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*Remembering the Achaemenids in the
Character of Nehemiah*

Ancient Jewish Memories of Achaemenid Persia 3

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REMEMBERING THE ACHAEMENIDS IN THE CHARACTER OF NEHEMIAH

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1. INTRODUCTION

Nehemiah is one of the most prominent figures associated with the Achaemenid Empire in the Hebrew Bible.¹ The book bearing his name portrays Nehemiah as a cupbearer to the king, a builder of Jerusalem's walls, and a temple reformer. His close relationship with the Achaemenid monarch Artaxerxes is central to this portrayal, as it is Artaxerxes who permits Nehemiah to return to Jerusalem to rebuild its walls and gates. Despite opposition from the neighboring groups, Nehemiah's efforts continue with Achaemenid support. While the book of Nehemiah explicitly emphasizes his connection to the Achaemenid Empire, other texts—such as 1 Esdras, 2 Maccabees, and Sirach—present this relationship in more limited or indirect terms.² Across these writings, Nehemiah is consistently linked to the restoration of Jerusalem, both its city and temple. However, the extent and tone of Achaemenid involvement vary. Although Achaemenid authority is acknowledged in each text, only the book of Ne-

¹ Thanks so much to Kristin Joachimsen and Jason Mokhtarian for their invitation to reflect upon later images of the Achaemenids in the character of Nehemiah. Also, thanks to James Nogalski, Dennis Tucker, and an anonymous reviewer for their very helpful feedback.

² Past studies have highlighted Nehemiah's transition from Persian courtier to governor and build upon established images of power set within the context of the Achaemenid period. See, for example, Sean Burt, *The Courtier and the Governor: Transformations of Genre in the Nehemiah Memoir*, JSJSup 17 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014). Nehemiah's image in other Second Temple period texts, however, provides a different characterization within the authoritative boundaries of Achaemenid control. Ehud Ben Zvi and Sylvie Honigman's study on Nehemiah examines how the character is remembered in Ezra-Nehemiah, Sirach, and 2 Maccabees. Ehud Ben Zvi and Sylvie Honigman, "Remembering Three Nehemiahs in Late Second Temple Times: Patterns and Trajectories in Memory Shaping," *JHS* 18 (2018), <https://doi.org/10.5508/jhs.2018.v18.a10>. In this current study, I am not broadly examining Nehemiah as a character, but how Nehemiah is remembered regarding the Achaemenids and reframed in different Second Temple period texts.

hemiah portrays it in overtly positive terms. In fact, Nehemiah stands as the clearest literary example of Achaemenid power in the Second Temple period literature.

Over time, however, portrayals of Nehemiah's relationship with the Achaemenid monarchy shift—particularly in Hellenistic-era texts—reflecting changing attitudes toward foreign rule over Judah and the temple.³ Several studies explore Nehemiah's evolving role in early Second Temple period literature. For instance, H. Clay Smith analyzes the composition of Nehemiah alongside 2 Macc 1:10–2:18, arguing that Nehemiah serves as a literary precursor to the Hasmonean hero Judas Maccabeus.⁴ Ehud Ben Zvi and Sylvie Honigman investigate Nehemiah's changing portrayal through the lens of memory studies.⁵ While these analyses are crucial for understanding how Nehemiah is portrayed in the Hebrew Bible and Apocryphal literature, this current study specifically examines how Nehemiah is depicted in relation to the Achaemenid Empire across Nehemiah, 1 Esdras, 2 Maccabees, and Sirach. Although Persian rule has long since ended by the time of final composition of these texts, the literary memory of the Achaemenids, particularly as it concerns Nehemiah, continues to evolve. Initially portrayed as a leader empowered by imperial authority, Nehemiah's association with the Achaemenids becomes increasingly subdued within these Second Temple period texts. As his relationship to the Achaemenids shifts, his connection to the temple and restoration also shifts. This study first examines Nehemiah's relationship with the Achaemenids in Ezra-Nehemiah, followed by an analysis of 1 Esdras, 2 Maccabees, and Sirach. Some of these texts highlight the Achaemenids as active supporters of Nehemiah's building efforts, while others do not establish this connection at all. These variations in portrayal reflect broader changes in how Jewish authors of the Hellenistic period understood and remembered foreign imperial power.

³ See, for example, the portrayal of foreign monarchs throughout the narratives of Daniel, Esther, and 1 and 2 Maccabees.

⁴ See H. Clay Smith, "Reconsidering the Composition of Ezra-Nehemiah in Light of 2 Maccabees 1:10–2:18," *JBL* 141 (2022): 257–76, <https://doi.org/10.15699/jbl.1412.2022.4>. See also the important work on the subject of the composition of Ezra-Nehemiah in relation to other Hellenistic era texts by Sylvie Honigman, *Tales of High Priests and Taxes: The Books of the Maccabees and the Judean Rebellion Against Antiochos IV*, HCS 56 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014); see further Sylvie Honigman, "Antiochus III's Decree for Jerusalem and the Persian Decrees in Ezra-Nehemiah and LXX 1 Esdras," *JSJ* 52 (2020): 303–29, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15700631-BJA10017>.

⁵ Ben Zvi and Honigman, "Remembering Three Nehemiahs." Other significant studies include Theodore Bergren's examination of Nehemiah in 2 Maccabees. Theodore A. Bergren, "Nehemiah in 2 Maccabees 1:10–2:18," *JSJ* 28 (1997): 249–70; Honigman, "Antiochus III's Decree"; Smith, "Reconsidering the Composition of Ezra-Nehemiah."

