Collective Memory and Collective Identity

Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic History in Their Context

Edited by
Johannes Unsok Ro and Diana Edelman

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Łukasz Niesiołowski-Spanò (University of Warsaw)

Why Was Biblical History Written during the Persian Period? Persuasive Aspects of Biblical Historiography and Its Political Context, or Historiography as an Anti-Mnemonic Literary Genre

Most recent research dedicated to the so-called Deuteronomistic corpus, or even more broadly, to the biblical narrative texts adopting a historiographical perspective, focuses on their trustworthiness as historical sources. The main question is how much historians can base their work on the biblical narratives. This enhancement of methodological caution reflects the debates emerging in the last few decades on the methodological issues concerning the different aspects of historical reconstructions of the past societies in the southern Levant. These debates have raised questions about the credibility of biblical narratives as historical sources. Sceptical, critical, and sometimes hyper-critical views on the value of biblical narratives as historical sources have elicited a natural reaction from scholars arguing in favor of the historical credibility of the biblical texts.[1] After three decades of heated debate, the scholarly landscape can be described as follows. Some scholars tend to believe in the Bible and try to defend its value, while others still doubt the credibility of the Scriptures as the basis for reconstructing the early history of the southern Levant; nevertheless, most try to reflect on the methodological aspects of the historical sources, which was not always the case in the field of biblical studies.

A review of the recent research on biblical historiography yields many detailed studies. Tentatively, I would place them in two categories. In the first, the research method employed is one that compares biblical narratives with extra-biblical texts and archaeological data. This approach illustrates the reasonable wish to evaluate narratives of the Hebrew Bible using different data and other types of

1 Halpern 1988.

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sources and reflects methodological caution about the value of the biblical material if treated in isolation. The few scholars who claim that no biblical narrative can be accepted as historically trustworthy unless it is confirmed by an extra-biblical source have forced a re-examination of how historicity is to be gauged.[2] This radical claim, even if not widely followed, has influenced scholarship considerably. As a result, most biblical scholars now would look for relevant extra-biblical evidence and evaluate the biblical sources in the light of the extra-biblical data before claiming the biblical texts are historically reliable.[3]

The second category largely limits it methods to those within the frames of biblical scholarship. Many studies have analyzed biblical historiographical narratives, considering their style and literary forms and interpreting the historiographical texts in light of other biblical texts. Such a biblical hermeneutic, without referring to extra-biblical sources, results in circular reasoning, illustrating one biblical text with another.

I do not doubt that such studies may offer, and in the past have offered, spectacular results.[4] As an historian, however, I would postulate that the scope and range of the research should be opened to non-biblical sources. Studies claiming to be serious historical scholarship but being limited to intra-biblical analyses tend to remain old-fashioned, speculative works offering explanations of the *ignotum per ignotius* (explaining the unknown by means of the more unknown) type. Undoubtedly, some biblical texts explain the sense of other biblical texts. However, to offer a historical reconstruction of events or the intellectual history of the Bible, the relative and absolute chronologies have to be established. Reconstruction of the past without a firm anchoring of the sources on a timeline risks being unhistorical. Without establishing a firm chronological background, drawing conclusions about the history of any text, as well as about the authors and their worldviews, ideologies and agendas – not to mention the history of the people and events described in the texts – must lead to deceptive results. Among the scholarly attempts to deal with biblical historiographical narratives, there are sound historical studies. Most of these works try to offer coherent interpretations of the events based on the biblical account, but they seek to anchor each source in relative and absolute chronology.[5]

The works of Martin Noth, a prominent scholar in the study of Deuteronomistic historiography, stands as the paradigmatic turning point of research on bibli-

2 Thompson 1999; Davies 1992; 1998.

3 Cf. Grabbe 2007.

4 Cf. Römer and de Pury 2000.

5 E. g. Adamczewski 2012; Germany 2017.

cal historiography.[6] His reasoning was based on the identification of certain ideologies common to many texts and then linking them to historical circumstances or even specific historical events.[7]

I will not discuss any of the detailed aspects of the history of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah based on the historiographical narrative from the Hebrew Bible. Rather, I will focus on the text proper, highlighting the unparalleled genre of biblical historiography. It is a well-known phenomenon that, in the literature of the ancient Near East, there were different kinds of texts referring to the past.[8] Yet, none of the preserved Near Eastern texts referring to past events can be compared with the biblical narratives in terms of their length, literary complexity, or sophistication.[9] Only the ancient Greek and Roman cultures created historiographical literature similar to the biblical tradition.

