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## VOLUME 7, ARTICLE 12

**GARY N. KNOPPERS, (ED.),  
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NEHEMIAH: IN CONVERSATION WITH JACOB  
WRIGHT'S *REBUILDING IDENTITY: THE NEHEMIAH  
MEMOIR AND ITS EARLIEST READERS* (BZAW, 348;  
BERLIN: DE GRUYTER, 2004)**

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## INTRODUCTION

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It is a real pleasure, as a guest editor of the *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures*, to introduce the following series of reviews of Dr. Jacob L. Wright's recently published book, *Rebuilding Identity: The Nehemiah Memoir and its Earliest Readers* (BZAW, 348; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2004). Dr. Wright is an assistant professor of Hebrew Bible at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia. A special session of the Chronicles-Ezra-Nehemiah section was held at the national meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature in November 2006 (Washington, DC) to honor, discuss, and evaluate Jacob's monograph, a revised and updated version of his dissertation at the University of Göttingen (written under the direction of Professor Reinhard G. Kratz). The same special session at the 2006 Society of Biblical Literature meeting also featured a series of collegial reviews of Melody D. Knowles' *Centrality Practiced: Jerusalem in the Religious Practices of Yehud and the Diaspora in the Persian Period* (Archaeology and Biblical Studies 16; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006). The reviews of this work (and Professor Knowles' response) were published in a recent issue of the *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* (vol. 7, 2007).

Readers are encouraged to read both sets of reviews not only because both books deal with Ezra-Nehemiah, but also because the scholarly discussions about these books provide a useful introduction to current debates about the application of various forms of literary and historical criticism to the biblical text. In the case of Wright's book, its focus is on the compositional history of the Nehemiah memoir. In examining this complicated issue, Wright also deals with the composition of other parts of Ezra-Nehemiah. Hence, his book contains many observations about the ways in which different sections of the biblical book may relate (or fail to do so) to each other. In the discussion of Wright's views, some of the contributors (and Wright, as well) revisit the relationship of the composition of Ezra-Nehemiah to that of the Apocryphal (or Deutero-canonical) book of First Esdras (Esdras  $\alpha$ ).

I wish to extend my thanks both to Professor Tamara Eskenazi of the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion (Los Angeles) for suggesting this special session and to the chair of the Chronicles-Ezra-Nehemiah section of the Society of Biblical Literature, Professor Christine Mitchell of St. Andrew's College (Saskatoon, Saskatchewan) for all of her diligent work in helping to organize this special symposium. Special thanks also go to each of the reviewers: Ms. Deirdre N.

Fulton, a graduate student at Penn State University (University Park, PA); Professor David M. Carr of Union Theological Seminary (New York); and Professor Ralph W. Klein of the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago for their willingness to revise and publish their detailed reviews in the *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures*. Finally, I would like to thank Professor Jacob Wright for his informative and extensive response to the reviewers' comments.

Readers should be aware that the following reviews and authorial response were originally given in an oral setting. As a guest editor, I asked the reviewers to revise their works for publication, but I did not ask them to convert their works into formal articles with extensive documentation, footnotes, and so forth. This means that the responses still retain some of the stylistic characteristics of reviews delivered in an originally oral setting. To be sure, reviewers were allowed to add any footnotes that they deemed helpful for readers to understand the context, force, and setting of their evaluations, but the decision whether to do so was left to the discretion of the individual participants.

In closing, it is appropriate to express our many thanks to the editor of the *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures*, Professor Ehud Ben Zvi of the University of Alberta (Edmonton) for his willingness to create a productive context for pursuing cross-disciplinary conversations among scholars by publishing this collection of reviews, as well as the response to those reviews by Professor Wright. In this context, it is also fitting to express a special word of thanks to the family of Terry Butler. He handled many of the electronic logistics for the *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* over the course of the past decade. He was instrumental in ensuring that the rise of the *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* went as smoothly as possible. His fine work served the interests of many contributors, who were much less proficient in internet publishing than he was. His wonderful work on behalf of the *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* is much appreciated and his untimely death is much to be mourned. This collection of essays is dedicated to his good memory.

## A RESPONSE: IN SEARCH OF NEHEMIAH'S REFORM(S)

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The composition of Ezra-Nehemiah has become a significant area of research within biblical studies in recent years. Jacob Wright's monograph, *Rebuilding Identity: The Nehemiah-Memoir and its Earliest Readers*, is a noteworthy contribution to the ongoing debate regarding the composition of both Ezra and Nehemiah. His work employs literary and source-critical models for the purpose of understanding the process of the construction of Nehemiah. In this review, I will address the methodological framework underlying Wright's study and outline his reconstruction of the composition of the book of Nehemiah.<sup>1</sup> I will also make some comments on the textual criticism of Ezra-Nehemiah and how the discipline of textual criticism may intersect with the disciplines of source criticism and redaction criticism as practiced by Wright in his recent book.

Wright's detailed examination of Nehemiah develops out of two areas of study: earlier source-critical models for considering the chronological sequence of the composition of the work and literary-critical models for considering the final form of the book. Wright acknowledges the methodological contributions of earlier scholars, such as W. Zimmerli and O. H. Steck<sup>2</sup> to his study of Ezra-Nehemiah (p. 4). His work also follows on the heels of the studies undertaken by his *Doktorvater*, Reinhard Kratz, most notably Kratz's important work, *The Composition of the Narrative of the Old Testament*,<sup>3</sup> which examines the compositional history of Ezra-Nehemiah, as well as those of several other individual historical books found within the Hebrew Bible. Wright begins by examining the need for a literary-critical analysis of the material in question and proceeds to focus on a source-critical and redaction-critical analysis of Nehemiah 1-13. In his study, Wright proposes to

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Gary Knoppers, Tamara Eskenazi, and Christine Mitchell for inviting me to participate in the Chronicles-Ezra-Nehemiah session at the 2006 Society of Biblical Literature.

<sup>2</sup> See W. Zimmerli, *Ezekiel: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel* (2 vols.; Hermeneia. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979, 1983); O. H. Steck, *Exegese des Alten Testaments: Leitfaden der Methodik—ein Arbeitsbuch für Proseminare, Seminare und Vorlesungen* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1989).

<sup>3</sup> R. G. Kratz, *The Composition of the Narrative of the Old Testament* (London: T & T Clark, 2005), which is John Bowden's translation of R. G. Kratz, *Die Komposition der erzählenden Bücher des Alten Testaments: Grundwissen der Bibelkritik*. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000).

establish several successive layers in the development of the Nehemiah memoir. Reminiscent of the model of excavating various layers of an archaeological tell, Wright uses archaeological terminology to excavate the history of the text and present his source-critical findings to modern readers. His goal is to uncover and explain the various strata that may be discerned in the complex growth of the biblical text. He concludes that the creation of the Nehemiah memoir was a “process (a *creatio continua*), rather than a static entity consisting of sources that have been shaped and molded according to the providential plan of one (or two) editor(s). The literary process in Ezra-Neh was initiated by the composition of Nehemiah’s report and continued by generations of active readers” (p. 330).

In some older models of source criticism, the book of Nehemiah was thought to contain many different sources that were strung together, placed in sequence, and eventually edited by one or more writers/redactors. In Wright’s investigation, the source-critical history of Nehemiah is a much more complicated process. Individual layers in the history of the composition of the book themselves became sources that subsequent writers (re)interpreted and (re)edited. Moreover, such later writers added their own material to the layers of material contributed by earlier writers. Each of these writers addressed the issue of identity by focusing on a certain issue, such as the rebuilding of Jerusalem’s wall, the rebuilding of the temple, overcoming local opposition, the restoration of Judah, and so on. Hence, Wright argues that through several intentional additions to the Nehemiah memoir, the text developed and grew substantially over a long period of time. The literary process of composition, interpretation, and redaction, reinterpretation, re-editing, and further composition began in the Persian period and continued well into the Hellenistic period.

Wright’s book is divided into four sections:

- I. In Susa (pp. 7-66);
- II. From Susa to Jerusalem (pp. 67-188);
- III. Additional Reforms during the Work on the Wall (pp. 189-269);
- IV. The Dedication of the Wall and the Formation of a New Climax (pp. 271-339).

Within these four sections, Wright lays out the themes found in Nehemiah and examines individual texts, placing them into both the topical context and the chronological sequence in which they were composed. To assist the reader in understanding his argument, Wright provides a summary chart that outlines his proposed seven major layers of the composition of Nehemiah. In his source-critical and compositional analysis, Wright envisions three significant redactional periods. Although this summary is helpful for understanding how Wright envisions the composition of Nehemiah, it should be noted that throughout the book Wright presents a more complex process of the composition of Nehemiah than his final summary details. That is, there are additions to layers, as well as several texts that by Wright’s own admission do not fit neatly within the several strata that he reconstructs.

In the course of his study, Wright attempts to piece together the various intentions that motivated the additions to the original composition of Nehemiah (reflected in the first stratum). The first

compositional layer of Nehemiah, which is fairly brief, begins with the first person account of Nehemiah's request to Artaxerxes and consists of Nehemiah's wall-building account found in several verses (and parts thereof) in chapters 1-2, as well as in 3:38, 6:15. Wright employs a form-critical analysis, when examining the contours of the original building report. The work done investigating the contours of this original building report is perhaps the most substantive form-critical analysis found in the monograph.

Wright's second stratum is combined with the first-person account from stratum 1, as well as with new material comprising the register of builders. His second stratum ties together the record of builders present in 3:1-32 and other minor additions added to chapter 2. With the addition of this pro-Priestly material, the focus of rebuilding shifts away from the walls, which was the concern of the original Nehemiah material, and turns to the temple. In Wright's third stage of composition, other texts are added to assert "the positive implications of the building project by way of the negative reactions of the enemy; characterized by the use of the שמע-*שמע*-formula" (p. 340). This material may be found in several scattered verses, particularly in chapters 2-6.

In stratum 4, specific texts found in chapters 2, 5, and 6 refer to Nehemiah as governor. These materials were inserted into the story to depict Nehemiah as the great builder of Jerusalem. The writer of this stage in the growth of the Nehemiah memoir employed the motif of the "relentless builder," for which Wright finds extra-biblical parallels in several building inscriptions in the ancient Near East (e.g., Assyrian texts and Neo-Babylonian texts involving Nebuchadnezzar I and Nabonidus) that reflect similar themes (p. 137). With the addition of Nehemiah 5, the attention of the memoir shifts away from simply being a building report to being a report on Judah's restoration. Hence, in stratum 5 one finds that the Nehemiah memoir has been augmented yet again. The focus is now on "extramural reforms," characterized by the use of the זכרה *זכרה* prayers. In this phase, Wright argues that the account stops focusing on building and turns into a story of the restoration of Yehud.

Stratum 6 of Wright's proposed reconstruction contains additions that relate to the (re)population and dedication of the city. Incidentally, these texts presuppose, in the author's reconstruction, the addition of Ezra 1-6 to the expanded text. Finally, Wright completes his analysis of the primary layers of Nehemiah with his final (seventh) stratum, which draws attention to the struggle between the temple and the Torah (p. 340). In reconstructing each of these layers, Wright considers evidence from the book of Ezra and whether material in Ezra comes before, simultaneous with, or after layers in Nehemiah. Such cross-references to the composition of Ezra aid the reader in clarifying how Wright views the overall compositional process leading to the emergence of the entire Ezra-Nehemiah corpus.