2. ACHAEMENID CHARACTERIZATION AND NEHEMIAH'S BUILDING ACTIVITIES IN THE BOOK OF NEHEMIAH

The book of Ezra-Nehemiah generally portrays Achaemenid rule in a positive light, especially favorable depictions of Achaemenid kings. Four Achaemenid kings are mentioned in Ezra: Cyrus, Darius, Xerxes, and Artaxerxes. Their appearances loom large in the first six chapters of Ezra, with Cyrus instituting the return of the Babylonian exiles to Judah. The other three kings—Darius, Xerxes, and Artaxerxes—are mentioned in the events surrounding the building of the temple in Jerusalem. Notably, most of the royal figures appear in Ezra 1–6, prior to Ezra's personal involvement in the narrative. Cyrus is the first figure mentioned in Ezra-Nehemiah and allows the exiles to return to Judah, yet Artaxerxes is the most-referenced Achaemenid within Ezra-Nehemiah. This fact is not surprising since the activities of Ezra and Nehemiah take place during the kingship of Artaxerxes.⁶

In line with the Cyrus edict at the opening of Ezra, the book of Nehemiah begins in the *bira* of Susa, where Nehemiah is serving as a cupbearer (משקה) to King Artaxerxes. While the Achaemenid King sanctions Ezra's return (cf. Ezra 7:11–26), Nehemiah's relationship to Artaxerxes is depicted in more intimate, familiar terms. When Nehemiah appears before the king and queen consort, Artaxerxes initiates a personal conversation, asking why Nehemiah's face is sad (רעים). This personal exchange allows Nehemiah to voice his concerns about the state of Jerusalem (Neh 2:2–3), resulting in the king granting him permission to return and rebuild.⁷ Artaxerxes fur-

⁶ Which Artaxerxes is referred to in the time of Ezra is still debated. Scholars who support Ezra's return during the reign of Artaxerxes I (465–434 BCE) include H. G. M. Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, WBC 16 (Waco, TX: Word, 1985); Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah: A Commentary*, OTL (London: SCM Press, 1989); Philip Young Yoo, *Ezra and the Second Wilderness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); Tamara C. Eskenazi, *Ezra: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AYB 14A (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2023). Scholars who support Ezra's return during the time of Artaxerxes II (404–358 BCE) include Diana V. Edelman, *The Origins of the "Second" Temple: Persian Imperial Policy and the Rebuilding of Jerusalem*, BibleWorld (London: Equinox, 2005); David M. Carr, *The Formation of the Hebrew Bible: A New Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Lisbeth S. Fried, *Ezra: A Commentary* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2015); Bob Becking, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, HCOT (Leuven; Bristol, CT: Peeters, 2018). But see also Lester L. Grabbe, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, OTR (London: Routledge, 1998), for a discussion of Artaxerxes as an idealized figure, indicating later historical and theological motivations for his portrayal.

⁷ Chapters 1 and 2 are somewhat disjointed in context and outcome. One major difference between chapters 1 and 2 is that the report that Nehemiah receives in chapter 1 diverges from what he relays to the king in chapter 2. In Neh 1, it is reported to Nehemiah that the walls and gates of Jerusalem have been burned by fire. In Neh 2:3, the destroyed walls and gates are mentioned again, but he also mentions that his ancestors' graves

ther supports Nehemiah by providing official letters of support and an armed escort (Neh 2:7–9). The narrative thus frames Nehemiah’s authority as divinely sanctioned through imperial approval.

In the past several decades, many scholars have examined the close relationship between Persian authorization for the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the characters of Ezra and Nehemiah.⁸ While Ezra is authorized to oversee Temple matters (cf. 7:11–26), Nehemiah is authorized to rebuild the city and its walls. Although several studies focus on Achaemenid imperial authority of Temple administration, Sean Burt observes that Nehemiah complicates these depictions as he moves away from the role of a Persian official to the role of the city reformer and governor.⁹ Several scholars have further developed Burt’s observation, pointing out that Nehemiah’s actions may be viewed as those of a king, rather than a governor.¹⁰ Ehud Ben Zvi and Sylvie Honigman explore these kinglike qualities through memory studies. Specifically, they examine how Nehemiah is remembered in later periods, understanding Nehemiah’s depiction as paralleling the activities of a good, ancient Near Eastern king. They highlight four actions with which good ANE kings were generally associated: 1) successful military leadership, 2) maintenance of temple purity and cultic practices, 3) building and rebuilding temples, and 4) maintenance of the “proper order,” so that those with power do not “misuse their power to oppress the powerless.”¹¹

are in ruin. These graves, however, are never mentioned again.

⁸ Kenneth G. Hoglund, *Achaemenid Imperial Administration in Syria-Palestine and the Missions of Ezra and Nehemiah*, SBLDS 125 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992); Edelman, *Origins of the “Second” Temple*; Oded Lipschits, “Achaemenid Imperial Policy, Settlement Processes in Palestine, and the Status of Jerusalem in the Middle of the Fifth Century B.C.E.,” in *Judah and the Judeans in the Persian Period*, ed. Oded Lipschits and Manfred Oeming (Penn State University Press, 2006), 19–52; Oded Lipschits, “Persian-Period Judah: A New Perspective,” in *Texts, Contexts and Readings in Postexilic Literature: Explorations into Historiography and Identity Negotiation in Hebrew Bible and Related Texts*, ed. Louis C. Jonker (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 187–211.

⁹ Burt, *The Courtier and the Governor*.

¹⁰ See, for example, Iain M. Duguid, “Nehemiah, the Best King Judah Never Had,” in *Let Us Go Up to Zion: Essays in Honour of H.G.M. Williamson on the Occasion of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. Ian W. Provan and Mark J. Boda (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 261–72; Ben Zvi and Honigman, “Remembering Three Nehemiahs”; Eran Gluska and Oded Lipschits, “In Nehemiah’s Footsteps? Uzziah at the Service of the Chronicler’s Ideology,” *JHS* 23 (2024), 1–37, <https://doi.org/10.5508/jhs29627>.

¹¹ Ben Zvi and Honigman, “Remembering Three Nehemiahs,” 9. For a thorough discussion of temple rebuilding in the Persian period, see Andrew R. Davis, *Reconstructing the Temple: The Royal Rhetoric of Temple Renovation in the Ancient Near East and Israel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019). See also Diana V. Edelman and Ehud Ben Zvi, ed., *Leadership, Social Memory, and Judean Discourse in the Fifth-Second Centuries BCE* (Bristol, CT: Equinox, 2016).

