BRILL

Decentering Exile

Methodology and Alternate Versions of Judean History in Nehemiah 9:5–37

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Abstract

I argue that the Levitical Prayer offered in Neh 9:5–37 (LP) offers a version of Judean history that does not include the Babylonian exile. Instead, it narrates an unbroken chain of possession of Judean territory that spans from the conquest and settlement of Canaan to the post-monarchic context of the prayer's composition. Drawing insights from the study of cultural trauma, I make the case that the interpretive importance of such a catastrophic event cannot be assumed for subsequent Judean communities who sought to form a sense of cultural identity through the retelling of a shared past. Potentially traumatic events like the Babylonian exile are not actualized naturally; communal trauma is instead the product of social processes in the present that serve the needs of present and future communities. An elision of the Babylonian exile from a piece of post-monarchic period literature like the LP does not, therefore, require the interpretative conclusion that the prayer was written by the descendants of Judeans who avoided exile and remained in Judea during the sixth century BCE. Importantly, neither does it exclude the possibility that the LP was produced by a community whose ancestors were displaced and resettled in Babylonia during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar II. Through this analysis I invite scholars to explore a broader range of interpretative possibilities in their study of Ezra-Nehemiah as a composition and the understanding of the defining elements of Judean identity in the post-monarchic period.

1   Introduction

In this paper I argue that the Levitical Prayer offered in Neh 9:5–37 (LP) provides a rehearsal of Judean history that does not consider the Babylonian exile as a central node of importance for the construction of Judean identity in the post-monarchic period. The prayer, in fact, does not refer to the exile at all. Instead, it offers a record of the Judean past that is built around a claim to unbroken possession of the land promised to Abraham and the Exodus generation, a claim that serves an important rhetorical function within the prayer. In support of this reading, I draw on insights from the study of cultural trauma to challenge the (unstated) assumption frequently found in biblical scholarship that the Babylonian exile was such a fundamental and important event for subsequent generations of Judeans that its inclusion in any historical retelling must be presumed to have been necessary. Rather, despite its scale and the traumatic effects it may have had on the individuals who experienced it, the exile need not have been an essential event for post-monarchic accounts of Judean history. We cannot, therefore, draw historical conclusions about the community responsible for producing the LP based solely on the presence or absence of such an event in a given re-telling of history. Through this conclusion, I hope to open up a broader range of interpretative possibilities in the study of Ezra-Nehemiah as a composition and to push for an expanded consideration of the defining elements of Judean identity in the post-monarchic period.

2   Editorial Seams in Nehemiah 9–10

The prayer offered by a group of Levites in Neh 9:5–37 (LP) is one of a number of originally independent (or displaced)[1] texts that have been (very loosely) coordinated by an editor into the shape of what scholars have called a

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1   This is particularly the case with Neh 8, which scholars have often suggested has been displaced from the Ezra narrative due to that character's prominence in the reading of the law. See, for example, the treatment of this issue in Williamson's commentary. Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 283–286.

covenant renewal ceremony in Neh 8–10.[2] These texts include the narrative of the reading of the law (ch. 8), a short prelude that introduces the LP (9:1–4), the LP (9:5–37), a transition between prayer and agreement (אמונה; 10:1), a list of Judeans who are entering the agreement (10:2–28), and a series of obligations for the support of the Jerusalem temple that this group agrees to take on (10:29–40).[3] The composite nature of this section is particularly apparent due to the glaring editorial seams that are present in the MT. For example, the protagonists of Neh 8's public reading ceremony, Ezra and Nehemiah,[4] completely disappear in Neh 9–10.[5] There is also a dramatic shift in tone from the joyful public reading of the תורה in ch. 8 to the somber fasting and mourning rites of Neh 9:1–4. Finally, though the obligations outlined in ch. 10's agreement seem to be prompted by the history outlined in the LP (ובכל זאת in 10:1), there is essentially no overlap between them and the history of rebellion rehearsed in the prayer.[6]

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2 Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 275–276; Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 41–47; Duggan, *Covenant Renewal*; Fried, "A Religious Association," 77–78; Fried, *Nehemiah*, 191–196. Böhler argues that these chapters are part of a larger editorial edition that followed the joining of the Nehemiah Memoir to the Ezra material, but argues that they are—with a few notable exceptions—elements of a single redactional layer. Böhler, *Die heilige Stadt*, 316–374.

3 For an effort to understand this agreement (ch. 10) within the broader context of the ancient Mediterranean in the late Persian and early Hellenistic periods, see Fried, "A Religious Association."

4 Nehemiah appears in v. 9 in the MT but is absent from the LXX version. It is widely accepted that his appearance in the MT is a later addition meant to correct the issue of his absence from the narrative. On the interpretation of התרשתא—which has traditionally been read as an otherwise unattested Persian word meaning "governor"—as a second Persian personal name for Nehemiah, see Fried, *Nehemiah*, 188–189. On Ezra's disappearance, see Pakkala, *Ezra the Scribe*, 182–184.

5 The Greek version of this event (2 Esd 19) notes the presence of the Levites but also includes Ezra, giving him the role of speaker for the prayer ([5]καὶ εἴποσαν οἱ Λευῖται… [6]καὶ εἶπεν Εσδρας…). Japhet has argued that 2 Esdras is later than and dependent on the MT tradition of Ezra-Nehemiah. Japhet, "Postexilic Historiography," 325–329. In addition to literary dependence, one can also make a strong case for *lectio difficilior* in the MT reading. The issue of Ezra's disappearance in MT Neh 9 creates a serious narrative issue and has been a crucial part of identifying Ezra 8–9 as the original literary setting for this narrative. Böhler has argued that the joyful Neh 8 was displaced from its original narrative context in the Ezra Memoir as part of the broader redactional effort that introduced the Nehemiah Memoir into the original Ezra narrative (most closely attested in the Greek edition, Esdras α). Böhler, *Die heilige Stadt*, 316–332. For further discussion of the relationship between Neh 8 and Ezra 7–10, see Pakkala, "Original Independence," 17–26.

6 Nehemiah 9:14 does refer to the introduction of Sabbath observance, but there is no mention of the community's ancestors transgressing that statute. Compare, however, the relationship between the narrative context of Ezra 9 and the prayer offered there, which seems to directly address the alleged transgressions of the community.

This lack of coordination between the literary units within the covenant renewal ceremony of Neh 8–10—and within chs. 9–10 in particular—suggests that the LP was not composed for its current literary context, but was rather included alongside the other texts in this section as part of a broader process of compilation.[7] This raises the issue of the origins of the LP prior to its inclusion in Ezra-Nehemiah. When was this prayer written and under what circumstances? The question is complicated by a lack of clear historical references within the prayer (with the exception of the mention of the Assyrians in v. 32) and so scholars have sought other anchoring points to begin their analysis. The datum that I have encountered most frequently is the LP's lack of an explicit reference to the Babylonian exile—the resettlement of a significant portion of Judah's population in the land of Babylonia as a result Babylonian military activity in the Levant during the first quarter of the 6th century BCE. This absence is notable because, as we will see, scholars have traditionally seen the Babylonian exile as a watershed moment for subsequent—ancient and modern—reflections on Judean thought, culture, and religion.

