Seeking the Divine, Divining the Seekers: The Status of Outsiders Who Seek Yahweh in Ezra 6:21

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SEEKING THE DIVINE, DIVINING THE SEEKERS: THE STATUS OF OUTSIDERS WHO SEEK YAHWEH IN EZRA 6:21[*]

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Ezra-Nehemiah is a book about boundaries, and as such it incorporates a wide range of strategies for creating, regulating, and reinforcing the boundaries between the community of restored Israel and those who are perceived to be outside of it. The book, as a redactional product,[1] insists that the community of restored Israel is composed predominantly (if not exclusively) of the descendants of people who were exiled to Babylon following the liquidation of the kingdom of Judah in 586 BCE, and that there were no descendants of Judah remaining in the former land of Judah when the exiles began to return to it after 539 BCE.[2] The national labels *Israel* and *Judah* are applied only to the community of exiles (Ezra 1:5; 2:2; 3:1; 4:3–4, 6; 7:7, 13; 10:9; Neh 2:10; 7:7, 73; 13:18), and the community itself is frequently tied to the exile (Ezra 1:11; 4:1; 6:19-20; 8:35; 9:4; 10:6–7, 16; Neh 1:1–4; 7:6; 8:17). Those dwelling in and around the former territory of Judah who are not part of the exilic community are castigated as "people(s) of the land(s)" (Ezra 3:3; 4:4; 9:1; 10:2; Neh 10:30) or as foreigners (Ezra 4:1–3; 9:1–4).

[1] For a recent review of compositional models for Ezra-Nehemiah, see T.C. Eskenazi, "Revisiting the Composition of Ezra-Nehemiah: A Prolegomenon," in F.R. Ames and C.W. Miller (eds.), *Foster Biblical Scholarship: Essays in Honor of Kent Harold Richards* (Atlanta: SBL, 2010), 215–34.

[2] L.L. Grabbe, *Yehud: A History of the Persian Province of Judah* (vol. 1 of *A History of the Jews and Judaism in the Second Temple Period*; Library of Second Temple Studies, 47; London/New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 286.

The insiders are the only true Israelites; the outsiders are all foreigners.[3]

This article treats the conflict between the community of returned exiles and the outsiders who oppose them in Ezra 1–6. The conflict is much more of a literary construction than a reflection of historical reality,[4] rooted in Ezra-Nehemiah's own distinctive interpretation of the trope of exiled Israel as the only true Israel.[5] Likewise, the image of a large, unified contingent of Babylonian Judeans returning together to an empty land must be relegated

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[3] For a recent treatment of the relevant data, see D. Rom-Shiloni, *Exclusive Inclusivity: Identity Conflicts Between the Exiles and the People Who Remained (6th–5th Centuries BCE)* (LHB/OTS, 543; New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 34–47.

[4] P. Bedford, *Temple Restoration in Early Achaemenid Judah* (JSOTSup, 65; Leiden, Brill 2001); H.G.M. Williamson, "Welcome Home," in P. Davies and D. Edelman (eds.), *The Historian and the Bible: Essays in Honour of Lester L. Grabbe* (LHB/OTS, 350; New York: T&T Clark, 2010), 113–23.

[5] E. Ben Zvi, "Inclusion and Exclusion from Israel as Conveyed by the Use of the Term 'Israel' in Post-Monarchic Biblical Texts," in S.W. Holloway and L.K. Handy (eds.), *The Pitcher is Broken: Memorial Essays for Gösta Ahlström* (JSOTSup, 190; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 95–149. Ben Zvi uses the siglum EI = I (Exiled Israel = Israel) to describe this discourse. Building on his work, P. Bedford, "Diaspora-Homeland Relations in Ezra-Nehemiah," *VT* 52/2 (2002), 147–65, notes that Ezra-Nehemiah, in contrast to Chronicles, limits Israel exclusively to the exile, not just during the exile but indefinitely. The repatriate community becomes a colony, surrounded by foreigners just like the exilic community, and dependent on the exilic community for its identity and its leadership. Thus, Ezra-Nehemiah is able to assert the continued importance of the diaspora after it becomes apparent that no mass ingathering of exiles will be occurring (as envisioned by Haggai and Zech 1–8). G. Knoppers, "Ethnicity, Genealogy, Geography, and Change: The Judean Community of Babylon and Jerusalem in the Story of Ezra," in G. Knoppers and K. Ristau (eds.), *Community Identity in Judean Historiography* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2009), 147–71, building on Bedford's work, argues that Ezra-Nehemiah's radical EI = I stance allows it to construct a vision of Israelite identity that is transnational and transgenerational, yet still rooted in the old Kingdom of Judah. J. Kessler, "Persia's Loyal Yahwists: Power Identity and Ethnicity in Achaemenid Yehud," in O. Lipschits and M. Oeming (eds.), *Judah and the Judeans in the Persian Period* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 91–121; ibid., "The Diaspora in Zechariah 1–8 and Ezra-Nehemiah: The Role of History, Social Location, and Tradition in the Formation of Identity," in Knoppers and Ristau (eds.), *Community Identity*, 119–45; ibid., "Images of Exile: Representations of the 'Exile' and 'Empty Land' in the Sixth to Fourth Century BCE Yehudite Literature," in E. Ben Zvi and C. Levin (eds.), *The Concept of Exile in Ancient Israel and its Historical Contexts* (BZAW, 404; Berlin and New York: De Gruyter, 2010), 309–51 (333–39), concurs substantially with Bedford, but challenges his notion that the repatriates are depicted as dependent upon the diaspora; rather, he sees them as a "charter group," initially rooted in the diaspora but uniquely equipped to practice authentic Yahwism via their proximity to the restored temple.

to the realm of historiographical fiction.[6] I am concerned here not with reconstructing the historical realities behind the text but rather with reconstructing the contours of the ideology that led the text's authors to represent history as they have. Ezra 1–10, in particular, strongly adopts the perspective that authentic Yahwism completely disappeared from the land of Judah during the exile,[7] and that it continues to reside solely with the exiles and with those repatriates from exile, whom I will refer to as Returnees,[8] who repeatedly

[6] L. Grabbe, " 'They Shall Come Rejoicing to Zion' – or Did They? The Settlement of Yehud in the Early Persian Period," in G. Knoppers, L. Grabbe, and D. Fulton (eds.), *Exile and Restoration Revisited: Essays on the Babylonian and Persian Periods in Memory of Peter R. Ackroyd* (LSTS, 73; New York: T&T Clark, 2009), 116–27. Likewise, the "people(s) of the land(s)" and the foreigners referenced throughout Ezra-Nehemiah were probably descendants of those who remained in the land during the exile; see Grabbe, *Yehud*, 287.

[7] Evidence from Neh 1–13 is more ambiguous. There is very little dispute today that the Judeans (יהודים) referenced pervasively in the Nehemiah Memoir (Neh 1:1–7:3; 13:4–31) were understood to be autochthonous before the Nehemiah Memoir was integrated with the rest of Ezra-Nehemiah; see S. Japhet, "The Concept of the 'Remnant' in the Restoration Period: On the Vocabulary of Self-Definition," in *From the Rivers of Babylon to the Highlands of Judah: Collected Studies on the Restoration Period* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 432–49 (438–39); see also J. Wright, *Rebuilding Identity: The Nehemiah Memoir and its Earliest Readers* (BZAW, 348; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2004), 63–64, and G. Knoppers "Nehemiah and Sanballat: The Enemy Without or Within?," in O. Lipschits, G. Knoppers and R. Albertz (eds.), *Judah and the Judeans in the Fourth Century B.C.E.* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2007), 305–31 (309–11). For an opposing view, see Rom-Shiloni, *Exclusive Inclusivity*, 34–36. See Japhet, "The Concept of the 'Remnant,' " 440–45, and ibid., "People and Land," 108–12, on the redactional assimilation of autochthonous persons in Nehemiah and in Ezra 1–6 into a single community of returned exiles. Most scholars today agree with Japhet that Ezra-Nehemiah, in its final form, attempts to erase all traces of Judahites who remained in the land during the exilic period; however, Eskenazi has argued that Neh 8-13 actually integrates the autochthonous and repatriate populations of Yehud into a single, diverse restoration community; see T.C. Eskenazi, *In an Age of Prose: A Literary Approach to Ezra-Nehemiah* (SBL Monograph Series, 36; Atlanta: Scholars, 1988), 82, 90. I build on Eskenazi's arguments in C. Jones, "Retrofitting Jerusalem: Conceptions of Space, Identity, and Power in Ezra-Nehemiah," (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2014), 266–88.