The ancient Near East created a well-established, fruitfully developed tradition of chronicle-writing. This specific genre is based on the annual summation of the most important, spectacular, and sometimes, curious events. These chronicles, read after a long period, may seem similar to historiography, but this is only superficial, which becomes evident when one realizes the differences in the origins of the two types of narrative. Two fundamental differences distinguish the chronicle from historiography as literary genres. Firstly, the chronicle contains a current perspective, referring to events taking place in the present of the writers, not in the past, which is the focus of historiography. Secondly, the writers of chronicles often have eyewitness status, which is not the case with the writers of historiography. This makes biblical historiography an exceptional type of ancient Near Eastern literature. I would venture to say that it is not the content of these texts that should intrigue scholars but rather, the nature of this literature and its existence. The fact of the existence of biblical literature of a historiographical nature deserves more study than any research about the events referred to in these texts. I would say that the existence of these texts as a phenomenon *sui generis*, the origin of this literature type, and the reason for its creation present the most intriguing matters for historians.

Before reviewing the possible process of the creation of genre of biblical historiography, it is reasonable to begin with Greek historiography. Scholars agree that, as a genre, Greek historiography evolved out of philosophical reflections about the world – the philosophy of nature. Before real historiography came

6 Noth 1943 (1957).

7 See the contribution by Dominik Markl (ch. 5) in this volume.

8 Van Seters 1983; Foster 1996; and Glassner 2000.

9 Knauf 2000, 391–92.

into being, Greek authors, influenced by the teaching of the sophists, started to write mythological narratives and *logoi* of a geographical nature. This intellectual effort resulted in the creation of a literary genre fulfilling the wish to understand the norms of the human world. This old philosophical question, *mutatis mutandis* found its realization in the works of logographs, authors of geographical *logoi* that described the world far away from Greece and of *historiē* that described past events. Arnaldo Momigliano pointed out the fundamental similarities between Greek and biblical historiographies.[10] Momigliano claimed that the scale of these similarities cannot be explained as accidental and indicates the common source of the two historiographical traditions. Writing in the 1970s, he based his reasoning on the then current consensus in biblical studies about the time of composition of the Hebrew Bible. Accepting that the growth of Greek historiography and biblical historiographical narratives took place more or less contemporaneously, Momigliano hypothesized that the two could not have influenced each other. This prominent classicist was convinced that the two traditions had to have flourished from a common source. In effect, he proposed the hypothesis that the Persian writers, the supposed first inventers of historiography, influenced both Greek and biblical authors. This coherent model allowed Momigliano to explain the contemporaneous development of history writing at the turn of the sixth and during the fifth century BCE.

Momigliano's outwardly attractive hypothesis has one fundamental weakness: there are no traces of Persian historiography in the times of the Achaemenids (sixth-fourth centuries BCE). Bearing in mind the scale of the Persian Empire and its number of intellectual resources, traces of Persian literature are scant. There are few apologetic monumental inscriptions, seen as the continuation of the royal propagandistic literature so typical in the ancient Near East. There are no real hints that the Persians created any elaborate form of historiography in the Achaemenid period.[11] Here, one may also question the supposed language of such literature. Should we imagine this unpreserved Persian historiography to have been written in old Persian, Elamite, or Aramaic? Momigliano saw similar features in two literary traditions written in Greek and Hebrew and imagined their common source in unpreserved Persian historiography. Although during Achaemenid rule the Persian Empire was large and may have incorporated many local intellectual traditions with different languages and different scripts, the small number of texts preserved is striking. With the exception of the wisdom literature written in Aramaic, for example, the *Words of Ahiqar*, one may say that the Persian Empire

10 Momigliano 1971; 1981.
11 Niesiołowski-Spanò 2018.

did not produce any important literary genres. The lack of any traces of Persian historiography and the scant quantity of Persian literature in general represent the most important weaknesses of Momigliano's hypothesis. With all respect to Momigliano, his hypothesis simply does not stand.

Noth and Momigliano share in common an assumed chronology for the production of the biblical texts. Unquestioned acceptance of this hypothetical chronology no longer undergirds current biblical scholarship. Currently, there is no consensus about a Deuteronomic revolution in the time of Josiah, followed by a so-called Deuteronomic school, and there is no consensus about the origins of the core of the books of Kings in the sixth century BCE. As a consequence, as we question dogmas about the history of the Hebrew Bible and principles related to the history of the Israelites and the Judahites and Judeans, it comes as no surprise that the previous views no longer fit the current state of research. This also is the case with the origins and intellectual sources of biblical historiography.

The so-called Deuteronomistic historiography hypothesis is rooted in the notion that the historiographical narrative expressed the postulates of the "Deuteronomists" about monotheism, cult centralisation, and a kingless society. Furthermore, the scholarly consensus presumes that history-writing offered answers to important contemporaneous questions of the intended readers. In past scholarship, proto-Deuteronomy was dated to the time of King Josiah; as a result, historiography was supposed to have been written during the sixth century BCE.[12] Such a chronology implies that the main intellectual problems historiography addressed itself to was the reason for the fall of the kingdom of Judah, how society was to be ruled without kings, and what meaning was conveyed in the traumatic history of the fall of Israel and Judah.

