The First Encounter of the Golah and Their "Adversaries" (Ezra 4:1–5):

Who Are the Adversaries, and on What Is the Adversity Based?

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THE FIRST ENCOUNTER OF THE *GOLAH* AND THEIR "ADVERSARIES" (EZRA 4:1–5): WHO ARE THE ADVERSARIES, AND ON WHAT IS THE ADVERSITY BASED?*

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INTRODUCTION

Ezra 4:1–5 narrates the first challenge the *golah* group[1] faced as

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[1] The term *golah* (גולה) can refer to different things: the condition of being deported from one's homeland, the place where one is deported, or the deportees themselves collectively. In the book of Ezra, the term *golah* is used mainly in reference to those who returned from Babylon to Judah (3:3; 4:1; 6:16, 19, 20, 21; 8:35; 9:4; 10:6, 7, 16; "captivity" in 2:1). Even though it is not the only term used to identify the protagonist group, this term best sums up the group's identity as mostly made up of those who returned from the Babylonian exile and is used to define this group. The determination of the nature of the *golah* in Ezra is important in light of the questions about the identity of the community/ies of Second-Temple Judaism; that is, whether the predominant use of the term *golah* would imply a community formed exclusively around the experience of exile. Consider Blum's point that community in the Second Temple period forms not as a theocracy, nor a political unit, nor a denominational congregation, but as a community whose identity is based on an understanding of their ethnos and on ethical choices. Blum's argument is well taken, that being a YHWH worshipper and "Israel" was no longer the same as it was before the Persian period; i.e., that "Israel" seems to be claimed by the *golah* community, whose membership is dependent not just on genealogy but also on a certain way of worshipping YHWH, participation in the temple building and in the Passover celebration. See Erhard Blum, "Volk oder Kultgemeinde? Zum Bild des nachexilischen Judentums in der alttestamentlichen Wissenschaft," in W. Oswald et al. (eds.), *Grundfragen der historischen Exegese, Methodologische, philologische und hermeneutische Beiträge zum Alten Testament* (FAT, 95; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015), 195–214. As Blum argues, the term *golah* does seem to reflect a community based partly on choice, first of all on their choice to return to Judah (Ezra 1:3), and not completely on genealogy or simply being in exile (2:59–63). Also, following the *golah* way of worshipping YHWH is clearly an important criterion, as the analysis of Ezra 4:1–5 confirms. Thus, although the community seems to have formed predominantly

they began to build the temple. This incident is the first real encounter with the "other" in the book of Ezra.[2] Having arrived in the land and having had their first worship by setting up the altar and offering sacrifices and freewill offerings (Ezra 3:3–6), the *golah* group finally set out to build the temple. But, as they began their work, "other" people—identified as the "adversaries of Judah and Benjamin"—proposed to build with them, claiming that they worshipped the same God (Ezra 4:1–2). The *golah* group leaders declined the offer, stating that they alone, as charged by Cyrus, would build it (Ezra 4:3). After this encounter, the "other" group, designated by the phrase "people of the land," brought the building work of the *golah* people to a halt (4:4). While the text gives no further explicit description of the "other" beyond designating them as "adversaries of Judah and Benjamin" and "people of the land," scholars often identify them with the Samarians, and argue that the text demonstrates anti-Samaritanism.[3] Considering the vague nature of the narrative, such specific identification is premature. Through a close re-examination of the text, I find that there is not enough evidence to identify the "other" as a specific group of people. Thus it would be better to interpret the identity of these "adversaries" as all or any non-*golah*. I will also argue that the "other" people were denied participation in building the temple on the basis of cultic difference.

Much discussion of Ezra 4:1–5, the whole of chapter 4, or the larger context of Ezra 1–6, revolves around authenticity, chronology and purpose, such as that of the Aramaic documents and of the narrative in general.[4] One example is Grätz's argument, on the question of the chronology of the narrative of Ezra

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around those who returned, the text appears to leave some openness. The text does not explicitly state that the group is exclusively formed of only those who returned. To maintain the various nuances, I will use the term in its transliterated form—*golah*—without translating it into English (although it is often translated as "returnees" or "returned exiles").

[2] The first reference to the "other" in the book of Ezra is in Ezra 3:3 but it is just a report that the *golah* group was dreading them and there is no actual meeting of the two groups.

[3] See, for example, Mordechai Cogan, "For We, like You, Worship Your God: Three Biblical Portrayals of Samaritan Origins," *VT* 38 (1988), 286–92; Rainer Kessler, *Sozialgeschichte des alten Israel: Eine Einführung* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2006), 153, 164. Also see Sebastian Grätz, "The Adversaries in Ezra/Nehemiah – Fictitious or Real? A Case Study in Creating Identity in Late Persian and Hellenistic Times," in Rainer Albertz and Jakob Wöhrle (eds.), *Between Cooperation and Hostility, Multiple Identities in Ancient Judaism and the Interaction with Foreign Powers* (JAJSup, 11; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013), 73–87, 74.

[4] On Aramaic documents, Williamson's response to the recent tendency to question the authenticity of the documents (e.g., in the work of Gunneweg, Grabbe, Schwiderski, Grätz, Janzen, Wright, Pakkala, Edelmen) gives a brief yet comprehensive picture of the debate. See Hugh G.M. Williamson, "The Aramaic Documents in Ezra Revisited," *JTS* 59 (2008), 41–62. Fried also argues that the Artaxerxes correspondence in Ezra 4 are "at base authentic and reliable." See Lisbeth S. Fried,

1–6. He contends that the narrative is not to be read as a linear chronology, but should be read as a salvation-historical continuum from the hermeneutical lens of a period of divine salvation beginning with Cyrus (Ezra 1:1–4).[5] Grätz argues for distinct source documents, which he identifies with a redaction-historical approach; and he contends that they were combined with the intention of forming a restoration history. According to his argument, it was the act of combining sources that caused breaks in the chronology and content.[6] Although I start with the final form as we have it, Grätz and I come to similar conclusion that the narrative can be read with one underlying and coherent theme,[7] which I argue is cult and restoration of community through a certain expression of Yahwistic cultic worship. That same theme drives the nature of the perception of the protagonist *golah* group toward the "other" in the narrative. Thus, with

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"The Artaxerxes Correspondence of Ezra 4, Nehemiah's Wall, and Persian Provincial Administration," in Aren Maeir et al. (eds.), *"Go Out and Study the Land" (Judges 18:2), Archaeological, Historical and Textual Studies in Honor of Hanan Eshel* (JSJSup, 148; Boston: Brill, 2012), 35–57. Given the limited nature of the evidence, while some scholars such as Williamson and Fried maintain the Aramaic documents as authentic, clearly arguments for inauthenticity will continue to avail, and it appears that the debate will continue.

On Ezra 1–6, Edelman's argument stands out among others. She argues how the narrative of Ezra 1–6 "appears to be an implanted memory inserted into a non-originating historical context," thus reading the narrative as a creation of idealized past which, although it began with an ideal beginning for a non-political, ethno-religious entity, it was not entirely clear if the aspired ideal was truly achieved. See Diana V. Edelman, "Ezra 1–6 as Idealized Past," in Ehud Ben Zvi et al. (eds.), *A Palimpsest: Rhetoric, Ideology, Stylistics, and Language Relating to Persian Israel* (PHSC, 5; Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2009), 47–59.

[5] Sebastian Grätz, "Chronologie im Esrabuch. Erwägungen zu Aufbau und Inhalt von Esra 1–6," in Jens Kotjatko-Reeb, Benjamin Ziemer, and Stefan Schorch (eds.), *Nichts Neues unter der Sonne? Zeitvorstellungen im Alten Testament, Festschrift für Ernst-Joachim Waschke zum 65. Geburtstag* (BZAW, 450; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2014), 213–25.

[6] The distinct source documents Grätz identifies are the correspondence with Artaxerxes (Ezra 4:6–23), the Aramaic Chronicle (Ezra 5:1–6:18), Ezra 3, the list in Ezra 2, and Ezra 4:6–23. I agree with the existence of distinct sources in Ezra 1–6, and yet, as Grätz also notes, the circles of redaction are only speculative, as Ezra 3:8ff and 6:19–22 seem to be from circles close to the Chronicler, while Ezra 4 does not suggest closeness to the Chronicler. Grätz, "Chronologie im Esrabuch," 223. As such, I read, with others, the narrative as following a coherent theme despite its composite nature.

[7] For Grätz, the two driving intentions in Ezra 1–6 are legitimization of the Second Temple and the exclusivity of the community that gathers there. In other words, the overarching intention of Ezra 1–6 is to argue in favor of strict autonomy for religious politics and a strict self-awareness. Grätz, "Chronologie im Esrabuch," 224. I agree with his reading and in this paper I am taking the question further to ask how those intentions play out in the *golah* groups' perception of and interaction with those who are not part of the *golah*, or who they seek to exclude.

regard to the question of who the "other" are, if we consider the larger context of Ezra 1–6 as well as the whole of Ezra 1–10, the "other" people would not be the same people throughout the narrative, but rather different people in each specific literary context, of which Ezra 4:1–5 would be only one. Nevertheless, with an unspecific identity for the "other" people and their characterizations, they form a broad "other," in which all or any non-*golah* people may be included.