To explain the absence of a seemingly foundational element in Israel's past in the LP, scholars have typically offered one of three solutions. First, it has been suggested that the prayer must have been composed at some point prior to the fall of Jerusalem in the early sixth century. A second solution assumes that the idea of exile is implicitly present throughout the prayer, even if the event is never directly mentioned. Finally, it has been argued that the exile is in fact absent from the LP, and the prayer must therefore reflect the views of a community who did not suffer forced migration. Accordingly, we should look for its origins in a community who remained in the environs of Judea following the Babylonian conquest.

3   Between Exiles

In favor of the first view, that the Babylonian exile had not yet occurred when the LP was composed, Adam Welch advocated for an origin of the prayer in the Northern Kingdom prior to Jerusalem's fall to Babylon.[8] Welch argued that the combination of the prayer's Deuteronomic language and outlook—a tradition closely associated with the Northern Kingdom according to Welch—and the

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7   Williamson, "Structure and Historiography," 117–118; Pakkala, *Ezra the Scribe*, 184.

8   Welch argued for a northern origin based on parallels he identified between the description of Ahab in 1 Kgs 19 and the "slaying of prophets" referenced in Neh 9. Welch, "Source of Nehemiah IX," 130–137; cf. Chrostowski, "An Examination of Conscience," 253–261.

absence of a reference to the Babylonian captivity means that the prayer must have predated that event. Welch pointed to the prayer in Ezra 9 and its heavy emphasis on the experience of exile in support of this conclusion. He claimed that it was not Judah but the Northern Kingdom who lost political independence as a result of the Assyrian conquest, meaning that the prayer was likely composed by northerners in the interim between the annexation of Israel as an Assyrian province and the fall of Judah.[9]

Is a pre-exilic dating for the LP tenable? One way to answer this question is to consider the prayer's source material. The LP draws on a wealth of traditions that have been preserved in the Hebrew Bible, including significant narrative material from the Pentateuch. Welch already recognized the importance of Deuteronomic and Deuteronomistic literature for the author of the LP, a conclusion strongly supported by Mark Boda's detailed work on the prayer's sources.[10] Boda also argued for the influence of P and P-adjacent material (e.g., the Book of Ezekiel) as sources of inspiration for the LP.[11] A close reading of the LP shows that the author of the prayer drew on narrative details from other non-P and non-D Pentateuchal material as well.[12]

Importantly, it seems that author of the LP did not encounter these sources as distinct documents, but rather in their compiled form. As a number of scholars have recognized, the harmonized narrative of the LP, its mixing of idiom and syntax from multiple Pentateuchal sources, and its reliance on redactional elements that arose late in the process of Pentateuchal compilation are best explained by postulating the following: the author of the LP encountered these

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9 See also the recent work of Gili Kugler, who argues that the prayer's anti-imperial stance without a mention of the exile (or the more general theme of divine abandonment) best fits a period at the end of the Judean monarchy. Kugler cites, too, the lack of pro-Persian sentiment that is typical of 6th–4th century literature (e.g., Haggai, Zechariah, and the rest of Ezra-Nehemiah) as further evidence for a late 7th century date for the LP. Kugler, "Present Affliction," 605–626.

10 Boda, *Praying the Tradition*, 43–73.

11 Boda, *Praying the Tradition*, 61–66.

12 For example, the pillars of cloud and fire (Neh 9:12, 19) are non-P elements of the Exodus narrative (Exod 13:21–22; 14:19, 24; Num 14:14). The motif of Yahweh leading the Israelites by cloud and by fire does occur in the D narrative (Deut 1:33), but this version does not describe the divine presence as a "pillar" (עמוד) like we see in both the LP and the non-P account from the Pentateuch. The LP also quotes significant portions of other non-P material, including the creation of the golden calf (v. 18). This scene also occurs in the D source (which draws on the non-P version), but the language in the LP is almost identical to the non-P material in Exod 32–33. For more examples of the use of non-P material and detailed analysis of how all of the Pentateuchal sources are intertwined in the LP, see Yoo, *Ezra*, 39–66.

literary traditions as part of an already-compiled Pentateuch.[13] This observation is important for our consideration of the LP because the consensus among Pentateuchal scholars is that the Pentateuch reached its final (or near final) form during the Persian period.[14] This means that the LP could not have been composed prior to the late 6th century, thereby rendering Welch's assertion of a monarchic period setting for the prayer untenable.

4 Implicit References to Exile

With the possibility of a monarchic period date for the LP excluded, another approach to the apparent absence of the Babylonian exile is to argue that the Babylonian exile *is* referenced in Neh 9:5–37, just not explicitly so. For example, Judith Newman argues for a subtle reference to the exile in v. 27: ותתנם ביד עמי הארצת, "and you [Yahweh] delivered them to the peoples of the lands."[15] However, there is nothing in these lines that indicates deportation. As Boda argues, the passage draws heavily on motifs from the book of Judges, including the expression marking delivery (ביד + נתן).[16] Notably, this expression does not indicate exile or expulsion within Judges, but rather conquest and local domination, as it does elsewhere in the LP.[17] It is associated with deportation in literature that deals directly (or indirectly) with the Babylonian

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13   Yoo, *Ezra*, 39–66; Stackert, *Deuteronomy and the Pentateuch*, 122–125; Römer, *Israels Väter*, 539–542; Gunneweg, *Nehemia*, 129; Schmid, *Genesis and the Moses Story*, 282–286; Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 316; Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 303.

14   This consensus covers a broad range of scholarly approaches to the composition of the Pentateuch. See for example Schmid, "Persian Imperial Authorization," 23–38; Carr, *Reading*, 324–333; Blum, *Studien*, 358; Baden, "Redactor or Rabbenu," 110–111; Yoo, *Ezra*, 17.
      Outside of specifically Pentateuchal criticism, there has been considerable scholarly attention paid to the role that the Persian Empire might have played in the process of composition. Peter Frei revived a theory that it was in fact the Persian imperial administration who inspired the composition of the Pentateuch through their policy of codifying local law codes. Frei, "Zentralgewalt." Frei's hypothesis, known as the "imperial authorization hypothesis," inspired an important edited volume dedicated to addressing (and critiquing) the theory (Watts, *Persia and Torah*). For a response to some of these critiques, see Schmid's article cited above.

15   Newman, *Praying*, 99. Cf. Shalom-Guy, "Undercurrents," 51–52.

16   Boda, *Praying the Tradition*, 174–176. E.g., God granting victory to Israel's enemies: Judg 2:14; 6:1, 13; 13:1; God granting victory to Israel or an Israelite: Judg 2:23; 3:10, 28; 4:7, 14; 7:7, 9, 14–15; 8:3, 6–7; 11:21, 30, 32; 12:3.