*Rebuilding Identity* is a carefully-written and meticulous study. Wright carefully surveys where each text should be placed, paying close attention to patterns, parallels, and specific phrases in order to organize the material into a larger coherent model, which reflects his analysis of the composition of Nehemiah. There are, however, certain passages

that do not align with Wright's broad interpretation of the context of Ezra-Nehemiah. Consequently, these verses do not appear to be included in any of his seven primary layers. For example, the reader is left wondering where he places large sections of material, such as Neh 11:4-25, within his greater literary scheme. Wright notes that the composition(s) of the lists in 11:3-12:26, in particular, are difficult to place in a chronological context, but he does argue that 12:1-26 was inserted into stratum 7.

This brings up the larger issue of textual criticism and how text-critical analysis may or may not relate to source-critical and redaction-critical methods. Since there are clear discrepancies present in the LXX and MT versions of Neh 11:12-12:9, it would be helpful to address these textual discrepancies and examine how they fit (or do not fit) into Wright's broader reconstruction. Additionally, a text-critical analysis of Neh 3:34-37, found in Wright's stratum 3, might also benefit his overall study. This stratum consists of several insertions that present a positive picture of Nehemiah's building project (including 3:34-37). Wright comments that 3:34-37b is particularly problematic, because it contains material with different agendas. In 3:34a, Sanballat, "spoke before his brethren and the host of Samaria," but in 3:37b the (MT) text states, "they provoked you to anger in the presence of the builders" and thus provides a competing context for Sanballat's antagonistic behavior (p. 117). Wright believes that verse 34a is a later gloss. It is important to note, however, that verse 37b is not present in the LXX, thereby bringing to the fore the question of his conclusion that verse 37b is older than verse 34a.

In one context, Wright does acknowledge that there is MT material lacking in the LXX. He observes that 3:38 is not present in the LXX, but adds that this is because of inter-textual discrepancies. The LXX translator does not "transmit 3:38," because of the "confusion created by the composition of 4:1-6:14" (p. 122). If Wright's idea that the LXX writer omitted material in order to avoid contradictions, then perhaps he would also see a similar factor at work in why (MT) 3:37b does not appear in the LXX.<sup>4</sup>

In addressing differences among the various witnesses to the biblical text, it should be noted that most text-critical differences between the MT and the LXX arise from accidents in the transmission of the text, such as haplography, parablepsis, dittography, transposition (metathesis), and so on.<sup>5</sup> This is not to rule out the possibility of a tendentious addition here and there in either the tradition represented by MT or the tradition represented by the LXX. Tendentious omissions are, however, relatively rare. My point is that an analysis of the text-critical issues that are present in LXX and MT Nehemiah would help elucidate (and perhaps complicate) certain aspects of Wright's proposal for a long history in the composition of Nehemiah. Traditionally, textual criticism has been seen as foundational to other kinds of literary

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<sup>4</sup> One of his comments on the text in question on p. 117 (n. 86) points in this direction.

<sup>5</sup> E. Tov, *The Text-critical Use of the Septuagint in Biblical Research* (Jerusalem Biblical Studies, 3; Jerusalem: Simor, 1981) and idem, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* (2nd rev. ed. Assen: Van Gorcum, 2001).



criticism (source criticism, redaction criticism, historical criticism, form criticism, etc.). The establishment of a text (earliest and best) from several different witnesses is pivotal to analyzing the literary-critical dimensions of such a text. In some cases (e.g., MT Jeremiah, LXX Jeremiah, 4QJer<sup>a</sup> and 4QJer<sup>b</sup>), textual criticism proves also to be of enormous help in reconstructing the redactional history of a given biblical book. Thus, such a meticulous and systematic treatment of the literary-critical issues, as Wright has provided readers, would benefit by including a discussion of the text-critical differences between the LXX and the MT.

There is another way in which text-critical issues may come into play in discussing the source criticism and redaction criticism of Ezra-Nehemiah. Wright sees the compositional process of the Nehemiah memoir as extending well into the Hellenistic epoch. This raises the question of how the compositional history of Ezra-Nehemiah may relate to the translation of this work (or, at least, parts thereof) into two different works in the Septuagint (Esdras A [a.k.a. 1 Esdras] and Esdras B [a.k.a. LXX Ezra-Nehemiah]). Given some of the proposed dates, for example, the second century B.C.E. dating of Nehemiah 12:1-26 (p. 314), the reader is left to wonder how such proposals mesh with the evidence for the range of dates traditionally assigned to the LXX translations of Ezra-Nehemiah? Since Wright dates much of the overall composition of Nehemiah to the Hellenistic period, it would be beneficial to see a more thorough discussion of how the proposed dates for the composition of the several layers in the text represented by MT Nehemiah relate to the translations of LXX Ezra-Nehemiah (Esdras B) and 1 Esdras (Esdras A).

In the work of past biblical scholars, the composition of LXX Ezra-Nehemiah and 1 Esdras have been much debated. Some commentators, such as Batten,<sup>6</sup> date the translation of Ezra-Nehemiah to the Hellenistic period. Batten also contends that the *Vorlage* of 1 Esdras actually represents the earlier of the two texts.<sup>7</sup> In his commentary, Myers also argues at length for the importance of the witness of 1 Esdras (which he dates to some time in the second century B.C.E.), but with more caution than did Batten before him.<sup>8</sup> Recently, this general view has been revisited at length by Böhler not only with respect to the dates of the two LXX translations, but also with respect to the relevance of 1 Esdras for understanding the compositional history of Ezra-Nehemiah.<sup>9</sup>

There are, of course, other opinions. Blenkinsopp takes a different approach.<sup>10</sup> He contends that the two LXX versions are independent from one another and dates 1 Esdras to the late 2<sup>nd</sup>-1<sup>st</sup> centuries B.C.E.<sup>11</sup> In contrast to Böhler, Talshir maintains that 1 Esdras is a

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<sup>6</sup> L. W. Batten, *The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah* (ICC, 12; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1913).

<sup>7</sup> See Batten, *Books of Ezra and Nehemiah*, pp. 6-14.

<sup>8</sup> J. M. Myers, *I & II Esdras* (AB, 42; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1974), pp. 5-16.

<sup>9</sup> D. Böhler, *Heilige Stadt*.

<sup>10</sup> J. Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1988).

<sup>11</sup> Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, p. 70.

compilation based on the Hebrew text underlying the MT of Chronicles-Ezra-Nehemiah. Nevertheless, she thinks that the text was translated in the late-third or early second century B.C.E.<sup>12</sup>

Clearly Wright does not have to resolve all of these issues. But it would be helpful if he discussed them and situated his own proposal in the context of the longstanding debate about the dates and purposes of the two LXX translations. In one short excursus in his book (pp. 322-24), Wright does discuss the work of Böhler on 1 Esdras. Wright contends (in contradistinction to Böhler) that the scattered references found in 1 Esdras (but not in Ezra) to the rebuilding of Jerusalem are all deliberate additions made by the author of 1 Esdras to compensate for the fact that he has not included most of the Nehemiah material within his own work. This is a creative proposal, but it is largely asserted and not argued. It needs to be demonstrated on a case-by-case basis with reference to each of the texts in question. Moreover, does Wright think that 1 Esdras was authored as a Greek composition or does he think that there was a Hebrew/Aramaic *Vorlage* that was subsequently translated into Greek? Again, the answer to this question may bear on the larger issue of dating the final stages in the composition of the Nehemiah memoir well into the Hellenistic period. Since the compositional process of the last stages in the Hebrew (MT) text may be intimately connected to the dates one might attribute to the formation of the 1 Esdras translation of the LXX, it would be useful for Wright to provide a detailed discussion outlining his position on these important issues.

*Rebuilding Identity* is an admirable and noteworthy contribution to the field of source and redaction-critical studies, making the reader more acutely aware of the complexity of the development of the text of Nehemiah. Wright's work is especially helpful in drawing attention to seams within the larger work. By pointing out areas where there are discrepancies in flow and content, he helps illuminate the compositional, albeit complex, history of Nehemiah. His seven-strata model of the Nehemiah memoir offers one approach to explaining these tensions. Wright's argument that "rebuilding identity" took place "through active reading," is clearly outlined in his book (p. 339). Consequently, his study allows the modern scholar to be an active reader of Wright's own work. Even if the reader disagrees with Wright's highly-complicated redactional reconstruction, there is much that can be learned from his individual exegetical observations. This commendable study calls attention to the ongoing debate about the composition of Ezra-Nehemiah which, as Wright persuasively argues, was more of a complex process than was previously recognized.

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<sup>12</sup> Z. Talshir, *I Esdras*, p. 261.

## A RESPONSE

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I was asked to reflect on Wright's attempt in this book to move from a source/compiler model for the growth of texts, which is often presupposed in earlier research, to an emphasis upon the gradual process of the book's formation - what he calls "*creatio continua*." The essay that follows starts with general comments about Wright's *Rebuilding Identity* and then focuses on a comparison and contrast of Wright's approach to textual growth on the one hand and that advocated most recently by Dieter Böhler on the other.

From the start, Wright's *Rebuilding Identity* shows a remarkable combination of intense diachronic interest with an obvious feel for the shape and movement of texts. For example, in chapter 1 Wright puts together a multi-dimensional argument that the prayer in Neh 1:5-11 postdates the description of continuous praying in Neh 1:4. Not only does this argument include various observations about the verses in Nehemiah itself, but a good brief survey of cases where we have manuscript documentation of prayers being added to earlier versions.<sup>13</sup> Yet in the same chapter Wright sensitively discusses how the chiasmatically structured prayer in Neh 1:5-11, "consciously reinterprets both its immediate context and the book as a whole in new theological categories."<sup>14</sup> Though the prayer, according to Wright, is based on Solomon's temple dedication prayer in 1 Kings 8, it downplays the temple and uplifts the commands of the Torah, much like later chapters in Nehemiah 9-10 with which this prayer at the outset of Nehemiah is linked.

There are other examples of how Wright joins a focus on the diachronic with focus on the synchronic. In chapter two he devotes attention both a) to how the quoted Aramaic letters in Ezra 4 are later additions to the story and b) how their addition was made to accentuate anti-foreign and other themes implicit in the first chapters of Nehemiah.<sup>15</sup> Or, to take just one more general example: chapter 7 of the book begins with a beautiful synchronic survey on the "unity" of Nehemiah 1, before Wright analyzes it into at least five layers and a series of glosses.<sup>16</sup>

Clearly, Wright has moved far beyond a stage in scholarship that once was prevalent, in which one either thought a Biblical passage to be an artful whole or one thought that it was formed over time by clumsy redactors. For Wright, the Ezra-Nehemiah corpus was shaped gradually over time by artful narrators, authors who reshaped what came before them through careful additions to the preceding material and the

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<sup>13</sup> Jacob Wright, *Rebuilding Identity: The Nehemiah Memoir and Its Earliest Readers* (BZAW, 348; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2004), pp. 10-14.

<sup>14</sup> Wright, *Rebuilding Identity*, pp. 14.

<sup>15</sup> Wright, *Rebuilding Identity*, pp. 35-43.

<sup>16</sup> Wright, *Rebuilding Identity*, pp. 129-30.

creation of major new sections that set older material in a new context. The books of Ezra-Nehemiah as a whole are the product of the addition of at least six layers of material, culminating in the extension *backward* of a multi-layered Nehemiah narrative with successive portions of the Ezra chapters that progressively privileged the temple and priestly leadership of Ezra over the wall and lay leadership of Nehemiah.