The Aramaic documents and their place in the narrative are indeed an important theme and should be addressed. Yet, with the limited evidence we have, which is mainly from linguistic and stylistic characteristics, it seems that the debate will continue, at least until we have other, more solid evidence to ground a more common interpretation. While we anticipate such evidence and better understanding, it is worthwhile to study the narrative as it is, to see its portrayal of its characters such as the "adversaries" (Ezra 4:1–2) or *people of the land* who later thwart the work of the building (Ezra 4:4–5). The portrayal of their situation and community identity is clearly a crucial theme for the Second Temple. In the narrative as we have it, the identity of the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin and the *people of the land* seem to be deliberately left open, and thus could include anyone who is not a part of the *golah* community.

I base my analyses on the final form of the text and will analyze the narrative mainly from a literary point of view,[8] in somewhat similar manner to that of Tamara Eskenazi in her book, *In an Age of Prose: A Literary Approach to Ezra-Nehemiah*.[9] As Eskenazi points out, the literary "seams" in the book of Ezra are not always smooth—with dramatic shifts between first and third person narratives and long and repetitive lists. However, a literary approach identifies these characteristics as literary devices that carry and fulfill the meaning of the text, rather than create a disturbance.[10] Since extratextual evidence is scarce, a literary

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[8] I acknowledge the complexities of Ezra 1–6. However, I read the narrative of Ezra 1–6 synchronically despite the historical discrepancies or variance of genre in the text, since a clear theme can be seen running through the narrative. I will not be able to address the complexities of the larger context here. As Brevard S. Childs observes (*Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979], 628–38), studies of Ezra-Nehemiah mostly start with the formation and/or composition of the book, and traditionally, historical-critical methods have been employed to read it. Yet, such methodologies have not resulted in a fruitful interpretation of the text nor have they resolved many of the complexities of the book. So, by employing a literary study of the final form I am not disregarding the complex compositional stages or sources Ezra might have had, since the purported message of the narrative could be understood without completely solving those problems. Whatever stages or sources the book came through, we have the text as we have it now, and it is not merely a collection of accounts, but has a coherent theme and apparent meaning.

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

[10] Eskenazi, *In an Age of Prose*, 3–9.

analysis will shed light on the characters and their historical situation, particularly in areas where historical considerations lead to dead ends or ambiguities. Obviously, literary analysis and historical investigation cannot be totally mutually exclusives, and historical evidence, where at all available, must be utilized.

THE EVENT (EZRA 4:1–5)

> 4:1 When the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the *golah* community[11] were building a temple to YHWH the God of Israel, 4:2 they approached Zerubbabel and the heads of the fathers[12] and they said to them, "Let us build with you, because like you, we worship[13] your God and we have been sacrificing to him[14] since the days of Esarhaddon,[15] the king of Assyria, who brought us here." 4:3 But

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[11] I translate it as "*golah* community" (literally, sons of the *golah*), which is meant here, referring to the rebuilding of the temple as a project of the whole *golah* community.

[12] The "heads of the fathers of Israel" would be the leaders of the families of Israel. The leaders of associations of people or kinship groups in the postexilic period are commonly referred to as "heads" (cf. Ezra 1:5; 2:68; 3:12; 8:1; 10:16; Neh 8:13). And "fathers' house" would represent "families" in the sense of larger, extended families, not just of one line of descendants from one man, since in the exile and post-exilic times, larger units such as "clans" (משפחה) would not have survived exactly as they were before. That is, a "fathers' house" would not only encompass one father's extended family but also perhaps more than one father. In simple words, "fathers" representing "families" would mean extended family or would include several families; i.e., the equivalent of pre-exilic "clan." See Hugh G.M. Williamson, "The Family in Persian Period Judah: Some Textual Reflections," in William Gwinn Dever et al. (eds.), *Symbiosis, Symbolism, and the Power of the Past: Canaan, Ancient Israel, and Their Neighbors from the Late Bronze Age through Roman Palaestina* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 475–78.

[13] Literally "seek" (דרש), it is the same word used for worship (seeking God in worship and prayer); for example, Deut 4:29; Ps 14:2; 77:3; Isa 31:1; 55:6; 58:2; Jer 10:21; 29:13; Lam 3:25; Hos 10:12; Amos 5:4, 6; Zeph 1:6; 1 Chr 16:11; 2 Chr 12:14; Ezra 6:21.

[14] Reading with the *Qere* לוֹ ("to him"), rather than *Ketiv* לֹא ("not"), which does not make sense in this context. With the *ketiv*, it would read "we have not been sacrificing." This reading would give the "adversaries" a reason why they wished to participate in the building of the temple—to resume sacrificing when the temple is completed. That is, their claim to worship the same God is supplemented by their statement that they have not been able to sacrifice since a certain time ago, thereby strengthening their desire to participate in the temple building. With the *qere* ("we have been sacrificing to him") their claim of worshipping the same God is strengthened in the sense that they have also been sacrificing, thereby also strengthening their credentials to participate in the temple building. From the context, the *qere* makes more sense, as offering sacrifices would be the best way to show they indeed are worshippers and also that they can claim their eligibility to participate in the temple building.

[15] Esarhaddon ruled from 681 to 669 BCE. It is not known whether Esarhaddon deported people from Samaria and settled other people

Zerubbabel, Jeshua and the rest of the heads of the fathers of Israel said to them, "(It is) not for you and us to build the house of our God, because we alone will build to YHWH the God of Israel, as king Cyrus, the king of Persia, has commanded us."

4:4 Then the people of the land weakened the hands of the people of Judah, and they troubled[16] them to build. 4:5 And they hired counsellors against them to frustrate their plan all the days of Cyrus, the king of Persia, until the reign of Darius, the king of Persia.

THEME AND STRUCTURE OF EZRA 4

To better understand Ezra 4:1–5 it is necessary to examine its larger context: Ezra 4 as well as Ezra 3–6. Structurally, Ezra 3:1–6:22 is the temple-building account from the beginning until the completion of the temple. Following the preliminary work in Ezra 3—that is, the altar (3:1–6) and the temple foundation (3:7–13)[17]—Ezra 4 begins with the building of the temple proper,

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there. The cylinder of Esarhaddon, however, notes that he conquered Sidon in one of his campaigns, and it is likely that Samaria was also involved in rebellion against Assyria, following which a deportation could have taken place. See Charles F. Fensham, *The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 66–67; and *COS* 4.39 ii.65–70; iii.1–19; 4.40 i.14–37 (K. Lawson Younger [ed.], *The Context of Scripture* [4 vols.; Leiden: Brill, 2017], 4:175-76, 4:179–80).

[16] "Weakened the hands" would mean discouraging them from their work. How they "troubled" them is explained in the next verse, by reporting them to Persian officials and eventually halting their work.

The word here (*Ketiv*) ומבלהים is a *hapax legomenon* from בלה. The *Qere* ומבהלים is from a different root בהל, which is more common and means "frighten them." But the meaning in this context is not so different, in the sense that both words express a problem faced by the *golah* community in their temple building. They could possibly have been frightened by the *people of the land*, but ultimately, the main point is that the temple building is now encountering problems. The "other" people created a problem for the *golah* group in their building work by writing to the Persian officials and bringing a halt to the progress of the work. Whether the *golah* people were afraid or not, the point is that the *people of the land* caused the building work to halt.

[17] Williamson (following Talmon) identifies 3:1–4:5 as the initial stage of temple work. Hugh G.M. Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah* (WBC, 16; Waco, TX: Word, 1985), 44. Talmon identifies a structural device he calls "summary notation." He recognizes 4:4–5a as the summary notation or concluding formula for the unit 3:2–4:3. In the unit 3:2–4:3, 3:3 ("and they [could only] set the altar upon its bases, for fear was upon them because of the people[s] of the land") is reflected again in 4:4. And the "adversaries of Judah and Benjamin" of 4:1 is reflected again in 4:5 with the phrase "[they] hired counselors." Shemaryahu Talmon, "Ezra and Nehemiah," in Robert Alter and Frank Kermode (eds.), *The Literary Guide to the Bible* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1987), 359–60.

If we follow Williamson's structuring, we can go further to identify three subunits in Ezra 3:1–4:4, in line with the three building projects: the altar (3:1–7), the temple foundation (3:8–13), and the temple proper

which soon faces obstructive opposition. The theme of Ezra 4 is the obstruction faced by the *golah* group in their building project, the rebuilding of the house of God. Ezra 4 begins with the obstruction of the temple building in verses 1–3, which consequently leads to the halting of the work, in verses 4–5. The theme of obstruction is further elaborated in the passage following Ezra 4:1–5, with other accounts of obstructions the *golah* group faces during the rebuilding project, though from a different time period.

While Ezra 4:1–5 is set in the time of king Cyrus and is about the temple, the narrative that follows is set in a later time and is about the wall and the city. Ezra 4:6 and 4:7 refer respectively to kings Ahasuerus (Xerxes) and Artaxerxes, and 4:12 mentions the wall and the city. Three letters of accusation against the *golah* community are noted in Ezra 4:6–23. One letter was given to king Ahasuerus (Xerxes), another to king Artaxerxes (4:7) and a third one also to king Artaxerxes (4:8–10).[18] While the letter of 4:7 does not explicitly mention that it is against the *golah* group ("Jews" is the term used in this section, written in Aramaic) the context implies it.[19] Perhaps two different letters were given to king Artaxerxes by two groups of people, but to prove or disprove that here is beside the point, the main point being the several obstructions the *golah* group faced. The text illustrates that there are many groups of people standing against the *golah* group and their projects to rebuild the house of God, including the temple (4:1–5) and the city and the wall (4:6–23).[20] Following Artaxerxes' reply in Ezra 4:17–22, the *golah* group is prevented from working (Ezra 4:23).