While Nehemiah may resemble a good ancient Near Eastern king, recent studies have also highlighted tensions within the text regarding foreign control of Judah. Several scholars, including Daniel Smith-Christopher, Wil Gafney, David Janzen, and Christopher Jones, read Ezra-Nehemiah through the lens of postcolonial theory.¹² As Christopher Jones argues, there are clear sentiments of anti-Persian imperialism in Ezra-Nehemiah.¹³ Admiration and fear are two of the ways that subjugated groups interact and deal with colonial power. Moments of tension do exist, specifically in the events of Neh 9, but the text nevertheless remembers Nehemiah as closely associated with Persia. And, in keeping with Ben Zvi and Honigman's assessment of Nehemiah as king-like, there is no clearer example of colonial mimicry than portraying your own leader—whom the ruling colonial power has appointed—as a monarch himself. They observe that:

the Nehemiah of memory in E-N was imagined as fulfilling certain roles usually associated with royal figures; or, to put it differently, social memory patterns associated with kings played a substantial role in the shaping of memories of Nehemiah. This is true even though Nehemiah was clearly not a king and certainly not a Davidide.¹⁴

¹² Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, "The Mixed Marriage Crisis in Ezra 9–10 and Nehemiah 13: A Study of the Sociology of Post-Exilic Judaean Community," in *Second Temple Studies 2: Temple Community in the Persian Period*, ed. Kent H. Richards and Tamara C. Eskenazi (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994), 243–65; Wil Gafney, "A Prophet-Terrorist(a) and an Imperial Sympathizer: An Empire-Critical, Postcolonial Reading of the No'adyah/Nechemyah Conflict," *Black Theology: An International Journal* 9 (2011): 161–76; David Janzen, "A Colonized People: Persian Hegemony, Hybridity, and Community Identity in Ezra-Nehemiah," *BibInt* 24 (2016): 27–47, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15685152-00241P03>; Christopher M. Jones, "Embedded Written Documents as Colonial Mimicry in Ezra-Nehemiah," *BibInt* 26 (2018): 158–81, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15685152-00262P02>. A number of other scholars have examined passages in Ezra-Nehemiah in light of postcolonial theory, including Roland Boer, "Thus I Cleansed Them from Everything Foreign: The Search for Subjectivity in Ezra-Nehemiah," in *Postcolonialism and the Hebrew Bible: The Next Step*, ed. Roland Boer (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2013), 221–38, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1b7x69m>; Anselm C. Hagedorn, "Local Law in an Imperial Context: The Role of Torah in the (Imagined) Persian Period," in *The Pentateuch as Torah: New Models for Understanding Its Promulgation and Acceptance*, ed. Gary N. Knoppers and Bernard M. Levinson (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2007), 57–76. See C. M. Jones for a more complete list of sources on the subject.

¹³ Jones, "Embedded Written Documents." Jones specifically points to Nehemiah 10 as a text that hopes for the end of foreign domination, in contrast to Ezra 7 which uses colonial-style writing to bolster the golah's standing in Judah.

¹⁴ Ben Zvi and Honigman, "Remembering Three Nehemiahs."

Regardless of how one understands the exact motivations behind Nehemiah's cooperation with the Achaemenid empire—whether out of admiration or fear—the narrative clearly portrays Nehemiah as a subject of, and subject to, Artaxerxes's authority.¹⁵ This power dynamic is well-established in Nehemiah since the narrative connects his actions to Artaxerxes in a few key places (Table 1).

Table 1: References to Artaxerxes in MT Nehemiah

Neh 2:1	ויהי בחדש ניסן שנת עשרים לארתחשסתא המלך יין לפניו ואשא את־היין ואתנה למֶלֶךְ ולא־הייתי רע לפניו	In the month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine had served him, I carried the wine and gave it to the king. Now, I had never been sad in his presence before.
Neh 5:14 ¹⁶	גם מיום אשר־צוה אתי להיות פחם בארץ יהודה משנת עשרים ועד שנת שלשים ושתים לארתחשסתא המלך שנים שתיים עשרה אני ואחי לחם הפחה לא אכלתי	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.
Neh 13:6	ובכל־זה לא הייתי בירושלם כי בשנת שלשים ושתים לארתחשסתא מלך־בבל באתי אל־המלך ולקץ ימים נשאלתי מן־המלך	While this was taking place, I was not in Jerusalem, for in the thirty-second year of King Artaxerxes of Babylon I went to the king. After some time, I asked leave of the king.

As previously mentioned, the text opens with Nehemiah in the *birā* of Susa and as part of the court (Neh 1) when he is informed of the condition of Jerusalem. He is in the presence of the King and Queen consort when he requests a return to Jerusalem, which Artaxerxes grants (Neh 2). Kingly authority allows Nehemiah to rebuild the walls (Nehemiah asks the king for timber and then rebuilds the walls

¹⁵ As previously stated, the authority of the Achaemenids is very clearly seen in the text of Ezra, specifically chapters 1–6.

¹⁶ Whereas LXX Neh 2:1 and 13:6 use the same titles for Nehemiah as the MT (Ἀρθασασθα βασιλεῖ and Ἀρθασασθα βασιλέως Βαβυλώνος), LXX Neh 5:14 does not have a title, but only refers to the king as “Arthasastha” (Ἀρθασασθα). The MT provides him with the title, “Artaxerxes the King” (ארתחשסתא המלך). This is the only textual divergence between the MT and LXX regarding Artaxerxes's titles (or lack thereof). In all other references to Artaxerxes, found in both the MT and LXX (Ezra 4:7, 8, 11, 23; 6:14; 7:1, 7, 21; 8:21; Neh 2:1 and 13:6), there are no other textual divergences concerning his title.

in 2:8). Nehemiah provides the regnal year of Artaxerxes when he recalls his actions as governor (Neh 5). Finally, Nehemiah's absence from Jerusalem—due to his service in the court of Artaxerxes—allows him to disassociate himself from the misuse of temple space that occurred in his absence (Neh 13:6–7).¹⁷