This, needless to say, is a big idea, one that contrasts sharply with many other construals of the growth of the Ezra-Nehemiah tradition. The majority of past reconstructions have posited a fundamental duality at the outset of the Ezra-Nehemiah tradition: an originally separate Ezra tradition of some kind alongside an originally separate Nehemiah memoir. Already in 1783 Michaelis had concluded on the basis of the lack of overlap of Ezra and Nehemiah that two histories – one about Ezra and one about Nehemiah – had been combined in the book. This approach, in far more refined form, is the one advocated in two other major publications of recent years on Ezra-Nehemiah, Böhler's *Die heilige Stadt* (1997) and Pakkala's *Ezra the Scribe* (2004) along with a more recent article published in 2006.<sup>17</sup> And it is this kind of separate source model that Wright is offering an alternative to in *Rebuilding Identity* (2004).

At this point it is instructive to look at the major points of this older approach that Wright seeks to replace. Probably the most comprehensive recent presentation of this approach is Dieter Böhler's 1997 book, *Die Heilige Stadt*. Though it promotes a version of an older hypothesis, this book is distinguished in the extent to which it uses text-critical evidence from the Esdras  $\alpha$  tradition to support Michaelis's older two-source theory.<sup>18</sup> On the basis of a survey of major variants between Esdras  $\alpha$  and the MT Ezra tradition, Böhler argues that the version of the Ezra tradition found in the MT has been systematically revised to prepare for the account of Nehemiah rebuilding Jerusalem and its wall in Nehemiah 1-7 and his resolution of the divorce problem in Nehemiah 9-13.

"In the beginning," so Böhler, was a Hebrew Ezra tradition much like the *Vorlage* of Esdras  $\alpha$  minus the secondary addition of the story of the three bodyguards seen in Esdras  $\alpha$  3:1-5:6, an addition which Böhler maintains is secondary to 1 Esdras and the Hebrew tradition it reflects. This early Hebrew *Vorlage* to the Esdras  $\alpha$  tradition speaks not just of Jerusalem as a place, but specifically of the rebuilding of Zion, the temple forecourt, city gates, marketplaces, etc. Böhler shows that these references to a built Jerusalem before Nehemiah are missing in the MT

<sup>17</sup> Dieter Böhler, *Die Heilige Stadt in Esdras  $\alpha$  und Ezra-Nehemia: Zwei Konzeptionen der Wiederherstellung Israels* (OBO, 158; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1997); Juha Pakkala, *Ezra the Scribe: The Development of Ezra 7–10 and Nehemiah 8* (BZAW, 347; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2004); idem, "The Original Independence of the Ezra Story in Ezra 7–10 and Nehemiah 8," *BN* 129 (2006), pp. 17–24.

<sup>18</sup> Here I will not attempt to cite specific pages for the overview of Böhler. His position can be found first and foremost in Böhler, *Heilige Stadt*. An English language summary is published as "On the Relationship Between Textual and Literary Criticism: The Two Recensions of the Book of Ezra: Ezra-Neh (MT) and 1 Esdras (LXX)," in *The Earliest Text of the Hebrew Bible* (ed. Adrian Schenker; SBLSCS, 52; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), pp. 35–50.

version of Ezra. Instead, there are only general mentions of Jerusalem as a place, thus leaving space in the narrative for Nehemiah to oversee the rebuilding in Jerusalem. So also, where the Esdras  $\alpha$  tradition has Ezra as the one, who effects divorces of foreign women, the same reference in MT Ezra is obscured and Nehemiah becomes the one who leads the community in divorcing foreign women.

Overall, so Böhler, the conflator of the Ezra and Nehemiah tradition revised an early, separate form of the Ezra tradition so that there was room for Nehemiah's city-building work. He even moved the correspondence with Artaxerxes from the outset of this early Ezra tradition – where it temporarily halted the Temple rebuilding before Zerubbabel's return – so that it was relocated *after* the return of Zerubbabel. This Artaxerxes correspondence is the main instance in the Ezra-Esdras tradition to speak of a halt to city construction. Through relocating this episode later in the Ezra tradition, the author of Ezra-Nehemiah could explain why the city was not rebuilt until the time of Nehemiah.

Nevertheless, Böhler argues that this relocation of the Artaxerxes correspondence in Ezra-Nehemiah created certain problems. In the Esdras  $\alpha$  tradition, the roles of Sheshbazzar and Zerubbabel in temple building are distinct, and the focus on city rebuilding in the Artaxerxes correspondence is *but a pretext* for the stoppage of temple rebuilding. This is made clear in the notice that follows the correspondence, in which the effect of the correspondence is the ending of the rebuilding of the *temple*, not the city as one would expect from the correspondence (1 Esdras 2:26 [ET 2:30]; Ezra 4:24). Overall, the sequence of Esdras  $\alpha$  starts with Sheshbazzar's return under Cyrus with temple implements, and it is Sheshbazzar who starts rebuilding the temple foundations as per Cyrus's order. The opponents of this rebuilding deviously enlist Artaxerxes' support in stopping the *temple* rebuilding through a letter framing it as an issue of *city* rebuilding (1 Esdras 2:12-26 [ET 2:16-30]). Soon Zerubbabel returns (1 Esdras 5:7), resumes the work of laying the temple foundation (1 Esdras 5:57), and completes the temple rebuilding, eventually overcoming the objections of opponents (1 Esdras 5:66-71 [ET 5:66-73]) through the prophetic help of Haggai and Zechariah and the political help of a decree from Darius (1 Esdras 6:1-7:4). Toward the end of the narrative, the support of all three Persian kings for temple rebuilding is noted (1 Esdras 7:4//6:14), including even Artaxerxes who had only been tricked into delaying the temple rebuilding through a ruse focused on city rebuilding.

In MT Ezra, Sheshbazzar and Zerubbabel's once distinct roles are fused, Zerubbabel's career now spans the time from Cyrus to Darius, and the Artaxerxes correspondence is only partially adapted to serve a new purpose of halting city rebuilding until the time of Nehemiah. Sheshbazzar returns with temple implements, then Zerubbabel returns and builds the altar only to have his building of the temple interrupted by the correspondence with Artaxerxes. Ultimately, in MT Ezra the Artaxerxes correspondence only stops the city building (once just the pretext for stopping temple building), since Darius's edict allows Zerubbabel to complete the temple. Nevertheless, despite this reinterpretation, the MT Ezra tradition preserves the older conclusion to the Artaxerxes correspondence that focuses exclusively on the end of *temple* not *city* rebuilding (Ezra 4:24; cf. 1 Esdras 2:30). It preserves the older

summary which depicts Artaxerxes not as an actual opponent of temple rebuilding (so 6:14), but as one of its supporters (7:4). And it transforms what once was a precise retrospective summary of two phases of opposition to temple rebuilding (5:69-70 [ET 5:72-73]). In Ezra 4:4-5 this retrospective blurs into a more general account of opposition to such rebuilding, both summarizing the just-narrated opposition to Zerubbabel's rebuilding (Ezra 4:4) and looking ahead to an as-yet-unnarrated account of use of Persian power to hinder rebuilding (Ezra 4:5). Thus the redactor who rearranged these and other texts modified them somewhat to fit their new contexts, eliminated elements of the Ezra tradition that prematurely anticipated the work of Nehemiah, and radically re-positioned a correspondence with Artaxerxes that used city construction as a pretext for opposing temple construction so that the correspondence now explains the end of city construction in actuality.

Such are some of Böhler's text-critically supported, text-internal arguments for the primacy of the Esdras  $\alpha$  version of the Ezra tradition. Since the time of Michaelis, scholars have added to these arguments some external considerations, particularly the apparent witness of book XI of Josephus's *Antiquities* (159-183) to separate forms of both the Ezra and Nehemiah traditions, a Nehemiah memoir and a separate Ezra tradition like 1 Esdras. To this, Böhler and some others would add the witness of Ben Sira's praise of the fathers, which fairly comprehensively reviews biblical figures, including Nehemiah (Ben Sira 49:13) but strikingly omits any mention of the major figure of Ezra. Though an argument from silence, this can be taken as an indication that Ben Sira had a form of the Nehemiah tradition which had not yet had the Ezra traditions added onto it.

According to Böhler, the redactor who conflated these traditions separated their conclusions from their beginning, first giving the bulk of the Ezra tradition, then the bulk of the Nehemiah memoir in Neh 1:1-7:5. Moreover, this redactor effected a substantial change in how the Torah reading of the Ezra tradition was conceived. In the older, independent Ezra tradition, the Torah reading in the separate Ezra tradition was immediately preceded by a list of those who divorced (Ezra 10:19-44//1 Esdras 9:17-36 [ET 9:16-36]) along with a notice that – once free of foreign wives – the priests and Levites settled in Jerusalem and environs while the others Israelites were in their settlements (1 Esdras 9:37a). This, so Böhler, was part of a broader pattern in 1 Esdras where the returnees separate from foreigners, a list is given of those separating – and then the temple and Torah are instituted. Böhler argues that the conflator of the Ezra and Nehemiah traditions kept the list of divorcees that once stood right before the Torah reading but eliminated the settlement notice at the end of the divorce list, added the bulk of the Nehemiah memoir (Neh 1:1-7:5) and then added the list of returnees taken from Ezra 2 (/1 Esdras 5:7-45; now in Neh 7:6-71 [ET 7:6-7:72]). Only at this point did the redactor include a settlement notice, now one parallel to the one that concluded the Ezra 2 list (Neh 7:72 [ET 7:73a]). As a result, in this newly created Ezra-Nehemiah corpus, both the temple building and the Torah reading are preceded by a highly similar block of materials: list of returnees, settlement and gathering in the seventh month. This repositioned climax to the old Ezra tradition, this Torah reading after city rebuilding, now sets the stage for

a swathe of new, special redactional material about *Sukkot* and Nehemiah's confession in the rest of Nehemiah 9 and 10, along with Nehemiah's reforms in Nehemiah 11-13. This new redactional material is distinguished from the older Ezra and Nehemiah material by its more intense focus on Torah obedience, its hostility toward foreign rulers, and its argument that the concrete political protection from foreigners provided by Nehemiah's measures was essential to Torah obedience.

As one might expect, Böhler's arguments have not been accepted by all, though he receives guarded approval in Grätz's recent monograph on Artaxerxes edict and an inceptive acceptance by Jacob Wright that I will discuss in a moment.<sup>19</sup> The most vigorous challenge to Böhler's approach so far is undoubtedly Zippora Talshir's article-length review of his book in *Biblica*, in which she maintains, following another older thesis (Trendelenburg in 1795), that the distinctive features of the 1 Esdras tradition are mostly explained by understanding the work as an adaptation of traditions from the Chronistic History so that they can frame the large interpolation of the story of the three bodyguards.<sup>20</sup> Thus, Talshir sees no evidence that the conclusion of the Artaxerxes correspondence in Ezra 4:24 (//1 Esdras 2:26 [ET 2:30]) is a subtle note about how temple building stopped as a result of a correspondence with Artaxerxes focused on the city. Rather the focus on the temple in this verse comes from the fact that it rounds out the story of the correspondence with Artaxerxes with a resumptive repetition of the summary of opposition to temple building in Ezra 4:4-5. If Böhler's acceptance of the 1 Esdras sequence is correct, why, she asks, would Artaxerxes be able to interrupt the *first steps* of a rebuilding process that started almost a century earlier by Sheshbazzar under Cyrus. Finally, in addition to some issues with Böhler's positive assessment of certain variants in 1 Esdras, Talshir takes the settlement notices in Neh 7:72 and 1 Esd 9:36 as decisive evidence that the author of 1 Esdras had a form of Ezra-Nehemiah before him. "What possible connection," she asks, "can there be between the priests, Levites and Israelites settling . . . and the separation from foreign wives?"<sup>21</sup> She suggests the Ezra-Nehemiah tradition was first and already had this list of returnees and settlement as a natural part of the conclusion to the Nehemiah rebuilding narrative. The incongruous link of the divorce list and the settlement found in 1 Esdras was created by the author of the early Esdras tradition. When this author eliminated the Nehemiah memoir and joined the Torah reading story in Nehemiah 8 to the end of the other Ezra traditions, the author accidentally added the end of Nehemiah 7 as well.