(4:1–5). While each of the three sub-units begin with the commencement of the work, only the first two units conclude with completion of the work, whereas the third sub-unit is interrupted and halted by the oppositions. The fear, adversity, and hiring of counselors in 4:5 is reflected in 4:6 in a parenthetical nature, with "repetitive resumption" of 4:5b in 4:24.

[18] The mention of Samaria in 4:10 may be taken to indicate that the Samaritans are the "adversaries" of 4:1–5, but as I argue later, it is premature to identify the "adversaries" with Samarians or with any specific group of people. The identifications and descriptions used in the texts for any group other than the *golah* are vague. Furthermore, 4:1–5 is about the temple and is set during the reign of Cyrus, while the section following 4:6 is about the city and wall (see 4:10) and is set during the reign of Artaxerses. Thus, the groups may not be equated with the one another.

[19] Clines even argues that the letter given to king Artaxerxes, mentioned in Ezra 4:7, might be favorable toward the Jews, unlike the one in 4:8, which clearly opposed the Jews. David J.A. Clines, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther: Based on the Revised Standard Version* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 77. This argument, however, lacks sufficient evidence. Given the context and theme of Ezra 4, which is a record of difficulties and accusations against the *golah*, the letter mentioned in 4:7 must be an accusation letter as well.

[20] Again, as Eskenazi argues (*In an Age of Prose*, 53–57), "the house of God" could include the temple, the city, and the wall.

Ezra 4 then concludes with verse 24. Its phrasing is similar to verse 5, returning to the reign of Darius after narrating events from his successors Ahasuerus (Xerxes) and Artaxerxes.[21] Therefore, 4:6–23 may be understood as a "parenthetical" unit between 4:1–5 and 4:24, which further elaborates on the theme of the whole chapter of obstruction against the *golah* group. That is, even though there is a section (vv. 6–23) that talks about another period and projects differently from the preceding passage (vv. 1–5), it does not cause problems in understanding the narrative. The structure and theme remain consistent. In fact, it presents more significantly how the "other" group is perpetually adversarial towards the *golah* group. Such structuring serves to validate and characterize the "other" group, who are introduced as "adversaries" (Ezra 4:1), indeed as adversarial to the protagonist *golah* group in the narrative. In short, Ezra 4 is structured around the primary theme of obstructions faced by the *golah* group while they are fulfilling YHWH's command to build the house of God (see Ezra 1:2–3). The "other" people, who are not part of the *golah* group, are obstructing their work.

Note also that Ezra 4 switches to Aramaic in v. 8 and continues until 6:18. This switch in language, however, need not be seen as an inconsistency in the theme or structure.[22] The narrative is complex in nature, as clearly the Aramaic letters of Ezra

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[21] The literary technique of returning to the same or similar point after talking about other, later things is known as "repetitive resumption." It indicates a "self-contained unit inserted in a longer passage." Talmon, "Ezra and Nehemiah," 360. Williamson also compares this ancient technique to a modern author's use of a parenthesis or footnote to mark the resumption of a narrative after inserting some digressionary materials. Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 57. It is also known as a "Resumptive Clause," which refers to the use of a same/similar clause in two places with other materials in between. Lisbeth S. Fried, "The 'am Hā'āreṣ in Ezra 4:4 and Persian Imperial Administration," in Oded Lipschits and Manfred Oeming (eds.), *Judah and the Judeans in the Persian Period* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 123–45, 133.

Blenkinsopp also explains well that inexact historical chronology is not unusual in ancient historiography; in this case, the author would simply be emphasizing narrative theme instead of chronology. It does not necessarily mean that the author is ignorant of the correct order of Persian rulers. Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1988), 106.

[22] It coud be that the letters are quoted in the official Aramaic language (Ezra 4:11b–16). Besides the documents, the communications ("narrative seams," Ezra 4:8–11a, 17a, 23–24) are also in Aramaic. That said, another possible purpose for utilizing bilingualism in a narrative, as argued by Bill Arnold, may be at work here. As Arnold argues, the congruent theme of Ezra 4—the rebuilding of the temple and the oppositions the *golah* group faces in its building projects—could be one factor for the retention of Aramaic even after quoting the Aramaic documents. For instance, the prophecy of Haggai and Zechariah noted in 5:1–2 is still in Aramaic, though it was unlikely to be documented originally in Aramaic. Another factor that may have led to the retention of the Aramaic, Arnold argues, is a shift in "point of view" of the narrator. In Ezra 4:6–18, the narrator's point of view shifts to an "externalized viewpoint," describing the events of the Persian kings with an "internal

4:6–6:15 can be seen as part of an independent unit.[23] Yet, while the original composition of the Aramaic section is beyond recovery, the Aramaic section does not diminish the central theme of the whole narrative—that YHWH the God of the Jews/Judeans is behind the rebuilding task in Jerusalem, even amidst oppositions.

As a summary, Ezra 4:1–5 and the rest of the chapter records the obstructions that the *golah* group faced in their building works. Yet, Ezra 4 also is not merely a record of oppositions but serves as a characterization of the "other" group—how they are not aligned with the *golah* group and are adversarial and obstructionist towards them. Our main interest is in the first face-to-face interaction and dialogue between the *golah* group and the "other" in their initial work on the temple, that is, in Ezra 4:1–5; so the rest of Ezra 4 will not be discussed in detail in the remainder of this article. In order to study the factor/s behind the unfriendly encounter in Ezra 4:1–5, the nature of the adversity needs to be understood first.

THE NATURE OF ADVERSITY

The usage of the term "adversaries" (צרים) in this passage (Ezra 4:1–5) is confusing since no strong picture of hostility has been reported at this point in the narrative. The "other" people simply came to the *golah* leaders and offered to build with them, stating that they too worshipped the *golah* community's God (4:2). In fact, this gesture can be seen positively as a generous and friendly offer to help with the building work. A study of the term in other contexts will be helpful to examine the meaning and significance of the term in this passage.

The noun צר is used in other contexts mostly to refer to Israel's adversary/enemy.[24] In some contexts, it is used in relation to war, such as in Amos 3:11, where an "enemy" will over-

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intimacy" in relation to the *golah* community in Ezra 1:1–4:5. Then, in Ezra 6:19, after a transitional paragraph in Ezra 6:16–18, the viewpoint changes back to the *golah*'s perspective and the language correspondingly switches to Hebrew. Later, starting in Ezra 7:12, the language switches to Aramaic again for the same reasons as before, since the section starts once more with an Achaemenid letter and a shift in the narrator's point of view. Bill T. Arnold, "The Use of Aramaic in the Hebrew Bible: Another Look at Biligualism in Ezra and Daniel," *JNSL* 22 (1996), 1–16. For additional discussion of the "externalized point of view" concept, see: Joshua Berman, "The Narratological Purpose of Aramaic Prose in Ezra 4.8-6.18," *AS* 5 (2007), 165–91.

[23] For instance, as Schmitt points out, the Aramaic section presents an independent understanding of the constitution and roles of elders, comparable to that of the Pentateuch. Hans-Christoph Schmitt, "Die 'Ältesten' in der Exodusüberlieferung und im Aramäiscen Briefbericht von Esr 4,8–6,15," in Ingo Kottsieper et al. (eds.), *Berührungspunkte, Studien zur Sozial- und Religionsgeschichte Israels und seiner Umwelt. Festschrift für Rainer Alberts zu seinem 65. Geburtstag* (AOAT, 350; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2008), 57–72, 67–68.

[24] Helmer Ringgren, "צר," *TDOT* XII: 465–68.

run the land; in Num 10:9, with reference to an "enemy" oppressing Israel; in Lam 1:10, where the "enemy" lays hands on Israel; in Isa 9:11, where YHWH raises "enemies" against Israel/Jacob; in Ezek 39:23, where Israel is handed over to "enemies"; in Deut 32:27 and 33:7, where the term refers to the "enemy" of Israel/Judah; and in Zech 8:10, where the "enemy" disrupts the daily safety of the people. It is unlikely that such war language is implied is Ezra 4:1–5, but in each of these references the "enemy" is actively seeking to destroy Israel and is even at times winning against Israel. Perhaps this term is used in Ezra 4:1 in anticipation of the destructive plan that the "other" group develops later, with their thwarting the work of the *golah* (Ezra 4:4–5). In other contexts, the term may be understood as the enemy of an individual; but in those instances the individual is still representative of Israel, and the "enemy" wishes or is working towards ill-fate for Jews or the people of Israel. For instance, in Esth 7:4, 6, Mordecai's enemy Haman tries to destroy Mordecai and all Jews, so Haman is the enemy of all Jews; in Ps 3:2 and 2 Sam 24:13, the enemy/ies of David rise/s up against him, with David representing Israel as its king.[25] Thus the term in these other contexts carries a strong connotation of hostility between the two parties in question, mostly between YHWH-worshipping Israel and other non-YHWH worshipping nations. The "enemy" is against the Israelites/Jews and seeks to destroy them.

