

Dischronological Previews to Shape Historical Narrative Continuity in Ezra 4

Gary E. Schnittjer
Copyright © 2013

Introduction¹

Biblical storymakers arrange and juxtapose historical narrative episodes and other elements to highlight relationships and connections, suggest theological inferences, and shape continuity.² Sometimes they arrange narrative elements in ways other than according to chronological sequentiality. Dischronological narration includes flashbacks and previews. Importing flashbacks and previews into particular narrative contexts takes advantage of juxtaposition to suggest inferences. This study suggests that Ezra 4 presents previews of later analogous circumstances to establish and shape continuity of opposition against the Yahwistic Judeans. The ever present hostilities against the returned exiles serves as the context in which their identity is formed and tested and in which God intervenes especially through the decrees of the emperors. The effect of Ezra 4 with its inter-spliced previews includes demonstrating narrative continuity and theological connection between several episodes separated more than a half a dozen decades.

This study aims to clarify and extend several interpretations offered regarding Ezra 4. While my concerns in this case are decidedly synchronic, several diachronic issues bear on how to interpret this narrative. To get at synchronic concerns requires interacting with recent studies on the Aramaic source(s) in Ezra 4-6, text critical issues concerning the relationship of 1 Esdras 2 and Ezra 4, and narrative periodization (relevant literature cited below).

The emphasis of this study falls upon narrative critical issues, especially the function of the dischronological narration itself. The basic issues at play in the Ezra 4 narrative are well known, even if the details are contested: dischronological presentation of correspondence from the narrative's future (4:6, 7-23) framed by a resumptive repetition (4:5, 24), which resumes with

¹ An earlier draft of this paper was delivered at the Old Testament Narrative Literature session of Evangelical Theological Society, Baltimore, November 20, 2013.

² I use the term storymakers to get at the kind of unity and coherence exhibited by the scriptural narratives. This is simply a loose analogy to our easy discussions of the meaning and intentions of filmmakers even while we are very aware that feature films are collaborative ventures, including hundreds of people, each with their own agenda and contribution (e.g., set designers, casting agents, sound technicians, director, etc.). Our culture typically chooses to view films as coherent and meaningful. The integrity of a given film is presupposed when it is viewed, interpreted, and discussed. In a similar way, biblical narratives present meaningful, unified stories even while they make use of source materials. When I discuss the views of others I typically use their preferred terms (e.g., author, editor, redactor, and so on).

a challenging chronological “then” (4:24).³ The storymakers present opposition against the Yahwistic Judeans in the time of Ahasuerus (486-465 BCE) in 4:6 and the time of Artaxerxes (465-424) in 4:7-23 before resuming the narrative in the time of Darius (522-486) through Ezra 5-6. While the dischronology and associated issues have long been recognized, the narrative significance of these embedded coming attractions in Ezra 4 has not been adequately explained. This study intends to unpack the narrative function of these previews.

Dischronological Narration

The non-chronological ordering of the materials in Ezra 4 is not of itself the problem. Scriptural storymakers frequently arrange materials dischronologically. Moses spends time in the tent of meeting before it is constructed (see Exod 33:7-11). The census of first wilderness generation appears at the head of the book of Numbers instead of where it would fit within other dated elements (Num 1:1 chronologically falls between 7:1 with Exod 40:17 and Num 9:1-3). The final episodes of the book of Judges when everyone did as they saw fit are dated to the beginning of the period of the judges (see Judg 18:30; 20:28). David taking Jerusalem appears before he defeats the Philistines which is set at the time of his anointing (see 2 Sam 5:6-10, 17 with 5:3). Solomon’s early moral declension and political troubles are presented at end of the narration of his rule (see 1 Kgs 11:27, 33 with 9:10, 15-16, 24; and see 11:14, 21, 25, 33). Herod imprisons John before Jesus is baptized (see Luke 3:20-21). The scriptures house many other dischronological narratives.⁴

Ancient Near Eastern historical narratives and other historical writings also exhibit dischronological arrangement. Assyrian annalistic materials do not always follow chronological sequence. Sometimes the king’s most important accomplishments are presented as occurring in the beginning of their rule.⁵ Ancient Egyptian inscriptions and Greco-Roman Egypt archives take

³ All translations mine from *BHQ*, unless stated otherwise.

⁴ For interaction with several dischronological narratives in the Pentateuch, see Gary E. Schnittjer, *The Torah Story* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 23, 188-90, 244-46, 272, 373-76. For numerous other contexts see David A. Glatt, *Chronological Displacement in Biblical and Related Literatures* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993).

⁵ See Hayim Tadmor, “History and Ideology in Assyrian Royal Inscriptions,” in *Assyrian Royal Inscriptions: New Horizons* (ed. Fredrick Mario Fales; *Orientalis Antiqui Collectio 17*; Rome: Oriental Institute, 1981), 13-32. Tadmor refers to several examples including Ashurnasirpal and Shalmaneser’s son Tukulti-Ninurta I. For these contexts see *ARI*, 2: 122-24.

advantage of reverse chronological order.⁶ Chronological sequentiality is not a necessary element of historical narration, though it appears to be its default setting.

Constructing Ezra 4

The sources, redacting, editing, and updating of Ezra 4 remain highly contested and much discussed (the same is true for Ezra and/or Nehemiah and/or Chronicles, and the relationship of these and 1 Esdras). These historical critical concerns are not a hindrance but of decided importance, even essential to study the scriptural Ezra-Nehemiah story. The storymakers' commitment to honoring the source materials, including a certain kind of editorial reticence likely born of respecting the historical integrity of the sources, has left behind the footprints of these sources. These literary footprints of sources, redaction, and editing are part and parcel of the final biblical narrative, and, as such, become part of routine of interpreting the story. Several recent studies provide especially important contributions to understanding the Ezra 4 narrative. While I do not concur with the conclusions of the studies summarized in this section, parts of these studies will be applied to interpreting Ezra 4 in the next sections.

The dischronological letters in Ezra 4 overlap with the beginning of the first of two Aramaic passages, Ezra 4:8-6:18 and 7:12-26. Richard C. Steiner makes an extensive argument for historical authenticity of the Aramaic letters in Ezra 4-6, including the original historical reverse order collation of the letters.⁷ He explains the sources as coming from an official ancient Persian archivist with numerous analogies in ancient Aramaic Persian era writings, along with other analogues, including reverse chronological listing in the Harvard OnLine Library Information System (664). He suggests that ancient researchers worked with the most recent sources first, similar though not identical to their modern counterparts. Steiner works very closely with the numerous difficulties in 4:7-11 and offers explanations for each item preserved within four different literary layers (650-673), along with several comparative materials in three detailed appendices (676-685). Steiner follows Hugh G. M. Williamson in seeing the Aramaic narratives connecting the letters as coming from the biblical author (674).⁸ Steiner maintains the entire archivist report may be identified with one of the documents Nehemiah brought with him

⁶ See discussion and numerous examples in Richard C. Steiner, "Bishlam's Archival Search Report in Nehemiah's Archive: Multiple Introductions and Reverse Chronological Order as Clues of the Origin of the Aramaic Letters in Ezra 4-6," *JBL* 125 (2006): 641-85, esp. 662-63.

⁷ See *ibid.*, 641-85, cited parenthetically in this section. For a detailed argument that the letters in Ezra 4 were forged for the sake of the Ezra-Neh story, see Jacob L. Wright, *Rebuilding Identity: The Nehemiah-Memoir and Its Earliest Readers* (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2004), 31-44, esp. 35-39.

