also be limited by the amount of historical information available about Persia and its rituals, laws, and storytelling traditions. Still, framing questions of Persian-period textuality around the issue of documentary authority will continue add fresh perspectives to the study of this era's history and literature alike.

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