Again, in Ezra 4:1–5, the reasons for strong hostility are not clearly expressed. Yet, considering the common connotation of the adversaries/enemies destroying Israel observed in the uses of the term צר in other contexts, we can posit a similar meaning in Ezra 4:1–5. As the "adversaries" of the *golah* group eventually destroyed the plans of the *golah* community by blocking the temple work (4:4–5), a term like "adversaries" might be employed to foreshadow their later action. The term seems to be used in a generic sense to mean anyone or all those who wished an ill-fate for and would work to destroy the *golah* people, as a categorization of the "other" group—that they are vicious and malicious towards Israel.

The "other" people in Ezra 4, then, are not simply separate from the *golah* group but stand in opposition to them.[26] Following the denial of their offer to join the *golah* group in building the temple, the "other" group, as befits the title "adversaries" in the beginning of the passage (Ezra 4:1), thwarted the plans and work of the *golah* community even until the reign of Darius (Ezra 4:4–5). And as the "other" group took to thwarting the cult related building work of the *golah* community, they came to be characterized and introduced as "adversaries." Yet, with the reason for adversity not stated, understanding how the *golah* community

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[25] Other appearances of צר include: Gen 14:20, enemies of Abraham, the father of the nation of Israel; and Josh 5:13, enemy of Joshua the leader of Israel. In other contexts, it stands for enemies of YHWH and YHWH's victory's over enemies: e.g., in Job 19:11, Job as YHWH's enemy; Pss 78:66; 97:3; Isa 1:24; 26:11; 59:18; 64:1; Jer 46:10; Nah 1:2; Deut 32:41, 43.

[26] Clines, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, 73.

perceives itself will help explore why they cannot accept "other" people to join them or perceive them as adversaries in the first place.

THE ADVERSITY BASED ON CULTIC DIFFERENCE

Ezra 4:1–5 withholds explicit reasons for adversity, yet some hints can be drawn from the conversation between the so-called "adversaries" and the *golah* leaders. Here, verses 2 and 3 are vital. The "adversaries" offered to join the *golah* group in the building work by claiming that they worshipped their (the *golah*'s) God. In response, however, the *golah* leaders said that they alone would build the house of their (the *golah*'s own) God (4:3; cf. 1:3). Grounding their exclusive authority to build the temple on Cyrus' decree creates the impression of political or legal reasoning. Indeed, if Cyrus' decree is taken strictly, it can be interpreted as being addressed to the *golah* only since it permits YHWH's people from wherever they were to *go up to Jerusalem in Judah and build the house of YHWH*, God of Israel (Ezra 1:3). That is, it implies a return, thereby referring to exile-returnees, the *golah*, as the only ones authorized by the king (Cyrus) to build the temple. In fact, this legal reason for permission coming from a political figure is the most direct reason the passage offers.

Yet, even if one emphasizes the legal reasoning, by strictly applying the command of Cyrus, the narrative presents Cyrus as merely an instrument of YHWH to renew temple service. The motivation behind Cyrus issuing this decree is that he was roused by YHWH to build the house of God, a task which he entrusted to the *golah* (1:1–2). Also, those who did return to Jerusalem to fulfill Cyrus' decree are those roused by God (Ezra 1:5). That is, both the command to return and the act of returning originated from YHWH, and those who are roused to actions—to command and to return—are ultimately responding to YHWH, not to Cyrus. Some aspect of political aspiration could certainly have been involved in Cyrus' edict, in his allowing them to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple. However, from a literary perspective, the motivations for the *golah* to return and rebuild the temple, and the creation of such an edict permitting a return in the first place, ultimately came from YHWH. Therefore, even the legal reasoning for the denial finally comes down to cultic concerns. Not only the *golah* group, but the "adversaries" also claim cult as their qualification to apply for participation in the temple building.

In their proposal to join the *golah* group in building the temple, and perhaps also to be a part of the community, the "other" group claimed a cultic similarity with the *golah* as their credentials. They held that because they also have worshipped the *golah*'s God from the time that they were brought there by the king of Assyria (Ezra 4:2) they might join in building the temple. That is, the claim to validate their participation in the temple building is not based on kinship or familial grounds or some political aspect but rather on cultic sameness. The *golah* group leaders did not comment on the validity of such qualifications for building the temple, so it cannot be known exactly whether they accepted or

denied the legitimacy of their claim. However, the use of *your* God by the "other" group ("we worship *your* God"; 4:2) and *our* God by the *golah* group ("build a house to *our* God"; 4:3) offers a hint. It could imply a cultic difference; that is, the "other" people might not be genuinely worshipping YHWH since they cannot even claim YHWH as their own God, while the *golah* community can confidently claim so. Instead, they call YHWH the *golah*'s God and say that they worship this God as well, perhaps in addition to their own god. Thus, while an argument from these two possessive pronouns alone cannot settle all, the text does seem to imply a difference between the two groups.

The second part of the claim of the "adversaries of Judah and Benjamin" states that the Assyrian king Esarhaddon brought them down at a certain time (Ezra 4:2).[27] There is, however, no way to know whether these people who claimed to have been brought down by Esarhaddon are Israelites from the earlier northern kingdom or are foreigners. Their own self-claim of worshipping the God of the *golah* since their arrival implies the latter case. But, as the text does not tell us the exact identity of the "adversaries," nothing can be known for sure. As the narrative is primarily about the *golah* group and is less interested in the "other" group, often leaving no specific information about the "other" group/s, the "adversaries" could even simply be in reference to a mixture of Israelites and foreigners. What the text clearly says is that the "adversaries," unlike the *golah* group, have only worshipped YHWH from a certain point in time, making them either proselytes or a mixture of proselytes and Israelites.

The prominent and intended impression of the text is then twofold. First, these "other" people cannot even claim ownership of the God they claim to worship. Secondly, they have worshipped this God only from a certain point in time.[28] That is, they are neither genuine nor originally YHWH worshippers. As such, even though the "adversaries" try to claim similarity by stating that they worship the same God as the *golah* community, the text shows that they are not the same as the *golah*, that their

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[27] There is no biblical reference to such a settlement by king Esarhaddon. But a similar reference occurs in 2 Kgs 17:24–41, where king Sargon II is said to have settled people in Samaria who also eventually began to worship YHWH (although syncretistically, along with their own gods). Though not attested, Esarhaddon could have carried out a similar practice of bringing people to Israel. It is not possible to solve this riddle. Perhaps cultural memory is at work here. Edelman, for example, argues that the narrative of Ezra 1–6 is drawing on all available prophetic elements related to temple building, to make the idealized memory a reality, but that it is often difficult to narrow down the specifics. Edelman, "Ezra 1–6 as Idealized Past," 47–59. It is possible that a similar drawing on elements from cultural memory is happening here in order to fulfill the characterization of the "other" as someone brought by an Assyrian king, which is generally true but cannot be confirmed with regard to the specific king.

[28] That is, from sometime during Esarhaddon's reign (681–669 BCE) to that of Cyrus (539–530 BCE).

worship of YHWH is not the same as that of the *golah*'s. Further-more, it can be assumed that participants in the building of the temple would also be participants in the temple worship and services later, at least in some ways.[29] Following that, it could be that the *golah* leaders wish to keep worship at the temple and any other services for their own group, and so are not ready to welcome others. The reason highlighted in the text is primarily cultic worship of YHWH.

As seen above, the protagonist *golah* group is inspired by YHWH to build the temple through the permission of Cyrus, whose action is also inspired by YHWH. Similarly, the antagonist "other" group, the "adversaries," also claim worship as their main validation. In this way, the account of the interaction between the "adversaries of Judah and Benjamin" and the *golah* leaders (Ezra 4:1–5) revolves around cult. The reasons given in the text for the desire of the "adversaries" to participate, and the *golah* leaders' rejection of the same proposal, all come down to cultic reasons and differences. Cult is central in the narratives following and preceding the event of Ezra 4:1–5 as well.

CENTRALITY OF CULT IN THE NARRATIVE FOLLOWING EZRA 4:1–5

After narrating the different obstructions facing the *golah* community (Ezra 4), Ezra 5:1–2 notes the renewed inspiration for their rebuilding work. This inspiration comes from nowhere other than the God of Israel, who speaks through the prophets Haggai and Zechariah. As a result of this inspiration and with full support of their God's prophets, the *golah* group are able to resume their work. Furthermore, even when they face another obstacle—that is, being questioned about their permission to build the temple—God protects them such that their work is not halted while they await king Darius's decision (Ezra 5:5). Thus, the resumption of the building work as well as the overcoming of the obstruction are credited to YHWH.

Even in the words of an "other," the Persian official Tattenai, the God of the *golah* is said to be the "great God" (5:8). Tattenai also states that the *golah* people refer to themselves as the "servants of the God of heaven and earth" (5:11), attributing the destruction of their former temple ultimately to the action of their own God because of their ancestors' disobedience (5:12). Thus, the *golah* people are identified as a cultic people of God, whose fate also rests on their obedience or disobedience towards their God. The temple is also referred to in terms of worship or cult—that it is a "place for offering sacrifices," in the quotation of Cyrus's edict (6:3). The edict also orders that the gold and silver vessels of the (former) temple be returned to the house of God (6:5), which implies restoration of the temple service. Following the recovery of Cyrus's edict, Darius orders Tattenai and his colleagues to co-operate with the building and to supply necessities for burnt offerings to the God of heaven. The function of the temple is thus presented with a focus on worship and cult

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[29] Clines, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, 74.