While Nehemiah is a subject of the Achaemenid monarch, Artaxerxes' status as *Persian* king does not appear in Nehemiah. Rather, Artaxerxes is often called “the king” (cf. Neh 1:11; 2:1–9, 18–19; 3:25; 13:6) but never called “Artaxerxes the Persian” or “King Artaxerxes of Persia.” In fact, the final reference to Artaxerxes in Nehemiah refers to him as the “King of Babylon” (מֶלֶךְ-בָּבֶל אֲרַתְחַשְׁתָּא).¹⁸ Furthermore, terms for “Persia/Persian(s)” appear only one time in the text of Nehemiah, referring to “Darius the Persian” (דָּרְיוֹשׁ הַפָּרְסִי; Neh 12:22). Ezra contains several references to Persian kings: Cyrus of Persia (Ezra 1:2, 8; 3:7; 4:3), Darius of Persia (Ezra 4:5, 24), Artaxerxes of Persia (Ezra 4:7; 6:14; 7:1), and a generic reference to Persian kings (Ezra 9:9).¹⁹ The lack of reference to Persia in many of these titles within the biblical books of Ezra-Nehemiah appears to be in line with Achaemenid traditions, since most of their own inscriptions do not include this title.²⁰

¹⁷ This last reference to Artaxerxes, however, calls him אֲרַתְחַשְׁתָּא מֶלֶךְ-בָּבֶל “King Artaxerxes of Babylon,” which is very different from other references to Artaxerxes in Ezra-Nehemiah. The Aramaic and Syriac, however, have “King Artaxerxes of Persia,” which appears to be a later emendation.

¹⁸ It is noteworthy that Cyrus is also called the “King of Babylon” in Ezra 5:13. Cyrus's actions of encouraging the rebuilding of the Jerusalem temple and the return of temple vessels is contrasted to the well-known Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar, who destroyed the temple and took the vessels to Babylon. Although there is no record of Artaxerxes using this title in the two extant inscriptions credited to him (Becking, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 318), there is an example of Cyrus using it. In the Cyrus Cylinder, Cyrus begins to use this title upon his conquest of Babylon; cf. Jacob M. Myers, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, AB 14 (New York: Doubleday, 1987), and Fried, *Ezra*, 365. Cyrus is also called the king of Sumer and Akkad. Alexandria Frisch states, “At the time of Cyrus's reign, Akkad no longer existed, so, much like the anachronistic case of Darius and Assyria, the Persians could not have conquered Akkad. Instead, as “king of the world,” Cyrus proclaims that the Persian kingdom was synonymous with these other kingdoms.” Alexandria Frisch, *The Danielic Discourse on Empire in Second Temple Literature*, JSJSup 176 (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 43. For a discussion of Achaemenid connections to Assyrian rhetoric and ideology, see Muhammad A. Dandamayev, “Assyrian Traditions during Achaemenid Times,” in *Assyria 1995: Proceedings of the 10th Anniversary of the Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 7–11 September, 1995*, ed. Simon Parpola and Robert M. Whiting (Helsinki: The Neo Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 1997), 41–48.

¹⁹ There is also one reference to “Persians” in Ezra 4:9.

²⁰ Samuel K. Eddy, *The King Is Dead: Studies in Near Eastern Resistance to Hellenism, 334–331 B.C.* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1961), 22–23; Klaus Koch, “Weltordnung und Reichsidee im alten Iran und ihre Aus-

In the end, the activities in Jerusalem for which Nehemiah is best known—wall building, temple reforms, and certain social reforms—are directly tied to the authority of one king: Artaxerxes. This specific connection to a single, named king cements a close relationship between Nehemiah and Artaxerxes. It does not, however, establish his relationship with all the Achaemenid monarchs. The only way that this broader connection is made is in light of the text of Ezra.

Although his actions may align with those of a king, the narrative does not depict Nehemiah as operating outside the realm of behaviors commonly performed by a vassal on behalf of his king. The text specifically addresses such possible charges. When the wall building is finished (Neh 6), Sanballat and Geshem send a message stating that the Judeans plan to rebel and Nehemiah plans to become king. While the fear of being accused of rebellion against the “king”—although unnamed as an Achaemenid in the text—is implied in the larger narrative, the Achaemenids never act on these charges. Nehemiah’s relationship to the Achaemenids is therefore never truly questioned within the book itself.

As this brief sketch outlines, memories of Achaemenid connections to Nehemiah loom large in the text. The setting, characters, and conflicts often revolve around Achaemenid hegemony in the tiny region of Judah. Yet the text of Nehemiah, which was finalized in the Hellenistic period, reveals a continued understanding of the importance of Nehemiah’s relationship with Artaxerxes. And thus, while the text’s final form dates to the Hellenistic period, later editorial work never removed this close connection between Nehemiah and the Achaemenids. Rather, this connection to the Achaemenids is one of the strongest cooperative bonds in the book.

3. ACHAEMENID CHARACTERIZATION AND NEHEMIAH’S BUILDING ACTIVITIES IN APOCRYPHAL LITERATURE

In the Hellenistic texts of 1 Esdras, 2 Maccabees, and Sirach, Nehemiah is portrayed as a minor yet significant figure, particularly emphasizing his connection to Jerusalem during a period known as the “Nehemiah Renaissance.” This term reflects the increased positive references to Nehemiah in these texts compared to later literature where he becomes largely absent.²¹ The Achaemenids, however, do

wirkungen auf die Provinz Jehud,” in *Reichsidee und Reichsorganisation im Perserreich*, ed. Peter Frei and Klaus Koch (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996), 133–316, here 216–18. See also Frisch, *Danielic Discourse on Empire*, 45–46, for a discussion of the use of Persian titles.

²¹ For a discussion of the “Nehemiah Renaissance,” see Ulrich Kellermann, *Nehemia: Quellen, Überlieferung und Geschichte*, BZAW 102 (Berlin: Töpelmann, 1967), 148; Dieter Böhler, *1 Esdras*. Translated by Linda M. Maloney. IECOT (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2016); Deirdre N. Fulton, *Reconsidering Nehemiah’s Judah: The Case of MT and LXX Nehemiah 11–12* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015), 8; Smith, “Reconsidering the Composition of Ezra-

not experience a similar renaissance; their role diminishes significantly in relation to Nehemiah when compared to earlier portrayals in Ezra-Nehemiah. Also, any specific relationship to Artaxerxes disappears. In 1 Esdras, Nehemiah's connections to the Achaemenid court are notably absent, with the text focusing instead on Zerubbabel's relationship to the Achaemenids. Meanwhile, 2 Maccabees acknowledges Nehemiah but presents him more as an independent actor rather than one reliant on Achaemenid support. Sirach further omits any mention of the Achaemenids, highlighting Nehemiah's contributions to rebuilding without attributing these contributions to foreign influence. Thus, while Nehemiah's personal significance is somewhat elevated, the Achaemenids' presence as "the power behind the man" is downplayed across these texts.