[8] In this essay, I avoid using the term "Judean" to describe people whose ancestral homeland is the territory of the former Kingdom of Judah, despite the suggestions of S.J.D. Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties* (Hellenistic Culture and Society, 31; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 69–70, and S. Mason, "Jews, Judaeans, Judaizing, Judaism: Problems of Categorization in Ancient History," *JSJ* 38/4–5 (2007), 457–512. Judean identity (in the sense meant by Cohen and Mason) is itself a major site of contestation in Ezra 1–6, so it seems inappropriate to use the term "Judean" to refer only to the group in the text that claims to be Judean. As noted above, the

work to re-establish their view of proper Yahwistic piety in the Persian province of Yehud. The Returnees are a literary construct, in no way synonymous with social realities in Judea, whether in the sixth century, when the narrative is set, or in the time period of the text's earliest audiences.

Conflict between the Returnees and the local population plays a particularly prominent role in the narrative of temple rebuilding that dominates Ezra 1–6. In Ezra 1–3, a group of exiles from the former Kingdom of Judah returns from Babylon with orders from Cyrus, King of Persia, to rebuild the temple of Yahweh in Jerusalem. Everything proceeds according to Cyrus's orders until, in Ezra 4:1–5, a group of Yahwists from the surrounding territories approaches the Returnees and offers to assist them in rebuilding Yahweh's temple. When the Returnees rebuff their offer, the local Yahwists become hostile; through intimidation and bribery, they succeed in halting the rebuilding effort until the reign of King Darius. The new temple is only completed when Darius intervenes directly on behalf of the Returnees and orders their opponents to stand down (Ezra 6:1–12). In this narrative, there is a clear and persistent distinction between the Returnees, who work to actualize Yahweh's will by rebuilding his temple in Jerusalem, and the local people of Persian Yehud and Samaria who attempt to block their efforts. Temple building and boundary maintenance are intrinsically

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term "Returnee" reflects not historical reality but rather the oversimplification of history presented in the historiography of Ezra 1–6. Indeed, the text of Ezra 1–6 preserves traces of this more complex reality when it twice refers to the community as "Judah and Benjamin" (Ezra 1:5; 4:1; see also 10:9). Current scholarly consensus holds that the Babylonians did not deport most of the people who lived in Benjaminite territories in 586; for a review of literature on this, see E. Ben Zvi, "Total Exile, Empty Land, and the General Intellectual Discourse in Yehud," in Ben Zvi and Levin (eds.), *Concept of Exile*, 155–68 (155 n. 1), and note critiques of this view in B. Oded, "Where is the 'Myth of the Empty Land' to be found? History Versus Myth," in O. Lipschits and J. Blenkinsopp (eds.), *Judah and the Judeans in the Neo-Babylonian Period* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 55–74; and D.S. Vanderhooft, "New Evidence Pertaining to the Transition from Neo-Babylonian to Achaemenid Administration in Palestine," in R. Albertz and B. Becking (eds.), *Yahwism After the Exile—Perspectives on Israelite Religion in the Persian Period* (Studies in Theology and Religion, 5; Aasen-Maastricht: Van Gorcum, 2003), 219–35. Likewise, the list of repatriates (Ezra 2:1–67 // Neh 7:6–68) includes several Benjaminite sites among the places to which the exiles returned. Historically speaking, however, these people could not have returned to their hometowns because they would never have been deported. See Japhet, "People and Land," 110–11. Japhet suggests that the list originally included people from territories that did not experience deportation under Nebuchadnezzar II, but that they were assimilated redactionally into the exilic community via the heading in Ezra 2:1. Ben Zvi, "Total Exile," 155–68, argues that the Benjaminites, who did not experience exile, nevertheless adopted the collective memory of exile as their own because it allowed them to assert their own continuity with the old Kingdom of Judah as Jerusalem's status rose at Mizpah's expense during the Achaemenid period.

linked: the Returnees, and nobody else, are charged with rebuilding the temple.

It seems all the more surprising, then, that some of these nearby outsiders, whom the book of Ezra otherwise excludes from the restoration community, apparently join the repatriates in the Passover celebration that follows the completion and rededication of the temple. According to Ezra 6:20–21:

כי הטהרו הכהנים והלוים כאחד כלם טהורים וישחטו הפסח
לכל־בני הגולה ולאחיהם הכהנים ולהם: ויאכלו בני־ישראל
השבים מהגולה וכל הנבדל מטמאת גוי־הארץ אלהם לדרש
ליהוה אלהי ישראל:

> [20]For the priests and the Levites had purified themselves; to a man all of them were pure. And (the Levites) slaughtered the Passover for all the sons of the exile, and for their brothers the priests, and for themselves. [21]And the sons of Israel who had returned from the exile ate, along with all those who had separated themselves from the impurity of nations of the land to them to seek Yahweh God of Israel.[9]

According to this pericope, the Passover sacrifice is eaten by the returned exiles, and by any persons who had separated themselves from gentile impurities to seek Yahweh. This text has often been cited as an example of proselytism in nascent Judaism: it appears that persons who had previously been excluded from the community are now permitted to participate in one of its core cultic observances.[10] This position, however, runs up against a problem: if the people who separate themselves from gentile impurities to partake in the Passover sacrifice are outsiders, then Ezra 6:21 would appear to conflict with the rest of Ezra 1–6, which invokes imperial writing to limit the restoration community exclusively to repatriates from the Babylonian diaspora, i.e., the Returnees.

On these grounds, Matthew Thiessen has recently challenged the consensus that Ezra 6:21 allows for outsiders to be included in the community.[11] Thiessen argues that those who hold the consen-

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[9] All translations, unless otherwise noted, are my own.

[10] Scholars who hold this position include J. Myers, *Ezra. Nehemiah.* (AB, 14; Garden City: Doubleday, 1965), 54; F.C. Fensham, *The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah* (NICOT; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 96; H.G.M. Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah* (WBC, 16; Waco, TX: Word, 1985) 85; J. Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah: A Commentary* (The Old Testament Library; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1988), 132–33; Japhet, "People and Land," 115; Kessler, "Persia's Loyal Yahwists," 109. Other scholars hold that these "proselytes" are really autochthonous Judeans who are welcomed into the community of Returnees: W. Rudolph, *Esra und Nehemia* (HAT, 20; Tübingen: Mohr, 1949), 64; H. Schneider, *Die Bücher Esra und Nehemia* (HSAT, 4/2; Bonn: P. Hanstein, 1959), 128; M. Smith, *Palestinian Parties and Politics that Shaped the Old Testament* (2d ed.; London: SCM, 1987), 167.

[11] M. Thiessen, "The Function of a Conjunction: Inclusivist or Exclusivist Strategies in Ezra 6.19–21 and Nehemiah 10:29–30?," *JSOT* 34

sus position have not adequately explained the tension between the inclusion of outsiders in Ezra 6:21 and the exclusion of outsiders everywhere else in Ezra 1–6.[12] To solve the problem, Thiessen claims that the *waw* in Ezra 6:21 should be understood epexegetically (i.e., as a *waw explicativum*). Therefore, the phrase "all those who had separated themselves . . ." does not refer to a distinct category of persons; rather, it modifies "the sons of Israel who had returned from the exile," qualifying the conditions under which they participate in the Passover. There is therefore no inconsistency in Ezra 1–6: everywhere, the restoration community is limited exclusively to the Returnees.

In this essay, I defend the consensus position that Ezra 6:21 includes outsiders in the community. In so doing, I answer Thiessen's arguments against the consensus position. First, I evaluate Thiessen's reading of the conjunction in Ezra 6:20–21. I conclude that Thiessen's reading, while possible, is not inevitable, and that the matter must be decided on the basis of evidence from the rest of Ezra 1–6. In the second section of the essay, I show that the consensus understanding of Ezra 6:20–21 better fits the remainder of Ezra 1–6. My thesis is that the Cyrus edict (Ezra 1:2–4) and the register of repatriates (Ezra 2:1–67), the two written texts that limit the restoration community to the Returnees, function only to define the community that restores the temple. Once the temple is restored, the cult takes over the function of determining the community's boundaries, and thus the community can be opened to qualified outsiders who participate in the cult.

WHAT'S YOUR FUNCTION, CONJUNCTION? THE *WAW* IN EZRA 6:21

The title of Thiessen's essay is "The Function of a Conjunction," and the conjunction in question is the one that links the two grammatical units that describe the people who celebrate the Passover in Ezra 6:21. Here is the whole sentence, once again, in Hebrew:

ויאכלו בני־ישראל השבים מהגולה וכל הנבדל מטמאת גוי־
הארץ אלהם לדרש ליהוה אלהי ישראל:

In my translation, above, I treat the *waw* in the phrase וכל הנבדל מטמאת גוי־הארץ as a simple conjunction, rendering the sentence as referring to two distinct classes of people: 1) repatriates from the diaspora and 2) outsiders. Thus the preposition אלהם, "to them," refers to the Returnees: the outsiders who join in the Passover separate themselves *from* the impurities of the nations of the land *to* the restoration community. Thiessen argues, however, that the *waw* between the two phrases functions epexegetically.[13] He translates thusly: "And all the sons of Israel who had returned from exile, *that*

(2009), 63–79.