17   See, for example, Neh 9:24, where the Levites assert that Yahweh allowed their ancestors to dominate the former inhabitants of Canaan: ותתנם בידם ואת מלכיהם ואת עממי הארץ לעשות בהם כרצונם.

siege of Jerusalem, but is typically identified as a step that precedes (and is necessary for) dispersion;[18] the city must be delivered to Nebuchadnezzar (נתן ביד) before he can make decisions about what to do with its population.[19]

Furthermore, the intentionally vague nature of the expression עמי הארצת, its typical function in identifying non-Judean "others" in Late Biblical Hebrew,[20] and the prayer's general lack of contemporary historical references are elements of the LP that better lend themselves to reading this verse as a kind of paradigm for foreign domination of Judean territory.[21] While the Assyrians are mentioned explicitly in v. 32, the anonymized enemy עמי הארצת could just as easily have indexed any of their successors (e.g., Babylon, Persia, Greece), or even Judah's ancient, less imperialistic neighbors (e.g., Moab, Ammon, Edom, etc.), who continued to draw the ire of Judean authors during the post-monarchic period (e.g., Obadiah, Ps 137, Jer 49). There is nothing in the language of Neh 9:27, therefore, that requires reading the passage as a reference to exile or deportation.

Katherine Southwood also makes the case for exile as an implicit theme that runs throughout the LP. In her efforts to understand the prayer as a kind of "ethnic history"—a narration of past events that informs and is informed by a contemporary construction of ethnic identity[22]—she highlights the election of Abraham as the recipient of the land of Canaan (vv. 7–8) as representative of the experience of returnees who (re)inherited Judea. "Abraham also

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18 Particularly notable here is the sequences of "curses" in Lev 26. In the covenant training regime that is outlined there, conquest (ונתתם ביד אויב; v. 25) occurs as the part of the fourth phase of instructional punishment (vv. 24–26), while exile (ואתכם אזרה בגוים; v. 33) occurs only in phase five (vv. 27–33). For a recent argument for dating at least portions Holiness Code (of which Lev 26 is a part) to the Neo-Babylonian period, see Stackert, "Political Allegory," 220–223.

19 See, for example, Jer 20, where the deity asserts that he will deliver the city and all its wealth (אתן ביד) to the Babylonians and *then* the enemy will deport Jerusalem's citizens (והגלם; v. 4) and return to Babylon with their plunder (ולקחום והביאום בבלה; v. 5). The idiom appears another five times in ch. 32 (vv. 32:4, 24–25, 36, 43) and in each case it is clear that what is at stake is authority and not necessarily movement or deportation (cf. 2 Kgs 17:20 and the deportation of Israelians as a *subsequent* action to a period of domination).

20 Cf. Ezra 3:3; 9:1–2, 11; Neh 10:28; 2 Chr 13:9; 32:13. For a treatment of this "generic" usage, see Thames, "A New Discussion," 120–125.

21 The expression נתן ביד occurs often in the Hebrew Bible with the general meaning of "give authority over." Within the context of war, it typically signals one army's success over another. Notably, the expression does occur in contexts related to the Babylonian exile. For example, it occurs frequently in the book of Jeremiah and its description of Babylon's conquest of the city (e.g., Jer 20:4–5; 32:4, 24–25, 36, 43; 34:21; 39:17).

22 Southwood, "'But Now,'" 4–14.

functions as an ethnic exemplar; just as Abraham was a גר who had to leave his birthplace and homeland, so too Israel had to sojourn in exile."[23] It is worth noting, however, that according to the Pentateuchal tradition, Abraham did not sojourn in Mesopotamia, but rather in Canaan (cf. Gen 23).[24] Southwood's reading therefore seems to cut against the plain reading of the rest of the LP, which takes as its primary focus the *inheritance* and *continued possession* of Canaan.[25]

Furthermore, the claim to Abraham as a symbol of land (re-)possession seems to have been a matter of significant debate during the 6th and 5th centuries.[26] For example, within the Book of Ezekiel, those who remained in Judea following the exile of Jehoiachin are represented as embracing Abraham as a symbol of their continued claim to Judean territory (Ezek 11:14–15; 33:23–24).[27] So while it may have seemed "natural" for *some* Judeans to make the connection between Abraham's migration and that of Judeans from Babylonia,[28] it was certainly not necessary or the only possible interpretation of the patriarch's journey to Canaan. We cannot, therefore, assume that he stands for Judeans who undertook return migration in the LP without a consideration of the broader ideological goals of the prayer, including the absence of any explicit reference to the Babylonian exile.[29]

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23   Southwood, "'But Now,'" 16.

24   Abraham's encounter with the Hittites in Gen 23 is from a different source (P) than the notice in Gen 15 that the patriarch lived in Ur of the Chaldeans (non-P/E). However, as established in the previous section, the authors of the LP encountered these sources in their compiled form. Notably, Abraham's descendants were sojourners in Egypt (cf. Gen 15:3 [E]; Exod 2:22 [J]), and the Exodus motif became a powerful symbol among some groups of return migrants in the 6th century (cf. Isa 42:15–16; 48:21; 50:2; 51:9–11; 63:12, 13–14), but this is not Southwood's claim, nor does the Exodus seem to be the primary issue at stake within the LP. On the value of the Exodus tradition for return migrants to Judea, see Shalom-Guy, "Undercurrents," 47, esp. n. 36, for further literature.

25   Shalom-Guy makes this point emphatically, focusing on the LP's claims for a continuous and unbroken bond between land and people, but still presumes that the composition reflects the views of return migrants to Judea (or their ancestors). Shalom-Guy, "Undercurrents," 46–59.

26   Duggan, *Covenant Renewal*, 202–203.

27   Williamson, "Structure and Historiography," 129–131.

28   See, for example, the argument of Blenkinsopp who notes that the reference to Abraham's Mesopotamian origins likely inspired writers of the 6th and 5th centuries to draw from his story (cf. Isa 51:2; 63:16). Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 303.

29   See the comments of Duggan: "[W]hile the focus of the covenant with Abraham in the Levites' prayer might derive from the exilic and postexilic controversies over legitimate rights to the land, the prayer does not strive to support the claims of the exiles, as does the preceding narrative in Ezra-Nehemiah." Duggan, *Covenant Renewal*, 203.

5   Not *Our* Exile

For those who agreed with Welch about *actual* absence but disagreed with his dating, the elision of exile suggests that those who produced the prayer were neither among those Judeans who were resettled in Babylonia nor their ancestors. H. G. M. Williamson, for example, identified resonances with the Judeans who remained in Judea following the deportation of the Jehoiachin exiles, citing the references to Abraham from the Book of Ezekiel noted above (see also Ezek 11:3). He therefore concluded that the prayer was produced by a community of Judeans who remained in Judea throughout the 6th century during the transition from Babylonian to Persian hegemony. Williamson went on to identify this group as the primary source of conflict for those who return migrated to Judea in the Persian period, at least according to the authors of Ezra-Nehemiah.[30] There is, therefore, a claim to Yahweh's covenant with Abraham within the LP that would, at least implicitly, exclude from membership within the Judean community those whose experiences are narrated throughout the rest of Ezra-Nehemiah.