⁸ See Hugh G. M. Williamson, "The Composition of Ezra i-iv," *JTS* 34.1 (1983): 1-30.

to Jerusalem according to 2 Maccabees 2:13, and which he kept in his own archive (648-649).⁹ Steiner affirms the common view of a resumtive repetition inserted by the biblical author in 4:24 to close the “flashforward” he had initiated in 4:4, 5 (674). While Steiner sees the author’s use of reverse chronological order as a “true tour deforce,” he acknowledges that it is “too subtle” for most readers, leading to widespread misinterpretation as far back as Josephus (675).

Responses to Steiner’s thoroughgoing study are appreciative but mixed.¹⁰ One exception is Andrew Steinmann who both accepts and extends Steiner’s study.¹¹ Steinmann argues “the Aramaic [source] of Ezra 4:8-6:18 is one composition that connects a number of pre-existing documents to form a single narrative.”¹² The logic of the reverse chronological order of the letters in Ezra 4-6 for Steinmann is explained by the archivist’s needs in preparing a persuasive research report for the Persian monarch, in which the archivist takes it upon himself to influence Artaxerxes on behalf of the Judeans.¹³ By contrast Steiner more modestly suggests the letters themselves were collected in reverse order (from researching the most recent first) and the “biblical author decided to retain the reverse chronological order.”¹⁴ Steiner and Steinmann have

⁹ “The same things are reported in the records and in the memoirs of Nehemiah, and also that he founded a library and collected the books about the kings and prophets, and the writings of David, and the letters of kings about votive offerings” (2 Macc 2:13 NRSV).

¹⁰ Williamson refers to Steiner’s argument as a “bold hypothesis” (51, n. 20) but chooses to defend and update his own earlier arguments (esp. his 1983 “Composition of Ezra i-iv” cited above), see Hugh G. M. Williamson, “The Aramaic Documents in Ezra Revisited.” *JTS* NS 59 (2008): 51, n. 20 (41-62). Deirdre N. Fulton and Gary N. Knoppers appreciate Steiner’s close attention to the textual difficulties of Ezra 4:7-11 but find the study wanting because it failed to deal with the parallels in 1 Esdras, which they consider decisive, see their “Lower Criticism and Higher Criticism: The Case of 1 Esdras,” in *Was 1 Esdras First?: An Investigation into the Priority and Nature of First Esdras* (ed. Lisbeth S. Fried; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011), 20, n. 41 (11-29). Also see Mark Leuchter, “Coming to Terms with Ezra’s Many Identities in Ezra-Nehemiah,” in *Historiography and Identity (Re)formulation in Second Temple Historiographical Literature* (ed. Louis Jonker; T & T Clark, 2010), 58 (41-63).

¹¹ See Andrew E. Steinmann “A Chronological Note: The Return of the Exiles under Sheshbazzar and Zerubbabel (Ezra 1-2),” *JETS* 51.3 (2008): 516, n. 6 (513-22); and esp. idem., “Letters of Kings about Votive Offerings, the God of Israel and the Aramaic Document in Ezra 4:8-6:18,” *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* 8.23 (2008): 2-14.

¹² Steinmann, “Letters of Kings about Votive Offerings,” 10. This essay is edited and embedded in his commentary, see Andrew E. Steinmann, *Ezra and Nehemiah* (Concordia Commentary; Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2010), 193-204; for the passage quoted here, see 201.

¹³ See *ibid.*, 10-13. Steinmann works through a series of sub-hypotheses and scenarios to compensate for numerous problems with his reading. The piling up of hypotheses diminish the viability of his thesis that Ezra 4:8-6:18 including the connecting narratives is a royal archivist’s report. For problems with Ezra 4:8-6:18 as a preexisting Aramaic document, see Sara Japhet, “Periodization between History and Ideology II: Chronology and Ideology in Ezra-Nehemiah,” in her *From the Rivers of Babylon to the Highlands of Judah: Collected Studies of the Restoration Period* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 424, n. 29. For studies which emphasize Aramaic as denoting an “external” voice, see B. T. Arnold, “The Use of Aramaic in the Hebrew Bible: Another Look at Bilingualism in Ezra and Daniel,” *JNSL* 22 (1996): 1-16; Joshua Berman, “The Narratorial Voice of the Scribes of Samaria: Ezra IV 8-VI 18 Reconsidered,” *VT* 56.3 (2006): 314-26; idem., “The Narratological Purpose of Aramaic Prose in Ezra 4.8-6.18,” *Aramaic Studies* 5.2 (2007): 165-91; Gary N. Knoppers, *Jews and Samaritans: The Origins and History of Their Early Relations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 136-37, n. 9.

¹⁴ Steiner, “Bishlam’s Archival Search,” 676. Steinmann suggests that Steiner thinks Ezra 4:8-6:18 *in toto* is the archivists’ report (“Letters of Kings about Votive Offerings,” 10, esp. n. 23). Steiner does credit the reverse

established convincing explanation of the historicity of the letters including the possibility that the reverse order goes back to ancient archival research. Their interpretations of the purposes of the letters which revolve around the archivist's circumstances, however, do not adequately explain the function of the letters in the Ezra-Nehemiah narrative. If the archivist's source suggested the reverse order of the letters, their significance in the biblical narration extends well beyond the source's supposed purpose.

A recent study by Deirdre N. Fulton and Gary N. Knoppers argues that 1 Esdras 2:15 provides a more original version of the narrative also housed in Ezra 4:6-11a.¹⁵ Because this thesis only relates indirectly to the present study, close interaction with it is housed in an appendix below. The upshot of their findings is that the many "plusses" in Ezra 4:6 and following (and possibly several other passages in Ezra 4-6) are best explained by thinking of them as scribal additions. While such an approach skews the interpretive agenda toward the alleged scribal updates themselves the comparison helps distinguish these parts of the Ezra narrative over and against 1 Esdras. I will make use of part of Fulton and Knoppers' findings below, with due caution since I disagree with their main argument (see appendix below).

Sara Japhet notes that the book of Ezra-Nehemiah presents chronological references in relation to Persian emperors, to priests and leaders of the returned exiles, and to events in the narration itself. The structure of the narrative develops around principle leaders of the returned exiles and events associated with their work. Japhet regards the periodization of the narrative as twofold, built around two pairs of leaders: Zerubbabel and Jeshua in Ezra 1-6 and Ezra and Nehemiah in Ezra 7-Nehemiah 13. Rather than a general history the narrated events concern matters in the beginning and end of the first period (538-515), the initial period of Ezra's return (458), and narrated portions of Nehemiah's two terms as governor (445, c. 428-426).¹⁶ The book