[12] Thiessen, "Conjunction," 71–72.

[13] Thiessen, "Conjunction," 70, 72–73.

is, those who had separated themselves from the impurity of the nations of the land to them to seek YHWH God of Israel, ate . . .”[14]

Thiessen adduces three pieces of evidence within the pericope to defend his argument. First, only three classes of people (priests, Levites, and laity) are purified in Ezra 6:20, suggesting that these same classes (and nobody else) participate in the Passover feast. Second, the phrase “to them” (אלהם) in Ezra 6:21 lacks a clear antecedent, but the pairing of טמאה, “impurity” in 6:21 with טהור, “pure,” in 6:20 suggests that the people of Israel are separating themselves from the impurity of the nations to the purity of the priests and Levites (who had already purified themselves). Lastly, he argues that 1 Esd 7:13 treats the *waw* in Ezra 6:21 as epexegetical by omitting it entirely.[15] On these grounds, in tandem with the exclusionism evident elsewhere in the book of Ezra-Nehemiah, Thiessen claims that “the onus of proof should be on those who believe that Ezra 6:21 envisions a contrasting openness to foreigners.”[16]

Thiessen is correct that the *waw* in Ezra 6:21 carries an epexegetical nuance: the mere fact that the persons listed in Ezra 6:21 partake of the Passover sacrifice entails that they have separated themselves from gentile impurities and that they seek Yahweh. Does this, however, exclude other potential participants from the feast? Thiessen implies that the epexegetical character of the *waw* in Ezra 6:21 is mutually exclusive from any conjunctive nuance: it either means “and” or “that is,” but it cannot mean both. It is true that the Hebrew *waw* conjunction can serve a wide variety of functions, and these various functions necessitate different English translations: for instance, conjunctive *waw* demands English “and,” disjunctive *waw* demands English “but,” sequential *waw* may require English “then,” and epexegetical *waw* often requires English “that is,” as in Thiessen’s translation.[17] It does not follow, however, that we can import the meaning of the English translation back into the logic of the Hebrew grammar; rather, the various “species” of the *waw* conjunction are heuristic constructs that we employ to make sense of ancient Hebrew. As Steiner has shown, the *waw*-conjunction signifies merely that the entities on either side of it have a positive truth value—the various “species” of the conjunction are determined by context.[18]

Context, then, must determine how we understand the conjunction in Ezra 6:21. In identifying the conjunction in Ezra 6:21 as epexegetical, Thiessen indicates that the material that follows it clarifies or specifies the identity of the material that precedes it; this does not necessitate that the entities on either side of the conjunc-

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[14] Thiessen, “Conjunction,” 73.

[15] Thiessen, “Conjunction,” 76.

[16] Thiessen, “Conjunction,” 74–77 (quotation p. 77).

[17] On these various species of the conjunction, see *IBHS* §39.2 and *GKC* §152.

[18] R. Steiner, “Does the Hebrew Conjunction ו– Have Many Meanings, One Meaning, or No Meaning At All?,” *JBL* 119/2 (2000), 249–67.

tion are identical. In fact, the sort of construction that Thiessen identifies in Ezra 6:21, in which a relative clause is conjoined epexegetically to another clause in prose narrative, is virtually unprecedented in ancient Hebrew.[19] The overwhelming majority of epexegetical conjunctions in the Hebrew Bible occur either in the context of elevated poetic speech (where near-syntactic coordination is a common stylistic feature) or within legal and architectural texts (where unfamiliar terms are frequently used).[20] Given the lack of any parallel to the construction Thiessen identifies in Ezra 6:21, we need to let context determine our understanding of it, rather than foreclose any possibilities on the basis of our heuristic constructions of Hebrew grammar.

Evidence from the immediate context of Ezra 6:21 is inconclusive. Thiessen argues that 1 Esd 7:13, by omitting the *waw* entirely, treats it as epexegetical, but this is not necessarily the case. In fact, the LXX translates epexegetical *waw* with καὶ in a majority of occurrences;[21] moreover, 1 Esdras is not merely a translation of Ezra-Nehemiah but a coherent literary composition in its own right, and its author may have had other reasons for merging the exilic community entirely with the category of persons who had separated themselves from gentile impurities. Thiessen's argument that the same classes of persons listed in Ezra 6:20 would be expected to participate in the feast in Ezra 6:21 would be operative whether or not Ezra 6:21 explicitly excludes foreigners, since those in addition to the returnees would be added, by means of the

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[19] G. Vanoni, "Zur Bedeutung Der Althebraischen Konjunktion W.: Am Beispiel Von Psalm 149,6," in W. Richter et al. (eds.), *Text, Methode und Grammatik: Wolfgang Richter zum 65. Geburtstag* (St. Ottilien: EOS, 1991), 561–76. There are occasionally examples of lists and other longer phrases that are attached, via an epexegetical *waw*, to the term they specify; see Exod 24:12 and 2 Kgs 8:9; for discussion of the latter, see B.A. Mastin, "Waw Explicativum in 2 Kings Viii 9," *VT* 34 (1984), 353–55. I am aware of only one possible example of a relative clause joined via an epexegetical *waw* to another clause, Jdg 7:5b; for discussion, see A. Hornkohl, "Resolving the Crux in Judges 7: 5b–7: A Critique of Two Traditional Approaches and the Reproposal of a Third," *Hebrew Studies* 50 (2009), 67–84. Hornkohl's interpretation, however, is hardly the consensus reading of the text, and even if it is correct the parallel with Ezra 6:21 is only partial: the identity of the "sons of the exile" in Ezra 6:21 requires no further clarification, unlike the identity of those who lap like dogs in Jdg 7:5b.

[20] For a partial list, see D.W. Baker, "Further Examples of the *Waw Explicativum*," *VT* 30/2 (1980), 129–36; and P. Wilton, "More Cases of Waw Explicativum," *VT* 44 (1994), 125–28. On the use of epexegetical *waw* in Hebrew poetic parallelism, see H.A. Brongers, "Alternative Interpretationen Des Sogenannten Waw Copulativum," *ZAW* 90 (1978), 273–77.

[21] Baker, "*Waw Explicativum*," 135–36, notes 27 instances where the LXX translates epexegetical *waw* with καὶ, versus thirteen where it omits the conjunction and five where it substantially reinterprets the passage in question.

expansive criteria for inclusion in Ezra 6:21b, to the community that was already participating in the ritual in Ezra 6:19–20. Thiessen's final argument, that the antecedent of אלהם in Ezra 6:21 is the priests and Levites in Ezra 6:20, falters because the "sons of Israel" in Ezra 6:21, being nearer to the pronoun in question, are the more probable antecedent.[22] Thiessen's internal arguments, then, are at best inconclusive.

WRITTEN DOCUMENTS AND COMMUNITY BOUNDARIES IN EZRA 1–6

In the preceding section, I showed that Thiessen's reading of Ezra 6:21, while not impossible, is hardly the most probably on grammatical grounds. I have not yet addressed Thiessen's broader argument, however, that Ezra-Nehemiah is so radically exclusionary towards outsiders that the consensus reading (wherein outsiders are included in the community) is highly improbable on ideological grounds. In this section, I will argue that exclusionary texts like Ezra 9–10 and Neh 13:23–30, upon which Thiessen bases much of his argument, do not necessarily figure into the interpretive framework of Ezra 1–6. Rather, the narrative is internally coherent and should be understood first on its own terms. Then, I show how written texts (namely, the Cyrus Edict in Ezra 1:1–4 and the register of repatriates in Ezra 2:1–67) function provisionally, in the absence of a temple cult, to define community boundaries in exclusionary terms. Once the temple is rebuilt, the community's boundaries can be renegotiated.

Following the publication of Tamara Cohn Eskenazi's monograph *In an Age of Prose: A Literary Approach to Ezra-Nehemiah*, the dominant trend in Ezra-Nehemiah scholarship has been to treat the canonical book as a literary and thematic unity,[23] and Thiessen

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[22] H.G.M. Williamson, "More Unity than Diversity," in M. Boda and P. Redditt (eds.), *Unity and Disunity in Ezra-Nehemiah: Rhetoric, Redaction, and Reader* (Hebrew Bible Monographs, 17; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2008), 329–43 (335).