As mentioned above, there no longer is a consensus about the date of the Deuteronomic movement, and thus, the Josianic date cannot be assumed.[13] In my view, Deuteronomy does not contain any hints that point to a date of composition in the pre-exilic period. The society envisioned in the text of Deuteronomy is a small political community whose members are to present gifts at the central sanctuary three times a year. This model indicates a direct form of tax-paying, which was typical in societies of limited territory, with no local administration. The society of the early province of Yehud fits this model much better than the inhabitants of the late kingdom of Judah, in terms of territory and local administration. In defining the structure of authority and power, the authors of Deutero-

12 Bultmann 2001, 135–37; and Barton 2001, 6–7.
13 Davies 2014.

nomy do not intend to describe royal rule. The passage about establishing the king's rule seems like satire in relation to actual Near Eastern kings:

> When you have come into the land that the Lord your God is giving you, and have taken possession of it and settled in it, and you say, "I will set a king over me, like all the nations that are around me," you may indeed set over you a king whom the Lord your God will choose. One of your own community you may set as king over you; you are not permitted to put a foreigner over you, who is not of your own community. Even so, he must not acquire many horses for himself, or return the people to Egypt in order to acquire more horses, since the Lord has said to you, "You must never return that way again." And he must not acquire many wives for himself, or else his heart will turn away; also silver and gold he must not acquire in great quantity for himself. When he has taken the throne of his kingdom, he shall have a copy of this law written for him in the presence of the levitical priests. It shall remain with him and he shall read in it all the days of his life, so that he may learn to fear the Lord his God, diligently observing all the words of this law and these statutes, neither exalting himself above other members of the community nor turning aside from the commandment, either to the right or to the left, so that he and his descendants may reign long over his kingdom in Israel. (Deut 17:14–20)

While every aspect of power and control in the societies of the ancient Near East was related to the king's authority, this biblical passage does not describe a real kingdom. It is, rather, a parody of a kingdom, where the king has to be deprived of horses from Egypt – a symbol of wealth – and a large number of wives – a symbol of biological strength, ensuring fertility of the land. The profile of a pious intellectual, reading the scroll of law, is hardly the figure of a real monarch. Furthermore, Deuteronomy omits the king when describing the key elements of power in the country inhabited by the Israelites. The typical Near Eastern king was the most important protagonist in the central cult; he was the central figure in the distribution of goods in the land (including the tax-collection system). It was the king who served as the highest judge, and the king was the most important military leader in his kingdom. All these competences are prescribed in Deuteronomy in a way that ignores the existence of the king.[14] The presumed social system functions without a monarch. Taxes are to be paid to the sanctuary, while the judicial system is based on the local authorities, with the possible use of the priests in the case of an appeal; even the system of military recruiting and command is described without mentioning a king. Hence, Deuteronomy does not reflect or originate in the period when monarchy existed. It should be dated to the early

14 So e. g. Pakkala 2009; Müller 2016; Samuel 2018.

Persian period, when the "newly" established society needed new law to create a new social, economic, and political system.[15]

The intended social realities, limited territory, and non-monarchical aspects fit well with the early Persian period. It is easy to imagine a small population living in Jerusalem and the surrounding settlements of the province of Yehud, which would create a new law code for establishing new social rules. This would be the period when passages in Deuteronomy that basically ignore and parody the king would not irritate the ruling monarch.[16] I would argue that this historical context offers the most plausible time for the composition of large parts of Deuteronomy.

The abovementioned considerations arguing for an early Persian date for Deuteronomy point to a different setting for Deuteronomistic historiography than the exilic period[17] or the period of King Josiah – views still dominating current scholarship.[18] In my view, the most probable time for the composition of Deuteronomy is the mid-fifth century BCE.[19] Consequently, the composition of Deuteronomistic historiography cannot be dated earlier than the second half of the fifth century BCE. Accepting such dating would offer two consequences. First, it would change the possible relative chronology of biblical and Greek historiography, which might in turn offer a different explanation of their mutual similarities. Secondly, the creation of Deuteronomistic historiography would be dated much later than the exilic era assumed by Noth and, as such, could not be explained as the main text addressing the problem of the collapse of the kingdom of Judah. I would say that in the second half of the fifth century BCE and later periods, the story of the kingdom and the faith and the guilt of its kings would not have represented the center of contemporaneous intellectual discussions.