(6:9–10). The text even employs a technical cultic term, "pleasing sacrifice" (ניחוחין) (6:9–10; cf. Exod 29:18 and Lev 1:9),[30] clearly highlighting the temple's cultic purpose.

It is also noteworthy that in the report to king Darius, the leaders are not named or given designations. The leaders are simply called "elders of Jews" (Ezra 5:5, 9; 6:7, 8, 14).[31] Considering that the fate of their building work is at the hands of the Persian government, they could refer to themselves as individuals authorized or recognized by the Persian government. Instead they call themselves "servants of the God of heaven and earth" (5:11). In so doing, they seem to imply that they are simply servants of God, not of Persians. Such a description indicates the intention to highlight the centrality of God/YHWH and their identity as people of God.

At the conclusion of the account of resumption and completion of the temple building work, credit is given to the God of Israel (6:14). The text states that motivation for resuming the building came from the work of prophets, and the ability to complete the project ultimately came from the God of Israel, who worked through the Persian kings (6:14). Thus, as in Ezra 4:1–5, the centrality of God/YHWH and cult is painted all over the narrative following it. The same can be observed in the narrative preceding it.

CENTRALITY OF CULT IN THE NARRATIVE PRECEDING EZRA 4:1–5

In the narrative preceding Ezra 4:1–5, the *golah* community is mainly identified with the term "Israel"—such as "people of Israel" (2:2b); "sons of Israel" (3:1); or by listing their leaders as "Zerubbabel, Jeshua and the rest of the chiefs of the fathers of *Israel*" (4:3). The usage of such a term indicates that they are portrayed as the contemporary Israel, a continuation of the pre-exilic Israel. It is unlikely that the term "Israel" here would mean the pre-exilic united kingdom of Israel, or that it would refer to the later northern kingdom of Israel. Since the purpose of returning and rebuilding the temple is cultic worship (Ezra 1:3; 2:70; 3:2, 6, 8, 10, 11), it is clear that the cult is central for the *golah* community. Thus, within a narrative where cult is central, the term "Israel" could be "a literary designation for the nation

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[30] Berman, "The Narratological Purpose of Aramaic Prose in Ezra 4.8-6.18," 184. Other references include Gen 8:21; Lev 2:12; Num 15:3, 7, 10, 13, 14; Ezek 6:13; 16:19.

[31] Schmitt argues that the elders in the Aramaic section of Ezra are comparable to those in Pentateuchal passages (such as Exod 3:16–17; 12: 21–27). That is, the elders have regained some political function by regaining leadership roles for the second temple community, as can be seen in their communication with the Persian officials. Schmitt, "Die 'Ältesten' in der Exodusüberlieferung und im Aramäiscen Briefbericht von Esr 4,8–6,15," 65. Schmitt makes a compelling point concerning how the "elders" would have occupied prominent roles, and so that would be how the Persian authority recognized them. Yet also significant is that they self-identify as "servants of the God of heaven and earth" (Ezra 5:11).

of the devotees of YHWH who inhabited the territories of Israel and Judah since early time," as Na'aman argues.[32] That is, "Israel" would not stand for a political group or the land itself but rather for the people as a cultic community—devotees of YHWH, but also ones who inhabit the land, and as such they to be seen as a continuation of the referents of the term in an earlier era. Now, it is not explicitly clear whether the current *golah* group indeed includes people from the earlier inhabitants of northern Israel, but it does seem that the term Israel is used here to imply true devotees of YHWH instead of a political province as such.

The narrative presents the *golah* group as continuing the preexilic Israel tradition and expectation. For example, the *golah* community obediently responds to YHWH's command through Cyrus to return and build the temple (Ezra 1:2–3). The same vessels from the former temple, which had been taken away by Nebuchadnezzar, are now released and brought back to Jerusalem for the new temple (1:4–11). The temple will be rebuilt on its original site (2:68), emphasizing that it is the legitimate reconstruction of Israel's original temple of YHWH. The *golah* community, on their arrival in Jerusalem, begins to follow Moses' instruction "correctly," to build the altar to offer burnt offerings (3:2), erects the altar on its original site (3:3), and observes festivals "as is prescribed" (Ezra 3:4). Thus, the *golah* group is "Israel" in that they are devoted and obedient to YHWH in carrying out cultic activities correctly. The life and activities of the *golah* group are mainly presented in a cultic sense.

The named leaders also reflect the group's allegiance to YHWH. Zerubbabel is mentioned without highlighting his Davidic lineage or his being a governor under the Persians (3:2, 8; 4:1, 3). Such naming gives the impression of Zerubbabel mainly as a leader commissioned by YHWH, rather than as a privileged Davidic descendant or a representative of Persian power.[33] Listing and grouping the *golah* people in terms of the cultic leaders and lay people is common in the book of Ezra (for instance, Ezra 1:5; 2:68, 70; 3:8; 6:16). Thus, the named leaders here, Zerubbabel and Jeshua, would simply represent the cultic leadership and the other leaders would represent lay leadership. In other words, even if Zerubbabel is the Persian governor, that point is not highlighted in the text. Rather, the focus is on YHWH's designation of him as a leader representing the *golah* community,

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[32] Na'aman also notes that the name Israel, when used for the peoples of the two kingdoms, is pre-exilic. He further adds that only in a much later period does the term begin to refer to "political and administrative life"; that is, in the Hasmonaean period, when "Judea gradually expanded to include the territories of the former kingdom of Israel." Nadav Na'aman, "Saul, Benjamin and the Emergence of 'Biblical Israel' (Part 2)," *ZAW* 121 (2009), 335–49, 348. See also Israel Finkelstein, who agrees with Na'aman's understanding of the term Israel, even if they disagree on other details ("Saul, Benjamin and the Emergence of 'Biblical Israel': An Alternative View," *ZAW* 123 [2011], 348–67, 365).

[33] Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 32; Ralph W. Klein, *Ezra-Nehemiah* (NIB, III; Nashville: Abingdon, 1999), 691.

which implies that the community is primarily a cultic-bound community, with primary allegiance to YHWH.

In summary, Ezra 4:1–5 presents YHWH and cult as central in the life of the *golah*. Even where other issues are raised, such as political or imperial (Ezra 4:3), the main issue is still allegiance to YHWH. That is, the life of the *golah* has a cultic purpose and origin—Cyrus's permission to rebuild the temple also came as a result of being inspired and entrusted to do so by YHWH (Ezra 1:1-3). In the account of the interaction between the *golah* group and the "other" in Ezra 4:1–5, the "other" group argues for similarity with the *golah* group by claiming worship of the same God, but the text reveals otherwise. It shows that they, unlike the *golah*, cannot claim ownership of that God; and that they, also unlike the *golah* community, have worshipped that God from only a certain point in time. As such, the rejection as well as the adversity would have been rooted in their cultic difference.

The narratives preceding and following 4:1–5 also present the centrality of YHWH and cult, and the temple as the cultic center.[34] These narratives, however, do not contain much about the "other" people, except when they are needed to push the narratives forward, either by aiding in the fulfillment of the *golah* purpose, as with Cyrus and Darius, or by obstructing it, as with the "adversaries." The narratives are clearly about the life of the *golah* community and only secondarily about any "other" groups, who are seldom described with any specificity. Let us now turn to examine whether there is a pre-existing and underlying adversity and if so, on what basis is that adversity based.

A PRIOR ADVERSITY EXISTED?

Prior to Ezra 4:1–5, there is one negative reference to "other" groups. In Ezra 3:3, the *golah* group is said to be in fear of the *peoples of the lands* even though the cause of the fear is not provided.

> 3:3 They set up the altar upon its foundations, although[35] dread was upon them from the peoples of the lands. And

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[34] There is no denying that, historically, the temple would also be an economic and political center, but those themes are not highlighted in the text. The text portrays the temple primarily as a cultic center.

[35] Commonly, the preposition כי is translated as causal; that is, they build the altar *for* or *because* they fear the peoples of the lands. In this sense of translation, they build the altar so that they can take refuge in YHWH on account of their fear of the people, which is not an unusual reason for building an altar when entering a new place (cf. 1 Chr 21:28–22:1). Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehmiah*, 97. However, I translate it as adversative. I follow Fensham's translation ("in spite of") since it seems that fear of the peoples of the lands was not the sole driving force for the building of the altar (Fensham, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 59). As noted above, there probably was an altar during the exile, but it is understood to be not "according to the law of Moses" and demolished by the *golah* group to build their "correct" one. There is then good reason that they would be afraid of the existing inhabitants of the land whose altar is now being replaced. Furthermore, it is possible that the *golah* would experience some insecurity as they return and try to settle back in the land, which

> they offered burnt offerings to YHWH in the morning and
> in the evening.