[23] Eskenazi, *Age of Prose*, 11–14, 37–42, 177–84. Eskenazi's view was quickly challenged by J.C. VanderKam, "Ezra-Nehemiah or Ezra and Nehemiah?," in J. Blenkinsopp and E.C. Ulrich (eds.), *Priests, Prophets, and Scribes: Essays on the Formation and Heritage of Second Temple Judaism in Honour of Joseph Blenkinsopp* (JSOTSup, 149; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992), 55–75; and D. Kraemer, "On the Relationship of the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah" *JSOT* 59 (1993), 73–92; however, the dominant stream of scholarship today leans toward unity, e.g., L. Grabbe, *Ezra-Nehemiah* (London: Routledge, 1998), 93–99; J. Wright, "Seeking, Finding, and Writing in Ezra-Nehemiah," in Boda and Redditt (eds.), *Unity and Disunity*, 277–304 (301–4); D. Janzen, "The Cries of Jerusalem: Ethnic, Cultic, Legal, and Geographic Boundaries in Ezra-Nehemiah," in Boda and Redditt (eds.), *Unity and Disunity*, 117–35 (117–21); C. Karrer-Grube, "Scrutinizing the Conceptual Unity of Ezra and Nehemiah," in Boda and Redditt (eds.), *Unity and Disunity*, 136–59. Those who question the unity of Ezra-Nehemiah include B. Becking, "Ezra on the Move . . .: Trends and Perspectives

invokes exclusionary texts like Ezra 9–10 and Neh 13:23–30 as evidence that Ezra 6:21 must be understood in exclusionary terms.[24] There are good reasons, however, for limiting the context of Ezra 6:21 to Ezra 1–6.[25] First of all, Ezra 1–6 constitutes a complete narrative unit in its own right: it opens with Cyrus's order to rebuild the temple, and it closes with the completion of the temple. Ezra 7:1 begins an entirely new episode concerning the mission of

on the Character and his Book," in F.G. Martinez and E. Noort (eds.), *Perspectives in the Study of the Old Testament and Early Judaism: A Symposium in Honour of Adam S. van der Woude on the Occasion of his 70th Birthday* (VTSup, 73; Leiden: Brill, 1998), 154–79, repr. in *Ezra, Nehemiah, and the Construction of Early Jewish Identity* (FAT, 80; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011); and J. Pakkala, "The Disunity of Ezra-Nehemiah," in Boda and Redditt (eds.), *Unity and Disunity*, 200–215. It should be noted that all of the above scholars acknowledge the complex compositional history of Ezra-Nehemiah; the question is whether the final redactional product constitutes a thematic or a narrative unity.

[24] Thiessen, "Conjunction," 66–67.

[25] Virtually all scholars agree that Ezra 1–6 is compositionally distinct from the remainder of Ezra-Nehemiah, though the order in which it was added, and the degree to which it was originally independent, is debated. Blenkinsopp argues that Ezra 1–6 originated as a continuation of the Chronicler's work and that it resulted from a Chronistic redaction of prior sources. Ezra-Nehemiah emerged as first an Ezra Memoir and then a Nehemiah Memoir were added to this work; see *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 41–47. Williamson contends, on the contrary, that Ezra 1–6 was composed (from prior sources) as a preface to the combined memoirs of Ezra and Nehemiah; see *Ezra, Nehemiah*, xxiii–xxiv, xxxv; and ibid., "The Composition of Ezra 1–6," *JTS* 34 (1983), 1–30. Williamson's position is adopted by L. Fried, *The Priest and the Great King: Temple-Palace Relations in the Persian Empire* (Biblical and Judaic Studies from the University of California, San Diego, 10; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2004); ibid., "Who Wrote Ezra-Nehemiah—And Why Did They?," in Boda and Redditt (eds.), *Unity and Disunity*, 75–97. Fried elaborates on Williamson's compositional framework by isolating Aristotelian rhetorical conventions in Ezra 1–6; see ibid., "*Deus ex Machina* and Plot Construction in Ezra 1–6," in M. Boda and L. Beal (eds.), *Prophets and Prophecy in Ancient Israelite Historiography* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013), 189–208; and ibid., "Ezra's Use of Documents in the Context of Hellenistic Rules of Rhetoric," in I. Kalimi (ed.), *New Perspectives on Ezra-Nehemiah: History and Historiography, Text, Literature, and Interpretation* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2012), 11–26. D. Edelman, "Ezra 1–6 as an Idealized Past," in E. Ben Zvi, D. Edelman and F. Polak (eds.), *A Palimpsest: Rhetoric, Ideology, Stylistics, and Language Relating to Persian Israel* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2009), 47–59; and B. Porten, "Theme and Structure of Ezra 1–6: From Literature to History," *Transeuphratène* 23 (2002), 27–44; both Edelman and Porten treat rhetorical features of Ezra 1–6 in relative isolation from the remainder of Ezra-Nehemiah. J. Wright, finally, treats Ezra 1–6 as a response to an early form of the Nehemiah Memoir; see "A New Model for the Composition of Ezra-Nehemiah," in Lipschits, Knoppers and Albertz (eds.), *Judah and the Judeans*, 333–48. It cannot be presumed, within any of these compositional frameworks, that Ezra 1–6 shares the exclusionary ideology of Ezra 9–10.

a character named Ezra. Second, we cannot presume that Ezra 1–6 and Ezra 7–10 share the same assumptions about community boundaries without first examining the evidence. As it turns out, Ezra's expulsion of foreign women in Ezra 9–10 is based on a highly synthetic reading of Torah, one that combines disparate strands of tradition into an unprecedented categorical ban on intermarriage between Returnees and foreigners.[26] Ezra 1–6, by contrast, never mentions Torah with respect to the delineation of community boundaries.[27]

Despite these differences, Ezra 1–6 does share in common with Ezra 7–10 the use of written texts to define the boundaries of the restoration community. Ezra 1–6 begins by quoting a written text, the Cyrus edict (Ezra 1:2–4),[28] which authorizes people who worship Yahweh throughout the Persian Empire to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple to Yahweh there. The edict, situated as it is at the beginning of Ezra 1–6, is paradigmatic of the plot of Ezra 1–6, and much of the subsequent action unfolds as the community carries out Cyrus's directive and as outsiders oppose them in their task. The Cyrus edict is also ideologically paradigmatic: it serves as the source of the Returnee community's legitimate and exclusive right to rebuild the temple. Thus, in Ezra 4:1–3, when Yahwists already living in the Levant approach the Returnees and offer to help with the rebuilding project, the Returnees rebuff them on the grounds that only they are authorized by Cyrus to rebuild.[29]

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[26] On this point, see Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 185; ibid., *Judaism, The First Phase: The Place of Ezra and Nehemiah in the Origins of Judaism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 67; M. Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985), 114–29, especially 115–17; S. Olyan, "Purity Ideology in Ezra-Nehemiah as a Tool to Reconstitute the Community," *JSJ* 35 (2004), 1–16; ibid., *Rites and Rank: Hierarchy in Biblical Representations of Cult* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 85–87.

[27] Torah is invoked in Ezra 1–6 with respect to the construction of the sacrificial altar (Ezra 3:2), the observance of Sukkoth (Ezra 3:4), and the appointment of priestly and Levitical courses (Ezra 6:18). In Ezra 1–6, Torah serves a limited divinatory function, that of properly constructing the altar and executing ritual requirements. Torah, however, operates fully under the auspices of Persian imperial power and serves a limited function.

[28] Cyrus' edict exists in two different versions in Ezra 1–6: an oral version is quoted in Ezra 1:2–4, and in its heading (Ezra 1:1) reference is made to the fact that it also existed in writing (וגם־במכתב); the written version is quoted (within a letter from Darius, who found it in a royal treasury in Ecbatana) in Ezra 6:3–5. There are major problems with any attempt to take both edicts as the authentic words of Cyrus, as they show internal contradictions.

[29] Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 50; see also ibid., "More Unity than Diversity," 335–36. I share Williamson's critique of Janzen: we have here not an ontological distinction between Israelites and foreigners, but rather a political distinction between those authorized to rebuild and those not authorized to rebuilt. See Janzen, "The Cries of Jerusalem," 124-26, and

In response to their claim to be fellow Yahweh-worshippers (". . . we, like you, seek your God," כככם נדרוש לאלהיכם)," Zerubbabel says, "It is not for you but for us to rebuild the House of our God, for we alone may rebuild (it) for Yahweh God of Israel, just as King Cyrus of Persia commanded us."[30] Later, when a Persian official, Tattenai, challenges the Returnees' right to rebuild, they request that Cyrus's original edict be sought in the royal archives (Ezra 5:3–17). It is only after King Darius discovers this edict and issues an edict of his own that the temple is finally completed (Ezra 6:1–15). Imperial writing, in the form of the Cyrus edict, authorizes the Returnees to rebuild the temple. When their exclusive right to do so is questioned, it is likewise the Cyrus edict that ultimately allows them to complete the task.