1 Esdras: Nehemiah's Subdued Role as Ruler and Rebuilder

In 1 Esdras, the Achaemenid monarchy, particularly during the time of Darius, plays a central role in certain events throughout the book. This is most evident in the book's emphasis on Zerubbabel, who emerges as the most prominent character and is closely connected to the Persian court. In contrast, 1 Esdras has very few references to Nehemiah, and these few references have no connection to the Achaemenid court or its kings. This notable absence of Nehemiah has intrigued scholars, especially when comparing 1 Esdras with Ezra-Nehemiah.²² For example, Nehemiah appears in 1 Esdras 5:8 and 40, where he is among the returnees to Judah led by Zerubbabel and Jeshua. However, his involvement is limited; in one instance, he instructs the priests about their participation in holy matters alongside Atharias, but again, there is no reference to the Achaemenids. Chronological issues emerge with Nehemiah's appearance in this text, since 1 Esdras depicts the return as taking place during the time of Darius, rather than that of Artaxerxes.²³

In Nehemiah's first appearance in 1 Esdras, he is among the returnees to Judah led by Zerubbabel and Jeshua (5:8). In the latter reference, Nehemiah, along with Atharias, instructs the priests who were not registered, "not to partake in the holy things until there arises a priest who is adorned in explanation and truth" (μὴ μετέχειν

Nehemiah," 258.

²² Several works have examined the composition of Ezra-Nehemiah in light of 1 Esdras and vice-versa. See, for example, Mark J. Boda and Paul L. Redditt, eds., *Unity and Disunity in Ezra-Nehemiah: Redaction, Rhetoric and Reader* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2008); Lisbeth S. Fried, ed., *Was 1 Esdras First? An Investigation into the Priority and Nature of 1 Esdras*, SBLAIL 7 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011). See also Kristin De Troyer, "1 Esdras: Structure, Composition, and Significance," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Historical Books of the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Brad E. Kelle and Brent A. Strawn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 367–78, for a helpful summary of the discussion.

²³ This connection to Darius has led some scholars to question if this Nehemiah is, in fact, a different Nehemiah.

τῶν ἁγίων αὐτούς, ἕως ἀναστῆ ἀρχιερεὺς ἐνδεδυμένος τὴν δῆλωσιν καὶ τὴν ἀλήθειαν; v. 40). It is noteworthy that 1 Esdras does not remove Nehemiah's authority over priestly matters connected to the temple. Yet in the parallel text of Ezra 2:63, Nehemiah is not involved in these activities, but rather "the governor" (הַתְּרַשָּׁתָא) tells them to "not partake in the holy foods until there is a priest to consult Urim and Thummim" (כִּהֵן לֹא־יֵאָכְלוּ מִקֹּדֶשׁ הַקֹּדְשִׁים עַד עֵמֶד (לְאֹרִים וּלְתַמִּים)). In this case, "the governor" is a reference to Zerubbabel. Nehemiah's absence from Ezra 2 is not surprising, since the book depicts his return as occurring later. But in 1 Esdras, Nehemiah retains some authority over priestly matters.

In contrast with Ezra-Nehemiah, 1 Esdras includes no clear reference to the Achaemenids in the context of Nehemiah's actions. In fact, it appears that 1 Esdras intentionally removes any possible connection between Nehemiah and the Achaemenids to develop instead a close connection between the Achaemenids and *Zerubbabel*. Michael Bird hypothesizes that the only reason that 1 Esdras may have inserted Nehemiah into the activities at all was to show his subordinate status to Zerubbabel.²⁴ This proposal seems likely since Nehemiah's close connection to the Achaemenid court in the book of Nehemiah is completely absent in 1 Esdras. Specifically, 1 Esdras removes the relationship between Artaxerxes and Nehemiah, although Artaxerxes appears in other contexts.²⁵ In place of this relationship, 1 Esdras locates Zerubbabel within the Persian court and therefore establishes a close relationship between the Davidic descendant (Zerubbabel) and the Achaemenids, especially Darius. The most famous story connecting Zerubbabel and Darius is the Story of the Three Youths in 1 Esd 3–5, which cements the connection between the two individuals since Zerubbabel is in Darius's court.²⁶ The final editor of 1 Esdras thus excludes any association between Nehemiah and the Achaemenids, and excludes most associations of Jerusalem with Nehemiah, instead opting to reconfigure the dynamics of power between the Achaemenid empire and another critical

²⁴ Michael F. Bird, *1 Esdras: Introduction and Commentary on the Greek Text in Codex Vaticanus*, SCS (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 197.

²⁵ Passages mentioning Artaxerxes include the letter of support for the Judeans (1 Esdras 2:16, 17, 30) and for Ezra, more specifically (1 Esd 7:4, 6, 8, 9, 19, 28).

²⁶ Traditionally, 1 Esdras 3–5 has been considered an insertion into the text of 1 Esdras, cf. Charles C. Torrey, *Ezra Studies*, Reprinted from 1910 (New York: Ktav, 1970), or that 1 Esdras was written to provide context for the story, cf. Zipora Talshir, *1 Esdras: From Origins to Translation*, SCS 47 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1999). A third, more recent perspective is offered by Kristen De Troyer, who identifies two distinct levels of insertion: the first focuses on the theme of empire, while the second emphasizes the theme of truth, Kristin De Troyer, "'A Man Leaves His Own Father': On Relationships in 1 Esdras," *BN* 164 (2015): 35–50. For a discussion of the different models for the composition of 1 Esdras 3–5 in relation to the rest of the book, see De Troyer, "1 Esdras."

figure in Judah politics. For 1 Esdras, this association must remain between Zerubbabel—the Davidic descendant—and the Achaemenids.