One immediate question is whether the "other" groups in Ezra 3:3 and 4:1–5 should be understood as the same groups of people. In Ezra 3:3, the "other" is designated as *peoples of the lands*, and in 4:1–5, they are "adversaries of Judah and Benjamin" (v. 1) and *people of the land* (v. 4). With no further helpful information to aid in identification, it is probable that the same people are being referred to in 3:3 and in 4:1–5. Certainly, they fit together in a broad group of the "other," encompassing any or all non-*golah* people.[36]

With regard to the variants *peoples of the lands* in Ezra 3:3 and *people of the land* in 4:4, Fried argues that *peoples of the lands* (in plural, as in 3:3) always refers to the neighboring non-Israelite/non-Judean foreigners "who dominated Israel from the time of her settlement in Canaan"[37] while *people of the land* (in the singular, as in 4:4) always refers to the landed "aristocracy, the elites who control and administer an area."[38] As such, Fried reasons that the "other" in 3:3 and in 4:1–5 would not be the same people. Fried identifies the "adversaries of Judah and Benjamin" (4:1) and the *people of the land* (4:4) as Persian officials since they are in a position to pay the bureaucracy to prevent the *golah* group from building.[39] Thus, for Fried, the "other" in Ezra 3:3 are foreigners living around Judah, while the "other" in 4:4 and latter part of ch. 4 are the Persian satrapies, those in power.

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is now occupied by others.

[36] On the other hand, while the "other" people in 4:1–5 and 4:6–10 would fit together in a broad group of "other" non-*golah* people, it is unlikely that they are the same people. First, 4:6–10 narrates a different period of the reigns of other kings—Xerxes in 4:6 and Artaxerxes in 4:7–23, while 4:1–5 is set during the reign of Cyrus (4:5). Second, the "other" people in 4:7–10 are particularly named officials while the "other" in 4:1–5 are an unnamed group of people. Finally, while the "other" people in 4:1–5 accused and thwarted the work of the temple, the "other" people in 4:6–16 made accusations concerning the city and the wall (4:12–13), not concerning the temple. Thus, those who accused the *golah* in 4:1–5 and in 4:6–8 do not seem to be the same people. While it is possible that the "other" in 3:3 and 4:1–5 might be the same people but different from the "other" in later parts of Ezra 4, all these "other" people are treated in the text as constituting one broad group of the "other" who stands against the *golah* community.

[37] Lisbeth S. Fried, *Ezra: A Commentary* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2015), 165.

[38] Lisbeth S. Fried, "Because of the Dread Upon Them," in John Curtis and St. John Simpson (eds.), *The World of Achaemenid Persia: History, Art and Society in Iran and the Ancient Near East: Proceedings of a Conference at the British Museum 29th September-1st October 2005* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2010), 458; Lisbeth S. Fried, "The 'am Hā'āreṣ in Ezra 4:4," 123–45.

[39] Fried's reasoning is that the redactor made a mistake to assume that these officials (such as those titles and names which appear in Ezra 4:6–11) were descendants of those brought by Assyrian kings (Ezra 4:3, 10). Fried, "The 'am Hā'āreṣ in Ezra 4:4," 130. Also, Fried, *Ezra*, 192, 197.

The usage of terms and phrases such as "adversaries" and *people/s of the land/s* in the text of Ezra, however, seems to intentionally avoid specific identifications of the "other." *Pace* Fried, the text tends to treat all non-*golah* people as constituting a large group of the "other." There is not enough evidence to specifically identify the phrases *peoples of the lands* (3:3) and *people of the land* (4:4). The text seems uninterested in specifying who these groups are, except that they are not part of the *golah* group and are adversarial, threatening and hindering the *golah* group. From the perspective of the text, then, there are two groups of people: (1) the *golah*; and (2) everyone else who constitutes the "other," non-*golah* group. In conjunction with the unspecific descriptions, the "other" people are also often portrayed negatively. Thus, it can be said that there is an unfriendly relation, or adversity, between the *golah* group and "other" people even before the incident of Ezra 4:1–5. The next question is whether that prior adversarial relation also relates to cult.

ADVERSITY IN EZRA 3:3 BASED ON CULT?

Ezra 3:3 notes that the *golah* group who arrived in the land are in fear of the *peoples of the lands* when they built the altar. The text does not provide the explicit reasons for the *golah*'s dread of the *peoples of the lands*, but some hints can be gathered from the meaning and connotations of the term "dread" (אימה). When someone dreads another, the person feels danger, insecurity or even threat.[40] Concerning the activity of the *golah*, Ezra 3 mentions only that they built an altar "according to the law of Moses" (Ezra 3:2), at its original site (3:3), and that they were observing the festival and burnt offerings "as prescribed" (3:4). Thus, the activities of the newly arrived *golah* people might have been different from those who had already been dwelling there. Or, it could even be that the *golah* people seized the existing altar for themselves, disregarding whatever the existing condition might have been.[41] In such cases, an expected reaction from the existing inhabitants would be hostility, causing tension between the groups and fear on the part of the *golah* people.

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[40] The term for fear (אימה) is used in some instances to indicate fear or awe of YHWH's power (e.g., Exod 15:16; 23:27; Deut 32:25; Ps 88:16; Job 9:34; 13:21). In other instances, the term connotes terror, dread, or insecurity in relation to death or other human beings. In Gen 15:12, e.g., darkness and dread or confusion fall on Abram. In Ps 55:5, there is talk of terrors of death. Prov 20:2 refers to dread of a king. Job 33:7 refers to fear of another human (in that case, Elihu). In Job 20:25 terror comes to the wicked or godless. In Josh 2:9, the Canaanites are afraid of the spies sent by Joshua. And terror in Isa 33:18 apparently is fear of oppression by an enemy. In still other instances, the term could connote fear (or madness) of idols (Jer 50:38), or terror of animals (Job 39:20; 41:6).

[41] Jer 41:5 also indicates the presence of an altar and sacrificial activities during the exile. Commentators such as Fensham argue for such a possibility. Fensham, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 59. Fleishman also thinks that the *peoples of the land* "apparently were the older inhabitants of the land of Judah and Samaria, and foreign peoples who settled in various

In summary, the only passage prior to Ezra 4:1–5 that narrates the unfriendly relationship between the *golah* and the "other" also references cultic activities (Ezra 3:1–6).[42] While the text does not give the explicit reason for the dread of the *golah*, it does portray the implicit cultic difference between the *golah* group and the "other" people. As such, the dread between them stemmed from differences in cultic activities between the two groups.[43] This finding is similar to the one reached for the passage Ezra 4:1–5. Such an unfriendly relationship between the two groups in Ezra 4:1–5, as well as in the preceding and succeeding narratives, finally lead to the question of who the characters are, or at least how they are characterized.

THE CHARACTERS

There are two characters in this passage. On the one hand there is the protagonist group, the *golah* group; and on the other hand there is the antagonist, the "other" group.

THE GOLAH

The protagonist group is identified by the terms "sons of the *golah*" (4:1) and "the people of Judah" (4:4). From the identifying term "sons of the *golah*" it can be said that the protagonist group is constituted by those who went into exile and now have returned to Judah. There is no mention or acknowledgment of Israelites who were not exiled. The expression "the people of Judah"[44] connotes that the protagonist group, the *golah* group, is acknowledged as the rightful inhabitants of Judah. In addition, the identification of the antagonist group as "the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin" (Ezra 4:1) reflects the protagonist group, the *golah* group, as constituted by the descendants of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin. As observable from these identifications, the central character, the *golah* group, is clearly identifiable while the "other" group is ambiguously identified.

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districts of Judah," and so the exile returnees are in fear of them since the *peoples of the land* demolished the existing altar in order to build a new one in its place. Joseph Fleishman, "An Echo of Optimism in Ezra 6:19-22," *HUCA* 69 (1998), 15–29 (28).

[42] While other reasons such as political power, land ownership, economic struggles and so forth were likely aspects of the historical reality, they are not highlighted in the text.

[43] Lortie also argues, from a literary analysis of Ezra 1–6, that the narrative is structured with key imperatives such as "go up" (עלה) and "build" (בנה) to demonstrate the centrality of YHWH in the narrative. YHWH is the one who enables the temple rebuilding project, with prophets being catalysts for the project's success. Christopher R. Lortie, "These Are the Days of the Prophets: A Literary Analysis of Ezra 1-6," *TynBul* 64 (2013), 161–69.

[44] "Judah," in this instance, apparently stands for the *land* Judah (commonly called "Yehud" in the Persian period) rather than the *tribe* Judah, particularly since the term is juxtaposed with "people of the land."

THE "OTHER" GROUP

The "other" group is identified variously and vaguely by the terms "the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin" (4:1) and "the people of the land" (4:4). The "adversaries of Judah and Benjamin" is juxtaposed with "the people of the *golah*" (4:1), indicating that they are not part of the *golah* and are adversaries of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin. "The people of the land" is juxtaposed with "the people of Judah," thus indicating that they would be anyone else in the land but not part of "the people of Judah," that is the *golah* group.

From these identifications of the "other" group, it is clear that this group is identified and recognized merely with respect to and in terms of its relationship with the central character, the *golah*. Furthermore, with different terms used for the "other" group/s, there is no way to know if the terms refer to the same group of people or not. The best way to understand such a vague representation is that any or all non-*golah* people who do not align with the ways of the *golah* are treated and grouped together in one broad group of "others."