Another written text,[31] the register of repatriates in Ezra 2:1–67, precisely defines the boundaries of the community of Returnees. It lists the various phratries that constitute the community, either by patronym or by hometown. The heading of the list, in Ezra 2:1, defines the group according to three criteria. First, they are descendants of the ancient kingdom of Judah (בני המדינה).[32] Second, they are members of the Babylonian diaspora community (העלים משבי הגולה אשר הגלה נבוכדנצור מלך־בבל לבבל).[33] Third, they return to Jerusalem and Judah (וישובו לירושלם ויהודה). These criteria are important because they serve precisely to define the boundaries of the community with respect to outsiders like those who approach them in Ezra 4:1–3. These outsiders, like the Returnees, are Yahwists, and they likewise are the products of an exile—the same root, עלה, is even used to describe their entry into the land of Israel.[34] They are not, however, descendants of the

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note that he, like Thiessen, reads an epexegetical *waw* in Ezra 6:21.

[30] For my translation of כי אנחנו יחד נבנה, see M.D. Goldman, "Misunderstood Polaric Meaning of a Word," *ABR* 1 (1951), 61–63; and J.C. de Moor, "Lexical Remarks Concerning *YAḤAD* and *YAḤDĀU*," *VT* 7 (1957), 350–55. For a recent treatment of יחד and יחדו in the context of legal contentions, see S. Holtz, "The Case for Adversarial *yaḥad*," *VT* 59 (2009), 211–21. Holtz's treatment concerns adverbial usages of the term, however.

[31] That the register of repatriates is understood to be a written text can be inferred from Ezra 2:62, in which certain priests who cannot verify their ancestry "searched for their (written) genealogical register" (בקשו המתיחשים כתבם) but were unable to find themselves mentioned in the text. I elaborate on Ezra 2:59–63 below.

[32] *Pace* F.C. Fensham, "Mĕdînâ in Ezra and Nehemiah," *VT* 25 (1975), 795–97. The use of the word מדינה is entirely consistent with the ideology of Ezra 1–6, in which Judah is presented as fully subordinate to Persian imperial rule.

[33] The Cyrus edict (Ezra 1:3, especially) represents the return as having come from all throughout the Persian Empire, and not only from Babylon. The list, however, emphasizes the reversal of the exile, and as such it telescopes the diaspora community, treating all of it as that which Nebuchadnezzar exiled to Babylon.

[34] D. Frankel, *The Land of Canaan and the Destiny of Israel: Theologies of*

province by means of the Babylonian diaspora, and therefore they are not authorized, by the Cyrus edict, to participate in the rebuilding program. The Cyrus edict designates the community that is charged with rebuilding the temple; the register of repatriates eliminates any potential for ambiguity concerning that community's boundaries.

Written documents, then, have enormous authority in Ezra 1–6.[35] Jacob Wright, in his penetrating study of seeking, finding, and writing in Ezra-Nehemiah,[36] has argued that writing serves two interrelated functions in Ezra 1–6. First, writing in Ezra-Nehemiah serves as a source for the divination of Yahweh's will. In this respect, Ezra-Nehemiah participates in an ongoing shift in divinatory methods within Judean culture of the Second Temple period: increasingly, the study of written texts, rather than charismatic or mantic modes of divination, take precedence.[37] Wright, citing Fishbane, attributes this process both to the centralization of the Judahite kingdom during the 7th and 6th centuries BCE and to the subsequent liquidation of that kingdom by Babylon in 586. According to Wright, the "administrative consolidation" of the state would have extended to the divinatory infrastructure of the royal temple, and royally-sanctioned writing would have served as a prime conduit for knowledge of the divine will, particularly among elites.[38] The loss of that cultic/oracular infrastructure, along with

Territory in the Hebrew Bible (Siphrut, 4; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 208–9, argues that the author of this text presupposes the events of 2 Kgs 17:24–41, in which the king of Assyria, having exiled the people of Israel following the fall of Samaria, forcibly moves people from elsewhere in his empire to resettle the land. 2 Kgs characterizes the religion of these settlers as syncretistic: they worship Yahweh, as the god of their new homeland, in addition to their own ancestral deities. Historical corroboration of this datum may come from Amherst Papyrus 63, which transcribes the liturgy of a new year's festival celebrated in Upper Egypt by people who may have been related to those forcibly resettled by the Assyrians; for discussion, see "The Aramaic Text in Demotic Script (1.99)," translated by R.C. Steiner (_COS_ 1:309–27). (I am grateful to Lawson Younger for suggesting this parallel to me.) Frankel, however, notes that Ezra 4:1–3 does not mention syncretism as a reason for excluding them from the restoration community. Their status as outsiders is sufficient.

[35] This observation is stated seminally by Eskenazi, _Age of Prose_, 58–60; she also anticipates my arguments about the Cyrus edict and the register of repatriates, above.

[36] Wright, "Seeking, Finding, and Writing," 277–304.

[37] Wright, "Seeking, Finding, and Writing," 277–79. Wright cites Gen 25:22–23, in which Rebekah "seeks" Yahweh (ותלך לדרש את־יהוה) to divine the meaning of her troublesome pregnancy, and several texts from Qumran (4Q415–418, 4Q423) in which the same terminology of "seeking" is applied to the study of written texts, as paradigmatic bookends for this ongoing process.

[38] Wright, "Seeking, Finding, and Writing," 278; Fishbane, _Biblical Interpretation_, 244. "Administrative consolidation" is Fishbane's term. See, for instance, Lachish letter 3, lines 19–21, in which an oracle from a prophet is relayed in writing from a soldier to his superior. For this reading of the

the court prophets and the Urim and Thummim, would have made written records of divine revelations associated with the temple/palace complex all the more central as sources of knowledge of the divine.[39]

According to Wright, the second function served by writing in Ezra-Nehemiah arises out of the symbiotic relationship between temple and palace in ancient Near Eastern civilization.[40] Ezra-Nehemiah, taking its cues from Deutero-Isaiah, transfers the royal prerogative of temple-building from the Davidic monarchy to Cyrus, king of Persia.[41] In Ezra 1–6, the primary source of the divine word is likewise Persian imperial writ,[42] and in this capacity as

ostracon, see H. Barstad, "Lachish Ostracon III and Ancient Israelite Prophecy," *Eretz-Israel* 24 (1993), 8–12. J. Schaper, "Exilic and Post-Exilic Prophecy and the Orality/Literacy Problem," *VT* 55 (2005), 324–42 (327–29), further observes that the ascription of bureaucratic writing to God in, e.g., Mal 3:16 and Isa 65:6 demonstrates the prevalence of bureaucratic writing in Judahite society and the general trust that elites placed in written records. E. Ben Zvi, "Introduction: Writings, Speeches, and Prophetic Books—Setting an Agenda," in E. Ben Zvi and M.H. Floyd (eds.), *Writings and Speech in Israelite and Ancient Near Eastern Prophecy* (SBL Symposium Series, 10; Atlanta: SBL, 2000), 1–30 (8–10), identifies the class of persons who could read and produce bureaucratic—and hence, also religious—texts as "literati," a group of people with a distinctive in-group identity and a shared set of aesthetic and epistemological assumptions who assumed the role of brokers of divine knowledge. See also D. Carr, *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart: Origins of Scripture and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 116–22.

[39] Wright, "Seeking, Finding, and Writing," 278; Schaper, "Exilic and Post-Exilic Prophecy," 338. Ben Zvi, "Writings, Speeches, and Prophetic Books," 14, writes, "In such a scenario, the process of composing, redacting, and editing prophetic books, along with the use of written sources for these purposes, would have had much to do with the literati's self identification as animators of the prophets and YHWH, or in other words, with a quasi-prophetic status . . . The literati voice the 'I' of the text, which is more often than not a godly 'I,' either human or divine. By doing so, they identify with that 'I.'"

[40] Wright, "Seeking, Finding, and Writing," 282–83; see also V. Hurowitz, *I Have Built You an Exalted House: Temple Building in the Bible in light of Mesopotamian and Northwest Semitic Writings* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1992), 135–63.

[41] On Cyrus's royal function in Deutero-Isaiah, see J. Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 40–55* (AB 19A; New York: Doubleday, 2002), 249.