Gary Rendsburg, too, situated the composition of Neh 9:5–37 within a community who did not experience deportation under Nebuchadnezzar, but shifted their location north to the environs of Samaria. Agreeing with many of Welch's insights concerning the Northern perspective and language reflected in the prayer, Rendsburg also recognized many features of Late Biblical Hebrew in the LP and thus concluded that a pre-exilic date was impossible. Instead, Rendsburg argued that the absence of a reference to exile, when combined with the convergence of northern and late linguistic features, points to an origin for the LP among communities in Samaria and the Galilee. The community who produced the LP would have survived Assyrian domination of the Northern Kingdom essentially unassimilated and continued to exist well into the Persian period.[31]

There is no evidence in the LP to preclude either of these explanations, and one may, in the end, be correct (I should point out, however, that the clear "us vs. them" attitude that Williamson identified between those who remained in Judea and those who were forced to migrate, so explicit in the passages from Ezekiel, is notably absent from the LP). That being said, I am still struck by the logic that seems to inform these conclusions: Both Williamson and Rendsburg agree that an event as catastrophic and important as the Babylonian exile *must* be included in a community's history *if* its members (ancestors included) experienced that event. According to this position, it is only the absence of

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30   Williamson, "Structure and Historiography," 129–131.
31   Rendsburg, "Northern Origin," 366.

direct or inherited participation that can account for the absence of narration. This premise, which motivates all of the scholarship surveyed above, raises an important question about the role of trauma in communal history-telling.

6   Rethinking History-Telling in Light of Cultural Trauma

In its assessment of the LP and its relationship to the Babylonian exile, the scholarship surveyed above seems to be working from what Jeffery Alexander has called the "lay theory" of trauma.[32] Broadly speaking, trauma is the result or product of an event that is so forceful and disruptive that it marks a dramatic shift in worldview for the victim or victims, resulting in a distinct "before" and "after."[33] Significant interdisciplinary research has been done on the social, psychological, and physiological effects that these kinds of events have on individuals[34] and how those individuals may or may not transmit that trauma to those around them, including to their descendants.[35] The transgenerational potential of trauma is particularly striking because it has been observed on both the social-psychological[36] and physiological levels.[37]

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[32]   Alexander, *Trauma*, 7. Alexander points specifically to the work of Kai Erikson, who has studied the effects of natural disasters on communities. Erikson argues that while traumatic events naturally manifest as a centrifugal forces within communities, they can also re-bind members of an affected community to one another. Erikson, "Notes on Trauma," 186–188; idem, *A New Species of Trouble*, 226–242.

[33]   The literature on trauma, both individual and communal, is vast, spanning multiple fields, including (among others) psychology, sociology, and literary studies. For social or cultural trauma, see the papers collected in Alexander et al., *Cultural Trauma*; cf. Hamburger et al., *Social Trauma*.

[34]   Cathy Caruth's pioneering work from the 1990s remains fundamental for understanding individual experiences of Trauma. Caruth, *Trauma*; eadem, *Unclaimed Experience*.

[35]   For treatments of transgenerational trauma on the individual scale, see the articles collected in Danieli, *IHMLT*.

[36]   Secondary traumatization, the traumatization of latter generations through socialization—verbal or non-verbal expressions of the original trauma by the survivor—remains a debated topic in psychology. As suggested by M. Gerard Fromm, "what human beings cannot contain of their experience—what has been traumatically overwhelming, unbearable, unthinkable—falls out of social discourse, but very often on to and into the next generation as an affective sensitivity or a chaotic urgency." Fromm, *Lost in Transmission*, xvi. This transmission can manifest in many ways within the social formation of the next generation, but it nonetheless has the power to shape the identity of those who would receive it. See, for example, the studies in Fromm's volume. For further discussion, see the studies of Sagi-Schwartz et al. ("Intergenerational Transmission," 105–121) and van IJzendoorn et al. ("Children of Holocaust Survivors," 459–469).

[37]   The field of epigenetics—"the study of heritable changes in gene expression that are not due to changes in the underlying DNA sequence"—and its interest in the role of trauma

While insights from the study of individual trauma and its representations in literature have been productively applied to material from the Hebrew Bible, and especially to texts that deal with the aftermath of the Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem,[38] that is not my focus here.[39] Rather, I want to examine trauma as it manifests on the communal scale—what scholars call cultural trauma. At this level, trauma—the effects of a catastrophic event—can inform and influence a host of social processes and can extend beyond the generation who experienced the inciting incident first-hand by means of communal commemoration and story-telling.[40] The lay theory of trauma that Alexander identifies is built on an assumption that trauma occurs naturally at this communal level: there are objective and empirical events that deprive individuals and communities of their basic needs—security, order, love, connection—and these events necessarily produce traumatized patients and communities. These traumas then become the focal points of communal identity—the glue that holds the group together—in the present and in subsequent generations.

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in this process has been particularly fruitful in this regard. Scholars like Yehuda et al. have made the case that, as a result of epigenetic developments, the children of trauma survivors may be more likely to experience trauma themselves. Yehuda et al., "Parental Posttraumatic Stress Disorder," 1040–1048. For the definition of epigenetics offered above, and for a fairly recent summary of scholarship, see Kellermann, "Epigenetic Transmission," 33–39. For potential issues with this approach to the study of trauma, see Sagi-Schwartz et al., "Intergenerational Transmission."

38   This is especially the case for prophetic works like the books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel whose primary protagonists have been fruitfully analyzed in light of theories on trauma. Scholars have focused on both the individual and communal reflections on trauma that may inform these works. See, for example, the work of L. Juliana M. Claassens on Jeremiah: Claassens, "Jeremiah"; eadem, "Hidden Wounds"; eadem, "Preaching the Pentateuch." For work on Ezekiel, see especially the work of Ruth Poser. For example, Poser treats the history offered in Ezek 20 as an example of the fragmentation, regression, and reunification process that is often the goal of trauma literature. Poser, *Das Ezechielbuch*, 409–412; eadem, "No Words," 27–28.

39   I want to once again thank my reviewers, who pushed me to better distinguish between individual manifestations of trauma and the object of my study.

40   The trans-generational element is the critical component of most approaches to trauma at the communal level. See, for example the contributions of Andreas Hamburger, Jörn Rüsen, and Vamik Volkan to the volume Hamburger et al., *Social Trauma*, 3–15. Cf. Volkan, "Chosen Traumas and Their Impact," 43–51.

        For the importance of communal commemoration for the elevation of a potentially traumatic event to the status of broad-ranging, transgenerational cultural trauma, see Eyerman's comparison of school mass shootings in the United States to the national response to the mass shooting on the Norwegian island of Utoya in 2011. Eyerman, "Cultural Trauma and the Transmission," 679–705; cf. Feuchtwang, "Transmission of Traumatic Loss," 229–251.

Alexander, however, has argued that this theorization of trauma suffers from a "naturalistic fallacy." He claims that "events do not in and of themselves, create collective trauma."[41] Instead, Alexander and scholars like Ron Eyerman argue that it is *communities* who create collective trauma, who do the work of meaning-making through their contextualized interpretation of events and who transmit those interpretations across generations.[42] Evaluating whether the kinds of changes typically associated with trauma actually occurred is not, therefore, an objective or scientific exercise conducted by members of the community; rather, it is a socio-cultural process that is affected by power structures and the skills of reflexive social agents.[43]

In this way, catastrophic and potentially traumatic events are similar to other moments in a community's past: they do not automatically become important to later communities by virtue of something inherent in their character or scale.[44] As Michel-Rolph Trouillet notes, "Even when the historical continuities are unquestionable, in no way can we assume a simple correlation between the magnitude of events as they happened and their relevance for the generations that inherit them through history."[45] Rather, like all moments in a group's past, a potentially traumatic event gains relevance for a community's history (and thus self-definition) through the processes of selection, interpretation, and re-telling in the present.[46] This means that while trauma *can* serve as a centripetal communal force,[47] it does not do so "naturally," nor need it do