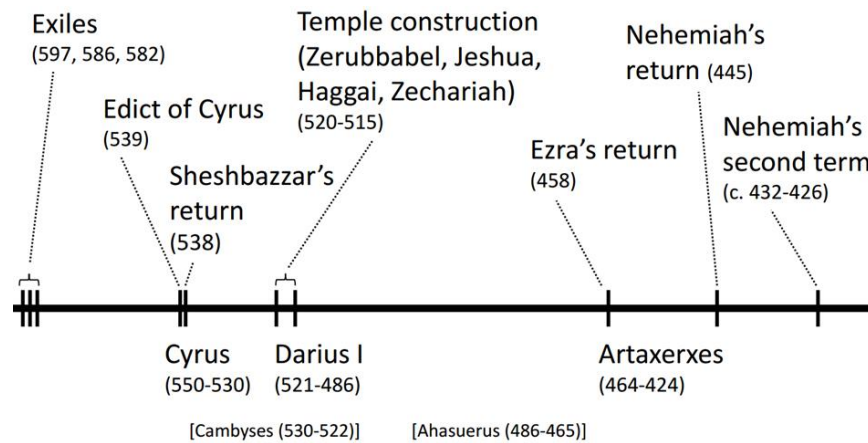
chronological order of the letters to the archival search results reported by Bishlam, Mithredath, and Tabeel (see "Bishlam's Archival Search Report," 657), but he does not equate that report with the Aramaic section of Ezra 4-6. Rather while Steiner views 4:7-11 as part of the archival report, he follows Williamson and says the letters embedded in the archivists' report are used by the biblical author who supplies the connecting Aramaic narrative material of 4:23-5:5; 6:1-2, 13-18 (see 674). For Williamson's explanations of the biblical author's connecting narratives in the first Aramaic section of Ezra, see "Composition of Ezra i-iv," 15-20. For lengthy close interaction with Williamson's study, see Baruch Halpern, "A Historiographic Commentary on Ezra 1-6: Achronological Narrative and Dual Chronology in Israelite Historiography," in *The Hebrew Bible and Its Interpreters*, Biblical and Judaic Studies (eds. W. H. Propp, B. Halpern, and David Noel Freedman; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 81-141. Halpern's own close study of Ezra 1-6 emphasizes chronological detail and presents a number of subtle observations. However, Halpern's projection of postmodern subversive intention to the biblical writer(s) obscures the potential merits of his interpretations.

¹⁵ See Fulton and Knoppers, "Lower Criticism and Higher Criticism," 11-29.

¹⁶ See Japhet, "Periodization between History and Ideology II," 416-31, esp. 420-22. Japhet works through some of this in more detail in "Composition and Chronology in the Book of Ezra-Nehemiah," in *From the Rivers of Babylon*

presents selected events from within two periods of 20 and 26 years respectively, with these two periods separated by almost 60 years. Knoppers notes that “of the approximately 112 years addressed by the book, there are gaps totaling some 89 years.”¹⁷ The Ezra-Nehemiah story is highly selective dealing with only 23 years.¹⁸ Japhet notes that continuity is created by the phrase “and after these things” in Ezra 7:1 which spans the lengthy gap between the narrated periods.¹⁹ Building on the pairs of leaders, Christiane Karrer-Grube discusses another connector between the two periods of restoration, namely, the dischronological letters in Ezra 4:11-23.²⁰ Karrer-Grube’s observations on how the letters connect the narrative periods will be discussed below. See Figure 1 for a graphic depiction of the brief narrated moments which punctuate long gaps in Ezra-Nehemiah.

Figure 1: Locating the Narrated Selective Moments of Ezra-Nehemiah on a Timeline



Selected Difficulties Associated with the Dischronology of Ezra 4

to the Highlands of Judah, 245-67. Also see Gary Knoppers, “Periodization in Ancient Israelite Historiography: Three Case Studies,” in *Periodisierung und Epochenbewusstsein im Alten Testament und in seinem Umfeld* (eds. Josef Wiesehöfer and Thomas Krüger; Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2012), 132-37 (121-45); on the dates cited here, see Knoppers, 133, 134, esp. nn. 40, 41; Knoppers uses the approximate dates 428-426 (133, n. 40) to allow some time for the problems of Neh 13:4-31 to arise after Nehemiah returned to Artaxerxes in 433 (13:6), yet elsewhere he says 430 is the approximate end of the second mission (see 134, n. 41). The symmetry of the two pairs of leaders is appealing, yet it does not account for Sheshbazzar. Knoppers mentions that it is unclear whether Sheshbazzar is a different person or another name for Zerubbabel, 135-36, n. 50. For a convenient listing of all dates in Ezra-Nehemiah along with summary of the major issues, see Herbert H. Klement, “Rhetorical, Theological, and Chronological Features of Ezra-Nehemiah,” in *A God of Faithfulness: Essays in Honour of J. Gordon McConville on his 60th Birthday* (eds. Jamie A. Grant, Alison Lo, and Gordon J. Wenham; New York: T&T Clark, 2011), 61-78, esp. 62-67, 75-78.

¹⁷ Knoppers, “Periodization in Ancient Israelite Historiography,” 134.

¹⁸ The editors have been “highly selective and telescopic” in what they chose to narrate (see *ibid.*, 135)

¹⁹ See Japhet, “Periodization between History and Ideology II,” 423.

²⁰ See Christiane Karrer-Grube, “Scrutinizing the Conceptual Unity of Ezra and Nehemiah,” in *Unity and Disunity in Ezra-Nehemiah: Redaction, Rhetoric, and Reader* (eds. Mark J. Boda and Paul L. Redditt; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2008), 148-49 (136-59). Also see Japhet, “Composition and Chronology in the Book of Ezra-Nehemiah,” 264.

Ezra 4-6 presents opposition against building the second temple, a series of official letters regarding pro-Jerusalemites and their opponents, connecting narratives between the letters, and brief generalized accounts of temple dedication and Passover celebration upon completing the temple. Table 1 provides an outline.

Table 1: Form and Structure of Ezra 4-6

[narratives, summary statements, and other notations]

[embedded letters]

opponents' offer to assist building the temple rebuffed (4:1-3)

summary of opposition from the time of Cyrus to the time of Darius (4:4-5)

charge against the pro-Judeans during the rule of Ahasuerus (4:6)

Bishlam, Tabeel, and their associates letter to Artaxerxes (4:7)²¹

(Aramaic begins)

Rehum and Shimshai wrote a letter against Jerusalem to Artaxerxes (4:8)

the opponents of Jerusalem who wrote the letter listed: Rheum, Shimshai, and their associates, the judges, envoys, officials, the Persians, the people of Erech, the Babylonians, the People of Susa (Elamites), and the rest of the nations whom Osnappar [Ashurbanipal] deported to Samaria, and the rest of the province Beyond the River (4:9-10)

letter introduced (4:11a)

letter to Artaxerxes (4:11b-16)

letter introduced (4:17a)

reply of Artaxerxes (4:17b-22)

Rehum, Shimshai, and their associates use the letter and by force made the work cease (4:23)

work on the house of God discontinued until the time of Darius (4:24)

Haggai and Zechariah prophesy and Zerubbabel and Jeshua work on the house of God (5:1-2)

opposition against the temple building by Tattenai, Shethar-bozenai, and their associates (5:3-5)²²

²¹ Sorting out the relationship of Ezra 4:7 and 4:8-10, and which named persons are responsible for the embedded letters to and from Artaxerxes (4:11-16, 17-22) falls outside the present study. Truthfully, I do not have an adequate interpretation or guess about exactly what to do with these verses. The important recent studies on this difficult context by Steiner and by Fulton and Knoppers discussed above, with their very different interpretations, are impressive and contain much of merit, even if they are inadequate for different reasons as noted. For helpful yet inconclusive comments on these verses, see David J. A. Clines, *Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther* (NCBC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 77; F. Charles Fensham, *The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 79ff.; Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah: A Commentary* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1988), 111ff.; H. G. M. Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah* (WBC; Waco, TX: Word Books, 1985), 61-62; Edwin M. Yamauchi, "Ezra and Nehemiah" (EBC, rev. ed.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 412-14.

letter introduced (5:6-7a)

letter from Tattenai, Shethar-bozenai, and their associates to Darius (5:7b-17); decree of Cyrus summarized along with its effects in a speech embedded in the letter (5:13-16)