[42] Wright, "Seeking, Finding, and Writing," 285–89; 294–301. According to Wright, different sections of Ezra-Nehemiah (corresponding roughly to various compositional strata) locate Yahweh's word in different texts. In Ezra 7–10, the prime source is Torah; in Neh 8–10, it is again Torah, but here the book has achieved an iconic status and is available to the whole community. On Wright's compositional model, see "A New Model for the Composition of Ezra-Nehemiah," 333–48. See also R. Kratz, *The Composition of the Narrative Books of the Old Testament* (London: T&T Clark, 2005), 49–86. For an alternate and dissenting model, see J. Pakkala, *Ezra the Scribe: The Development of Ezra 7–10 and Nehemiah 8* (BZAW, 347; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2004), 291–300 et passim; ibid.,

well Cyrus replaces the Davidic monarchy in the divine-human economy.[43] As noted above, the Cyrus edict precisely articulates the task that Yahweh has set before humans in Ezra 1–6 (i.e., the rebuilding of his temple), and that edict, in tandem with the register of repatriates (Ezra 2:1–67), precisely defines the boundaries of the community that will fulfill that task (i.e., the community of Return-ees). When their right to rebuild the temple is challenged, the Returnees cite the Cyrus edict (Ezra 4:1–5; 5:17); when Darius reaf-firms the right of the Returnees to rebuild, he likewise quotes the Cyrus edict (Ezra 6:1–12). Yahweh's will is articulated and ulti-mately fulfilled through the ongoing reinterpretation of a text writ-ten by a foreign king, supplemented by a genealogical register that establishes continuity between the Returnees and the ancient king-dom of Judah.

Written texts, then, clearly serve a divinatory function in Ezra 1–6. They reveal the divine will, and they can be used to clarify the divine will as time goes on. Is it true, however, that the use of written texts definitively eclipses mantic forms of divination in Ezra 1–6, as Wright claims?[44] Two episodes in Ezra 1–6 suggests otherwise. First, in the register of repatriates (Ezra 2:1–67), there are certain families who are unable to prove their Israelite ancestry (Ezra 2:59–63).[45] Though some commentators have argued that these persons are excluded from the community on account of their uncertain ancestry,[46] two considerations indicate that they are in fact included in it. First, they are listed before the final tally of repatriates in Ezra 2:64; the fact that slaves and other chattel are listed after this tally (Ezra 2:65–67) indicates that those listed before it are understood to be included in it.[47] Second, they are the

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"Disunity," 201–4, 215. For a recent survey of compositional models, see Eskenazi, "Revisiting the Composition of Ezra-Nehemiah."

[43] Wright, "Seeking, Finding, and Writing," 283.

[44] Wright, "Seeking, Finding, and Writing," 282.

[45] ולא יכלו להגיד בית־אבותם וזרעם אם מישראל הם (Ezra 2:59b).

[46] E.g., Grabbe, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 14–15.

[47] It must be noted that there is a substantial discrepancy between the total number of persons counted in the קהל in Ezra 2:64 and the total of the numbers from the census list that precedes it (29,818 in Ezra 2:1–63). The discrepancy has been variously explained. K. Galling, "The 'Gōlā-List' According to Ezra 2 // Nehemiah 7," *JBL* 70 (1952), 149–58, re-gards the total number as a redactor's fanciful addition. J. Bewer, *Der text des buches Ezra. Beiträge zu seiner Wiederherstellung* (Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments, 14; Göttingen: Vanden-hoeck & Ruprecht, 1922), 33, emends ארבע in Ezra 2:64 to שלש, yielding the number 32,360, which is closer to the totals derived from the census. This has rightfully been rejected as arbitrary, as it is unsupported by any versional or textual evidence. P. Redditt, "The Census List in Ezra 2 and Nehemiah 7: A Suggestion," in Kalimi (ed.), *New Perspectives on Ezra-Nehe-miah*, 223–40, has recently offered a new explanation: the discrepancy is deliberate and reflects the redactor's agenda of distinguishing between the "true Israel" and the rest of the population of Yehud. The suggestion is not without merit, as it fits well with the exclusionary tendencies of Ezra

only persons in the register of repatriates who are listed both by patronym and by place of origin. Elsewhere in the register, the laypersons in the community are listed either by patronym (Ezra 2:3–20) or by their ancestral land holding in the kingdom of Judah (2:21–35), with no appreciable difference in status between them—either, apparently, will suffice to prove one's authentic Israelite ancestry. By listing families who cannot definitively authenticate their Israelite ancestry by patronym and by their place of settlement in Babylon, the register of repatriates stacks positive evidence in favor of their right to be included in the community.[48]

Thus the laypersons who cannot prove their ancestry in Ezra 2:59–60 can be included in the community of repatriates. The priests who cannot verify their ancestry, however, present an additional problem: priesthood is a hereditary office, and a person serving illegitimately in it would desecrate the cult, and by extension the community that depends upon it.[49] Consequently, these priests of questionable heredity are "defiled from the priesthood" (ויגאלו מן־הכהנה) and forbidden from eating of the most holy food "until a priest should be available to (consult) the Urim and Thummim" (עד עמד כהן לאורים ולתמים). Harrington argues that the root גאל, the Pual of which is here translated "defiled," connotes "nausea and loathing," and she cites Lev 26:11, 43 as evidence.[50] The root in those cases, however, is געל, and while it is

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1–6; however, it must be rejected. Redditt's argument proceeds from the premise that the assembly (קהל) numbered in Ezra 2:64 represents all those living in Yehud and not merely those who returned from captivity. His attempt to establish this reading on the basis of scanty evidence in Ezra 9–10 (where the assembly could be construed to include the "foreign women"), Neh 8:2, 17 (where a distinction could exist between the whole assembly in 8:2 and the assembly of the returnees in 8:17), and Neh 13:1 (where it apparently includes all those who worship at the temple) falls well short of overriding the contextual evidence in Ezra 2 that the number should be taken, at face value, as reflecting only the returnees. More to the point, Redditt ignores entirely the fact that the entire assembly in Ezra 2:64 is characterized as being "as one" (כל־הקהל כאחד), a point that undermines any attempt to argue that the redactor's intent is to highlight the assembly's disunity. There is a similar discrepancy in the near-identical repetition of this list in Neh 7:6–72; for a discussion of the significance in that context, see O. Lipschits, "Literary and Ideological Aspects of Nehemiah 11," *JBL* 121 (2002), 423–40 (431–32).

[48] Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 37, notes that the use of place names in Babylon, where these families presumably were settled after the liquidation of the kingdom of Judah, stand in as a substitute "for the lacking genealogical points of reference." My argument builds on his.

[49] Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 37; Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 92; see also K. Joachimsen, "Boundaries in Flux in Ezra 2:59–63" (paper presented at the Research Seminar of the Hebrew Bible Department of Tel Aviv University, Tel Aviv, Israel, April 17, 2012).

[50] H. Harrington, "Holiness and Purity in Ezra-Nehemiah," in Boda and Redditt (eds.), *Unity and Disunity*, 98–116 (107). See also H.F. Fuhs, "געל," *TWOT* 3:45–48. Though the term, in the Qal, is a technical term for the dissolution of the covenant, it strongly connotes abhorrence and

true that the two roots are biforms of one another (as evinced especially by the use of גאל in biblical quotations containing גען at Qumran),[51] their distribution suggests that גאל becomes, in late texts (e.g., Isa 59:3; 63:3; Mal 1:7; Dan 1:8), a technical term for defilement or pollution.[52] In Ezra 2:62 these priests are forbidden from officiating in the cult while their genealogy is in question.[53] The implication is that, once their heredity has been verified, they would be eligible for reinstatement. Though the resolution of the matter is never explicitly stated, a priest by the name of Meremoth b. Uriah receives the goods that Ezra transports to Jerusalem from Babylon in Ezra 8:33. Elsewhere, Meremoth b. Uriah is identified as a son of Haqqoz (Neh 3:4, 21).[54] At minimum, these data suggest that at least one of the priestly phratries whose ancestry is doubted in Ezra 2:61–63 is regarded unproblematically as part of the priesthood elsewhere in Ezra-Nehemiah.

The means by which the genealogies of these priests are to be confirmed is via consultation of the Urim and Thummim. It is beyond the scope of this essay to wade into the many ambiguities that surround the Urim and Thummim.[55] The two aspects of their nature and use that are salient to my argument enjoy broad consensus among authorities on the topic: first, the Urim and Thummim are a mode of mantic divination;[56] and, second, they are explicitly

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loathing, as in Lev 26. *TWOT* has no entry for the biform גאל, and mentions it only in passing; see H. Ringgren, "גָּאַל,"*TWOT* 2:350–55 (351).

[51] J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 23–27* (AB, 3b; New York: Doubleday, 2000), 2301, cited in Harrington, "Holiness and Purity," 107 n. 29. Milgrom cites 1QM 9:8 and CD 12:16.