Some scholars claim that analogies between Greek historiography and biblical narratives, as well as a number of possible direct literary influences of the former on the latter, point to a Hellenistic date for much of the biblical literature.[20] General considerations about historiography as a genre, as presented by Momigliano, may be supplemented by the cases of formal similarities that are supposed to result from direct borrowings.[21] However, one must keep in mind that not every formal and stylistic similarity has resulted from direct dependence.

15 Niesiołowski-Spanò 2018b.
16 See below, pp. 366–69.
17 So e. g. Römer 2005.
18 So e. g. Weinfeld 1991, 1–84. For more recent views, see Gertz et al., 2016.
19 Niesiołowski-Spanò 2007.
20 Lemche 1993. Cf. Nielsen 1997; and Niesiołowski-Spanò 2018.
21 Wesselius 2002.

At least, it is not easy to argue convincingly for such dependence without other arguments. Such cases are always methodologically shaky. Dating of the biblical narrative based on relative chronology – that is, that the biblical text must be later than the texts it was based on – has the general weakness of ignoring absolute chronology.[22] I would be sceptical about drawing far-reaching conclusions based on such reasoning alone. I would say a much stronger case for dating biblical historiography is based on linking the narratives to contemporary events. By saying this, I do not reject the comparison of the Greek and biblical historiographies as an important factor in the study of biblical literature and the intellectual history of the Jews in the Second Temple period. Indeed, there are apparent similarities between the historiographical narratives in the Hebrew Bible and Greek historiography represented by Herodotus and Thucydides, as described below.

First, the similarity of the historiography of the Hebrew Bible and Greek historiography is evident in the scope of the texts. In both cases, the texts relate past events.[23] However, neither the past in itself nor the past events create the sole and main reason to write a history. Rather, the authors use the stories about the past as the tool to teach about more general values, including reflections on human nature. This aspect places historiography closer to philosophical literature than to chronicles. The reason for writing and reading about the past is not a superficial collection of data from and about the past. Instead, the real aim is to reveal a deeper sense of human history. Historiography is not the pure notation of the events on a chronological timeline but a sophisticated narrative that is not much different in scope from wisdom literature. This is one of the most important aspects of the success of historiography as a genre as well as one of the reasons for the high prestige of the best historians in antiquity and today.[24]

Secondly, historiographical texts use past events as material and a tool for presenting the author's agenda. Skilled authors write about past events but keep in mind the current situation and intellectual dilemmas. One may paradoxically say that the real sense of writing historiography is to present the past for the current context with a view serving the future. This feature of historiography, of anchoring older stories in the current situation, establishes one of the most important aspects of this genre.

Despite these fundamental similarities between Greek and biblical historiographies, it is not difficult to find important differences as well. Herodotus's

22 So e. g. Gmirkin (2006; 2016), who tries to anchor the process in Ptolemaic Egypt.

23 For the useful case of using Greek material as *comparanda* in biblical studies, see the chapter by Aubrey E. Buster in this volume (pp. 325–51).

24 On the origins of Greek historiography, see Marincola 2007; 2009.

Histories and Thucydides's *Peloponnesian War* were addressed to a broad Greek audience. This aspect can be drawn out of the "democratic" tone used by Herodotus and Thucydides, whose audience was much wider and socially much more egalitarian than members of the Athenian aristocratic elites. Analogously, one may point out that the above-mentioned historiographical classical works were not restricted to the political entity in which they originated. In addition, the widespread literacy of the Greek population played a significant role here.[25] The ability to write and read allowed access to the educational system, already feeding the popularity of philosophers, sophists, and historians in the fifth century BCE.[26] One may presume that the primary audience of these historical works comprised the Athenians, but undoubtedly, the two historians intended their works to be read broadly by the entire Greek-speaking *oikumene*. Hence, we have good reason to think that Thucydides and Herodotus were widely known and read throughout the Greek world, not only by the intellectuals but also eventually in schools.

In the case of the biblical historiographical narratives (Deuteronomistic historiography, as well as Chronicles), there is an apparent difference in presumed audience.[27] The texts were addressed to the limited population of Hebrew-speaking *literati*. The scale of the knowledge of Hebrew and Aramaic in the province of Yehud in the Persian period is a topic of discussion. The epigraphic sources, especially the Aramaic documents from Elephantine, Wadi Daliyeh, and literary texts of Aramaic wisdom (e. g. *Words of Ahiqar*), suggest the domination of Aramaic not only in the administration but also in the literature of the Persian period.[28] Aramaic, an internationally recognized language, must have gained the status of a language of prestige,[29] while Hebrew, as the language of a small minority, must have remained a vehicle of communication within a local community of limited number. In this light, the decision to write the text in Hebrew, not Aramaic, must have been a deliberate and conscious one. By doing this, the authors claimed that they were not interested in the wide dissemination of their text; instead, they were addressing it to the narrow group of their compatriots. Hence, one may assume that if the authors of biblical historiography had intended to communicate with wider audiences, they would have written in Aramaic. Similar linguistic choices to communicate in the globally recognised Greek instead of the local Semitic language were made in the early history of Christianity and determined the success-