Darius authorizes archival search (6:1-2a)²³

letter from Darius with his decision to support the pro-Jerusalem temple building group (6:2b-12); decree of Cyrus embedded in this embedded letter (6:3-5)

Tattenai, Shethar-bozenai, and their associates obey the letter from Darius (6:13)

summary of the building by the decree of Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes (6:14-15)

dedication of the house of God (6:16-18)

(Hebrew resumes)

Passover celebrated with joy in the wake of the Lord working in the heart of the king of Assyria (6:19-22)

The narrative of Ezra 4 raises many issues of which I will deal with only those directly relevant to this study. The antagonists are introduced as “enemies of Judah and Benjamin” but their reported speech gives no basis for this characterization. They say, “Let us build with you, for like you, we are seeking your God, and to him²⁴ we have been sacrificing from the days of Esarhaddon king of Ashur the one who brought us up here” (Ezra 4:2). Did Zerubbabel and company have sufficient basis for their “hermeneutic of suspicion” and categorical rejection of the offer to help?²⁵ Not in this narrative. Readers may give them the benefit of the doubt or wonder at their quick judgment. Why do they resist collaboration? Are the leaders nervous and insecure because of volatile political issues?²⁶ Are they elitist and/or racist?²⁷ One set of answers

²² Ezra 5:3 is narrated in third person and 5:4 in first person. See Steinmann, “Letters of Kings about Votive Offerings,” 9.

²³ For Ezra 6:2 as part of the letter rather than the connecting narrative, see *ibid.*, 4.

²⁴ Qere, see *BHQ*.

²⁵ Knoppers uses this phrase to describe the consistent attitude toward the opposition, see “Periodization in Ancient Israelite Historiography,” 136.

²⁶ The basis for insecurities can be interpreted in many ways depending on timing (which is unclear here). The political difficulties rooted in large part from the problems surrounding Darius’ rise to power sparked rebellions across the empire in 522 BCE and following. The place of Zerubbabel in these volatile times has been variously interpreted. Is there sedition in the air of Judea with a Davidic ruler and empire uncertainties? Is Zerubbabel a loyalist appointed as governor by Darius’ administration to prevent rebellion in Judah? For these competing interpretations, on the former, see Edwin M. Yamauchi, *Persia and the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1990), 156; Blenkinsopp, *OTL*, 117; and for the latter, see Mark J. Boda, *Haggai, Zechariah* (NIVAC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 28. Another approach is that the Achaemenid administration authorized the leadership of Zerubbabel to insure “cordial relations between Persia and Yehud” but that his Davidic pedigree may have raised hopes among the people longing for political independence (see Carol L. Meyers, and Eric M. Meyers, *Haggai, Zechariah 1-8* [AB 25B; Doubleday, 1987], xxxiii-xxxiv). For Persian materials related to these matters with

might be supplied by interpreting the foreigners relocated by Esarhaddon on analogy of the syncretistic foreigners relocated to Samaria by Shalmaneser V and/or Sargon II in 2 Kings 17.²⁸ On this reading Zerubbabel and his associates may be wisely avoiding the theological and syncretistic confusion of well-meaning would be temple building collaborators. Yet, such a reading does not adequately fit with the storymakers characterization of them as enemies.

Another problem confronts readers when trying to figure out the timing of Zerubbabel, Jeshua, and their associates' comment "we only will build for Yahweh God of Israel, according to the command of the king, Cyrus king of Persia" (4:3). The retrospective of the next verses enhances the chronological difficulties claiming opposition "all the days of Cyrus king of Persia even until the rule of Darius king of Persia" (4:5). Should Zerubbabel and Jeshua be set in the days of Cyrus' edict as inferred here (c. 537 with 3:8) or the days of Darius the Great (c. 520) as noted by Haggai and Zechariah and the collaboration of these prophets with Zerubbabel and Jeshua in Ezra 5:1, 2.²⁹ The narrative in the beginning of Ezra 4, along with several other associated difficulties in Ezra 1-6, have led to many and varied suggestions including that Zerubbabel is Sheshbazzar or he is junior associate of Sheshbazzar serving as building supervisor before replacing Sheshbazzar as governor of Judah.³⁰

The dischronological letter in Ezra 4:11-22, with its embedded letters (4:11-16, 17-22), presents its own problems. That the letter is dischronological is the main problem. Loring W. Batten most helpfully comments on his underlying impulses: "In reading a historical book it is desirable to have the material in proper chronological order."³¹ He goes on to rearrange Ezra-Nehemiah into its "proper" historical sequence and offers commentary on his own arrangement of the material. The author/editor/redactor has often been accused of ignorance, error, or the like,

interpretation, see Amélie Kuhrt, *The Persian Empire: A Corpus of Sources from the Achaemenid Period* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 135-77; and on the political situation, see Yamauchi, *Persia and the Bible*, 138-49.

²⁷ Williamson remarks that Ezra 4:3ff. does not offer enough detail to determine if the response is based on "inherently religious exclusivism," but that at least the temple builders did admit individual proselytes (formerly "outsiders") according to 6:21 (see WBC, 50, 85). It should be noted that Williamson considers "racist" Ezra's interpretation of the law in Ezra 9-10, even while he affirms his model leadership, see WBC, 160-61.

²⁸ See *ANET*, 284; also see Knoppers, *Jews and Samaritans*, 23; Yamauchi, EBC, 408-9; Nadav Na'aman and Ran Zadok, "Sargon II's Deportations to Israel and Philistia," *JCS* 40.1 (1988): 36-46.

²⁹ Haggai and Zechariah are mentioned again in Ezra 6:14 but Zerubbabel and Jeshua are not mentioned again.

³⁰ For the former see discussion of a "harmonizing interpretation" in Sara Japhet, "Sheshbazzar and Zerubbabel against the Background of the Historical and Religious Tendencies of Ezra-Nehemiah: Part 1," in *From the Rivers of Babylon to the Highlands of Judah*, 53-84, esp. 76-77. For the latter see Steinmann "A Chronological Note." Also for concise discussion of these interpretations, see Derek Kidner, *Ezra & Nehemiah* (TOTC; Inter-Varsity Press, 1979), 139-142; Shermayahu Talmon, "Ezra and Nehemiah," *IDBSup*, 319ff.

³¹ Loring W. Batten, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1913), 5.

though more recently his historical acumen is typically defended, with Ezra 6:14 cited as evidence that he knew the historical sequence of Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes.³²

A glaring difficulty of the letter in Ezra 4:11-22 stems from associating wall building with temple building. Why did the storymakers insert letters concerning rebuilding the walls into a context dealing with reconstructing the temple? Again, some scholars assign to the author/editor/redactor ignorance, error, and intentional misrepresentation of the issue.³³ And, again, other interpreters affirm the creators of the narrative for carefully editing the materials to juxtapose and draw analogy between the opposition to temple building in the days of the early returns and opposition to city building, perhaps in the events preceding Nehemiah's prayer and mission (esp. if 4:12, 21, 23 are associated with Neh 1:3).³⁴

A majority of interpreters note the use of resumptive repetition in Ezra 4:24 to enclose the letters from the episode's future.

So the people of the land weakened the hands of the people of Judah and made them afraid to build and they bribed counselors against them to frustrate their plans, all the days of Cyrus king of Persia even until the rule of Darius king of Persia (4:4, 5)

Previews of troubles in the days of Ahasuerus (Xerxes) (4:6) and Artaxerxes (4:11-22).