[52] L. Koehler and W. Baumgartner, "גאל," *HALOT* 1:169–70. The Pual is translated "to be defiled (ritually)."

[53] *Pace* Olyan, "Purity Ideology in Ezra-Nehemiah," 8, the fact that these priests were classified as polluted does not mean that they were expelled from the priestly ranks on account of their ancestry, or that the issue at stake is exogamy. There is no evidence in Ezra 2:61–63 that these priests' heredity is in question because of mixed marriages; rather, they, like the laypersons in Ezra 2:59–60, simply cannot find their genealogical register. Their defilement, moreover, is not permanent: the mere fact that the Urim and Thummim are used to adjudicate the matter indicates that the defilement is not a permanent state, but rather a legal condition laid upon them to prevent them from officiating in the cult.

[54] Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah,* 31, 37; Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 92.

[55] C. van Dam, *The Urim and Thummim: A Means of Revelation in Ancient Israel* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1997), 9–103, provides a review of literature on the Urim and Thummim from ancient times up to the publication of his book. Subsequent publications are addressed below. Van Dam identifies three broad areas where the nature of the Urim and Thummim has been questioned: first, the physical object or objects to which the terms Urim and Thummim correspond; second, the precise nature of the divination performed by means of the Urim and Thummim; and third, the etymology of the terms and the significance of the plural form.

[56] The means by which the Urim and Thummim are used for divination is debated. The majority position in the modern period has generally

associated with the cult in all of the references to them in the Hebrew Bible.[57] In all of these cases, a priest is present; moreover, in all of them, the divination occurs (or would occur) in proximity to an altar, suggesting a cultic setting. This datum explains why the matter must wait "until a priest should be available to consult the Urim and Thummim" (Ezra 2:63): since (within Ezra-Nehemiah) the only legitimate Yahwistic cult site is the temple in Jerusalem, the cult must be re-established before the Urim and Thummim can be used.[58] Until the cult has been re-established, these priests are

held that they are a form of cleromancy; see van Dam, *Urim and Thummim*, 35–36, n. 121, for a review of literature; see also J. Morgenstern, "The Ark, the Ephod, and the 'Tent of Meeting,' " *HUCA* 27 (1942–1943), 153–266 and *HUCA* 28 (1944), 1–52; repr. in *The Ark, the Ephod and the "Tent of Meeting,"* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1945). Van Dam, *Urim and Thummim*, 230–31, rejects that argument in favor of the view that the terms Urim and Thummim form a hendaidys, "perfect light," and refer to a single stone whose miraculous illumination could confirm the divine origin of an oracle. C. Houtman, "The Urim and Thummim: A New Suggestion," *VT* 40/2 (1990), 229–32, building on van Dam's argument, claims that the stone's position upon the high priest's heart (Exod 28:30) allowed him properly to understand Yahweh's message. Nevertheless, the dominant position remains that the Urim and Thummim are a means of divination by lots, a view held by B. Arnould, "Necromancy and Cleromancy in 1 and 2 Samuel," *CBQ* 66/2 (2004), 199–213; A.M. Kitz, "The Plural Form of *ʾÛrîm* and *Tummîm*," *JBL* 116/3 (1997), 401–10; and E. Noort, "Numbers 27,21" in H.L.J. Vansiphout et al. (eds.), *All Those Nations . . . : Cultural Encounters within and with the Near East* (COMERS/ICOG Communications, 2; Groningen: Styx, 1999), 109–16.

[57] There are only seven mentions of Urim and/or Thummim in the Hebrew Bible: Exod 28:30; Lev 8:8; Num 27:21; Deut 33:8; 1 Sam 14:35–42; Ezra 2:63 // Neh 7:65. Additionally, there is evidence within the textual tradition that references to the Urim and Thummim have been expunged from MT on several occasions. A. Rofé, " 'No *Ephod* or *Teraphim*'—*Oude Hierateias Oude Delon*: Hosea 3:4 in the LXX and in the Paraphrases of the Chronicles and the Damascus Document," in A.H.C. Cohen and S. Paul (eds.), *Sefer Moshe: The Sefer Moshe Weinfeld Jubilee Volume* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2004), 135–49, follows LXX in reading a reference to the ephod in 1 Sam 14:18 and to the Urim in Hos 3:4; L. Fried, "Did the Second Temple High Priests Possess the *Urim* and *Thummim*?," *JHS* 7/3 (2007), 6–7, notes that Josephus understands there to be a reference to priestly divination in 2 Chr 15:3, a verse based on Hos 3:4.

[58] Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation*, 263, cites Ezra 2:62–63 as evidence that the Urim and Thummim were "either lost or no longer usable after the exile." It is entirely unnecessary to postulate that the Second Temple priests did not have access to the Urim and Thummim, despite the claim to that effect in *b. Yoma* 21b. Indeed, as noted by van Dam, *The Urim and Thummim*, 218–21, 254–55, the mere fact that revelation by means of the Urim and Thummim is expected at some future date in Ezra 2:63 testifies to its presence in Second Temple times. Van Dam, however, does not think that the Urim and Thummim were used after the time of David, in part because Yahweh exercised his sovereign will and stopped revealing himself through them. It is more likely, however, that in Ezra 2:61–63

provisionally excluded from the priesthood; the implication seems to be that, once the cult is in operation, the high priest can consult the Urim and Thummim on their behalf and confirm their legitimate Israelite ancestry.[59]

EZRA 6:21 AND THE LIMITS OF WRITTEN AUTHORITY

The anticipated use of mantic divination in Ezra 2:61–63 to resolve a lacuna in an authoritative written text has implications for my treatment of Ezra 6:20–21. It appears, from my analysis, that the register of repatriates, a written document, functions only provisionally to authenticate priestly lines of descent; once the cult is re-established, cultic modes of divination will fill in the gaps in the written text.[60] Thiessen argues, on the basis of the same genealogical register (Ezra 2:1–67), that genealogical descent from ancient Judah is of paramount importance in determining whether one is included in the restoration community. According to Thiessen, following Williamson, outsiders (like the Yahwists in Ezra 4:1–

Jeshua simply has to wait until the cult was re-established to use the Urim and Thummim. See Fried, "*Urim* and *Thummim*?," for a survey of extra-biblical data. Fried argues persuasively on the basis of extra-biblical evidence that the high priest did, in fact, use the Urim and Thummin during Second Temple times; however, she nevertheless understands Ezra 2:63 to indicate that the Urim and Thummim were lost during the time of the earliest return.

[59] Another episode, the exhortations of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah in Ezra 5:1–2, also provides an example of divination occurring outside of the context of writing in Ezra 1–6. This shows, minimally, that the authors of Ezra 1–6 did not view written texts as the sole source of divine revelation. Fried, "*Deus ex Machina*," 189–208, views the intervention of Yahweh through his prophets as the crucial pivot-point of the narrative, which in turn obeys Aristotelian conventions of plot construction. The prophets fulfill the role of *Deus ex machina*, wherein the deity intervenes decisively to resolve the tension in the plot. Fried's comparison of Ezra 1–6 with Aristotelian narrative conventions is persuasive, but her account of the prophets' role understates the decisive role that the decrees of Cyrus and Darius play in the final resolution of the conflict. See also, ibid., "Ezra's Use of Documents," 11–26, where Fried argues that the written document in Ezra 4–6 function to prove the malicious intent of the adversaries who appear in Ezra 4:1–5. This seems unlikely, however, because the letter to Artaxerxes in Ezra 4:7–16, in warning Artaxerxes that the Judeans are rebuilding the fortifications of their city, reflects the anti-royalist, pro-imperial perspective of Ezra 1–6—note especially that their account of Jerusalem's past (Ezra 4:15) is echoed by the Returnees themselves in their correspondence with Darius (Ezra 5:11–12).

[60] *Pace* Wright, "Seeking, Finding and Writing," who notes the use of "charismatic divination" in Ezra 2:63 and argues that, because Ezra-Nehemiah never reports that a priest with Urim and Thummim appears, textual study must instead suffice. However, given that Ezra 1–6 is about the re-establishment of the temple, and given that the Urim and Thummim are cultic in nature, the most likely explanation is that the author felt no need to relate the resolution of the matter—it could be presumed to accompany the re-establishment of the cult.

5) are excluded from the community, regardless of their religious practices, because the text insists upon an ontological distinction between Israelites and foreigners.[61] If that were true, however, it would be odd that persons of uncertain ancestry would be included in the community, rather than excluded from it. Based on my analysis of Ezra 2:59–63, it is more likely that the register of repatriates functions only provisionally to identify the community's boundaries in the absence of a working temple cult. Once the cult is re-established, participation in the cult would serve to index inclusion in the community.