2 Maccabees: Persia’s Diminished Role in Nehemiah’s Rebuilding Activities

The book of 2 Maccabees explicitly associates Nehemiah with the Persians. Although the exact date and place of its composition are debated, most scholars agree that it was written in Greek, either by a member of the Jewish diaspora in Egypt—likely in Alexandria— or by a resident of Jerusalem.²⁷ Daniel Schwartz characterizes 2 Maccabees as a “diasporan work dedicated to describing affairs in Judaea, affairs which lay in the background of the formation of a sovereign Jewish state there.”²⁸ In contrast, Sylvie Honigman maintains that the text was written in Jerusalem to support a return to earlier Hasmonean policies.²⁹ While the broader narrative of 2 Maccabees focuses on the Maccabean revolt, its thematic focus is the Jerusalem temple. These events span from Jason’s “institutionalized Hellenization” in 175 BCE and Judas Maccabeus’s victory over the Seleucids, which Nicanor led in 161 BCE, and the securing of the temple.³⁰

To understand Nehemiah’s connection to the Achaemenids in 2 Maccabees, it is first necessary to trace Nehemiah’s portrayal in the text more generally. All references to Nehemiah appear in the books’ introductory second letter, addressed to the Jewish community in Egypt and to Aristobulus.³¹ The letter’s purpose is to encourage its recipients to keep a new ceremony commemorating the purification of the temple (2:18), using Nehemiah’s temple rededication as a guideline. In fact, Doran points out that:

the senders of the letter in 2 Maccabees skip over the complex story of the return from exile to Judea: the role of Zerubbabel, the governor, and Jeshua, the high priest; the enthusiasm of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah; the building of the temple in 520–515 B.C.E.; and the much later mission of Ezra, whenever

²⁷ For a discussion of the different scholarly models for the date and place composition of 2 Maccabees, see Robert Doran, *2 Maccabees: A Critical Commentary*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), 14–15.

²⁸ Daniel R. Schwartz, *2 Maccabees*, CEJL (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2008), 55.

²⁹ Honigman, *Tales of High Priests and Taxes*, 95–117. Honigman presents several pieces of evidence to support her thesis, primarily arguing that the ideology within 2 Maccabees does not align with contemporary Alexandrian political thought. Instead, it aligns more closely with Judean traditions and political ideologies.

³⁰ Schwartz, *2 Maccabees*, 4–5.

³¹ Judas is mentioned as one of the senders of the letter, which scholars assume is a reference to Judas Maccabeus. The letter, however, cannot be dated to the time of Judas Maccabeus (ca. 160 BCE), but rather to a later period during the Hasmonean Dynasty. For a discussion of the dating of the text, see Schwartz, *2 Maccabees*, 16–37; Doran, *2 Maccabees*, 14–19.

dated. Rather, the senders concentrate on Nehemiah, who was governor of Judea from 458 B.C.E.³²

The portrayal of Nehemiah in 2 Maccabees is only like Ezra-Nehemiah on a superficial level. While Nehemiah is depicted as a leader over temple affairs, which is akin to his depiction in Ezra-Nehemiah (particularly Neh 13), 2 Maccabees credits him with building the temple and altar, reinstating sacrifices, and giving the sacred fire to the temple for the sacrifice (2 Macc 1:18). 2 Macc 1:20–21 references the sacred fire narrative, stating:

διελθόντων δὲ ἐτῶν ἱκανῶν, ὅτε ἔδοξεν τῷ θεῷ, ἀποσταλεῖς Νεεμίας ὑπὸ τοῦ βασιλέως τῆς Περσίδος τοὺς ἐκγόνους τῶν ἱερέων τῶν ἀποκριψάντων ἔπεμψεν ἐπὶ τὸ πῦρ. ὡς διεσάφισαν ἡμῖν μὴ εὐρηκέναι πῦρ ἀλλὰ ὕδωρ παχύ, ἐκέλευσεν αὐτοὺς ἀποβάψαντας φέρειν·

But after many years had passed, when it pleased God, Nehemiah, having been commissioned by the king of Persia, sent the descendants of the priests who had hidden the fire to get it. And when they reported to us that they had not found fire but only a thick liquid, he ordered them to draw it out and bring it. When the materials for the sacrifices were presented, Nehemiah ordered the priests to sprinkle the liquid on the wood and on the things laid upon it.

Through divine intervention, the Persian king commissions Nehemiah, who then sends the descendants of the priests to get the fire. Once they find the liquid, the temple sacrifices were reinstated through an amazing sight: the sun started the fire.

Ezra-Nehemiah contains no references to Nehemiah that connect his activities to *temple* building. 2 Maccabees attempts to nuance his portrayal in a different way. Ben Zvi and Honigman summarize Nehemiah's activities in 2 Maccabees as aligning with several kingly characters throughout the Hebrew Bible, namely Moses, David, and Solomon.³³ These kingly activities also may be connected to cultic activities, since Moses, Solomon, and Nehemiah are central figures for the institution of sacred traditions. 2 Macc 2:9–10 recounts how Moses prays to the Lord, and then fire descends from heaven, consuming parts of the sacrifice. Likewise, during the rededication of the Temple, Solomon prays, and fire descends from heaven to consume the sacrifice. Finally, Nehemiah's reinstatement of the temple

³² Doran, *2 Maccabees*, 48.

³³ Ben Zvi and Honigman, "Remembering Three Nehemiahs," 24–25. For how Moses has many kingly qualities, see Ian Douglas Wilson, *Kingship and Memory in Ancient Judah* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 68–71; Thomas Römer, "Moses the Real Lawgiver," in *Remembering Biblical Figures in the Late Persian & Early Hellenistic Periods: Social Memory and Imagination*, ed. Diana V. Edelman and Ehud Ben Zvi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 81–94.

sacrifice and the miraculous actions of the sun lighting the sacrifices are likened to Moses's and Solomon's activities.