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<sup>19</sup> For Grätz, see Sebastian Grätz, *Das Edikt des Artaxerxes: Eine Untersuchung zum religionspolitischen und historischen Umfeld von Esra 7, 12–26* (BZAW, 337; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2004), pp. 5-34.

<sup>20</sup> Zippora Talshir, "Ezra-Nehemiah and First Esdras: Diagnosis of a Relationship Between Two Recensions," *Bib* 81 (2000), pp. 566-73. This direct response to Böhler builds on her extensive work she had earlier carried out on the textual history of 1 Esdras and Ezra-Nehemiah, in particular, in Z. Talshir, *1 Esdras: From Origin to Translation* (SBLSCS, 47; Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 1999).

<sup>21</sup> Talshir, "Diagnosis," p. 571.

Other critics have added other objections, such as Pakkala's note that 1 Esdras 9:55 (Neh 8:12) – "and they came together" – is a strange ending to an originally independent text.<sup>22</sup> Or there are Hanhart's arguments about how the book of 1 Esdras simplifies the chronological system preserved in Ezra-Nehemiah.<sup>23</sup> And there are various responses that could be made to these objections. But let me return now to Wright, both his response to Böhler's model and a comparison of their two methodologies.

In contrast to Grätz's tentative acceptance of Böhler's model and Pakkala and Talshir's rejection of it, Wright proposes a distinctively different course. He agrees with Böhler that many textual differences between 1 Esdras and Ezra-Nehemiah are on the level of comprehensive redaction, something confirmed, most recently by the way, by David Marcus's edition of Ezra-Nehemiah in the new BHQ -- Quinta edition.<sup>24</sup> Where Wright disagrees with Böhler is in what kind of redaction is testified to. As Wright puts it in a note toward the outset of his discussion, "The weightiest argument against Böhler's conclusions is that the development of Ezra-Neh[emiah] takes its point of departure from Nehemiah's account . . ."<sup>25</sup>

Throughout the rest of the book, Wright argues in various contexts for a dependence of the Ezra tradition on the Nehemiah tradition. The Artaxerxes correspondence in Ezra 4, so Wright, is an extension backward of the motif of "seeking and finding" seen already in earlier parts of the Ezra-Nehemiah tradition. This extension serves to accentuate the origins of hostility to rebuilding among *foreigners*.<sup>26</sup> Similarly, though even though the scholarly consensus and Wright's own sensitive analysis of Ezra 7-8 would suggest that this description of Persian sponsorship of Ezra would predate similar descriptions of Persian sponsorship in Nehemiah 2, Wright believes that the Nehemiah 2 version is earlier because of its lack of closer parallels with Ezra 7-8 and lack of mention of Ezra.<sup>27</sup> Wright presents a more complex view of dependence in the case of Ezra and Nehemiah's opposition to foreign marriage in Ezra 9-10 and Nehemiah 13:23-27. Whereas the echo of Deut 7:3b in Neh 13:23-25 predates an expanded version of this echo of Deut 7:3b in Ezra 9, the additions about Solomon in Neh 13:26-27 represent still later layers than that seen in Ezra 9.<sup>28</sup>

Finally, toward the conclusion of his book, Wright comes full circle back to Ezra 4. This time he argues that the report of opposition to temple building by "adversaries of Judah and Benjamin" in Ezra 4:1-5 postdates and provides a new context for the report of opposition to wall building by Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem in Neh 2:19-20, while

<sup>22</sup> Pakkala, *Ezra the Scribe*, 19.

<sup>23</sup> This is related particularly to the correspondence in 1 Esdras 2:15-25//Ezra 4:7-24, Robert Hanhart, *Text und Textgeschichte des 1. Esrabuches* (Mitteilungen des Septuaginta-Unternehmens, 12; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1974), p. 12.

<sup>24</sup> David Marcus, *Ezra and Nehemiah: Quinta Edition* (Biblica Hebraica Quinta, 20; Stuttgart: German Bible Society, 2006).

<sup>25</sup> Wright, *Rebuilding Identity*, p. 39, note 34.

<sup>26</sup> Wright, *Rebuilding Identity*, p. 39-43.

<sup>27</sup> Wright, *Rebuilding Identity*, 86-93.

<sup>28</sup> Wright, *Rebuilding Identity*, 243-57.



also drawing on other parts of Nehemiah that mention bribing of counselors (Neh 6:12-13) and frustrating plans (Neh 4:9). By this point Wright appears less concerned to establish direction of dependence. Instead, he builds a list of possible indicators of genetic relationship and then shows how the Ezra passage can be read as an adaptive inversion and recontextualization of its earlier counterparts in the Nehemiah tradition.<sup>29</sup>

This then leads to Wright's own inversion of Böhler's proposal. Where Böhler interprets many variants between 1 Esdras and Ezra-Nehemiah as evidence for a comprehensive revision of an early Esdras tradition through its conflation with the Nehemiah memoir, Wright interprets these variants as signs of a comprehensive redaction by the author of proto-Esdras to eliminate Nehemiah from the Ezra-Nehemiah tradition. He notes that Nehemiah appears to have had a certain currency in the early second century as reflected in Ben Sira and the larger Ezra-Nehemiah tradition, but points out that Nehemiah is a less prominent a figure in later periods. Indeed, he is almost totally eclipsed by Ezra in later Jewish and Christian interpretation. Wright sees signs of the beginning of this occlusion of Nehemiah in 2 Maccabees 1-2, in which Nehemiah's work is already being subsumed to the construction of the temple. He takes this as a parallel to a broader redactional process seen in the formation of the Ezra-Nehemiah tradition, in which the Nehemiah tradition is expanded backward through ever increasing emphasis on Torah and Temple in the Ezra materials, before Nehemiah is completely eliminated in the 1 Esdras version.

Thus in the writings of Böhler, Talshir, and Wright, we are dealing with fundamentally different conceptualizations of the growth of the Ezra tradition, with the differences based somewhat on the privileging of different evidence and somewhat on radically different interpretations of the same evidence. As mentioned, Böhler joins with many earlier scholars in seeing a fundamental duality at the outset of the Ezra-Nehemiah tradition, a duality attested to in the manuscript evidence for the books, the lack of overlap of the two figures, and in the apparent separation of traditions about Nehemiah and Ezra in Ben Sira and particularly Josephus. In contrast, Talshir sees many of the most important variants between 1 Esdras and Ezra-Nehemiah as being explained by the insertion of the story of the three guards into the Esdras tradition and a concomitant replacement of the figure of Nehemiah with the figure of Zerubbabel. Wright poses a fundamental unity at the outset of the Ezra-Nehemiah tradition: a unity starting with Nehemiah's autobiographical building account and a series of expansions of it, a unity eventually encompassing the expansion backward of the Nehemiah account through the addition of successive layers of the Ezra tradition, and a unity that eventually evolves, in certain contexts, toward a unitary focus on Ezra at the expense of Nehemiah.

I will not presume here to offer a final resolution, but I will make some points. First, much of Wright's argument depends on establishing both a genetic relationship between texts and a particular direction of dependence between them. At times, however, it seems he assumes what he is aiming to show. For example, the emphasis on archival

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<sup>29</sup> Wright, *Rebuilding Identity*, 322–24.

searching across different parts of the Ezra-Nehemiah tradition has been interpreted by others, such as Crüsemann, not as a sign of genetic dependence of parts of that tradition on each other, but as a sign of especially intensified emphasis on textual authority in the Persian period. Despite Wright's work both in this book and in an article soon to be published on this motif in Ezra-Nehemiah, I do not see clear evidence for a genetic relationship of Ezra 4 with the Nehemiah tradition. So also, though there are vague parallels between depiction of Persian sponsorship of Ezra and Nehemiah, I do not see the level of sustained verbal similarity that would establish genetic textual dependence between these texts either.

Perhaps the best case for a closer relationship between Ezra and Nehemiah texts has to do with the statements against foreign marriage in Ezra's confession (Ezra 9:12) and Nehemiah's report of purifying the priesthood (Neh 13:25). Nevertheless, it is striking to me that this one point where one sees a sustained verbatim parallel between Ezra and Nehemiah traditions is in the citation and similar adaptation of a *pre-existing* text, Deut 7:3. Indeed, if the book of Ezra postdates and was written as an expansion backward of Nehemiah, it is surprising that there are not far more such verbal parallels between them, indeed multiple and sustained parallels that are not related to similar dependence on pre-existing materials. This particular parallel in the prohibition of foreign marriage might reflect a dependence of the Ezra tradition on the Nehemiah tradition in some way, or it might reflect the circulation of this adaptation of Deut 7:3 in some form outside the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. In either case, one sometimes gets the impression from literary critical treatments of this kind that they presuppose a model in which biblical authors worked in a closed literary system made up exclusively of texts that we know, and they could only gain material for their later productions by borrowing and adapting – often quite freely – formulations embedded in other texts now in the Bible. Certainly, I am among the first to think that much such adaptation did occur, and I have presented models recently for how that might have happened in a book called *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart*.<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, my sense is that the model of intertextual borrowing has gained a dangerous primacy in some circles, without the methodological controls to establish both the existence and direction of genetic textual dependence.<sup>31</sup>

Meanwhile, seen from another vantage point, Wright's model has some difficulties *vis-à-vis* the kind of textual evidence featured by Böhler. If Wright is right, then the redactor who produced 1 Esdras not only eliminated the entire Nehemiah tradition, but also added a number of microscopic mentions of city gates, marketplaces, temple forecourts, etc. to our proto-Esdras. Why? The reasoning for such multiple expansions is less clear, in my mind, than Böhler's model, which posits that these often random mentions of specific elements of the city were eliminated by an author who was adapting the Ezra tradition so it could precede Nehemiah's city building. Similarly, I would add, all things

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<sup>30</sup> David M. Carr, *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart: Origins of Scripture and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

<sup>31</sup> I am at work on a manuscript on the history of Israelite literature that attempts to do this.

being equal, I think it much more likely that the overall variants between Ezra-Nehemiah and 1 Esdras were caused by the addition of the Nehemiah memoir to Ezra-Nehemiah than that all of these changes were caused by the addition of the story of the three guards to 1 Esdras. Perhaps some of the variants, perhaps even the switch in order related to the correspondence of Artaxerxes, are connected to the insertion of the story of the three guards. Nevertheless, the Nehemiah memoir is more massive, and most of the smaller variants between 1 Esdras and Ezra connect better to the themes of the Nehemiah material than to the story of the three guards (which actually seems to have been incorporated into 1 Esdras without the elimination of conflicts with the surrounding tradition). Moreover, given the proclivities of redactors to preserve what preceded them, a proclivity that Wright himself decisively affirms, it is much more likely that our present collection of texts was produced by the expansion of a proto-Esdras through the addition of Nehemiah than by the subtraction of Nehemiah traditions from Ezra-Nehemiah to produce a 1 Esdras.