My analysis of the role of imperial writing in Ezra 1–6 supports that conclusion. The Cyrus edict charges the diaspora community with rebuilding the temple; it does not suggest an ontological distinction between this community and outsiders. Zerubbabel excludes the local Yahwists from the temple reconstruction project (Ezra 4:1–3) on the grounds that they are not authorized by the Cyrus edict to participate; no other criteria are given. Following the rediscovery of the Cyrus edict by Darius (Ezra 6:1–3), the Returnees finish the work just as they have been ordered. The boundaries erected around the community of Returnees by the Cyrus edict and the register of repatriates are not ontological; rather, they are oriented toward the goal of rebuilding the temple. The register of repatriates functions under the auspices of the Cyrus edict to specify the community's boundaries, and it looks forward to the restored temple cult to fill its gaps. The efficacy of both texts in defining community boundaries, then, would be expected to "expire" with the completion of the temple.

It is no coincidence, then, that the first thing that the Returnees do after the dedication of the new temple (Ezra 6:16–18) is to celebrate the Passover. It is in the context of this Passover celebration that Ezra 6:20–21 occurs. On the basis of Ezra 6:21b, I have argued, *contra* Thiessen, that persons outside of the community of Returnees partake of the Passover. Having clarified the provisional role of writing in defining and enforcing the boundaries of the community of Returnees in Ezra 1–6, I am now prepared to make two final arguments in favor of my reading of Ezra 6:21.

First, note that those who participate in the Passover feast are defined, in the second half of Ezra 6:21, as "all those who separated themselves from the impurities of the nations of the land . . . to seek Yahweh, God of Israel." These people, regardless of their prior identity, are defined here primarily as participants in the cult of Yahweh. The language of purity and impurity used to describe their separation is attested in Ezra 1–6 only here and in Ezra 2:61–63. This datum suggests that purity concerns are only operative in the context of the temple cult.[62] More importantly, in the Hebrew

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[61] Thiessen, "Conjunction," 64–66; Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, 50.

[62] Compare this with, for instance, the use of purity language in Ezra 9–10, where exogamy threatens the purity of the entire community and the land upon which it dwells. See especially Ezra 9:2, 11.

Bible seeking Yahweh (לדרש ליהוה) frequently refers to cultic acts of worship (e.g., Deut 12:4–5; Isa 58:2; 1 Chr 13:3), sometimes but not always with an oracular component (e.g., 2 Chr 1:5).[63] In the context of Ezra 6:16–22, in which the temple is rededicated, it must mean that these persons are worshipping at the temple by participating in the Passover meal.[64] It is in this sense that they are "seeking" Yahweh.

In Ezra 1–6, only one other group of people is credited with "seeking" Yahweh: the Yahwists of Ezra 4:1–3, who are excluded from the temple-building project on the basis of the Cyrus edict and the register of repatriates. In introducing themselves, they say, "we, like you, seek your God, and we have sacrificed to him since the days of Esar Haddon" (Ezra 4:2),[65] and note again the juxtaposition of "seeking" and sacrificing, as in Ezra 6:21. These Yahwists make a claim, in essence, to being part of the same cultic community with the Returnees. In Ezra 4:4, these same local Yahwists are apparently grouped among the "people of the land" (עם־הארץ) in their opposition to the community of returnees. However, the near-repetition of the terms "to seek Yahweh" and "people/nations of the land" in Ezra 4:1–4 and 6:21 suggests that we are meant to understand that the same people are in view in both texts. Yahweh-seekers from among the people of the land who were excluded from the cultic community before the temple's restoration can now be included among it on the grounds that they separate themselves from gentile impurities (an entailment for participation in the cult and in the Passover festival). The restoration of the temple cult makes it possible for both communities to seek Yahweh in the same way. The criterion for inclusion shifts from genealogy to ritual practice, from written text to temple cult.[66]

The other argument in favor of my reading of Ezra 6:21 comes from the nature of the Passover festival itself. The Passover, as a commemoration of the Exodus, is paradigmatically a nation-defining and nation-constituting festival: those who participate are members of the community, and those who do not are excluded from it. Thus, in Exod 12:48–49 and Num 9:13, resident aliens (גרים) may be included in the Passover so long as they are circum-

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[63] On the use of the verb דרש with reference to the cult, see S. Wagner, "דָּרַשׁ," *TDOT* 3:293–307.

[64] Celebrating Passover at the one central sanctuary (i.e., the temple) is commanded in both Deuteronomic (Deut 16:1–8) and Priestly (Num 9:1–14) legislation. See P. Lau, "Gentile Incorporation into Israel in Ezra-Nehemiah?," *Biblica* 90 (2009), 356–73.

[65] Reading MT *qere*, לו, with the versions, in place of MT *ketiv*, לא, which implies that the local Yahwists worship Yahweh without sacrificing to him. The *ketiv* may reflect anti-Samaritan polemic; see D. Marcus, *Ezra and Nehemiah* (BHQ, 20; Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellchaft, 2006), 41*–42*.

[66] K. Joachimsen, "Cultic Bonding in Ezra 6:21," paper presented at the annual meeting of Old Testament Studies: Epistemologies and Methods, Oxford, England. September 17–20, 2012.

cised and so long as they obey the same law as the Israelites. If they do so, then they are reckoned "as a native of the land" (כאזרח הארץ) for the duration of the festival. The Passover is also, paradigmatically, a means to commemorate a cultically-significant building project: it is celebrated, in Numbers 9:1–14, to commemorate the completion of the Tabernacle, and in 2 Chr 30:1–20 and 35:1–18 to commemorate major renovations of the temple. These commemorative and constitutive elements of the Passover come together in Hezekiah's great Passover in 2 Chr 30. Hezekiah attempts to gather people from the northern tribes of Israel for the Passover, and a few do come (2 Chr 30:10–12), but they unwittingly eat the Passover without having first purified themselves (2 Chr 30:18). Hezekiah, however, prays for them that God would pardon them on the grounds that "they have set their whole heart to seeking God (כל לבבו הכין לדרש האלהים), Yahweh the God of their fathers," and God heeds his request (2 Chr 30:20). For at least a time, Israel is made whole again. These commemorative and constitutive elements of the Passover festival come together also in Ezra 6:19–21. The Passover, in Ezra 6:19–21, commemorates the completion of the restored temple, and in the process it also reconstitutes the cultic community that participates in worship at the new temple. Like Hezekiah's great Passover, it includes all those who seek Yahweh, even those from the north who had previously sought him improperly.[67] As in Chronicles, observance of the Passover defines who belongs to Israel and serves ritually to constitute that community.

The next verse, Ezra 6:22, concludes all of Ezra 1–6 by saying: "And they observed the Feast of Unleavened Bread with joy for seven days, for Yahweh had made them glad by changing the mind of the King of Assyria concerning them, so that he might support them in the work of the House of God, the God of Israel." Ezra 6:22 recounts, in summary fashion, the plot of Ezra 1-6 and its happy conclusion: Yahweh changed the mind of the Persian king, which led to the completion of work on the temple. Peace has been made with local Yahwists, and the cult of Yahweh in Jerusalem enjoys the full support of the Persian Empire, thus protecting it from hostile outsiders. The stage is set for open-ended, harmonious imperial rule.

CONCLUSION

In this essay, I have considered the tendentious retelling of the history of the return from exile in Ezra 1–6, and specifically whether Ezra 6:21 indicates that outsiders were permitted to join the community of Returnees. First, I have argued that the grammar of Ezra 6:21 is best understood to refer to two distinct groups, against Thiessen's argument that it concerns only the community

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[67] Per the *qere* of Ezra 4:2, they worshipped him outside of Jerusalem, whereas Ezra 1–6 seems to presuppose Jerusalem as Yahweh's only legitimate cult site.

of Returnees. Second, I have argued that the inclusion of outsiders in Ezra 6:21 is not incompatible with the exclusionism evinced elsewhere in Ezra 1–6, because the written texts that establish that exclusionism pertain only to the rebuilding of the temple: once the temple is rebuilt, the community's boundaries can be defined by the cult. Third, I have argued that the Passover celebration following the dedication of the new temple functions to reconstitute Israel along cultic lines. *Contra* Wright, Ezra 1–6 does not represent a definitive step away from mantic and charismatic modes of divination; while he is correct that it holds the authority of the written word in high esteem, written texts function only provisionally, in place of a working temple cult, to reveal the divine will. Once the temple is rededicated, cultic modes of divination once again predominate. Elsewhere in Ezra-Nehemiah (particularly Ezra 9–10 and Neh 8–12), writing (i.e., Torah) begins to eclipse temple as the center of Judean religious life, but Ezra 1–6 should not necessarily be assimilated to the perspective of those texts.