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41   Alexander, *Trauma*, 13.
42   Eyerman, *Cultural Trauma*, 1–20; idem, "Cultural Trauma and the Transmission," 681. Cf. Volkan's concept of "chosen trauma" for the construction of large group identity. Volkan, "Transgenerational Transmissions," 88–97; idem, *Blind Trust*, 47–53; idem, "Chosen Traumas and Their Impact," 17–24.
43   Alexander, *Trauma*, 15. Cf. Visser, "Contemporary Approaches," 109.
44   Eyerman suggests that scale *does* matter for considering traumatic potential. However, while it may be a necessary component of cultural trauma, scale is not enough on its own. Eyerman, "Cultural Trauma and the Transmission," 680–681.
45   Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 16.
46   As argued by Hayden White, historical "facts" are not self-evident and do not exist outside of discourse. Rather, events (things that happen) are subject to interpretation, a process which *may* lead to their transformation into "facts." These facts are then to be included/excluded from re-tellings of the past based on broader concerns of cultural authority. White, "Value of Narrativity," 5–27. See also Deal and Beal, "Hayden White," 117–121; Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 143–153.
47   According to Erikson, while trauma does not strengthen preexistent communal bonds, "that shared experience [of trauma] becomes almost like a common culture, a source of kinship." Erikson, "Notes on Trauma," 190.

so at all.[48] Instead, it takes the efforts of a group within the collective—a carrier group[49]—with enough political or cultural authority to create a persuasive trauma narrative that (re)establishes and (re)creates communal bonds in reference to the event.[50]

The Babylonian exile does appear to have reached the level of cultural trauma for those responsible for composing significant portions of the material that has been compiled in Ezra-Nehemiah. For example, Jeremiah Cataldo has pointed to the political value of the exilic experience for the *golah* group—those Judeans whose return migration is narrated in Ezra-Nehemiah and who were presumably responsible for the work's composition.[51] According to Cataldo, the vision of restoration offered in Ezra-Nehemiah is designed to legitimize the claims to authority made by members of the *golah* who would have perceived themselves as a minority and potentially marginalized group in the social-political context of Judea during the Persian period. This vision is thus the "proper" interpretation of the group's exilic experience, which Cataldo understands to be a *constructed* cultural trauma that responds to the contemporary social political context, authorizing the *golah* to claim authority over the future of the province.[52]

Lisa Cleath, who analyzes Ezra-Nehemiah in light of the cultural histories of indigenous communities in the Americas, similarly points to the social and political importance of the Ezra-Nehemiah narrative for the community it represents.[53] Like Cataldo, Cleath picks up on the particularity of the interpretation of the Babylonian exile in Ezra-Nehemiah, highlighting communal resilience as a point of narrative emphasis in the wake of a(n identified) shared catastrophe.[54] She concludes by arguing that "what is presented in the

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48 For analysis on communal decisions to ignore, elide, or repress potentially traumatic events from its past, see the discussion below.

49 Alexander, *Trauma*, 15; Eyerman, *Cultural Trauma*, 3.

50 As Mark Brett notes, however, "the suggestion is not that groups actually choose to be traumatized but, rather, that they select particular memories from a large range of options and place them at the center of group identity." He calls these agreed-upon memories "originating traumas." Brett, *Locations of God*, 81.

51 Cataldo, "Memory, Trauma, and Identity," 147–154. Brett, drawing on the work of Volkan, makes a similar argument for the role of the exile in the construction of *golah* identity in Ezra 7–10. Brett, *Locations of God*, 75–85. According to Brett, the rules of membership are ultimately expanded through the addition of Ezra 1–6.

52 Cataldo, "Memory, Trauma, and Identity," 147, 150, 153–154.

53 Cleath, "Rebuilding Jerusalem," 1–27.

54 Carlson Hasler makes a similar case for Ezra-Nehemiah exemplifying the resilience of the community responsible for the text in the face of so many false starts and failed attempts at restoration. Carlson Hasler, *Archival Historiography*, 5–29, 110–125.

composite narrative [of Ezra-Nehemiah] is one particularized community response among many possible Jewish responses to historical trauma."[55]

These observations raise another important issue for our discussion of Neh 9:5–37: the process by which a potential cultural trauma is actualized is rarely uncontested and typically involves negotiation between multiple "particular" interpretations. As Neil Smelser argues, there is no guarantee that a group, especially one of significant size and internal diversity (e.g., the population of Judea during the 6th–4th centuries BCE), will come to an interpretative consensus about the relevance of an event so as to elevate it to the status of cultural trauma.[56] As Eyerman has demonstrated through his study of the history of interpretation of slavery in America among generations of Black Americans, an event's relevance for the goals of the contemporary community can remain a point of contention among those parties looking to steer processes of self-definition.[57]

Furthermore, a collective may even choose to suppress or ignore a moment that a lay view of trauma would recognize as natural or necessary. This is a potentially difficult process, but can, at least in principle, be very effective.[58] For example, Alexander and his co-author Rui Gao point to the "disappearance" of the Nanjing Massacre—the mass murder of tens of thousands of citizens of the Chinese capital by Japanese soldiers in 1937—from political discourse in post-WW2 China, despite significant media coverage of the atrocities as they were occurring.[59] According to Alexander and Gao, this potential cultural trauma did not fit the narratives of Chinese sovereignty and military strength that the two dominant political parties, the CCP and the KMT, were trying to project as they jostled for control of the nation's future.

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55   Cleath, "Rebuilding Jerusalem," 28.
56   Smelser, "Psychological Trauma," 38. Cf. the comments in Eyerman, "Slavery and the Formation," 74.
57   Eyerman, "Slavery and the Formation," 74; Eyerman, *Cultural Trauma*, 1–22. Cf. Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 16–19. Within the world of biblical studies, Adele Reinhartz has made a similar case about the importance of the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in 70 CE for contemporary Judean/Jewish communities. She argues that evidence from the New Testament and early patristic literature demonstrates a concerted effort to downplay the importance of that event for Christ-followers and thus to prevent the event from reaching the status of cultural trauma. This ideological claim would have been particularly relevant for those Christ-followers who would have considered themselves Ιουδαιοι and seen a relationship to the temple as constitutive of their identities as such. Reinhartz uses this evidence to suggest an effort to distinguish between Christ-followers and the rest of the Ιουδαιοι quite early on in the Jesus movement. Reinhartz, "Destruction," 283–286.
58   Smelser, "Psychological Trauma," 38, 50–51.
59   Alexander, *Trauma*, 118–135.

While Alexander and Gao approach silence from a top-down perspective, Donna K. Nagata et al.'s study of Japanese-Americans who were incarcerated in internment camps during World War II observes this phenomenon among those directly affected by catastrophe. Their study shows that natural-born American citizens of Japanese descent who were subjected to the camps preferred to repress their experiences in the war's aftermath rather than activate the event's traumatic potential.[60] According to Nagata et al., this decision was part of a larger effort to tamp down aspects of their Japanese identities in order to (re-)enter the American mainstream. Even though life in the camps resulted in clear and measurable signs of individual trauma among survivors, the communal consensus was to repress or omit tellings of the experience of incarceration, resulting in a kind of "social amnesia" that lasted decades.[61]

While "silence" is by no means the only or even expected communal response to a catastrophic event,[62] the preceding insights from the study of

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60 Nagata et al., "Processing Cultural Trauma," 360.