At that time (lit. then) work stopped on the house of God which is in Jerusalem, and it was stopped until the second year of the rule of Darius king of Persia (4:24)

While resumptive repetition may signify a later editor's hand it offers considerable benefit when interpreted from a synchronic perspective.³⁵ The resumptive repetition demonstrates "intentional (chronological) displacement."³⁶ This recognition points the way toward interpreting Ezra 4 in light of the narrative function of the inserted previews. The use of "then" (אָדָּם + וְ) to resume the narrative in Zerubbabel and Jeshua's day creates another difficulty. The typical biblical use of

³² For a notable presentation which argues for the unhistorical character of Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah, see Charles Cutler Torrey, *Ezra Studies* (1910; reprint, Eugene, Oreg.: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2006). For defense of historical prowess of the author/editor/redactor, see, e.g., Blenkinsopp, OTL, 111; Williamson, WBC, 58; Tamara Cohn Eskenazi, *In an Age of Prose: A Literary Approach to Ezra-Nehemiah* (SBLMS 36; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), 173, n. 33. For a summary of the discussion that Ahasuerus (4:6) is Cambyses and Artaxerxes (4:11ff.) is Pseudo-Smerdis, see H. E. Ryle, *The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah*, Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges (Cambridge University Press, 1893), 64-66

³³ Batten calls this placement of materials "an obvious absurdity" (ICC, 160), and says, "[t]he Chr. had no idea that this passage dealt with the walls of the city" (164). Also, for interaction with Torrey's similar views, see Glatt, *Chronological Displacement*, 191-93.

³⁴ See Glatt, *Chronological Displacement*, 127; Eskenazi, *In an Age of Prose*, 55.

³⁵ See Burke O. Long, "Framing Repetitions in Biblical Historiography," *JBL* 106.3 (1987): 385-399. Also see Keil, 74-75; Blenkinsopp, OTL, 111, 115; Halpern, "Historiographic Commentary on Ezra 1-6," 110.

³⁶ Glatt, *Chronological Displacement*, 125.

this Aramaic term is narrative-temporal and narrative-consequence succession—“(and) then” or “(and) so.”³⁷ The causal sequence seems to be what Christopher Lortie has in mind when he says that within the rhetoric of Ezra 1-6 Artaxerxes’ demand stops the temple from being rebuilt.³⁸ Using similar logic, though from a different perspective, Baruch Halpern projects postmodern strong reading tendencies onto the ancient author and suggests he intentionally “blurs the distinction” by inferring a causal relationship between the circumstances of later wall fortifications and temple building.³⁹ These suggestions ignore the care the storymakers took to avoid speaking about temple building in the Artaxerxes era preview of 4:7-23. These suggestions also seem strained and overstated in the context of the evident resumptive repetition. Artaxerxes did not stop temple construction but his obstruction serves as an analog from the narrative’s future to explain the stopped temple building in the days from Cyrus to Darius.⁴⁰ It seems better to acknowledge the ambiguity and difficulty of the use of “then” (אָדאָ) to resume the story.⁴¹

Table 2 provides a summary of provisional dates for the sake of clarity, in order to get at the narrative function of the dischronologies of Ezra 4.

Table 2: Provisional Dates of Events Housed in Ezra 4-6

Ezra 4:1-5 is set in c. 437 and following (second year after return, 3:8).

Ezra 4:6 is set sometime in 486 (first year of Ahasuerus).

Ezra 4:7-23 is set sometime between 464 and 445 (before the twentieth year of the rule of Artaxerxes, Neh 1:1; 2:1).

Ezra 4:24-6:13 is set c. 520 (second year of Darius when Haggai and Zechariah minister, 5:1; Hag 1:1; Zech 1:1).

Ezra 6:14 is a panoramic retrospective from 539 to 445, especially highlighting the decrees of Cyrus (539, see 1:2ff; 6:3ff), Darius (520, see 6:6ff), and Artaxerxes (445, see Neh 2:7, 8).

³⁷ See Ezra 4:9, 23; 5:2, 4, 5, 9, 16; 6:1, 13, as well as many uses in Dan. Also see Franz Rosenthal, *A Grammar of Biblical Aramaic* (Porta Linguarum Orientalium NS 5; Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1983), §§ 85, 89; *HALOT*, 2: 1807.

³⁸ See Christopher R. Lortie, “These are the Days of the prophets: A Literary Analysis of Ezra 1-6,” *TynBul* 64.2 (2013): 168. Lortie’s essay makes several important contributions, esp. regarding the use of עלה and בנה in Ezra 1:1-4 to set up the ploy of Ezra 1-6 (see 161-69).

³⁹ See Halpern, “Historiographic Commentary on Ezra 1-6,” 112; also see Glatt, *Chronological Displacement*, 127, 129.

⁴⁰ See Klement, “Rhetorical, Theological, and Chronological Features of Ezra-Nehemiah,” 72.

⁴¹ See Keil, 74, 75; Williamson, WBC, 65. Perhaps “then” is used a general narrative temporal marked to link the episodes something like the way “then” (אָדאָ) may be used to link units in Kings without inferring causal chronological relationship. For an example see Nadav Na’aman’s comments on “then” in 2 Kgs 12:17 [18], “Royal Inscriptions and the Histories of Joash and Ahaz, Kings of Judah,” *VT* 48.3 (1998): 340-41 (333-49).

Ezra 6:15-18 is set on third of Adar (Feb-March) in the sixth year of the rule of Darius (515).

Ezra 6:19-22 is set in the first month (Nisan/March-April), Passover 515.

Narrative Function of Dischronology in Ezra 4

The dischronological letters in Ezra 4:6-22 offer a cure to many, though not all of the difficulties presented in the preceding section. Solving some of the problems seems important to the storymakers. Yet, fixing problems that preoccupy interpreters appears secondary to the positive accomplishments of the use of previews in the narrative arrangement. The major function of the previews is narrative continuity. The resultant narrative continuities of the embedded previews in Ezra 4 may be unpacked in several specific ways.

First, and most importantly, the previews of Ezra 4 establish continuity of opposition across the several returns and initial restoration of the covenantal community.⁴² The identity of the returned exiles is formed in the context of continual opposition internally, locally, and from across the empire. The summary in Ezra 4:5 tells of persistent hostility against the restoration from the first decades of the Persian empire. The previews present a panorama of “sustained

⁴² In this study I am using interchangeably returned exiles, Yahwistic Judeans, covenantal community, and the like. I am aware of the ongoing debate concerning the identity of the Judeans and “the other” in the biblical postexilic writings, including the differences in how they use the same terminology. My working view is that Ezra-Nehemiah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi share a similar outlook in terms of the postexilic identity as defined in covenantal terms. On the prevailing postexilic outlook as remaining covenantal, see, for example, Boda, *Haggai, Zechariah*, 91. For discussion regarding numerous issues surrounding the communal the identity of the returned exiles as these relate to Ezra-Nehemiah, see, e.g. Sara 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*, 432-49; Knoppers, *Jews and Samaritans*, 135-68; idem., “Ethnicity, Genealogy, Geography, and Change: The Judean Communities of Babylon and Jerusalem in the Story of Ezra,” in *Community Identity in Judean Historiography: Biblical and Comparative Perspectives* (eds. Gary N. Knoppers and Kenneth A. Ristau; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2009), 147-71; John Kessler, “The Diaspora in Zechariah 1-8 and Ezra-Nehemiah: The Role of History, Social Location, and Tradition in the Formation of Identity,” in *Community Identity in Judean Historiography*, 119-45. There are many studies of late on issues concerning the exile, diaspora, returns, and a large number of related issues including archaeological findings and publication of *al Yahuda* and other documents. In addition to full length studies numerous collections of essays have been published of which the following are representative, see *Judah and the Judeans in the Neo-Babylonian Period* (eds. Oded Lipschitz and Joseph Blenkinsopp; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003); *Judah and the Judeans in the Persian Period* (eds. Oded Lipschitz and Manfred Oeming; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005); *Judah and the Judeans in the Fourth Century B.C.E.* (eds. Oded Lipschitz, Gary Knoppers, and Rainer Albertz; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2007); *Judah and the Judeans in the Achaemenid Period* (eds. Oded Lipschitz, Gary Knoppers, and Manfred Oeming; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011); *Interpreting Exile: Displacement and Deportation in Biblical and Modern Contexts* (eds. Brad E. Kelle, Frank Ritzel Ames, and Jacob L. Wright; Ancient Israel and Its Literature 10; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011). Hammering out the important issues concerning the collective identity of postexilic Judeans falls outside the present study. In this study I am interested in working out part of the context within which these identities are formed and function.