I am aware, of course, that all of these models have problems, certainly including Böhler's, and I do not find his treatment of all variants equally convincing. Nevertheless, I find myself imagining what it would be like if we suddenly found an Old Greek translation of the Non-Priestly strand of the Pentateuch, let's call it "Non-Pesdras." Imagine that we had a first century Jewish historian, such as Josephus, who reviewed events in this non-Priestly strand of the Pentateuch separately from events in the Priestly strand, and imagine that we had a "Praise of the Fathers," such as that of Ben Sira, which focused exclusively on events in the P strand. Imagine, furthermore, that a systematic study of variants between our Greek non-Pesdras and the present Pentateuch revealed that our present Pentateuch included a lot of apparent adaptations to P – say in the names of Abram, Sarai, and God – that were not present in our non-conflated version of the non-P tradition, the proto non-Pesdras. I suspect that scholars would consider this find of a Greek non-Pesdras Pentateuch to be a fantastic confirmation of a centuries-long theory about the division of P and non-P, a huge find. Scholars have long posited a duality at the outset of the formation of the Pentateuch on the basis of differences far less significant, I would suggest, than those differences that distinguish the Ezra and Nehemiah blocks from each other. Yet, for a variety of reasons, I suspect that there would be less debate about the traditio-historical significance of this imaginary non-Pesdras than there is now about the significance about 1 Esdras.

I myself must continue to work through the variants debated by Böhler, Hanhart, Talshir and others before I will be convinced that Böhler and his precursors are right. Nevertheless, I would maintain that we are on far firmer ground when we work with such textual resources than when we posit multiple and successive layers of unattested traditions. This is a methodological, not an ontological point. It has to do with how much we can know about the formation of traditions, not just what actually happened to them. With Wright and others with whom he has worked, I think some passages in the Bible grew in very complex ways over time, often through complex processes of adaptation and transformation of the language of other passages. I also think that in

some instances, in which the Biblical authors have left us enough data, we can reconstruct *parts* of those complex processes of ongoing revision.

In other instances, we have evidence that authors did not just expand earlier texts, but combined originally separate traditions, often adding adapting and expanding those traditions in the process. In so far as this happened, the original separateness of the traditions can aid us in identifying the different profiles, providing us more to go on than we have in cases where authors subtly built around and on earlier traditions. This leads to my final methodological point: because such originally separate traditions are more recognizable, we may be better able to reconstruct examples of conflation than examples of what Wright calls *creatio continua*. Nevertheless, this difference in what *we can reconstruct* in a methodologically controlled way, does not mean that conflation actually was more common than gradual expansion.

So, I think Jacob Wright's book, *Rebuilding Identity*, represents an important marker of how far we have come in considering biblical texts both diachronically and synchronically. At the same time, I think it raises important questions about the models we presuppose and use to explain textual growth, the criteria needed to establish the genetic dependence of one text on another, and our ability to reconstruct different kinds of growth – whether conflation of originally separate traditions or an authorial *creatio continua*.

## A RESPONSE

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### FIRST COMMENTS

The book under review is a promise of what the next generation will contribute to our knowledge of the history, literature, and theology of early Judaism in the Persian period. Written at Göttingen, under the supervision of Reinhard Kratz, Wright's dissertation proposes a new and dramatic hypothesis, but uses, in my judgment, a questionable methodology.

The methodology from beginning to end is what Germans call *Literarkritik*, which has quite a different meaning, at least in some circles, than "literary criticism" does in English and in North America these days. Jacob identifies all sorts of tensions—in content or in syntax within the book of Nehemiah (and Ezra for that matter) and divides the materials from Nehemiah up into at least seven strata, whose chronological sequence of composition can be reconstructed. I say at least seven strata since he often identifies secondary supplements within the strata. Wright does not discuss the method itself or what kinds of tension in content or syntax might have been tolerated in a work such as Nehemiah. Such a discussion would be expected, I believe, in an American context, which has become increasingly skeptical of this method and doubtful about the ability to reconstruct something as complicated as seven or more sequential strata. In general, the book is well written, although with quite a few typos, and the argument is advanced with both confidence and passion. Frequent charts show how a given passage has been assigned to several strata, and a concluding survey (pp. 330-339), is followed by a final chart in which the judgments of the previous pages are summarized in a table entitled "The Primary Compositional Layers of Neh 1-13" (p. 340). The final chart is a somewhat simplified presentation of his findings since it does not indicate the supplementary elements within the strata, and the reader would be considerably helped by a chart indicating the sequence of the strata in Ezra. While he considers Ezra 10 subsequent to Ezra 9, it is not clear to me when Ezra 10 was added in the process.

I will concede at the start that an exhaustive and fair review of this proposal would involve testing and debating each of the dozens and dozens of cases of *Literarkritik*, which he proposes. Since that is clearly impossible within our limited time period, we will have to settle for test cases and more general criticisms of his proposal.

It may be well to begin with a brief review, from a more centrist position, of the introductory problems of Nehemiah. Scholars normally identify a first-person Nehemiah Memoir, consisting of most of 1:1-7:72a, followed by Nehemiah's account of the dedication of the wall in 12:27-43, and concluding with at least some of the materials in 13:4-31. The materials in chapter 13 are dated in the received text at least twelve years after Nehemiah's initial coming to Jerusalem, in his so-called second term in office. Within these parameters, the list of workers on the wall in 3:1-32 is generally recognized as secondary, or at least not written by Nehemiah himself, and there is a bewildering range of opinions on the relationship of Ezra 2 to Nehemiah 7 (the list of those who returned)—was it incorporated first in Ezra or first in Nehemiah, which is the better text, etc.? There are supplementary materials within 7:72b—Neh 12:26 and 12:44-13:3, and perhaps elsewhere, and it is generally agreed that Nehemiah's spirited defense of himself in 5:14-19 belongs historically with the materials in chapter 13. In my own commentary in the *New Interpreter's Bible*, while conceding with most scholars that Nehemiah 8 was once part of the Ezra account, I proposed that now it has become part of a new unit in which Ezra's reading of the law in Nehemiah 8 is followed by a confession of sin in Nehemiah 9, and concluding with "the firm agreement" in Nehemiah 10, and this unit is designed to portray an ideal response to the law.<sup>32</sup> While Tamara Eskenazi has given a highly influential reading of the final form of Ezra-Nehemiah,<sup>33</sup> almost everyone would agree, including Eskenazi, that the canonical text arose through a complicated evolutionary process. Where Jacob Wright diverges from this consensus is his dissection of the Nehemiah Memoir itself into multiple layers, leaving us with a very brief "original" Nehemiah Memoir, dealing only with the building of the wall, and consisting of some thirteen verses, and five clauses within these verses are identified as secondary (1:1, 11b, 2:1-6, 11, 15, 16a, 17, 18b, 3:38 and 6:15). He conjectures that this original document may have been a building inscription.

This first wall-building stratum is followed by a second, not attributable to Nehemiah himself, consisting largely of the list of builders from chapter 3 and related verses. Because Eliashib commenced the work in chapter 3, Wright assigns to the high priesthood the redactional efforts contained in this second stratum. The role of the high priest and his colleagues in initiating the work in 3:1 creates a tension that will propel the composition of Ezra-Nehemiah from its origins to its culmination. That is, there emerges a conflict between a pro-temple faction and a pro-Torah (anti-temple) faction, and these two factions jockey back and forth in stating their cases.

A third stratum introduces Nehemiah's conflict with Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem. This supplementary material illustrates the positive implications of the building project by way of the negative reactions of the enemy. It is only in the fourth stratum that Nehemiah is identified as the governor. In a fifth stratum "Nehemiah" undertakes the

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<sup>32</sup> Ralph W. Klein, "The Books of Ezra & Nehemiah," in *The New Interpreter's Bible*, 3 (ed. L. E. Keck *et al*; Nashville: Abingdon, 1999), p. 796-798.

<sup>33</sup> Tamara Eskenazi, *In an Age of Prose: A Literary Approach to Ezra-Nehemiah* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988).

reforms mentioned in chapters 5 and 13 although these materials “originally,” that is, in this fifth stratum, were done during Nehemiah’s first 52 days in Jerusalem, before the completion of the wall. It is in this stratum that the “Remember me, O my God, for good” motif was introduced into the book. The original building report, according to Wright, has now become a report of the general restoration of Judah.

At this point, Wright proposes that Ezra 1-6 was composed, largely in response to the criticism of Eliashib and the priesthood in general in Nehemiah 13 although he also reconstructs an earlier version of Ezra 1-6 in which the friction with Nehemiah’s account is minimal. The erection of the altar in Ezra 3:1-6 is one of the latest texts in Ezra-Nehemiah (note 68, p. 335) but it is not clear to me exactly when it was introduced into the work. Ezra 1-6 (7-8) concede that Nehemiah may have been correct in pointing out the corruption of the priesthood at the time of Nehemiah, but insist that the first repatriates followed the decrees of the Persian kings and initiated the reconsolidation of Judah with the construction and glorification of the temple. The sixth stratum of the Nehemiah Memoir was then composed, with additions related primarily to the population and dedication of the city.

Next comes the composition of Ezra 7-8, 9-10. With respect to style, the first person Ezra account in Ezra 7 and 8 eases the transition to the first person Nehemiah account. With respect to content, Artaxerxes tells Ezra to make *Aliyah* and to take funds to Jerusalem to glorify the temple. The subsequent addition of Ezra 9 to the growing Ezra-Nehemiah corpus treats Nehemiah’s work much more positively. Instead of the tension with the wall detected by Wright in Ezra 1-6, the addition of Ezra 9 recognizes the wall and the subsequent reforming acts of Nehemiah as the only solution to the community’s problems.

The seventh stratum of Nehemiah advocates firm adherence to the Torah, to the neglect of any mention of the temple, especially in Nehemiah 8-10. Because Ezra in Ezra 9 had acknowledged the importance of Nehemiah’s ethnic wall, he can now join the builders in preparation for the dedication ceremonies in Nehemiah 8. Study of the Torah and the confession of the sins of fathers are interpreted as an alternative to the temple and sacrifices performed by a high priest, who was allegedly in league with the enemies of the restoration. Nehemiah 8-10 intends to portray a cultic service in which the temple and high priest are dispensable and have been replaced with the Torah and a scribe (p. 336 and n. 72). In Nehemiah 9, the land, Moses, and Torah have replaced the temple. Final supplements to the seventh stratum (Neh 10:31-40; 13:30b-31a) redress this “imbalance” and introduce once more cultic concerns. Without these secondary additions to the seventh stratum, Wright observes: “We wonder whether the temple had fallen into complete oblivion” (p. 338). In short, there was a dialectical process between laity/wall and priests/temple that produced the book of Ezra-Nehemiah. Instead of the events involving the rebuilding of the temple and the missions of Ezra and Nehemiah, Wright has reconstructed a social history, in which tradents score political and theological points by alternate expansions to the book that became Ezra-Nehemiah, but that originated in a Nehemiah Memoir of about 13 verses.