61 Nagata et al., "Processing Cultural Trauma," 360–364. This does not mean that the Japanese-Americans who had experienced the camps directly did not communicate their experiences to the next generation in some way. In fact, as Nagata et al. argue, it is only through the efforts of that next generation that the United States has had to reckon with the realities of the incarceration camps and recognize/commemorate the experience of those who suffered there. Notably, these efforts by the next generation reflect the kind of meaning-making work that Alexander would ascribe to carrier groups. That is to say, the experience of incarceration camps became fundamental to the construction of a kind of Japanese-American identity as the children of those incarcerated sought to understand what had happened to their parents. For a compelling explanation of how trauma gets "silently" communicated between generations, see Kidron, "Silent Legacies," 193–228; eadem, "Toward and Ethnography," 5–27. Kidron's work also addresses the difference between individual reception of trauma between generations and the cultural trauma that takes place on a larger social scale, with those interviewed in her studies preferring to leave public commemoration up to carrier groups, if they sought public commemoration at all.

62 And even the academic identification of a culture-wide "silence" can be controversial. Take, for example, one of the most famous such "silences," the so-called "myth of silence" associated with the Jewish American response to the Holocaust. There was a consensus view in late 20th century scholarship that American Jews by and large did not identify with the experiences of their European co-religionists in the wake of the Holocaust (or even actively repressed that identification), embracing instead their improved status and integration into American society following the War. The most famous examples of this historical reconstruction are Peter Novick's *Holocaust in American Life* (1999) and Norman Finkelstein's *Holocaust Industry* (2003). See also the work of Leon Jick, who offered a version of this model already in 1981 (Jick, "Holocaust," 306–309).

More recent work like Hasia Diner's 2009 monograph, *We Remember with Reverence and Love,* has called this view into question through the close study of commemorative materials produced at the communal (rather than a centralized) level among American

cultural trauma should cause us to hesitate before assuming (or even anticipating) a uniform and "natural" response to a (potentially) trauma-inducing event like the Babylonian exile; rather, we should expect to find multiple voices in post-monarchic Judean literature offering different interpretations of that event in service of the needs and goals of the contemporary community. This means that while a number of the compositions that have been spliced together in Ezra-Nehemiah give the impression of a monolithic response to the Babylonian exile as singularly important for construction of subsequent Judean identity (e.g., Ezra 1–6, 9–10; Neh 1, 7), we cannot assume that this is the case for all of them. We should not be surprised, then, if a given retelling of the Judean past should choose to *omit* a reference to the Babylonian exile, especially if such a reference runs counter to or undermines the goals of a particular history-telling and the community it serves.

7   The Ideological Outlook of the LP

In the extended history recorded in the LP, the supplicants focus on two important and related issues. The first, widely recognized in scholarship, concerns Israel's sinful past and Yahweh's judgment. The supplicants recall various moments when their rebellious ancestors provoked the ire of their deity, failing to follow the precepts of their covenant and ignoring the warnings of his messengers. In each case, Yahweh punishes the sinful generation, allowing their enemies to oppress them. The supplicants do not condemn the divine violence, but rather praise Yahweh for his mercy (vv. 17, 19, 27–28, 31) and his restraint (v. 31). In every case Yahweh is vindicated for his actions, with those offering the prayer asserting his righteousness (אתה צדיק; vv. 8, 33) and devotion (v. 17) over against Israel's recalcitrance.

     This assertion of divine righteousness in the face of Israelite sinfulness is one of a number of themes in the LP that has traditionally led scholars to

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Jewish communities. While her approach seems to be built on a lay theory of trauma (e.g., "However universal the urge to memorialize communal catastrophes and however deeply Jewish culture embedded such a collective remembering …"; ibid., 3–4), Diner's study evidences the residue of the discursive processes that were at play as those American communities worked out how best to commemorate (and thus integrate into their own identities) what had befallen their metaphorical and literal kin on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean. That being said, Diner still reserves language of "construction" and "ideology" for those historians like Novick and Finkelstein whom she identifies as responsible for the "myth of silence." Notably, she does not recognize similar processes at work in the communities that she studies, suggesting that a lay theory of trauma informs her approach in this study.

classify it as a "penitential prayer." This genre, which also includes Ezra 9:6–15, Neh 1:4–12, and Dan 9:5–24 among its Biblical examples, is typically associated with the Persian and Hellenistic periods, when the form proliferates in extra-biblical examples.[63] It takes its name from the frequent appearance of the *hithpael* of the root *y-d-y*, "to confess one's sins,"[64] either within the prayer or in its narrative framing (Dan 9:4, 20; Ezra 10:1; Neh 1:6; 9:2–3).[65] Rodney Werline defines these prayers as a "direct address to God in which an individual, group, or an individual on behalf of a group confesses sins and petitions for forgiveness as an act of repentance."[66]

This classification is important for our understanding of the LP because scholars have traditionally associated the apparent prevalence of confession in these prayers with the historical circumstances of the exile and its aftermath. While rooted in the pre-exilic communal lament tradition, a genre defined by accusations of divine unrighteousness offered by the prayers' supplicants,[67] the penitential prayer represents an important development in communal interactions with the deity. According to Boda, the fall of Jerusalem removed any ambiguity concerning the sinfulness of Judeans and their culpability for the punishment wrought upon them. Thus for Boda, "the key to the setting of penitential prayer is that it arose from people who had experienced the pain of the loss of state."[68] This view of penitential prayer aligns with that offered by Claus Westermann, the dominant scholarly voice on penitential prayer in the second half of the 20th century. Westermann, too, argued that the penitential prayer genre (including the LP) reflected a fundamental shift in theology that

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63   Schuller, "Penitential Prayer," 1–16.

64   Cf. *HALOT* 2:389, s.v. ידה.

65   This root is part of a much larger pool of language that Boda identifies as shared among the prayers in this genre. See his full list in Boda, *Praying the Tradition*, 203–204. Notably, the verb only occurs within the text of the prayers in Dan 9 and Neh 1. The root occurs in the narrative introduction in Neh 9, and should therefore not be considered original to the prayer (see the discussion above). The root appears in the narrative frame of Ezra 9–10 as well, following the conclusion of the prayer in 10:1. The sequence is potentially important if, as argued by Dor, 10:1 is part of the latest layer of Ezra 9–10, the narrative frame. If so, then the addition may indicate an effort by the editor responsible for the Ezra Memoir to associate Ezra's prayer with others in the genre. On the relationship of Ezra 10:1 to the rest of Ezra 9–10, see Dor, "Composition," 26–47.

66   Werline, "Defining Penitential Prayer," xv.

67   Westermann outlines the typical features of the genre: address (and introductory petition), complaint (against god/over personal suffering/against the enemy), turning towards God (confession of trust), petition, vow of praise. He notes just how bitter the complaints against God can become, treading "that thin line between reproach and judgment." Westermann, *Praise and Lament*, 173–181, here 177.