opposition” in terms of “active resistance” which extends from the days of Cyrus and Darius through the days of Ahasuerus and Artaxerxes.⁴³

Who are these opponents? Beyond local hostiles the dischronological insert attests to opponents across the empire (see esp. 4:9, 10). This pattern of collaboration by enemies of the returned exiles aligns with the partnering of challengers against Nehemiah’s wall building (see Neh 2:19; 3:33; 4:1-2; 6:1, 6).⁴⁴ The opponents to restoration are everywhere and their manifold tactics to frustrate and stop the work of the returned exiles is constant. The identity and mission of the returned exiles emerges against omnipresent opposition.

Second, and closely related to the previous point, the previews of opposition to come in Ezra 4 explain the decisive actions of Zerubbabel, Jeshua, et al. rejecting the offer to help build the temple by apparently sympathetic locals. Readers wonder why Zerubbabel takes such a hard line against the friendly sounding offer to help their cause. The only explanation given rehearses Cyrus’ instruction to rebuild the temple as exclusively for the returning exiles (Ezra 4:3). Neither this response nor the narrator’s reference to those who offer to help as enemies add up easily with the generous sounding language of the locals. The previews of long running opposition against the returned exiles on display through the rest of the chapter vindicate the decision to reject the offer to help.

The juxtaposition of hostilities to come at one time handles several issues. The Yahwistic Judeans’ rejection is not rooted in xenophobia. The temple builders rejected the offer of assistance from the foreign transplants for good reason, as the previews of protracted opposition indicate.⁴⁵ At the same time the storymakers’ characterization of the people of the land as enemies is justified (see 4:1).⁴⁶ The revelation of opposition and hostility concealed by seeming

⁴³ See Fulton and Knoppers, “Lower Criticism and Higher Criticism,” 25, 27.

⁴⁴ See *ibid.*, 27.

⁴⁵ Fulton and Knoppers note that the early returned Judeans were not xenophobic in rejecting assistance. “What may have seemed on the surface to be a good-faith gesture by foreign transplants in the satrapy was disingenuous” (*ibid.*, 28). Also see Blenkinsopp, OTL, 128; Williamson, WBC, 128-29, and later he refers to this function as an “historical apologetic” (135); Ralph W. Klein, “The Books of Ezra & Nehemiah,” in NIB (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999), 3: 700-1.

⁴⁶ See A. Philip Brown II, “Chronological Anomalies in the Book of Ezra,” *BSac* 162 (2005): 45 (33-49). Brown makes several helpful observations. These are offset to some extent because of framing them against the “book of Ezra” without regard to the larger work of Ezra-Nehemiah. Brown in many ways stands at the opposite extreme from several studies which have rejected the integrity of Ezra-Nehemiah, yet his study suffers because of severing the narrative in half. See David Kraemer, “On the Relationship of the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah,” *JSOT* 59 (1993): 73-92; Bob Becking, “Continuity and Community: The Belief System of the Book of Ezra,” in *The Crisis in Israelite Religion: Transformation and Religious Tradition in Exilic and Post-Exilic Times* (eds. Bob Becking and Marjo Korpel; OTS 42; Leiden Brill, 1999), 256-75; James C. VanderKam, “Ezra-Nehemiah or Ezra and Nehemiah?” in *Priests, Prophets and Scribes: Essays on the Formation and Heritage of Second Temple Judaism in Honour of Joseph Blenkinsopp* (eds. Eugene Ulrich, et al.; JSOTSup 149; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992), 55-75.

goodwill gestures for help also provides a basis to interpret Ezra and Nehemiah's strong stand against intermarriage with peoples of the land. Intermarriage with locals internalizes within the covenant community opposition against the work of God.

Third, the previews of Ezra 4 display by analogy the sort of opposition faced in the early years of the returned exiles. Ezra-Nehemiah lacks narrative of the opposition against the covenant community in the days of Cyrus and Darius. Perhaps the storymakers did not possess sources for this important part of their historical narrative.⁴⁷ Whatever the reason, the reader is invited to retroject analogous hostilities into the early decades of return based upon the juxtaposition of previews of later antagonisms (4:6, 7-23) against the summary of the same in Ezra 4:4-5, 24.

The demonstration of hostility against Zerubbabel, Jeshua, and their associates by means of the later hostilities in Artaxerxes' day requires seeing temple construction and city wall building as interrelated.⁴⁸ The prophet says of Cyrus, "I raise him in righteousness, and all his ways I make straight, he will build my city and my exiles he will set free" (Isa 45:13).⁴⁹ The city of God, the temple, and the worship by God's people are intimately intertwined in the Zion orientation of the Psalter and in Chronicles.⁵⁰ The interrelated importance of several symbols of restoration and identity—temple vessels, altar, house of God, law of Moses, sanctified remnant, city fortifications, sabbath keeping—runs through Ezra-Nehemiah. The analogy between temple and city walls in Ezra 4 is not clever trickery but takes advantage of natural connection between two central restoration symbols.

One issue with the retrojection of opposition by means of the previews needs to be mentioned. The Ezra-Nehemiah storymakers knew of Haggai and Zechariah and even made use of these writings for the narrative of temple building (see 5:1ff.; 6:14). Some interpreters claim that the author of Ezra interprets the impediments to building the temple as external in direct opposition to Haggai who blames the narcissistic tendencies of the prophet's constituents (see

⁴⁷ See Clines, NCBC, 75, 76.

⁴⁸ See Karrer-Grube, "Scrutinizing the Conceptual Unity of Ezra and Nehemiah," 144; Eskenazi, *In an Age of Prose*, 54-56. For a comparison of the parallels between Ezra 4 and 5-6, see Hans H.-Mallau, "The Redaction of Ezra 4-6: A Plea for a Theology of Scribes," *PRSt* 15 (1988): 68-80, esp. 70-72; Stefan C. Matzal, "The Structure of Ezra IV-VI," *VT* 50.4 (2000): 566-68.

⁴⁹ Halpern suggest Isa 44-45 and Zech 1-6 connect building the temple and the city ("Histoigraphic Commentary on Ezra 1-6," 115), and Glatt narrows this suggestion to Isa 45:13 and Zech 1:16-17; 2:9 (see *Chronological Displacement*, 130, n. 189).