WHO ARE THE "ADVERSARIES OF JUDAH AND BENJAMIN" IN EZRA 4:1?

Identifying terms such as "adversaries of Judah and Benjamin" (4:1) as well as "people of the land" (4:4), and "peoples of the lands" (3:3) earlier in the narrative, are used with no further detailed information. Despite the unspecific nature of the text, scholars have generally identified the antagonistic "other" as one of three groups, particularly in interpreting the phrase, *people/s of the land/s* (Ezra 3:3; 4:4)—as non-exiled Judeans, Samarians, or a mixture of non-exiled Judeans and Samarians.[45] Some associate the "other" group with the Samaritans, perhaps because of the reference to being brought down by king Esarhaddon of Assyria (Ezra 4:2). For example, Zvi Ron, in a short article on Ezra 4, immediately identifies the adversaries as the Samaritans but without any explanation for the claim.[46] Others such as Cogan treat Ezra 4:1–5 as one of the biblical portrayals of Samaritan origins.[47] Commentators such as Loring Batten and Charles Fensham also immediately identify the "other" group here as the Samaritans.[48] The text, however, simply does not give clear clues for such specific identification with the Samaritans. The reference to being brought to the land by an Assyrian king does not help since it is not clear whether the text refers to Israelite inhabitants from the northern region, that is, Samarians; or to non-

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[45] Peter Ross Bedford, *Temple Restoration in Early Achaemenid Judah* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 12–13 (see especially notes 22, 23, 24).

[46] Zvi Ron, "The First Confrontation with the Samaritans (Ezra 4)," *JBQ* 43 (2015), 117–21.

[47] Cogan, "We, like You, Worship Your God," 286–92.

[48] Loring W. Batten, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1913), 126–27. Fensham, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, 65–66.

Israelites (such as Assyrians) that the king had brought from else-where to the land.

As scholars such as Coggins and Knoppers convincingly argue, there is no evidence that the conflicts in Ezra (or Nehe-miah), such as that in Ezra 4:1–5, are about the "Jews-Samaritan schism."[49] Further, the Jews-Samaritan schism is a complex phe-nomenon, and scholars should be cautious when attributing identity to the different groups who claim YHWH as their deity, in the text.[50] Certainly, there were ongoing tensions between the

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[49] Instead, there is evidence that cultic and cultural continuities and similarities existed between the Judeans/Jews and Samari-ans/Samaritans during the Persian period, and that a schism did not begin until the later Hasmonean or Roman period. Several other pas-sages that are generally thought to refer to Samaritans and to the Jews-Samaritans schism also point to similarity rather than to schism (e.g., 2 Kgs 17; 2 Chr 30; Isa 7:8b; Jer 41:5; Isa 56:9–57:13; 63:7–64:11; Ps 87:2; Zech 11). I follow Coggins' argument that these texts do not support an anti-Samaritan polemic but rather allude to fluidity between the two groups of people or regions (northerners and southerners). For in-stance, in 2 Kgs 17:7–23, where references to the North are given, they are to the old Northern Kingdom and not the later Samaritans, and thus the passage is not anti-Samaritan. In the following passage, 2 Kgs 17:24–41, which is usually taken as the origin of the Samaritans, the condemnation of syncretistic worship addresses Bethel rather than Sa-maria in general or the Samaritans of Shechem. It is in reference not so much to the natives of Samaria but to those who were introduced by the Assyrian imperial authorities (see vv. 25–33). Isaiah 7:8b also sug-gests a continuing tradition of further deportations and contains a warning about the fall of Samaria. It implies that both political and re-ligious conditions were fluid. Thus, it is not an anti-Samaritan polemic. Isaiah 56:9–57; 63:7–64:11 also give no strong evidence for a Samaritan interpretation and there is no solid evidence of already existing hostility between the two communities. On the whole, therefore, there is no strong internal evidence that Jews-Samaritan schism happened within the Old Testament period. Richard J. Coggins, *Samaritans and Jews, The Origins of Samaritanism Reconsidered* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1975), 13–81.

More recently, Knoppers also persuasively argues that the Jews-Sa-maritan schism happened quite late, in the Hasmonean and/or Roman era, and that there appears to be more continuities between the two groups throughout earlier periods of time. Gary N. Knoppers, *Jews and Samaritans: The Origins and History of Their Early Relations* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013).

[50] Hjelm shows how the arguments for early Jewish-Samaritan di-vergence are biased. Hjelm outlines that claims have been made that Jews and Samaritans diverged as early as the eighth century BCE (based on Assyrian deportations and resettlement policies; 2 Kgs 17); later in the fifth century (based on the expulsion of a priest from the Jerusalem temple; Neh 13); or even later in the fourth century (based on the arri-val of Alexander the Great and/or influenced by Josephus' writings, especially *Antiquities* 9,11,12); or before the groups finally split in the Roman era. In response to these claims, Hjelm argues that such claims assume the validity of these Jewish stories of the Samaritans. In her understanding, the Samaritans themselves would present a different story, in which they are the true Israel and have an unbroken chain of high priests and cultic continuity, as opposed to the portrayals in the Jewish stories. Ingrid Hjelm, *The Samaritans and Early Judaism: A Literary*

North and the South, but it is premature to identify the Samaritans with the Northern Kingdom, and by extension, to identify the Samaritans with the "adversaries of Judah and Benjamin" in Ezra 4:1.[51] The book of Ezra in general is not very interested in the "other" group/s, let alone in identifying them clearly. It is thus premature to identify the "adversaries" here as Samaritans and for that matter to identify them with any specific group of people. The text is at best ambiguous and there is simply not enough evidence to make such claims.

PEOPLE OF THE LAND

Another designation of the "other" people in Ezra 4:1–5 is *people of the land* (4:4).[52] With no further information to identify who the referent may be, it is best to understand the phrase as broadly referring to any non-*golah* people and also as a term of distinction from the *golah*. The phrase, as it is used in Ezra 4:4, is not interested in the exact identity of the people; but rather it puts emphasis on their action of obstructing the *golah* people's work, and it also provides a contrast between the important and unimportant characters.[53] The term "people of the land" is juxtaposed with the "people of Judah" (*golah* community), thus implying difference between the protagonist *golah* group and antagonist "other" group, even though they may be living in the same region, that is, Judah. These "other" people are described as simply "people of the land," as if they are living in Judah as usurpers. A similar reasoning is found earlier in the narrative as well. In the *golah* list of Ezra 2, there are two groups identified by the names of their domicile instead of by their fathers' names. In the first grouping there is no question of the genealogy of those listed from the region of Judah and Benjamin (2:20–35), but in the other grouping the Israelite ancestry of those from Babylon is questioned (2:59–60). It appears that there is a correlation between being of/from "Judah" and truly worshipping YHWH. Similarly, there is a correlation between *not* being of/from Judah and *not* truly worshipping YHWH. One possibility is that the "other" people are those who were in the land of Judah when the *golah* arrived, and—though they might have worshipped YHWH—their worship was different from the worship of the *golah* group.[54] In this way, the account of their lack of Judean

Analysis (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2000), 11.

[51] Coggins, *Samaritans and Jews*, 81.

[52] The phrase *people/s of the land/s* occurs in the book of Ezra in variants of singular and plural forms. In the plural variants it occurs as *peoples of the lands* in Ezra 3:3, 9:1, 2, 11; as *peoples of the land* in 10:2, 11; and as *people of the land* in 4:4.

[53] John Tracy Thames, Jr., "A New Discussion of the Meaning of the Phrase 'am hā'āreṣ in the Hebrew Bible," *JBL* 130 (2011), 109–25, 125.

[54] As Rom-Shiloni points out, Ezra (and Nehemiah) is not the only literature that narrates an "adversarial" relationship between YHWH-worshipping communities in post-exilic Judah. For examples, see Ezek 11:15–21; 33:23–29; Isa 6:11–13. Dalit Rom-Shiloni, "From Ezekiel to Ezra-Nehemiah: Shifts of Group Identities within Babylonian Exilic

heritage implies insincerity in their YHWH worship. In that sense, they were in some ways considered inferior or not genuine. Beyond such implications there are no details to aid readers in identifying the *people of the land* in Ezra 4:1–5. The only absolute identification in the text is that they are non-*golah* people.

On the other hand, Fried reasons that the *people of the land* in Ezra 4:4 are the Persian satraps because they were able to bribe the Persian officials to disrupt the building work of the *golah* community.[55] She further argues that the "other" in 4:1–5 (described as the "adversaries of Judah and Benjamin" in 4:1 and the *people of the land* in 4:4) and the "other" people in 4:6–10 (the named officials who wrote accusations against the *golah* to the Persian kings) are all the same. That is, they are the Persian satraps who have access and power to write accusation letters to Persian royalty against the *golah*.[56] In response to Fried, from the context and the use of rather vague and unclarified terms for "other" people in the book of Ezra, it is difficult to say whether the phrase the *people of the land* (4:4) could be specifically identified. Also, while the *people of the land* in 4:4 and the "other" people later in Ezra 4 (4:6–24) would certainly belong to a broad group of "other" non-*golah* people, even across an era, these groups cannot be equated since Ezra 4:1–5 and 4:6–24 narrate different projects in different time periods: that of the temple in Cyrus's era; and that of the city and wall in the Artaxerxes's era, respectively. Furthermore, it is unclear what kind of bribery, monetary or otherwise, was involved or what the officials actually did to trouble the building work of the *golah*.[57] At best, the *people of the land* comprises a broad group encompassing any or all non-*golah* people, who are not part of the *golah* group and in fact are obstructing the work of the *golah*.