2 Macc 1:18 depicts Nehemiah as the reason why its contemporary readers should participate in the Festival of Booths and the Festival of Fire. Consequently, the characterization of Nehemiah as builder and cultic initiator conveys reasons why the Jewish community in Egypt should participate in the reinstated rituals led by Judas.³⁴ 2 Maccabees also remembers Nehemiah for leaving a memoir, founding a library, and collecting books about the kings and prophets, writings of David, and royal letters about votive offerings (2 Macc 2). These activities, however, are not connected to the Persian monarchy in any direct way, nor do they specify where Nehemiah's library was housed. It appears that the reason for this reference to Nehemiah's literary activities in 2 Macc 2 is that it likens his collection of writings to Judas's own collection (in Jerusalem). And this characterization of Nehemiah is in keeping with what one may expect of a Hellenistic-era monarch (e.g. the Ptolemies). This passage presents the reader with the reason for validating Judas's claims for control and his actions in Jerusalem: He is like Nehemiah, who restructured and organized the temple. To summarize, Nehemiah's actions, as depicted in 2 Maccabees, overlap with his activities in the book of Nehemiah. But the absence of many of his activities and the ascription of new activities are not attributing Nehemiah's activities to Achaemenid sanctions. He is an independent actor in these stories, even more than his character in the book of Nehemiah.

The remembrance of the Achaemenids in 2 Maccabees differs from that of Ezra-Nehemiah in many ways. Ezra-Nehemiah consistently portrays Nehemiah's actions as supported, either explicitly or implicitly, by the Achaemenids, particularly Artaxerxes. In 2 Maccabees, no references to Nehemiah's activities or a specific Achaemenid monarch appear. Rather, this second letter includes references to Persia/Persians (1:13, 19, 20, and 33).³⁵ 2 Maccabees references the "Persians" six times. In four of these references, "Persia" signifies the region and not the empire itself (1:13, 19; 9:1, 21).³⁶ This geo-

³⁴ Ann Fitzpatrick-McKinley notes that, while 2 Maccabees knows Nehemiah, it provides no memory of Ezra. She also notes that Nehemiah functions as a builder and a preserver of certain traditions. There are many aspects of Nehemiah that are not included in this text compared to 2 Maccabees, namely he is not a religious reformer, economic reformer, or preserver of Torah. Anne Fitzpatrick-McKinley, *Empire, Power and Indigenous Elites: A Case Study of the Nehemiah Memoir*, JSJSup 169 (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 257.

³⁵ 2 Maccabees opens with two letters, written on behalf of the Jewish community in Jerusalem to the Jewish community in Egypt. The first letter (1:1–9) is written to encourage the Egyptian community to observe Hanukkah. The second letter (1:10–2:18) focuses on the legitimacy of the Second Temple, connecting Nehemiah's activities to Solomon's.

³⁶ Jonathan Goldstein comments that Jewish writers of the late second century called any of the territories found within the Parthian empire, "Per-

graphical connection is clear in 1:19 when the writer claims that their ancestors were led off into captivity to Persia, rather than Babylon. The other two references (1:20 and 33) are in connection to the Persian monarchy, and Nehemiah appears in both. The first reference returns to 2 Macc 2:20–21, in which Persia commissions Nehemiah, who then sends the descendants of the priests to get the fire originally hidden by those taken into captivity. After the priests retrieve the fire and reinstitute its related sacrifice, Nehemiah then commands that the remaining liquid should be poured onto large stones. Once they pour out the liquid, a flame arises but goes out once light from the altar is reflected.³⁷ In a moment of reversal, the Persian king—upon receiving confirmation of these events—fences-off the area and consecrates it as sacred. The king also exchanges gifts with his favored subjects.

In this series of events, 2 Maccabees depicts the Persians as allowing Nehemiah to collect the liquid for the fire and are thus remembered as the authoritative figures in charge of the temple-related events. Even Nehemiah's actions are in line with Persian wishes, so much so that when the miraculous event is reported to the Persian king (by an unnamed source), the site where the fire was stored becomes sacred. Many scholars note the importance of fire in Zoroastrianism, which was associated with the Persian empire.³⁸

While this episode may show a familiarity with Persian beliefs, the lack of specificity is striking. The fact that the text does not name a king, reveals, according to Schwartz, that the writer of 2 Maccabees either does not know who the king is, does not care who the king is (cf. Aristobulus, the teacher of King Ptolemy in 1:10), or both.³⁹ This lack of detail indicates that the letter is unconcerned with the Achaemenids beyond the king agreeing to the events and then venerating the miraculous narrative. These miraculous events are only possible because of the gathering of the holy fire of Jerusalem. This lack of detail is likely the result of the text's audience, which is a Hellenistic, Jewish audience and not a Persian one. As opposed to Ezra-Nehemiah—which situates its narrative in Babylon, Persia, and Judah—2 Maccabees sets its narrative in Egypt and Jerusalem.

Thus, while the memory of Nehemiah's connection to Persia continues in 2 Maccabees, the narrative alters several key elements. The Achaemenids are portrayed merely as a group that permits Nehemiah to send priests to collect the sacred fire. Following a miraculous event involving this fire, the Persians build their own temple on the spot where the fire was recovered. Consequently, the respon-

sis?": Jonathan Goldstein, *II Maccabees: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 41A (New York: Doubleday, 1983), 170.

³⁷ Doran, *2 Maccabees*, 51, understands this to mean that the liquid caught bits of fire from the altar, it was set aflame and then went out quickly.

³⁸ Schwartz, *2 Maccabees*, 158; Klaus Schippmann, *Die Iranischen Feuerheiligtümer* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1971).

³⁹ Schwartz, *2 Maccabees*, 158.

sibility for constructing a new Jerusalem temple, shifts to the subjugated Judeans, both through their efforts in rebuilding the Jerusalem temple and through the miraculous events associated with its rededication.⁴⁰ This shift means that a personal connection between the Achaemenids and Nehemiah is not central to his reforms, which contrasts sharply with the portrayal in Ezra-Nehemiah. Instead, Nehemiah's depiction may aim to inspire contemporary Jewish Hellenistic communities—who lack a personal connection to their Greek overlords—to engage in Judas's reinstitution of rituals.

Sirach: Persia's Diminished Role and Nehemiah's Glorified Status as Rebuilder

The text of Sirach 49:11–13 lists certain postexilic leaders whom the author believes are worthy of praise.⁴¹ R. A. F. MacKenzie refers to these leaders as “the rebuilders,” since the text focuses on their restoration of the temple and city.⁴² The text states:

Sir 49:11 Πῶς μεγαλύνωμεν τὸν Ζοροβαβελ;

καὶ αὐτὸς ὡς σφραγὶς ἐπὶ δεξιᾶς χειρός,

12 οὕτως Ἰησοῦς υἱὸς Ἰωσεδεκ,

οἱ ἐν ἡμέραις αὐτῶν ᾠκοδόμησαν οἶκον

καὶ ἀνύψωσαν ναὸν ἅγιον κυρίῳ

ἠτοιμασμένον εἰς δόξαν αἰῶνος.