⁵⁰ See Susan Gillingham, "The Zion Tradition and the Editing of the Hebrew Psalter," in *Temple and Worship in Biblical Israel* (ed. John Day; London: T & T Clark, 2005), 308-41; Sara Japhet, *The Ideology of the Book of Chronicles and Its Place in Biblical Thought* (trans. Anna Barber; 1989, reprint, Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2009), 347-53.

Hag 1:2-4).⁵¹ The prophet and the storymakers emphasize different problems, but claiming the Ezra narrative is rejecting, suppressing, or glossing over Haggai's judgment badly misses the shared ideology of the writings. The Ezra-Nehemiah storymakers, even more than the prophet, ferret out and display the ongoing declensions and apostasies of the returned exiles. The reoccurring attention to infidelity against God via marrying peoples of the land and sabbath breaking make the point (see Ezra 9-10; Neh 13).

The account of the opposition to the building of the city walls in Ezra 4 presents the construction of the walls and the temple as closely related issues.⁵² Both building the temple and the walls incite local opposition and require cooperation of Achaemenid kings.⁵³ The narrator accents this interrelationship by claiming "they finished their building by command of the God of Israel and by the command of Cyrus, Darius, and King Artaxerxes of Persia" (6:14).⁵⁴

Fourth, the dischronological previews in Ezra 4 create readerly expectations for several coming attractions in the Ezra-Nehemiah story. The previews set up the significance of the completion of the temple (Ezra 5-6), establish the basis for declension through succumbing to intermarriage with those opposed to the returned exiles (Ezra 9-10; Neh 13), and may obliquely hint at the destruction of the walls by which readers are introduced to Nehemiah (Neh 1).⁵⁵ Establishing constant widespread opposition to the returned exiles creates an appreciation for the antagonistic setting in which the remnant built the temple.

Karrer-Grube contends for the unity and coherence of Ezra-Nehemiah over and against recent objections. Her approach includes underlining the conceptually unifying functions of the account in Ezra 4 (which she applies to Ezra and Nehemiah as a whole). The reference to "this city is not to be rebuilt until I give orders" (4:21) is continued in Nehemiah 1 and establishes a basis for Nehemiah's anxieties in Nehemiah 2.⁵⁶ At the end of Ezra 4 the reader wonders: "Will the city wall be built? Will Artaxerxes change his mind? How will the relationship with the neighboring people develop in the future?"⁵⁷ The preview of the opposition *via* administrative

⁵¹ See, e.g., Jacob M. Myers, *Ezra, Nehemiah* (AB 14; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1965), 35.

⁵² By contrast, the version of the letter to Artaxerxes in 1 Esdras 2:18-20 (//Ezra 4:12ff.) identifies temple building project in Artaxerxes day. See Eskenazi, *In an Age of Prose*, 164.

⁵³ Karrer-Grube, "Conceptual Unity of Ezra and Nehemiah," 149.

⁵⁴ Eskenazi rightly regards Ezra 6:14 as the "linchpin for the whole book" (see *In an Age of Prose*, 59).

⁵⁵ See Kidner, TOTC, 48, 50, 53; Brown, "Chronological Anomalies in the Book of Ezra," 45, 46.

⁵⁶ Karrer-Grube, "Conceptual Unity of Ezra and Nehemiah," 145. Rowley contends against the view that the trouble with the walls in Ezra 4 is be associated with the destruction of the walls referred to in Neh 1, see H. H. Rowley, "The Chronological Order of Ezra and Nehemiah," in *The Servant of the Lord and other Essays in the Old Testament*, 2d ed. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1965), 150 (131-59).

⁵⁷ Karrer-Grube, "Conceptual Unity of Ezra and Nehemiah," 149.

correspondence in Ezra 4 not only establishes continuity of local hostility against the exilic community's mission but creates narrative anticipation by beginning the story of wall building within the story of temple building.

Conclusion

Ezra-Nehemiah is rich with challenges. Some of the difficulties which readers and interpreters seek to negotiate were present in the source materials and were dealt with in various ways by the storymakers. The use of dischronological previews in Ezra 4 has provided continuous challenges to interpreters beginning with 1 Esdras and Josephus. The difficulties should neither be minimized nor explained away. The storymakers' conservative commitment to narration bounded by the available historical sources provides part of basis for the innovative dischronological arrangement of the story. The resulting story, for all of its difficulties (and they are many), coheres around sustained opposition against the returned exiles. This constant hostility provides the context in which the identity of the restoration community is formed and sustained. The ever present opposition also underlines the remarkable fulfillment of God's word to Jeremiah through the edicts of a series of Achaemenid emperors. The graveness of the threat also foreshadows the dangers of turning away from God by marrying opposing peoples, no matter how good sounding their affirmations of Israel's God. The narrative continuities between the days of Zerubbabel and Jeshua and those of Ezra and Nehemiah are bound together in part by the dischronological previews in Ezra 4.

Appendix

Fulton and Knoppers studied the parallel between 1 Esdras 2:15 and Ezra 4:6-11a.⁵⁸ They open their survey with an overview of the collapse of the distinction between lower criticism (textual criticism) and higher criticism (source, tradition, historical, redaction, and form criticism) in the wake of the discoveries at Qumran. They rehearse 4QSam, 4QJer, 4QDan, and associated fragments, which alternatively bear witness to the Hebrew *Vorlage* of the LXX and MT. They summarize the commonly held positions on these texts of Eugene Ulrich, Frank Moore Cross, and Emanuel Tov (see 12-14).⁵⁹ They follow Tov in the case of Jeremiah developing from a shorter text represented by the *Vorlage* of the LXX and 4QJer^b (“edition I”) to a longer more detailed text represented by the MT, 2QJer, 4QJer^a, and 4QJer^c (“edition II”) (see 13-14). This “textual pluriformity” provides the context for evaluating the case in 1 Esdras 2 with Ezra 4:6-11a (17).⁶⁰

Fulton and Knoppers argue that while 1 Esdras is clearly dependent upon and derivative from Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah, in the case of parallel passages like 1 Esdras 2:15//Ezra 4:6-11a, “1 Esdras bears witness to an older, less elaborate form of Ezra” (17).⁶¹ The other passages they have in mind are 1 Esd 2:16-18//Ezra 4:11b-13; 1 Esd 2:21-24//Ezra 4:17-22; 1 Esd 6:1-4, 17//Ezra 5:1-4, 14; 1 Esd 8:43-44//Ezra 8:16; and 1 Esd 9:37-38//Neh 7:72-8:1 (see 17, n. 25). They spell out in detail the “plusses” in Ezra 4:6-11a, including interaction with the relevant parallels in Josephus (see *Ant.* 11.21-26), and list eight plusses. They set up their summary evaluation by asking, “Inasmuch as 1 Esd 2:15 presents a much briefer text, does it also represent, for the most part, the older text (*Brevior lectio praeferenda est*)?” (24).⁶² Fulton and Knoppers weigh the evidence, taking into account the possibility that the author of 1 Esdras abbreviated the account, and conclude “a text tends to become longer and more complex over time, rather than shorter and simpler” (26). Fulton and Knoppers apply their findings to the situations they introduced in the beginning of their essay. They see Ezra 4:6-11a as evidence of “*creation continua*, a long process of reinterpreting, rewriting, and embellishing older texts” (28).

⁵⁸ See Fulton and Knoppers, “Lower Criticism and Higher Criticism,” 11-29, cited parenthetically.

⁵⁹ For a different view, see Peter J. Gentry, “The Text of the Old Testament,” *JETS* 52.1 (2009): 19-45.