25 Cf. Langdon 2015, who published Greek inscriptions of herders in Attica.
26 Wolicki 1996.
27 Cf. recently Levin 2019.
28 Niesiołowski-Spanò forthcoming.
29 Gzella 2015, 157–211.

ful addressing of a wide audience. The decision to write in Hebrew proves that the intended audience of the Deuteronomistic texts was situated among the Jewish elite, for whom Hebrew continued to be the language of communication, at least among the group of Jewish *literati* and local intellectuals of the province of Yehud.

In a sense, the second difference results from the previous one because it lies in the content of the texts, which were written for an insider audience. The role of Greek historians was to present information unknown to common Greeks or to create order out of a messy set of rumours and *logoi*. The historian was supposed to find the truth about the events, interpret them, and impose order on a seemingly unrelated set of facts. In the case of the best Greek historians, they also managed to convey an intellectual message interwoven into the account. Hence, historians presented new knowledge to their wide audiences. Undoubtedly, readers and audiences of Herodotus had only minor knowledge of the Persian wars, not to mention the history and geography, curiosities, and *memorabilia* of Persia, Egypt, and other far-away countries. In contrast, Thucydides described more recent events that were probably better known to the audience, but he placed himself not only in the role of the transmitter of knowledge but also as an interpreter who explained the meaning of the events analytically. The *Peloponnesian War* not only presents events that took place during the war but also teaches much more profound lessons about humans and politics.

As mentioned above, the use of the Hebrew language for the writing of biblical history suggests that the message was addressed to the members of the narrow Judean elite. If so, it is hardly possible that one author or group of authors had at his or their disposal much more data about the past than the rest of the Jewish elite of the time. Our knowledge about the internal stratification of Judean elites of the Persian period is too limited to allow an assumption about the differentiation between well-informed, well-educated elite members and non-educated, less informed elite members. Based on our current knowledge, it would be much safer to assume a certain homogeneity in the intellectual background of all the members of the local Hebrew-speaking elite.[30] If this were the case, the main purpose of writing the history in Hebrew for the co-members of the local elites could not have been to present them with information with which they may have been unfamiliar. If there were any rational purpose in writing such stories, it would have concentrated on the way of presenting the past. A historiographical text presenting past events all were familiar with may have been interesting if it were presented in an attractive and new form. Furthermore, this was the case

30 Cf. Ben Zvi 2019.

when the form rather than the content determined the attractiveness of the narrative.

The juxtaposition clearly shows that, even if the two historiographical traditions originated from a common source or if one inspired the other,[31] the functional differences in the way these historiographies were used seems to outweigh their similarities. It is more than clear that the differences in use are linked to the differences between the nature and constituents of the two societies, forming the collective audience in each case.

History is not the past, nor is it memory. History is a narrative about the past, whose contents and explanation of causation reflect the needs, bias, and literary conventions of the writer. In this case, the history told (or written) in the Persian period might have differed considerably from the version of the past handed down in the collective memory. Writing about the past would not automatically have repeated scraps of shared memory but might have challenged some or all of them. The historian presented his view, which was not necessarily identical to the shared memory available to him and known by his audience. The writer created a version of the past that he wanted to impose on his intended readers, not merely have them recall.[32] Common memory did not need a written version, because it was shared by the wider cultural group. A written version was created to contrast with common memory, to argue against it. It is probably impossible to know what the memory about the past was like in the Persian period. I venture to say that it was much different from the version we have been told in the biblical historiographical literature. The very fact of the existence of history-narratives points to the difference between memory and historiography.

If one accepts the working hypothesis that Deuteronomistic Historiography originated in the second half of the fifth century BCE or later, then the narrative should be considered highly persuasive in nature. It is hardly possible that, over one hundred years later, questions about the guilt and faith of the kings and the link between this and the failure of the Judahite kingdom still would remain central for Judeans. The real controversy must have touched on current, crucial issues. It can be argued that, the stronger the polemics are in the narrative, the more profound the controversy must have been. If this is the case, the message interwoven in the narrative must have had a direct audience, which illustrates the

31 If Momigliano's hypothesis about the common Persian inspiration for Greek and biblical historiography is rejected, keeping in mind the possible chronology, one can accept the possibility that it was Greek historiography that influenced the biblical authors. The issue of how, when, and where this inspiration may have occurred must be addressed separately.