## CASE STUDIES IN *LITERARKRITIK* PRACTICED BY WRIGHT

### *Case I*

One argument for the secondary character of chapters 5 and 13, is its use nine times<sup>34</sup> of the Qal *naw* consecutive with the imperfect of the form “and I said” with a paragogic *be*. That is unusual for Nehemiah, who uses “and I said” seven times without a paragogic *be* in the rest of the book although those forms appear in five different strata! (Neh 1:5 (7<sup>th</sup>), 2:3, 5 (1<sup>st</sup>); 4:8 (3<sup>rd</sup>), 13 (3<sup>rd</sup>); 5:9 (5<sup>th</sup>); 7:3 (6<sup>th</sup>). The only attested use of “and I said” with the paragogic *be* elsewhere in Nehemiah is in 6:11, which Jacob Wright also identifies as secondary. Wright denies that the addition of the paragogic *be* can be attributed to copyists. But in the Masoretic text of the book of Isaiah, the form “and I said” occurs five times (Isa 6:5, 8, 11; 24:16; 41:9), all without the paragogic *be*. Nevertheless, in the great Isaiah scroll from Qumran, in three cases—60% of the time—the copyists replaced this with a form of the *naw* consecutive with a paragogic *be*. Hence I believe Wright does not make a convincing case that the forms with paragogic *be* in Nehemiah must of necessity be secondary and cannot result from changes introduced by copyists. I cite this example only to illustrate the precarious basis on which I feel many of his observations are built.

### *Case II*

According to Wright’s understanding, the original version of Nehemiah 8-10 expresses a temple-critical, or at least temple-avoiding, particularistic viewpoint, focused on the Torah. The temple focus in Ezra 1-6, on the other hand, represents the universalistic and cosmopolitan interests of the priests and the aristocracy. Wright claims that Ezra according to Nehemiah 8 is a scribe rather than the priest he is in Ezra 7 (where there is a genealogy going back, with a significant gap, to Aaron). One could argue that intertextuality would identify Ezra as a priest in any case also in Nehemiah 8. But even more embarrassing is Neh 8:2 where Ezra is explicitly called “the priest.” Wright dismisses this verse as secondary for a number of reasons. In fact, he writes that this verse is quite easy to identify as a later insertion (p. 321). “All the people” from v. 1 has been replaced by “the assembly” in v. 2. Ezra is not called a scribe in v. 2 as he is in vv. 1, 4, 9, and 13, but a priest. The reference to the first day of the seventh month in Neh 8:2 forms a doublet with Neh 7:72. The description of the audience in Neh 8:2 overlaps with the description of the people in 8:3. The masculine suffix in v. 3 referring to what Ezra read—he read in it-- does not agree with the feminine noun torah in v. 2. Rather, it refers to the book of torah of Moses in v. 1. Without v. 2, as Wright admits, the transition from v. 1 to v. 3 is rough. Although we are told that v. 2 is probably not original, we are also told by Wright that the information it provides is exactly what the reader desires. This dissonance between vv. 1 and 3 is why the verse was added according to Wright. Or, I would propose, this alleged dissonance between vv. 1 and 3 is why Neh 8:2 must be original. If so,

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<sup>34</sup> Neh 5:7, 8, 13, 17; 13:9, 11, 19, 21, 22.



Ezra is identified as a priest in Nehemiah 8. And he is called Ezra the priest the scribe in Neh 8:9—deleted by Wright.

### *Case III*

A similar observation might be made about Neh 10:31-40. In Neh 10:1-30 the community ratifies a new covenant to abide by the Torah. According to Wright, the authors of Nehemiah 8-10 present Torah-reading and confession as an alternative to the temple cult-promoted in Ezra 1-6 (7-8). Final supplements to the book, in Neh 10:31-40 and 13:30b-31a, counterbalance the concentration on Torah-study and penitence in 8:1-10:30 by redirecting the reader's attention back to the temple.

Nehemiah 10:1-30 is part of the seventh stratum written in Hellenistic times according to Wright. If we would assume for the sake of argument that vv. 31-40 were secondary, would not the Torah by this time include virtually all of what we call the Pentateuch, including all the cultic regulations in the broad Sinai account? Would not Torah-reading inevitably include stipulations from the last third of the book of Exodus and nearly all of Leviticus? I am not at all sure that it is legitimate to pit torah-reading or torah allegiance over against the temple cult since so much of the Torah deals with cult.

But would a "firm agreement" be so lacking in definite content and specificity as it would if the original account ended with v. 30? If Wright therefore is wrong, and vv. 31-40 are in fact original to the firm agreement, then its stipulations against mixed marriage, its ban of commerce on the sabbath, and its legislation about a temple tax of one third of a shekel, about the wood offering, about the offering of first fruits and the firstborn of humans and livestock—all in support of the temple—make his proposal to consider Ezra 9 and Nehemiah 8-10 as an intentional neglecting of the temple in favor of a society centered on the Torah unconvincing. In short, he creates his hypothesis about a group that urged neglect of the temple by deleting contrary evidence, especially in Neh 8:2, 10:31-40, and 13:30b-31a.

### *Case IV*

My fourth case study deals with Wright's removal of the chronological data concerning the length of Nehemiah's service in Jerusalem and in fact the complete separation of Nehemiah from the office of governor. Wright contrasts Nehemiah's cautious efforts to win the support of the rulers in Neh 2:16, whose support he desperately needed to build the wall, with his attitude in Neh 13:4-9 where he was not at all concerned to make friends with the ruling classes (p. 202). Wright argues that the criticism of Eliashib implicitly involved the entire Jerusalem priesthood (13:28) and that it creates an incongruity with Neh 2:16ff. in which Nehemiah attempted to secure the approval of the priests for his wall-building project. He writes: "One finds it difficult to believe that he both needed the approbation of the priesthood and at the same time overruled their decision with respect to the use of the temple chambers . . . . [T]he violation of the priesthood's sphere of sovereignty would certainly have precluded their cooperation in building the wall" (p. 203). Of course a lot can happen in twelve or more

years to sour the relationship between Nehemiah and the rulers of the people. Most of the difficulty Wright describes here, however, is self-created since he has eliminated the twelve year term of Nehemiah by literary critical judgments.

### *Case V*

In his reconstruction of the literary history of chapter 5, which together with chapter 13 was not in his judgment an original part of the Nehemiah's Memoir and not written by Nehemiah, Wright proposes that vv. 14-18 antedate vv. 1-13, and v. 19. He also proposes that vv. 16-18 are the earliest part of this chapter (part of his third stratum) and are parallel to Neh 4:15ff., which they may have originally followed. Nehemiah 4:15ff. report how people worked all day and stayed in Jerusalem overnight, working so hard in fact that they never took off their clothes at night. Nehemiah 5:14-15, in Wright's judgment, have been secondarily prefaced to vv. 16-18, since v. 14 and v. 16 both begin with the word *gam* and because Nehemiah's waiver of the governor's allowance in v. 15 is based on the fear of God, whereas the waiver in v. 18 is based on the heavy load on this people. But cannot both motives be true and complementary? From a humanitarian or even political point of view Nehemiah did not want to impose additional burdens on his hard-working people, but from a religious point of view he did this out of fear of God. Even in v. 15, that ends with the reference to the fear of God, the first half of the verse reads: "The former governors laid heavy burdens on the people and took food and wine from them." Thus both motivations are actually contained in that one verse! Wright implies that Nehemiah's not taking the food allowance of the governor in v. 18 does not mean that Nehemiah was governor (an argument of desperation in my opinion), since the explicit claim that Nehemiah himself was governor arose only in vv. 14-15 which Wright assigns to his fourth stratum.

Verse 14 in the Masoretic text reads: "Moreover from the time that I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, **from the twentieth year to the thirty-second year of King Artaxerxes, twelve years**, neither I nor my brothers ate the food allowance of the governor." Wright judges that the chronological information in bold face is not directly relevant to the interpretation of the context and hence appears to stem from a foreign hand (appealing to Kurt Galling for support). He also feels that the syntax is smoother without this information (p. 174). Wright argues that the date in Neh 13:6b (his fifth stratum)—noting that Nehemiah had left Jerusalem in the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes and returned to the king and then came back to Jerusalem some time afterward for a second term—is itself based on this very secondary information in Neh 5:14 that he assigns to his fourth stratum.. The bottom line is that by literary critical judgment he dismisses the notion of Nehemiah's governorship itself and its chronological data. This makes it possible for him to locate the dispute with Eliashib in chapter 13 during the initial wall-building activities. Only after all of these changes and deletions has he created a Nehemiah who simultaneously seeks the support of the leaders of the community in chapter 2 and severely criticizes them in chapter 13. Nevertheless

Wright argues that the reference to twelve years may be authentic, but indicating only the time of Nehemiah's death. In Wright's reconstruction, the additions made by various redactors in chapters 5, 6 and 13 put the blame on the Judeans themselves for the situation of affliction and reproach that necessitated the building of the wall, and not the threat from foreign nations, as was true in chapters 2-4 (p. 176). Moreover Wright argues that it was the nobles, rulers and the rest of the people in Neh 4:8 and 13, who appointed Nehemiah governor and not Artaxerxes. Would these people have dared to make such a move that could be construed as subverting the authority of Artaxerxes? Wright concedes this objection but insists that the Hebrew text allows for several interpretations and "one cannot be certain that the Persian court appointed him." Nehemiah's charge that his predecessors had laid heavy burdens on the people and Nehemiah's generous provision of food are both taken as allusions to the reign of Solomon and are without historical importance. Nehemiah's acting out of the fear of God is construed as an allusion to the last words of David (2 Sam 23:3). Wright therefore concludes: "The institution of governor—if it ever existed before Nehemiah—was not firmly established in Judah until after Nehemiah, and he himself did not serve in this capacity" (p. 179). Wright does not discuss the extensive epigraphic evidence assembled by Avigad and others that there were in fact governors of Yehud long before Nehemiah.

#### IN SUM

There is no question that Jacob Wright has made many astute observations about Nehemiah throughout this book, and no one can study Nehemiah in the future without attending to his work. Nevertheless the case studies I have presented suggest that a number of his literary critical judgments might be called into question, and with them the sequencing of the seven strata in Nehemiah with the sections in Ezra that represent various attempts to work out the balance between Torah and Temple.

Nevertheless, if early Judaism in the fifth and fourth centuries needed to work out the tensions between temple and Torah, the Chronicles-Ezra-Nehemiah Section of SBL should pay continued attention to the divergent methods practiced on both sides of the Atlantic and attempt to work out a *modus vivendi* in order to assess the potentially complementary contributions of our divergent methods. Perhaps this synthesis could be pursued with as much passion as Jacob Wright has detected in the composition history of Ezra-Nehemiah.

## LOOKING BACK AT *REBUILDING IDENTITY*

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First of all, I would like to thank both Gary Knoppers for suggesting this special review session to the committee of the Chronicles-Ezra-Nehemiah Section at the Annual SBL and my esteemed colleagues for honoring my work with such close readings. I am deeply grateful not only for their praise but also for their appreciation of the book's implications for the field of biblical studies as a whole. My intention in studying Ezra-Nehemiah has indeed been to gain a better understanding of the nature of biblical literature and the communities that produced it.

Rather than addressing the respondents' comments point-by-point,<sup>35</sup> it may be more useful to contextualize my work by reflecting upon the process that led to its formation. I will also discuss the broader hermeneutical principles that informed my attempt to forge in this book a new path in diachronic methods of analysis, one which diverges sharply from older approaches, such as *Literarkritik*. I believe that by describing how and why I chose to abandon the source-critical approach to Ezra-Nehemiah (hereafter, EN), this response will enable readers to appreciate more fully the dialogue with David M. Carr, Deirdre N. Fulton and Ralph W. Klein on my book. A similar autobiographical account by the ancient authors of EN on the composition of their book would have rendered my own work superfluous. Yet it also would have robbed us of the opportunity to engage each other in a meaningful way on our most fundamental presuppositions as biblical scholars.