68   Boda, "Form Criticism," 190. Cf. Rom-Shiloni, "Socio-Ideological *Setting*," 63–68.

accepted the inherent sinfulness of subsequent communities and no longer allowed for the kind of protest offered by a communal lament, a shift caused by the experience of the Babylonian exile.[69]

There is an issue with this reading, however. The supplicants in the LP do not offer a full-throated confession of *their* sins, as do the speakers in the other prayers of the genre.[70] There is nothing, for example, that approaches Ezra's admission that his and his community's sins are "stacked as high as the heavens" (Ezra 9:6) or Daniel's feeling that "utter shame" (בשת הפנים) has fallen on him and his community due to their disobedience (Dan 9:8). While the supplicants of the LP do not claim to be blameless,[71] their confession is focused almost solely on the sins of their *ancestors*. As Donna Laird points out, the supplicants' admissions recognize Yahweh's justified retaliation for sinful behavior, but do so in a way that implicates only (or at least primarily) the ancestors and their sins for the current state of affairs.[72] Thus the rehearsal of history offered in the LP affirms the righteousness of Yahweh's treatment of the community's ancestors not because (or at least not *solely* because) the exile has fundamentally changed the relationship between Yahweh and his chosen people; rather, it serves to establish *precedent*, to assert that the supplicants recognize that the deity has always been a reliable covenant partner who acts within the terms of the agreement.

This turn to precedent brings us to the second major issue that is addressed in the LP. The supplicants claim that even as their ancestors continually sinned and the deity saw fit to punish them for their disobedience, Yahweh never abandoned them or went beyond what was deserved. Rather, he recognized when the community's ancestors had been appropriately chastised and then delivered them from their oppressors (vv. 27, 28, 30–31). Members of the current generation, on the other hand, who neither experienced the same benefits

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69   Westermann, *Praise and Lament*, 201–213, esp. 206; idem, *Elements*, 153–157. See also the comments of Samuel Balentine: "Westermann surmised … that the historical catalyst for the replacement of lament with penitence in ancient Israel's prayers was the trauma of the exile. That experience, he argued, was so devastating that Israel had no choice but to yield to the Deuteronomistic theologians, who insisted it could only be interpreted as a divine judgment on disobedience so definitive that it muted any conceivable protest of innocence." Balentine, "'I Was Ready,'" 8.

70   See, e.g., Kugler, "Present Affliction," 608.

71   E.g., כי אמת עשית ואנחנו הרשענו in v. 33.

72   Laird, *Negotiating Power*, 278–279. See also Eskenazi, who sees here an imbalance in the doling out of blame, with the supplicants attempting to distance themselves from the "causative moments" in the community's history. Eskenazi, "Nehemiah 9–10," §2.14; cf. Gilbert, "Le place de la loi," 310.

as their predecessors (v. 35) nor reached their level of disobedience (v. 34), find themselves slaves on their own land,[73] using the products they harvest to pay imperial taxes (v. 36).

Beginning with the marked shift to the present of the supplicants in v. 32 (ועתה), the LP moves from history-telling and precedent-establishing to a(n implied) call for divine action. The extensive rehearsal of covenantal relationship precedent is not about an exilically-inspired recognition of humanity's inherent sinfulness; rather, it is a rhetorical device meant to spur the deity to rectify the *current* untenable situation of the (less sinful/more deserving) population of Judea that finds itself oppressed by an imperial regime—a perceived violation of Yahweh's covenant with Abraham and their ancestors. In this regard, the LP actually functions more like a communal lament (e.g., Pss 44, 79, 80, 89).[74] As Dalit Rom-Shiloni argues, the supplicants in communal laments remind "God that *he* is bound by a covenant that *he* seems to have not kept; according to that covenant, his major task is to be the savior of his people in times of need."[75] The presentation of history in the LP is meant to contrast the deity's long and well-established precedent of compassion with the community's ancestors with the current generation's circumstances, and thus to motivate the deity to respond according to that precedent.[76]

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73 My translation "slave" is meant to evoke the dissonance between Judea as the land promised to the supplicants' ancestors and their current status as imperial subjects on that land. Manfred Oeming has tried to read this remark in a positive light, interpreting עבדים in light of *bandaka-*, an Iranian word used in Persian royal propaganda to refer to subjects of the throne, and often with a positive or elevated status. He translates the expression אנחנו היום עבדים as "We, today, we should serve," interpreting the verse as a call to better serve Yahweh. Oeming, "'See, We Are Serving Today,'" 578–583. While he agrees with the connection that Oeming draws between Iranian *bandaka-* and Hebrew עבדים, David Janzen has pushed back on Oeming's positive interpretation, arguing that *bandaka-* was not used universally with such positive connotations. As demonstrated by its frequent rendering into Aramaic (*ʿylm*) and Akkadian (*qallu*), *bandaka-* could just as easily refer to the kind of arduous and exploitative servitude indexed by "slavery." Janzen, "Yahwistic Appropriation," 844–850. Aside from the flexibility that Janzen identifies in *bandaka-*, the broader literary context of Neh 9:37 demands a negative connotation for עבדים, despite Oeming's efforts to argue otherwise. Compare Blenkinsopp, who translates "slaves" as well and recognizes the LP's explicitly anti-imperial stance, and Fried, who draws the parallel between servitude in Egypt and the community's current context. Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 307–308; Fried, *Nehemiah*, 268.

74 See, for example, Bautch's argument that the LP is formally a communal lament with the new element of confession (v. 33) fused with traditional petition. Bautch, *Developments in Genre*, 116–121.

75 Rom-Shiloni, *Voices from the Ruins*, 206.

76 Bautch, *Developments in Genre*, 122; cf. Lambert, *How Repentance Became Biblical*, 64–67.

8   Precedent and Land Alienation

With this reading of the goals of the LP—establish historical precedent in order to inspire divine action—let us return to the question of the Babylonian exile's absence from the history offered in Neh 9. A key component of the historical argument levied by the supplicants in the LP seems to be that as bad as the sins of their ancestors may have been, and as angry as Yahweh might have gotten, he (Yahweh) never violated the covenant that he established with Abraham and the Exodus generation. That is, *he never alienated Israel from the land he guaranteed to them.*[77]

If, following Southwood, we read the LP as a kind of ethnic history that includes the most relevant details that serve the ideological needs of the present community,[78] then its claim to an unbroken possession of Judean territory seems to be a key element in the group's self-definition.[79] It is a fundamental component of the covenantal relationship with their god, a relationship that is being leveraged throughout the prayer as the supplicants seek relief from the ongoing imperial exploitation of their land. The Babylonian exile—an alienation of the territory Yahweh promised without stated qualification (v. 8) to Abraham and the Exodus generation—would represent a violation of that core component of Judean identity by undercutting the argument offered in the LP and its assertion of Yahweh as a loyal covenant partner.