32 For a similar notion of history and historiography in the case of ancient Rome, see ch. 16 by Jörg Rüpke in this volume.

existence of strong opposition in the Jewish elite at that time. The main controversy must have focussed on the major topics of Deuteronomistic historiography, that is, cult centralization, monotheism, and the role and significance of kings. If we consider this narrative to be a surviving literary expression of the internal controversies, we may assume the temperature and very nature of the dispute. Deuteronomistic historiography appears to be much more than the retelling of the past of the Judahites and Israelites; it seems to have been a vicious way of arguing against one's opponents, referring to the most important issues of the time. This argument leads us to the observation that, during the process of writing the Deuteronomistic historiography, the main topics of this narrative still played a central role and remained the important issues to be argued for. The topics of the historiography should not be considered old realities but rather, current subjects of controversy. Having said this, we shall try to evaluate the main themes of Deuteronomistic historiography and review them as possible important issues during the second half of the fifth century BCE.

The notion of the central sanctuary and centralization of cult, as mentioned above, establishes one of the fundamental elements of the ideology of Deuteronomy. This marks the new situation of the recently established community of Yehud in a highly circumscribed territory, for which a single sanctuary fulfilled the needs for a cultic place. The postulate of a single cult place, a unique spot for offering sacrifices, supported the political independence and self-government of the Jews from Jerusalem. It is not crucial, in this regard, whether the process originated in the Persian decision to establish Jerusalem as the capital of the newly established province Yehud or resulted from Jewish ambitions. Regardless of the source of inspiration for such a notion, it seems obvious to me that the idea of a single cult place should not be dated to the pre-exilic period, but instead, fits perfectly with the realities of the Persian period, as a strategy by which the province of Yehud could gain political importance. In the monarchic period, the role of sanctuaries as the place for collecting taxes must have been secondary to other issues confronting the royal administration. It may have played some role in the fiscal system in the monarchic period, but there is no need to consider sanctuaries as the only or the most important components of the royal tax-collection system at that time. The emphasis on the role of the sanctuary as the place of tax-collection in the Persian period may have been suitable for the kingless political system (on the local scale). The economic and political ambitions of Jerusalem, led by Nehemiah, provoked tension in the neighboring political centers. This was not because Jerusalem started to be a new religious center but rather, because its role as the central sanctuary established a new place for administration and tax collection. This was why Sanballat from Samaria, the Tobiads, and Geshem the Arab so strongly opposed Nehemiah (e. g. Neh 3:33–38). The postulate of a single

cult place, promulgated by the Jews of Jerusalem, constitutes the flip side of the same coin. Those in the political center did not want to share their income with others. The competition for taxes accompanied the rivalry for prestige and political power. At the same time, in the late fifth century BCE, the elite of Jerusalem may have influenced the members of the Yahwistic community at Elephantine in cultic, ritual, and religious practices, but they may not have been able to invalidate their sanctuary.[33] One may even speculate that there was no need for the Jews in Jerusalem to fight against the sanctuary in distant Elephantine, as it did not compete with Jerusalem.

The "global" competition between the cult places of Jerusalem and Shechem/Mt. Gerizim also had its local equivalent. Scholars have clearly demonstrated that there were many types of religious activities in the territory of Yehud during the Persian period.[34] If one considers the monolatric postulate in Deuteronomy as profoundly religious and theological, one must acknowledge the failure of the Jerusalemite propaganda in relation to local religious activities. However, if we interpret the single cult place postulate primarily from a political and fiscal perspective, the local religious activities in Yehud no longer create a problem for Jerusalem. I would be inclined to say that the anti-*bamot* ("high places") motif in the Deuteronomistic corpus refers mostly to the cult-places that may have competed with Jerusalem to become the political and economic center, not to the local and private sanctuaries and shrines in the households. Furthermore, even if the postulate of the centrality of the cult were considered more fundamentally to reflect a struggle against every place God was worshipped (I would still wonder why), the Persian period continues to fit these realities much better than the pre-exilic period does.

Most scholars claim that the second of the milestones of Deuteronomic ideology, the postulate of monotheism, did not play as important a role during the Persian period as it did in the monarchic period. This seems to be a presupposition derived from an outmoded evolutionary view of religion by which Yahwism moved from polytheism, through henotheism in the pre-exilic period, to monotheism during the Babylonian Exile and afterwards. However, there are sufficient arguments to claim that in Yehud and the diaspora, even during the Persian period, Yahwism did not reach the status of a monotheistic religion always and everywhere.[35] It is more than clear that Yhwh was the most popular deity in

33 Niesiołowski-Spanò 2007.

34 Stavrakopoulou and Barton 2010; Frevel et al. 2014.

35 This topic will be treated separately on a different occasion. See e. g. Stavrakopoulou and Barton 2010; Frevel, Pyschny, and Cornelius 2014; and Edelman, Fitzpatrick-McKinley, and Guillaume 2016.