I chose EN as a subject for my dissertation at the University of Göttingen for several reasons. My advisor, Reinhard G. Kratz, was writing an introduction to the narrative books of the Hebrew Bible at the time, and he was seeking a doctoral student who was interested in testing the various approaches scholars have adopted in interpreting this complex book. I agreed to assume this task not only because of the challenge it presented but also because of the history of disparaging interpretations of EN in past – particularly German – scholarship. My aim was to offer a more sympathetic reading of the book. Simultaneously, I had joined a research group that was funded by the German Research Society (DFG) to study early Jewish prayer texts. Because the so-called Nehemiah Memoir includes numerous and diverse types of prayers, it soon became the focus of my study.

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<sup>35</sup> I plan to address individual points in future articles as well as in a commentary on EN that I am writing for the new International Exegetical Commentary on the Old Testament (IECOT) series.

My original intention, therefore, was not to present a new model for the formation of EN. That my project soon took a different direction had to do with the weaknesses of older compositional models that I confronted from the outset. One of the problems these models posed relates to the use of first-person style as a criterion for isolating the book's sources. My examination of pre-critical interpretations of EN revealed that interpreters introduced this criterion at a relatively late point and continued to dispute its validity for a long time thereafter. In virulent reactions to Baruch de Spinoza's claim that the historical Nehemiah authored only the first-person portions of Nehemiah 1-13 (a claim that is rarely, if ever, contested today), many commentators from the 18<sup>th</sup> century on insisted that the superscript in Neh 1:1 and the first-person style of the book's final passages indicate that all of Nehemiah 1-13 must be ascribed to Nehemiah's own hand. These criticisms of Spinoza's view are, in fact, bolstered by the history of critical scholarship on EN, which is characterized by a range of views on the precise demarcation of the Nehemiah Memoir. One should not dismiss the lack of consensus in EN research on this issue as just another petty quibble of factious scholars. The problem is inextricably woven into the warp and woof of the material. First-person passages are used occasionally to introduce third-person passages (see Nehemiah 3 and 7), and third-person passages are conversely used to introduce first-person passages (see Neh 12:27-47). By simply extracting all the first-person texts, we are left with an incomplete and incoherent account. The use of the first- vs. third-person narration in these and many others cases throughout EN seems to be a deliberate literary strategy, rather than a trustworthy diachronic tool for distinguishing earlier material from later material.

The second problem I faced in my research related to Nehemiah's prayers, the original focus of my project. A number of passages conclude with prayers for remembrance addressed directly to the deity and lacking an introduction, such as "I prayed and said . . ." (see 3:36-37; 6:14; 5:19; 13:14, 22, 29, 31). These succinct orisons indicate that the passages they conclude were written ostensibly for a divine rather than a human reader. Yet in other places Nehemiah either recalls praying (2:4 and 4:3) or introduces a prayer with "I said, 'O YHWH, God of Heaven. . .'" (1:5). Due to the presence of this second group of texts, I found it difficult to convince my colleagues in the research group that we should treat the Nehemiah Memoir as an extended prayer – or at least as a text addressed to a deity. Hence, the problem of the account's genre forced me to deal with the compositional unity of the account.

In searching for solutions to these problems in past scholarship, I found the influential thesis of Hugh G.M. Williamson to be most helpful. As is well known, Williamson distinguishes two stages in the composition of the Memoir: an earlier building account and later additions written by Nehemiah himself after twelve years of gubernatorial service. In contrast to the first account, which would have been written for a human reader (perhaps the Achaemenid court), the secondary passages do not refer to building of the wall. Their focus is rather the reforms that Nehemiah instituted for all of Judah. Each of these reform accounts concludes with short prayers for remembrance addressed directly to Nehemiah's god ("Remember me, O my God . . ."; 5:19;

13:14, 22, 29, 31). Thus, in redacting his account, Nehemiah transformed the building report into a votive text.

The thesis is appealing and represents a major advance in our effort to define the genre of the Memoir. However, it also encounters a serious obstacle: the presence of prayers that are addressed directly to the deity in passages recounting the construction of the wall (3:36-37 and 6:14). With Williamson and others, one could argue that Nehemiah added these prayers to the building account when he inserted the texts recounting his reforms. Yet in examining the placement of the prayers, I discovered signs of a gradual reshaping of the account that render this explanation problematic.

My most significant observation in this respect was the stylistic and thematic connections between 6:17-19 and 13:4-9. Both passages report that key individuals were related and allied to Tobiah. Moreover, in the former text Tobiah exerts his influence in Judah by way of written correspondence. The latter reports that “before this” Eliashib had built a chamber for Tobiah in the temple precincts. When Nehemiah came to Jerusalem (for the first time; the date in 13:6b<sub>x</sub> is, as many scholars agree, secondarily drawn from 5:14), he cast Tobiah out of the chamber. Tobiah thus resorts to writing letters to his allies in Judah (6:17-19) after Nehemiah had chased him out of Jerusalem (13:4-9).

By means of this observation, an older structure of chaps. 5-13 re-emerged. Without the material in chaps. 7-12, five consecutive units would conclude with prayers for remembrance (5:1-19; 6:1-14; 6:17-19+13:4-14; 15-23, 24-31). Moreover, the three paragraphs that followed the notice of completion in 6:15-16 would not only conclude with prayers for remembrance, but also begin with variants of the expression “in those days,” evince a similar language and inner structure, and report three of Nehemiah’s “extramural” reforms.

Analysis of chaps. 7-12 confirmed my suspicion that this material had broken the earlier connection 6:17-19+13:4-9 and had gradually pushed chap. 13 back to the end of the book. For instance, the final line of chap. 6 (v. 19b), which appears to be redactional, introduces the aspect of intimidation in order to realign vv. 17-19 to the overarching theme of vv. 1-14 (the attempted assassination of Nehemiah – or at least that of his character). This statement contrasts sharply with the rest of vv. 17-19 and 13:4-9, which recounts how Tobiah attempted to exert influence in Judean politics and establish a *pied-à-terre* in Jerusalem. This new conclusion creates a unified “chapter” in the building project that is clearly demarcated from the account of the events following the completion of the wall in 7:1ff.

Furthermore, the first-person material in chaps. 7-12 usually attributed to the Nehemiah Memoir has either been heavily edited or has been composed with the third-person narrative of EN in view. For example, the contents of the scroll Nehemiah quotes in chap. 7 flow smoothly into the third-person account of the festivities celebrated during the seventh month in chaps. 8-10. Later, in the account of the dedication of the wall, Nehemiah’s own voice is heard again, yet faintly and fragmentarily (12:27-13:3), being drowned out by third-person material.

Such seamless transitions between first- and third-person material in chaps. 7-13 characterize the greater part of EN (see esp. Ezra 4-6, 7,

and 9-10). Although this fact continues to plague the attempt to isolate older material in EN, the book has long served in biblical scholarship as a parade example for the legitimacy of the source-critical approach. In EN we can supposedly see how one or two compilers or editors pieced together earlier historical documents, fitting their sometime contrasting perspectives into a unified historiographical framework. The editing of the text in this work contrasts with that of the Pentateuch, where one has much more trouble ascertaining the original shape of sources. Indeed, the book of EN had served in early biblical criticism – and probably unconsciously in later generations – as a model for understanding the formation of the Pentateuch. Conversely, the influence of the source-critical method in Pentateuchal criticism had contributed directly to the often unsuccessful struggle to achieve a consensus on the precise contours of the sources in EN.

The discovery of an earlier “join” between 6:17-19 and 13:4-9 and the gradual reshaping of the account demonstrated to me the necessity of relinquishing the source-critical approach and rethinking the formation of EN. I noticed that what one usually attributed to the book’s editor(s) often varies in perspective to such an extent that the assumption of compositional unity threatens to flatten the book’s diversity into what a particular interpreter wished to emphasize as the point of unity. Yet, where the sources would be expected to diverge in perspective from the ideology of the editor, they often agree – a problem that raised further questions regarding the adequacy of employing the first-person style as a criterion for identifying earlier source material. Above all, I saw that the source-critical approach had failed to appreciate the real dialogue and conversation going on in every part of the book. My intention in taking a more diachronic approach, therefore, has not been to be positivistic about the exact nature of literary growth in EN or to dissect large polyphonic texts into smaller, more monophonic ones. Rather, my aim has been to do justice to, and bring out the vibrancy of, the conversation that propelled the composition of the book and the later traditions that developed out of it.

In order to reveal this conversation, I adopt a diachronic approach in my book. For the sake of summarizing my results, I even present a table on the last page in which I assign texts to seven different layers. But it would be wrong to confuse my work as a whole with this table. I never refer to these strata in the study itself. Nor do I place much weight on the dating of layers. Instead, I begin by isolating the smallest circumscribable textual units and then compare their perspectives and emphases. At times it is easy to see how one unit presupposes another. At other times, the question of dependency must be left open – although I do not hesitate to set forth tentative reconstructions. Whether these units can be assigned to various authors or whether they were redacted by one individual over an extend time period is for me by and large insignificant. With respect to larger material blocks, it seems quite likely to me that they stem from different authors or circles. Yet the central objective of my book is to impress upon interpreters an appreciation for the plurality of voices that converse with each other in EN.

In my study I therefore dispense with the idea of one or two editors of EN who combined a plurality of sources. Instead I postulate a process (a “*creatio continua*”) in which generations of readers take in-

herited tradition and draw out its relevance for contemporary issues facing their communities. In a manner similar to other bodies of Jewish literature, these generations of readers produce commentary upon commentary. My inspiration for this model of understanding biblical literature was bequeathed to me by my *Doktorvater*, Reinhard G. Kratz, who inherited it from his *Doktorvater*, O. H. Steck. Formative influences have also been Walther Zimmerli's notion of *Fortschreibung*, which he developed in his commentary on Ezekiel, and not least Michael Fishbane's idea of inner-biblical exegesis, which has made a profound impact on both Steck's and Kratz's hermeneutical approach.

Although I would by no means dispute the existence of older source material in EN, my study has demonstrated that the authors of EN have selected and reshaped this material in response to the Nehemiah Memoir. The Memoir's first generation of readers saw in its author a hero of Judean history and took it upon themselves to draw out the significance of his work. In their hands, his highly nuanced yet succinct account unfolds, like a bud that blossoms, into a beautiful story depicting a transformation in Nehemiah's individual identity that sets in motion a project of rebuilding Judah's identity.

As part of this literary maturation, the first chapters tell how a Judean, living in a foreign land and occupying a position of prominence in the Achaemenid imperial court, was spurred to act on the part of his people after a conversation with his kin. In this pivotal encounter, he learns that not only Jerusalem's walls were in a state of disrepair but first and foremost that his people were in state of distress. The physical condition of the wall is here part of, and simultaneously mirrors, a larger social predicament.

In keeping with this correlation between the condition of the wall and that of the people, the following passages describe how each construction phase marks a new stage in the rebuilding of Judah's collective identity. The province's diverse population comes together and finds its unity in mending the walls of the Jerusalem, a central site of their collective memory. This unity is expressed graphically in the list of chap. 3, which maps the circumference of the city wall by listing the names of the districts, families and social groups who join forces "side by side," building the segments of the wall from beginning to end. The wall is here indistinguishable from the unified circle of people who build it.