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77   It is notable here that the LP diverges radically from important elements of its source material, including Leviticus, Deuteronomy, and the Deuteronomistic History. The curses of Lev 26 warn that the alienation of territory is one tool of instruction that the deity can wield in response to Israel's covenant violations (vv. 27–45), while Deut 28 warns of exile (v. 36) and the transfer of land and its produce to a foreign power (vv. 32–34, 64–68). Solomon's prayer in 1 Kgs 8 similarly considers population dispersion and land alienation as a response to Judean disobedience (vv. 33–34, 46–53). Moving forward in the Deuteronomistic History, the loss of territory in Canaan is attributed to the human failure to uphold Yahweh's covenant in the cases of both the Northern (2 Kgs 17:13–23) and Southern Kingdoms (2 Kgs 21:10–15). For the relationship between the LP and these texts, see Boda, *Praying the Tradition.*

        All that being said, the LP's view of Judean history and its elision of the alienation of Judean land would not be without precedent, nor would it be the most extreme example from the post-monarchic period. As Sara Japhet has famously argued, Chronicles offers a similar narrative of unbroken possession, although that version further omits the exodus event, asserting an eternal and abiding bond between people, land, and deity running from Jacob through David and into the post-monarchic period. Japhet, *Ideology*, 285–301.

78   Southwood, "'But Now,'" 9–14.

79   Aside from the argument being offered within the prayer, we can also see the importance of the land in terms of volume: the word ארץ occurs 13 times in the LP. As noted by Gilbert, this composition contains perhaps the greatest density of the term within the literature of the Hebrew Bible. Gilbert, "Le place de la loi," 310.

When considered through the lens of cultural trauma outlined above, the omission of the exile from the LP becomes (more) comprehensible: A reference to the exile does not align with the goals of the history offered. This means that the loss of land and experience of forced migration in the early 6th century was a potential trauma that was not actualized in every community; they were not "facts"[80] that would necessarily become defining elements of all subsequent constructions of Judean identity. To be sure, our literary evidence from the period suggests that these events frequently *did* become central nodes of communal definition. Furthermore, these post-monarchic reflections of Judean identity have had significant (if not undue) influence on scholarly reconstructions of the period. This, however, was not a necessary conclusion because of something inherently important about the events of 597 or 586. Rather, the "truth" of what happened (or did not happen) in the early 6th century and its relevance—traumatic or otherwise—for Judean communities in the subsequent decades and centuries was a matter of interpretation and deliberation for those groups who understood themselves to be producing authoritative history.[81]

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80   On "facts," see n. 46 above.

81   In this regard the notion of the carrier group dovetails nicely with scholarly concerns about scribal circles and activity in Persian and Hellenistic period Judea. We can see in the sheer variety of "restoration" narratives that have been preserved in the Hebrew Bible that there were competing answers to the question of what it meant to be Judean in the post-Monarchic period, and it was carrier groups (and the scribes in their service) who were responsible for providing those answers. See, for, example, the discussion in Wilson, "Persian Period," 118–120. Silverman has helpfully warned against distilling all literature of the Persian period to serving (exclusively and/or intentionally) the role of identify formation, particularly when one considers the size of the groups producing these texts and their potential audiences (Silverman, *Persian Royal–Judean Elite Engagement*, 23). Nevertheless, in addressing the new political, economic, and cultural landscape of Persian rule, the scribes who composed literature provided (at least implicit) normative answers to the question of what was important about Judean history and how previous experiences, once considered, should be interpreted. For his treatment of Deutero-Isaiah (Isa 40–55) and First Zechariah (Zech 1–8) in light of the relations between imperial authority and local elites, see Silverman, *Persian Royal–Judean Elite Engagement*, esp. 13–23, where he initially considers the questions of literary production in an imperial environment. For a discussion of the process by which prophetic "traditions" were transformed by groups into the compositions that we have inherited in the Hebrew Bible, see Nissinen, "How Prophecy Became Literature," 153–172. For the material concerns of the role that professional scribes played in preserving these competing traditions, see Rainey, "Scribes, Schools and Ideological Conflict," 63–78.

9   Conclusions

In the preceding analysis I have argued that despite scholarly presumptions
concerning the importance of the Babylonian exile for subsequent construc-
tions of Judean identity, we should not assume that it was a given or necessary
component for all Judean communities. Though much of the literature of the
Hebrew Bible seeks to naturalize the prevailing view, there is nothing about
the scale or devastation of that experience that naturally demands its inclu-
sion in subsequent retellings of Judean history and the constructions of Judean
identity that they inform.

These conclusions raise two important issues: the first is local to the study
of Ezra-Nehemiah as a whole and the second is more broadly methodological.
To begin, a primary reason for the Babylonian exile's presumed importance
within the LP has to do with its current literary context. Within Ezra-Nehemiah,
the Babylonian exile is otherwise an important touchstone of Judean iden-
tity construction, particularly within the book of Ezra.[82] What, then, was the
value of something like the LP, which offered a markedly different version of
Judean history, for the compiler(s) of that document? Does it fit Laura Carlson
Hassler's recent argument for understanding Ezra-Nehemiah as a kind of
archival history, meant to maximally represent the experience of a resilient, if
struggling, Judean community?[83] Or, alternatively, does the prayer's inclusion
(and thus ideological integration) within Ezra-Nehemiah reflect an effort by
that composition's compiler(s) to silence dissenting voices about the founda-
tions of Judean identity during the Persian or Hellenistic period? It is only in
appreciating the deeply composite nature of Ezra-Nehemiah, both in terms of
the sources it combines and the diversity of views contained in those sources,
that we can begin to approach the complicated socio-historical processes that
its composition may reflect.

This leads to my second point, on methodology. In making the preceding
argument about the absence of the Babylonian exile from the history of the

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82 This is especially the case with Ezra 1–6, 9–10, which focus on the earliest stages of the
    golah's return migration from Babylonia and the efforts by those returnees to maintain
    communal boundaries. However, as Amzallag has shown, the interest in defining the
    golah as a distinct entity essentially disappears within the book of Nehemiah, with the
    title only occurring in the introduction to the list of return migrants in Neh 7:6, which is
    itself a copy of the list of return migrants found in Ezra 2. The Nehemiah Memoir is far
    more concerned with those who currently reside in Judea (היהודים) than defining that
    group by the migration histories of its members. Amzallag, "Authorship," 275–277.
83 Carlson Hasler, *Archival Historiography*, 111–122.

LP, I have not offered my own historical reconstructions for the origins of the prayer. And, perhaps just as importantly, neither have I excluded the suggestions offered by those scholars treated earlier in this paper.[84] The absence of a reference to the Babylonian exile in the LP's history does not exclude its production within a community who did not suffer displacement at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar's army.[85] Nor, however, does it preclude composition by a community of Judeans whose ancestors had been forced to migrate to Babylonia. In the latter case, this absence may occur for some reasons we can rhetorically understand (e.g., holding God accountable for the contemporary state of Judea and its inhabitants) and maybe some that we cannot. Whatever the case, it is important to recognize that potentially traumatic events are not actualized naturally; communal trauma is the product of social processes in the present. To presume the natural or inevitable centrality of exile in the service of historical reconstructions of the Persian and early Hellenistic periods is, therefore, to misunderstand the fundamental goals of history-telling: to offer a version of the past that serves the needs of the present and future community. To read ancient histories like Ezra-Nehemiah and contemporary reflections on the Judean experience otherwise—to accept uncritically the "facts" offered by their authors—is to fall victim to their ideological goals and to acquiesce to the power structures that these histories are designed to support.

Acknowledgements

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84   With the exception, of course, of Welch and those who would propose a date in the monarchic period.

85   Here I am reminded of the conclusions of Benjamin Sommer and his critique of what he calls "Pseudo-Historicism." Sommer, "Dating Pentateuchal Texts."

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