Yehud at the time. However, one has to bear in mind that the religion of the capital may have differed considerably from that of the periphery.[36] The wide range of iconography attested in Yehud in the Persian period does not necessarily reflect an only-one-God theology.[37] Despite the possible influence of the official Achaemenid religion on the Jews,[38] the local traditional cults and deities may still have survived, even if the Yahwism from Jerusalem officially dominated. The documentation from the Judean military colony at Elephantine in Egypt in the fifth century BCE attests to non-orthodox cults there alongside a cult of Yhw.[39] Accepting the hypothesis that Yahwistic monotheism dominated official Judean religion in Jerusalem but did not reach the full-blown form of an alternative-less religion in the Persian period allows us to understand why Deuteronomistic writers fought so strongly for the one-God cult. Otherwise, their pro-monotheistic expositions seem pointless.

In this context, I would like to focus on one of the three foundations of the Deuteronomic ideology: anti-monarchic polemics. If we accept as a *terminus post quem* for the origins of biblical historiography in the mid-fifth century BCE, it becomes apparent that the anti-monarchic issue in the DtrH could not have reflected opposition to kings who had ruled Judah when it had existed as a kingdom. Any such conflict, had it existed, would have been long past. The traditional explanation for the anti-monarchic attitude, which was to blame kings for the fall of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, depends heavily on biblical tradition. In the mid-fifth century BCE, however, such an issue must have been considered an old dispute, without contemporary relevance. Any such anti-monarchic attitude resulting from the supposed mistakes of kings during the pre-exilic period would have echoed an extremely old resentment. Furthermore, the anti-monarchic position is supposedly related to mourning after the loss of the kingdom, but most of all, the destruction of the temple; in mid-fifth century BCE, both of these regrets were out of date, because the province of Yehud with the Jerusalem temple served as the contemporaneous political unit. In the early Persian period, the evaluation of the needs and positions of the Judean elites in the structure and governance of the province of Yehud suggests no reason for anchoring their ideology back to the Judahite kings (even for purposes of negating them).

36 Albertz and Schmitt 2012.

37 See Balcells Gallarreta 2017. For the iconography of small incense altars, see Frevel and Pyschny 2014.

38 Cf. e. g. Niesiołowski-Spanò 2007; Edelman 2009; Gerstenberger 2011; Edelman, Fitzpatrick-McKinley, and Guillaume 2016, and esp. Silverman 2016.

39 Van der Toorn 1992.

The references to the kings of the Judeans in the early Persian period, which plausibly predate the establishment of the province of Yehud – as attested in Zechariah and 1 Esdras – seem to be a way of coping with the double authority of the kinglike leader and priests. Interestingly, this tension is attested primarily in the early Persian period, as if this dual center of power did not compete later on. The scholarly literature highlights the possible tension between priests and kinglike leaders supported by the royalists only at the turn of the sixth century BCE, linking the latter with the names of Sheshbazzar and Zerubbabel and ignoring the possible existence of royalists in later times. I would be inclined to say that there was still an important issue of the king's power in Yehud after the mid-fifth century BCE. The controversy around the existence of kings and the bad nature of most of the kings in the past, expressed in such a vivid polemic in DtrH, also must have served in the current debate. As polemics against the ruling Achaemenid kings were hardly reasonable, it must have had a local value. I would venture to say that this topic of anti-monarchical attitudes interwoven throughout the Deuteronomistic corpus constitutes the most important, persuasive layer of the biblical literature in the Persian period. This is the case even though, and maybe even more so because, the opponents are not mentioned by name.

The Deuteronomistic corpus of historiographical texts openly criticizes the institution of kingship (primarily in 1–2 Samuel and 1–2 Kings). Thus, for readers, it is not a given that kingship itself is bad and the best political approach to self-government is without a king. The polemics underlying the historiographical narrative presume the existence of another option or viewpoint the Deuteronomistic writers fought against. If this is the case, the two paradigms – that in the Persian period, the kings from the past were always assessed negatively and that the monarchic option were gone forever, often uncritically accepted by scholars as a given – cannot be ruled out. If one interprets the anti-monarchic narratives as a way of polemicizing against the institution of kingship, in effect, it must be accepted that there had to have been opponents who held such positions. Polemics alone necessitate the existence of opponents. In effect, we shall accept the hypothesis that there were people assessing kingship and past kings positively at the time these books were composed. This is the case despite the fact that these people did not leave any direct statement of their opinions in the biblical narratives. These "mute" royalists logically assessed past kings positively, and this is why the biblical narrative so strongly presents the opposite view. However, it is even more plausible that the debate was not purely "academic," relating only to the approach to evaluating the past. It likely influenced then-current debates and politics. The existence of the polemics in the biblical narrative seems to prove that the tension was strong and the opponents important or numerous such that it was impossible to silence their view; it had to be argued against. As stated above, bib-