People of the Land in the Larger Hebrew Bible

In the larger context of the Hebrew Bible, over the history of interpretation, the term *people of the land* has generally been understood in two main trajectories. One is to take it as a technical term meant to represent a small, land-owning group of people,

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Ideology," in Oded Lipschits et al. (eds.), *Judah and the Judeans in the Achaemenid Period: Negotiating Identity in an International Context* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 127–51, 129.

Similarly, Japhet also identifies three Yahwistic communities in the land of Israel: the community of "returned exiles" that settled in Judah and Jerusalem (Ezra 2:1; 3:8; 6:21; etc.); another group that comprises the inhabitants of Judah who were not exiled and who remained in the land; and a third group of the Israelite habitants of northern Israel who remained in Samaria and Galilee after the Assyrian conquest. She also highlights two more communities outside the land of Israel: the community of Judean exiles which settled in Babylonia and later in Persia; and the community of Judeans in Egypt. Sara Japhet, *From the Rivers of Babylon to the Highlands of Judah: Collected Studies on the Restoration Period* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 97–100.

[55] Fried, "The 'am Hā'āreṣ in Ezra 4:4," 130.

[56] Fried, *Ezra*, 197.

[57] Thames, "A New Discussion," 117.

who are influential both politically and economically in the soci-ety.[58] The other is to interpret the phrase literally, as referring to ordinary people, the populace in general. It has also been under-stood to have different meanings in different time periods: for example, in the pre-exilic era it would refer to the class of free, land-owning citizens; but in the postexilic era such a technical definition of the term would no longer hold and would refer to the common people, those who are ignorant of the duties and observances of their religion.[59] Given such diverse understand-ings of the term in scholarship, it calls for a brief re-examination of its appearances.

An examination of several of the appearances of the phrase throughout the Hebrew Bible indicates that the phrase does not necessarily carry one meaning in all cases. For instance, in some places, the phrase is used to refer to Israelites or Judeans as cultic people or a political group of people (2 Kgs 15:5; Lev 4:27; 20:2; Ezek 45:22). But in other occurrences, it is used to refer to for-eign peoples (Hittites in Gen 23:7; Egyptians in Exod 5:5; Ca-naanites in Num 14:9). Furthermore, while in some cases it seems to imply a leadership group, in many other occurrences, it could perhaps mean the populace of the land in general, whether Israelites or foreigners. In Lev 4:27 the phrase must refer to or-dinary people, since it occurs just after a listing of rulers and priests in 4:22–26. Leviticus 20:2 would also be referring to peo-ple in general, since it makes comparisons with aliens. Ezekiel 45:22 refers to the participants of Passover, which would include common people and not just cultic officials. Jeremiah 34:19 would also refer to general people, since it comes just after an account of Judah and Jerusalem's officials, eunuchs and priests, with whom the king makes a covenant. Genesis 42:6 would refer to all people to whom Joseph sold food, Egyptians and others.[60]

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[58] Thames traces the different interpretations of the phrase begin-ning in the early twentieth century. Traditionally, the phrase was under-stood as a technical term for a leadership group of some sort, such as: for representative government in ancient Israel; for "the landed gentry, the landowners, the landed aristocracy, the lords of the land, the repre-sentatives of the people"; or for a preeminent political or military group. Later, interpreters understood it not as a technical term but as a very general term, the meaning of which varied from context to con-text. Other interpreters argued that it could be used in several specific ways: to refer to the entirety of a particular people group; to designate a particular Judean political group; or to refer to a group that "com-prised the class of free, landowning, full citizens of preexilic Judah." In response to these interpretations, Thames argues that the phrase should be read as a literary expression for something very ordinary, an idiomatic expression for "everyone in a particular locality who is rele-vant to a particular set of circumstances, but with the deliberate intent to efface or obfuscate the exact actor(s)." Thames, "A New Discus-sion," 110–20.

[59] Richard J. Coggins, "Interpretation of Ezra 4:4," *JTS* 16 (1965), 124–27, 125.

[60] Fried argues that if Joseph was selling to all peoples in general he would have sold "only to the heads of the landed estates in Egypt."

Exodus 5:5 would refer to the Egyptians in general. In some of its appearances in Kings, also, it appears that the phrase could refer to general people/subjects.[61] For instance, in 2 Kgs 11:14 (cf. 2 Chr 23:13), chiefs or officials have already been listed, so it seems that the phrase could imply the general populace (cf. 2 Chr 23:20). 2 Kings 25:3, too, expresses that there is no food to eat for the *people of the land* because of severe famine, thus implying the general populace.

From the above observation it can be concluded that the phrase does not carry one single meaning throughout all its appearances. As Thames reasons, it seems that in Ezra 4:1–5 the phrase is employed such that "the author has no real interest in or other means of identifying the subject," and the author is more concerned to "emphasize an action rather than a subject" and finally "to provide a contrast between important and unimportant characters, or to express a general indifference to the subject."[62] The term *people of the land* is used in Ezra 4:4 primarily for the purpose of differentiating any or all non-*golah* people from the *golah* community, rather than for identifying any specific group/s. As Rom-Shiloni also contends, the actual identities of the "other" people are obscured and "the only characteristics they do explicitly possess (and possess *in common*) is their being 'of the land', and their portrayal as adversaries of העם ('the people'; Ezra 3:3), or 'the people of Judah', that is, the Repatriates (4:4)."[63] Furthermore, unlike the *golah* group who supposedly continues the Israelite cult by rebuilding the temple and by being the people of Judah, the "other" people exhibit discontinuity from the "correct" way of worship as well as from the land, as

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Fried, "The ʿam Hāʾāreṣ in Ezra 4:4," 126. She arrives at this conclusion from her discussion on how the "distributory role of the large estates in Egypt's economy" would have been on the heads of the landed estates. Lisbeth S. Fried, "Temple-Palace Relations in Egypt," in *The Priest and the Great King: Temple-Palace Relations in the Persian Empire* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2004), 49–107. While Fried is right that Joseph would not have been "selling grain to every man or woman on the street who wanted it," the essence of the phrase *people of the land* in Gen 42:6 is how Joseph provides food to "all the people of the land," that is, all peoples including his brothers who came from Canaan. Thus, it is difficult to limit the phrase *people of the land* as exclusively referring to a certain class of people.

[61] In the books of Kings, it mostly refers to the privileged few or to officials. For instance, in 2 Kgs 21:24 the *people of the land* who make Josiah king would be those who have some leadership role. Also, in 2 Kgs 23:30, when Josiah dies, the *people of the land* who made his son Jehoahaz king would be people with power or authority to do so. In 2 Kgs 15:5 the phrase is used to express a king's son (Jotham) ruling over the *people of the land* in place of his father (Azariah). The phrase could technically mean the ministers of the king who interact with him directly, although the possibility of it referring to the general populace cannot be completely ruled out.

[62] Thames, "A New Discussion," 125.

[63] Dalit Rom-Shiloni, *Exclusive Inclusivity: Identity Conflicts Between the Exiles and the People Who Remained (6ᵗʰ–5ᵗʰ Centuries)* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 41.

they apparently do not even belong to a single people group.[64] Thus, judging from the story of the text, one is left with no evidence for specific identification of the "other," and it is best to understand the "other" group—identified in this passage as the "adversaries of Judah and Benjamin" and the "people of the land"—as broadly referring to any non-*golah* people. The "other" people could be any group, such as those Israelites/Judeans who were not exiled and thus remained in the land, or non-Israelites/non-Jews who also lived in the land. With vague identifications and descriptions, the "other" could certainly include people from neighboring provinces. Whoever they might be, the antagonist "other" group is characterized and utilized in the narrative in order to benefit the protagonist *golah* group.

CONCLUSION

As the *golah* group re-settles back in Jerusalem and finishes laying the temple foundation, they begin to rebuild the temple. However, they soon face obstruction from "other" people, identified as their "adversaries" (Ezra 4:1), who propose to join them in their temple-building work. As the *golah* leaders decline the proposal, the "other" people, the *people of the land,* go on to thwart the building work and have it suspended until the reign of Darius (4:4–5). Given the "other" people's own self-description as having been brought to the land by the Assyrian king Esarhaddon, and as being the *people of the land* in contrast to the people of Judah, readers could understand the "others" as earlier YHWH-worshipping Israelites, as non-Israelites, or as a mixture of both. With unspecific descriptions, the "other" is understood best as encompassing any non-*golah* people. For the *golah* community, there are only two groups of people: the *golah* and the non-*golah.* The narrative is primarily interested in the protagonist *golah* group and not with the antagonist "other" who receive no meaningful identification. It can also be observed that the sparsely available evidence for identification and characterization of the *golah* as well as the "other" is concerned primarily with the cult, in the sense of worship and allegiance to YHWH. As such, the adversarial attitude and relationship between the *golah* and the "other" would also have been grounded on cultic difference, that is, on their worship and allegiance to YHWH.

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[64] Rom-Shiloni, *Exclusive Inclusivity*, 42.