⁶⁰ For a briefer version of this argument, see Gary N. Knoppers, *I Chronicles 1-9* (AB 12; New York: Doubleday, 2003), 54-55, 64.

⁶¹ For a similar discussion, see *ibid.*, 56-59, 64, esp. 59.

⁶² For an older, less polished version of this view, see Torrey, *Ezra Studies*, 181-183.

The principle of traditions growing is sound and typically explains the relationship of parent-texts and their many children. With due qualification, I can concur with the revisions of Jeremiah represented by MT over and against the shorter *Vorlage* of the LXX Fulton and Knoppers summarize from Tov.⁶³ In the case of 1 Esdras 2:15 and Ezra 4:6-11a, however, the evidence seems inconclusive. The text of Ezra 4:6-11a may reflect expansions from an older edition akin to the source of 1 Esdras 2:15, or 1 Esdras 2:15 may be an abbreviated presentation of the text preserved in Ezra 4:6-11a. Fulton and Knoppers' list of eight plusses would be more impressive if most of these did not come from Ezra 4:6 or 4:9-11a, five of eight; the three plusses they list from 4:7 all relate to the reference to the Aramaic letter (see 23). The materials in Ezra 4:6 and 4:9-11a conceivably could have been omitted since they are difficult and relatively discreet (see table 3). The difficulty posed by Ezra 4:6 and following has been felt since antiquity, with Josephus being the leading example.⁶⁴ This could point to a different principle of lower criticism: the more difficult reading is more probable (*Lectio difficilior probabilior*).

Table 3 provides a parallel translation of 1 Esdras 2:15 and Ezra 4:6-11a.⁶⁵ The table illustrates the relatively discreet plusses/minuses between the two texts. The only part of Ezra 4:6, 9-11a represented in 1 Esdras 2:15 is the identification of the associates as living in Samaria, which is similar to deportees living in Samaria in Ezra 4:10. It appears that plusses/minuses could be explained as the result of the storymakers of 1 Esdras abbreviating a difficult passage. The phrase "the rest of their associates living in Samaria" could be adapted from similar language represented in Ezra 4:9, 10 MT while "and other places" (καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις τόποις) could be a gloss on the remaining peoples of these verses. Since the potentially omitted passages are fairly confined, it is reasonable to suppose they were omitted because they are confusing and/or do not contribute to the story in 1 Esdras.⁶⁶ While this scenario has its problems, it is conceivable.

⁶³ For one example see my brief interaction with the end of Jer 48 MT in "The Trouble with Jephthah," 10-11, at http://scriptureworkshop.com/studies/jephthah_b.pdf (accessed 11.11.13).

⁶⁴ See Steiner, "Bishlam's Archival Search Report," 675.

⁶⁵ Table 3 represents my translation of the texts from LXX Göttingen and *BHQ*. I compared this with LXX Cambridge, and benefitted from the comments of Fulton and Knoppers. My translation follows the same textual decisions presented by Fulton and Knoppers; they present the Greek, Hebrew and Aramaic in facing columns (see "Lower Criticism and Higher Criticism," 19).

⁶⁶ Jacob M. Myers explains "The correspondence between the enemies of Judah and Jerusalem and the Persian court in the time of Ahasuerus (Ezra 4:6)=Xerxes is omitted here and the writer begins his outline of the troubles experienced by the exiles with the complaint lodged against them in the time of Artaxerxes. 1 Esdras ignores the first caveat raised by the opponents and referred to in Ezra 4:7, and telescopes both communications into a single document as shown by the combination of names recorded in Ezra 4:7-8" (*I and II Esdras* [AB 42; Garden City,

Table 3: A Comparison of 1 Esdras 2:15 and Ezra 4:6-11a

1 Esdras 2:15

now, in the time of Artaxerxes King of the Persians, he wrote to him against those who were living in Judea and Jerusalem, (namely), Bishlam and Mithridates and Tabellius and Rehumus and Beltethmus⁶⁷ and Samshai the scribe and the rest of their associates, living in Samaria and other places the following letter.

Ezra 4:6-11a

In the reign of Ahasuerus, in his accession year, they wrote an accusation against the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem.

7 And in the days of Artaxerxes, Bishlam and Mithredath and Tabeel and the rest of their associates⁶⁸ wrote to King Artaxerxes of Persia; the letter was written in Aramaic and translated. 8 Rehum the royal deputy and Shimshai the scribe wrote a letter against Jerusalem to King Artaxerxes as follows

9 (then Rehum the royal deputy, Shimshai the scribe, and the rest of their associates, the judges, the envoys, the officials, the Persians, the people of Erech,⁶⁹ the Babylonians, the people of Susa, Dehavites,⁷⁰ the Elamites, 10 and the rest of the nations whom the great and noble Osnappar deported and settled in the cities of Samaria and in the rest of the province Beyond the River wrote—and now 11 this is a copy of the letter that they sent):

Two guiding ideals for comparing apparently related ancient texts are the shorter text is probably older and the more difficult reading is probably older.⁷¹ In this case, these principles point in different directions. Both of these general rules need to be applied with care since there are many exceptions and difficulties, as Tov notes.⁷² The storymakers of 1 Esdras apparently found Ezra 4 difficult since they glossed the Artaxerxes correspondence with “temple” twice (see 1 Esdra 2:17, 18//Ezra 4:12). They also placed the entire passage in a different part of the story. That the storymakers of 1 Esdras found Ezra 4 difficult is enough to raise doubts concerning a conclusion based on the shorter text is probably older principle.

Fulton and Knoppers have provided a helpful presentation of the numerous differences between 1 Esdras 2:15 and Ezra 4:6-11a. The evidence itself does not support their interpretation. It is unclear whether the *Vorlage* of 1 Esdras 2:15 is like unto it and Ezra 4 represents one or more glosses and targumic style expansions, or if 1 Esdras 2:15 eliminates the

NY: Doubleday, 1974], 41). For Fulton and Knoppers’ contrary interpretation see “Lower Criticism and Higher Criticism,” 25-26. Also relevant are the plusses in 1 Esd 2:18, 20, see Glatt, *Chronological Displacement*, 136-138.

⁶⁷ 1 Esdras 2:15 transliterated בעל טעם as a proper name rather than as “the royal deputy” or the like.

⁶⁸ Qere, see *BHQ*.

⁶⁹ Qere, see *BHQ*.

⁷⁰ Qere, see *BHQ*, see 42*. The alternative is to take the Kethiv as a relative pronoun, “the people of Susa, *that is* the Elamites” (so NRSV, NIV, and most of the versions); see Rosenthal, *Grammar of Biblical Aramaic*, § 35.

⁷¹ See Ernst Würthwein, *The Text of the Old Testament: An Introduction to the Biblia Hebraica*, 3d ed., rev. Alexander Achilles Fischer, trans. Erroll F. Rhodes (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 193-94.

⁷² For a discussion of the problems with preferring *lectio difficilior* and *lectio brevior*, see Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, 3d ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), 275-82.

difficulties of a *Vorlage* something like Ezra 4:6ff MT. The former option favors the shorter text is more original and the latter the more difficult text is more original. The evidence is inadequate for building a case on either option.⁷³

⁷³ Fulton's potential detailed study on the other parallel passages listed above may provide more definitive results. If these studies demonstrate the likelihood of the same sort of expansions in Ezra-Neh MT, this may provide additional secondary evidence to reconsider 1 Esd 2:15//Ezra 4:6-11a, see Fulton and Knoppers, "Lower Criticism and Higher Criticism," 17, n. 25.