13 καὶ Νεεμιου ἐπὶ πολὺ τὸ μνημόσυνον

τοῦ ἐγείραντος ἡμῖν τεῖχην πεπτωκότα

καὶ στήσαντος πύλας καὶ μοχλοὺς

καὶ ἀνεγείραντος τὰ οἰκόπεδα ἡμῶν.

Sir 49:11 How shall we magnify Zerubbabel?

⁴⁰ It is unclear where the fire was found and thus unclear where the Persian king constructed the new temple. One assumes these events are set in Persia. Doran observes, “The description in 1:19 suggests that the priests took the fire with them to Persia, but as the story of Nehemiah unfolds, it almost seems as if the fire was available in Jerusalem near the temple. However, it would seem to make sense for the Persian king to have made an area in Persia sacred.” Doran, *2 Maccabees*, 51.

⁴¹ For a discussion of the compositional unity of Sir 44–49, “Praise of the Ancestors,” see Patrick William Skehan and Alexander A. Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, AB 39 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1987). I am using the Greek text of Sirach, but for the Hebrew text, see Pancratius Cornelis Beentjes, *The Book of Ben Sira in Hebrew: A Text Edition of All Extant Hebrew Manuscripts and a Synopsis of All Parallel Hebrew Ben Sira Texts* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006).

⁴² R.A. F. MacKenzie, *Sirach*, OTM 19 (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1983), 187.

He was like a signet ring on the right hand,
 12 and so was Jeshua son of Jozadak;
 in their days they built the house
 and raised a temple holy to the Lord,
 destined for everlasting glory.

13 The memory of Nehemiah also is lasting;
 he raised our fallen walls,
 and set up gates and bars,
 and rebuilt our ruined houses.

Nehemiah's building work, as depicted in Neh 3, is his enduring legacy in this second century BCE text. As Ben Zvi and Honigman observe, "It is particularly worth stressing that Nehemiah is not imagined as building Jerusalem's walls, ruins, and ruined houses, but *our* walls, our houses, and the like."⁴³ He is remembered for only this deed, and in Ben Sira's mind, this is what legitimates his magnification.

Ben Sira lauds all three leaders (Zerubbabel, Jeshua, and Nehemiah) but fails to mention anything related to the Babylonian exile. This dynamic is consistent with the text's earlier references to exilic figures, for example Ezekiel, whom Ben Sira never places in the exile (Sir 49:8–9). In comparison to the other texts mentioned, namely Ezra-Nehemiah, 1 Esdras, and 2 Maccabees, Sirach is unique in its conspicuous absence of the Achaemenids. Rather than attribute Nehemiah's strength to his service to the Achaemenids, Ben Sira attributes his strength to his dedication to rebuilding Jerusalem. This portrayal is consistent with how Sirach presents noteworthy figures of Israel's past. At the start of the Praise of the Ancestors, the text states, "Now, let us sing the praises of famous men, our ancestors in their generations" (*Αἰνέσωμεν δὴ ἄνδρας ἐνδόξους καὶ τοὺς πατέρας ἡμῶν τῇ γενέσει*, 44:1). Notably, the Praise of the Ancestors also refers to Joshua's "enemies" without naming them, and when speaking of Moses and Aaron, never mentions Egypt or Pharaoh. Thus, the praise is for Israel's ancestors and their great deeds, without focusing on foreign monarchies, whether friend or foe.

Sirach's portrayal of Nehemiah is congruent with Sirach's pre-Hasmonean date and pro-priestly stance. Tensions between the Ptolemies and Seleucids are one explanation for the text's silence concerning foreign intervention. For Sirach, just as in 2 Maccabees, Achaemenid assistance has no place in the rebuilding of Jerusalem. Rather, the focus of rebuilding Jerusalem must remain on local leaders, akin to the high priest who the text is probably extolling in the first place.

⁴³ Ben Zvi and Honigman, "Remembering Three Nehemiahs," 22.

4. CONCLUSION

Nehemiah's connection to the Achaemenids is, in many ways, absent from most Hellenistic references to him. The book of Nehemiah frames his major building projects around Artaxerxes's authorization. Although Nehemiah is finalized in the Hellenistic period, the narrative retains Nehemiah's connections to the Achaemenids as authorizing his reforms—both city and temple. Subsequent texts that mention Nehemiah dramatically diminish this personal connection. This difference makes sense when considering the settings and contexts in which these texts were written. In the case of 1 Esdras—whose goal is to promote the power and legitimacy of Zerubbabel—highlighting Nehemiah's connection to Artaxerxes would be antithetical to the purpose of the text. Similarly, because of the focus on Zerubbabel's leadership, Nehemiah's role is relegated to one of the leading returnees who is consulted regarding one cultic matter, but with little power over Jerusalem's larger reconstruction. In the case of 2 Maccabees, the text promotes what its writer believed were the original ideals of the Maccabean heroes, and thus, only highlights Nehemiah's building projects to show a connection between the foundations of the Hasmonean dynasty and past leadership. Finally, Sirach removes Achaemenids/Persians from the narrative of Nehemiah altogether and presents a degree of self-sufficiency in the rebuilding of Jerusalem not witnessed in the other texts. This self-sufficiency is likely caused by the writer's feelings about foreign control over temple events.

In the end, Nehemiah's Hellenistic portrayals reveal changes in how various writers viewed the Achaemenids. While they are never viewed as wholly negative, there is clearly no benefit in maintaining the connection between Nehemiah and Artaxerxes found in Ezra-Nehemiah within the larger community for whom these books were written. Instead, Nehemiah's narrated actions are more compatible with Judean expectations for what a good leader (or king) should be, and any connections to Artaxerxes are unnecessary for legitimating these behaviors. Therefore, this Nehemiah renaissance does not also serve as an Achaemenid renaissance. Rather, the Achaemenids are relegated to a footnote in the events surrounding the rebuilding narratives of Nehemiah.