This (re-)construction of Judean identity develops in two closely-related directions in the account. On the one hand, Nehemiah describes an external opposition to the building project, and in so doing, demarcates those who belong to Judah (the builders) from those who do not (those who attempt to thwart the progress on the wall). Judah's chief antagonists are the representatives of her neighbors (Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem), whose jeering and threats of physical attack progressively bolster the resolve of the newly-consolidated community. These passages create "texture" in the account by differentiating construction phases, each beginning with the expression "as PN heard."

On the other hand, a large portion of the account treats the internal problems of the community. The nexus between the first and second group of texts is found in the number of Judeans who are related to the external opponents through (marriage) alliances (see 6:17-19; 13:4-9, 28). The presence of this "enemy within" necessitates a



change of attitude on the part of Nehemiah. Whereas at an earlier point he was concerned to bring together diverse groups in Judah whose participation was indispensable to the success of the building project, now he points his finger at these very same groups and takes them to task for failing to recognize the true nature of the project. Repairing the physical ramparts did not suffice. One must adopt a new form of behavior by treating Judean kin properly (5:1-19), being wary of corruptible prophets (6:10-14), breaking off alliances with Judah's inimical neighbors (6:17-19, 13:4-9), caring for the economic welfare of the Levites (13:10-14), ceasing from all labor and commerce on the Sabbath (13:15-22), and agreeing to marry only Judean women (13:23-30). These reform accounts are closely connected to the introduction in 1:1-4. Both emphasize the social aspects of the wall-building project, highlighting two key terms (רעה and הרפה).

Although the reforms have little or nothing to do with the construction of Jerusalem's physical ramparts, they serve the larger objective of the account. They expand the notion of "wall" by delineating Judah's social, political, cultic and ethnic boundaries. Nehemiah demarcates not only a physical but also a temporal space that was peculiarly Judean - or perhaps better, Jewish.<sup>36</sup> For example, he censures the nobility in 13:15-22 for allowing work in the winepresses to continue on the Sabbath, and in Jerusalem itself he uses the city gates to prohibit foreign traders from entering the holy city on the holy day. In instituting this reform, he appeals to the past and Judah's collective memory (13:18). Here, with the help of the wall, time and space in Judah are reconfigured according to spheres of holiness.

Significantly, these accounts describe abuses that Nehemiah identifies and treats *during* the course of the building project. Whereas 5:1-19 and 6:10-14 precede the notice of completion in 6:15-16, the three remaining passages, in keeping with the join between 6:17-19 and 13:4-9 described above, are dated to "those days." From the proximity between the notice of completion in 6:15-16 and the unit in 6:17-19+13:4-9(10-14), "those days" are clearly the 52 days of work on the wall mentioned in the notice of completion. By virtue of these appendices to the building report as well as the similar accounts in chaps. 5 and 6, the 25th of Elul represents the day not only when the ramparts were repaired but also when Judah initiated a new era in her history, one surrounded by a wall marking her new social, ethnic, cultic and economic identity.

In my research I slowly came to the realization that these texts, which amplify and interpret the deeper significance of Nehemiah's wall-building project, provided the impetus for the formation of EN as well as other textual traditions such as First Esdras. In its expanded form, the Nehemiah Memoir would have provoked great consternation in priestly circles, which are unquestionably responsible for the production of much of EN and First Esdras. The Memoir presents Judah and Jeru-

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<sup>36</sup> By "Jewish," I mean something that goes beyond "Judean" insofar as more self-conscious behavior and choice are involved. Ezra-Nehemiah paves the way for the distinction between Judeans, who live in Judah, and Jews, who build an identity that is distinct in many ways from that of mere Judean inhabitants.

salem in dire straits before the advent of its eponymous hero. It fails to acknowledge the largesse demonstrated by the Achaemenid court in bestowing generous funds for the construction and glorification of the temple. In 1:1-4 Nehemiah inquires only about those who had remained in the land and neglects the multitudes who had made Aliyah. Likewise, he fails to mention his predecessor Ezra. But above all, he accuses the high priesthood of widespread corruption and subordinates high-priestly jurisdiction to gubernatorial authority (13:4-14 and 28-31). In many priestly circles, these aspects of Nehemiah's account would have necessitated a sophisticated (literary) response.

It is difficult to imagine that the priestly circles responsible for EN or First Esdras would have added, of their own volition, the vituperative Nehemiah Memoir to their history of Judah's Restoration. The witness of First Esdras, despite occasional insistence to the contrary, does not furnish weighty support for assuming that the Nehemiah Memoir was secondarily interpolated. Insofar as I have demonstrated that many texts in Ezra 1-10 probably have the Memoir in view, it is quite unlikely that First Esdras represents an older version than EN. That this version transmits older readings in some places is probable, yet here one must distinguish between text-critical questions and redaction-critical questions.

Rather than being inserted at a later stage in the tradition, the Nehemiah Memoir is easiest to explain as its point of departure. Both external and internal evidence indicates that the Memoir was read relatively widely.<sup>37</sup> Because of its importance, priestly circles could not afford to simply ignore its portrayal of the Restoration. Creating the larger account of EN, they allow Nehemiah to expose the uncharacteristic troubles plaguing his age. But they also show how the Restoration began earlier. Before Artaxerxes simply allowed Nehemiah to go to Jerusalem and repair her ramparts, he had commanded the priest-scribe Ezra to make Aliyah and transport imperial donations for the maintenance of the *temple* (Ezra 7-8). And before Ezra received this commission, the first Persian kings had issued decrees allowing the construction of the *temple* (Ezra 1-6). Whereas the family of Eliashib had brought reproach upon the high-priestly office in the time of Nehemiah, the early phase of Restoration was characterized by a harmonious diarchy of lay and priestly leadership. The narrative style of Ezra 1-10 not only transforms the Nehemiah Memoir from an independent account into one source among others in the history of the Restoration, but also relegates it to a depiction of one year in the reign of a Persian king who, along with several of his predecessors, had for many years devoted his resources to making the temple the center of Judean society.

I would not deny that each of the units in Ezra 1-10 includes older material and has been shaped to communicate its own distinct message. The narrative of Ezra 1-6, for example, is sustained by a focus on texts as the primary bearers of authority in Judah's new post-monarchic

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<sup>37</sup> The *external* evidence is late (e.g. Ben Sira and 2 Maccabees). That the Memoir was already widely read in earlier generations is suggested by the *internal* (redactional) evidence.

age.<sup>38</sup> Yet even here the temple is at the center insofar as the authority of texts ultimately validates this institution. While Ezra 1-6 seems to have been composed originally to redress the – for priestly circles – incommensurable nature of the Nehemiah Memoir, the conversation with the Memoir intensifies in later stages. The insertion of the Artaxerxes correspondence in Ezra 4, for instance, allows the same ruler who later permits Nehemiah’s building project to prohibit initially any work on the wall. Before revoking this order, the temple is first completed (Ezra 5-6). Then he commissions Ezra “to glorify” the temple (Ezra 7:27). The account of Ezra’s Aliyah also alludes to the Nehemiah Memoir. For instance, whereas Artaxerxes sends army officers and cavalry with Nehemiah (2:9), Ezra remarks that “I was ashamed to ask the king for an army and cavalry to protect us against the enemy on the way, since we had told the king that the hand of our God is gracious to all who seek him, but his power and his wrath are against all who forsake him” (8:22).

As a unified book, EN in the end affirms the importance of Nehemiah’s project. The shift towards a more positive stance vis-à-vis Nehemiah is already apparent in Ezra 9-10, which mitigates the happy end of chaps. 7-8 by revealing severe fractures in the community’s foundation. The solution to the problem of mixed-marriages described in these chapters is only temporary. Before the book concludes with an account of Nehemiah’s marriage reforms, the community has built a cultic, ethnic, and social wall, which they fortify through a written pledge to follow the Torah and its requirements. The insertion of the material in Nehemiah 8-10 and the date in 13:6 reinterprets Nehemiah’s reforms. Now Nehemiah *returns* to Jerusalem in prophetic fashion, prosecuting (רִיב) the community for failing to adhere to its pledge to the Torah. Thus, the opposing forces that produced the book of EN finally come together in the Torah and the community that places it at its center. In this way, the indispensable role of the temple is reaffirmed (see 10:33-40 and 13:4-14, 28-31).

This larger perspective on the composition of EN made it possible for me to understand better the dynamics at work in other traditions that do not share the vision of EN. The Nehemiah legend transmitted in 2 Macc 1:18-36 makes Nehemiah a champion of the temple-cult and portrays him as figure very similar to Zerubbabel (whom various later Jewish traditions identified with Nehemiah). Similarly, the authors of First Esdras complete the process begun in Ezra 1-8 by giving Nehemiah the final *coup de grâce*. They respond to the criticism of the priesthood and the subordination of high-priestly jurisdiction to gubernatorial authority by completely cutting Nehemiah’s account out of the history of the Restoration. Anything that anticipates Nehemiah’s project (such as Ezra 4:21) they deleted, and other parts they subtly reformulated in order to render the reconstruction of the city superfluous. The implications of my analysis for the treatment of First Esdras are so clear that I could afford not to enter into detailed discussions of cases in

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<sup>38</sup> See my forthcoming article, “Seeking-Finding-Writing in Ezra-Nehemiah” in *(Dis)Unity of Ezra-Nehemiah* (ed. Mark Boda and Paul Reditt; Hebrew Bible Monographs; Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2007).

which this work likely transmits earlier readings. Nevertheless, in my future work on EN I plan to consider these cases at greater length.

I should emphasize that my study attempts to sidestep for the moment historical problems posed by EN and to appreciate the strategies its authors have provided for reading Nehemiah's Memoir. Nevertheless, my work does directly affect historical reconstructions of Judah under Achaemenid hegemony. Of course, reliable information would often have been introduced secondarily by redactors. Yet sometimes what serves as the foundations for attempts to write histories of this period turns out in my analyses to be solely literary aspects that developed in the tradition, and they deserve to be appreciated as such.

I should reiterate that my aim in writing *Rebuilding Identity* was not, in keeping with the old method of *Literarkritik*, to isolate the "original" form of the Nehemiah Memoir. Rather, I wanted to retrace the trajectory leading to the formation of the book we have inherited. I attempted to reprimarize older material not for its own sake, throwing out later tradition with the bathwater. Rather, my desire was to allow the Nehemiah Memoir once again to speak for itself and share its own, sometimes unconventional views, without subordinating them to the more dominant voice of EN's narrator. Such indeed may have been also the intention of EN's authors inasmuch as the book utilizes a variety of voices and texts. However, it seems to me that these authors wanted us to read Nehemiah's account through their own lenses. Thus, when Nehemiah asks about the fate of "the Judeans who had survived and escaped the captivity," it is not at all clear that he is also referring to Babylonian captives who had in the meanwhile joined the remaining inhabitants. Yet after telling us about massive Aliyot that preceded Nehemiah and after defining the prior inhabitants of Judah as the antagonists of the Restoration, the authors of EN probably wanted us to understand Nehemiah's question as if it were referring to the returning exiles. In contrast to the harmonizing tendency of much prior scholarship, my aim has been, both here and in other cases, to reveal all the possibilities and to show how texts have been reread in the earliest interpretive tradition found already in EN.

To conclude I would like to once again thank the respondents not only for their generous praise and insightful comments but also their critiques and questions. Both enabled me to articulate my position here in a manner that I hope will be useful for further discussion.