lical historiography was written in Hebrew and was addressed to members of the same small, Hebrew-speaking elite in the province of Yehud to which its authors belonged. Having this in mind, it is impossible to exclude the possibility that the "Deuteronomistic" historiographical narrative, with its argument against native kingship, proves the existence of a strong, pro-monarchic party among the Jewish elite of the time. However, their political views must have gone beyond the single, contested issue of how to assess the past. They must also have included a program for the future, i. e. a feasible political plan for their times. The political program would have been the real cause of the vivid polemics, not what people thought about kings who were long dead.

Undoubtedly, it is impossible to identify the people against whom the polemic was aimed. However, it is possible to evaluate the situation in which such a controversy arose. The debate over the assessment of kings from the past, of which we hear only one side, sheds light on the historiosophic views of that time and also reveals that the real debate was over the politics at the time the books were written as well as the anticipated future. The subject of the resistance to the monarchic option in the Second Temple period deserves a book-length study.[40] What follows, for reasons of space limitations, should be seen only as a preliminary study.

There are a few aspects of kingship in the ancient Near East that may explain the long-lasting existence of the pro-monarchic attitude, even in the times of kingless governance. First, there was a strong idea about the central role of the king in the cult. Kings were solely responsible for the building and renewal of central sanctuaries. The Persian king may have formally fulfilled this competence and duty in the rebuilding of the Jerusalem Temple.[41] However, the fact that the Persian king remained distant might have convinced the traditionalists in Jerusalem to look for a royal representative on site. For some, the king's permission would have been insufficient; the king needed to lead the ritual personally. This attitude would have initiated a call for a local king to fulfil the temple rituals. This explains why, in the early stage of the community in Jerusalem at the turn of the sixth century BCE, there were two kinglike figures connected to the temple – Sheshbazzar and Zerubbabel. Hence, the following question may be asked: Who replaced these "kings" in the succeeding centuries? On the one hand, the case of Joshua the priest in 1 Esdras and Zechariah suggests that high priest took over the many of the former duties of the king. On the other hand, some texts hint that the governor held power in the name of the Persian king (e. g. Neh 2:5–9) and, therefore, would have been the natural candidate to replace him in the temple rituals.

40 Cf. Niesiołowski-Spanò 2018b. This is the subject of the doctoral dissertation by Kacper Ziemba at the University of Warsaw.

41 Cf. e. g. Edelman 2005.

The second source for the royalist view may have been related to the notion of the important role of the king in the annual temple sacrifice, perceived as a form of guaranteeing the cosmic order and the wellbeing of the people. In many Near Eastern religions, kings played the central role, for example, in the New Year feast. This view, widely recognized in the ancient Near East, may have been considerably weakened by turning Passover into a family feast (Exod 12:1–27), depriving the former monarchic-era annual event of any temple characteristics.[42] The shift from the temple sacrifice to a feast located in the family environment most likely took place during the Babylonian Exile, as a result of the lack of a central sanctuary. If this is the case, one may ask how the people who remained in Yehud and other ultra-traditionalists reacted to this shift. Furthermore, the family aspect of Passover was juxtaposed with the recommendation of pilgrimage to the central sanctuary. This apparently resulted from the pragmatic decision to turn the annual feast into an opportunity for seasonal tax-collection. The idea of visiting the central sanctuary at the time of Passover might have been derived from an older pre-exilic spring religious festival celebrated at the temple in Jerusalem in which the king had played a prominent ritual role. Similarly, the role of the high priest in the Day of Atonement (Lev 16) seems to represent a kinglike ritual anchored in the traditional cult of the monarchic period.

Traces of the view that attributed to the king an important role in the religious sphere also are present in the biblical narratives. Some of the figures in the Bible bear strong royal traits. This is the case with Adam in Gen 2, when he gives animals their names;[43] Abraham and Jacob when they build altars;[44] or "prince" Moses, with his clear monarchic power in Exodus.[45]

Having said all this, and keeping in mind that the polemic against the monarchic option interwoven in biblical historiography was addressed to co-members of the Jewish elite of the time, I would venture to propose the hypothesis that, in the province of Yehud, there existed a strong pro-monarchic party during the Persian period. Its core supporters may have been related to the governor of the province, especially when he was of Judean origin. The importance of the "national" identity of the political leader is emphasized in Deut 17:15: "One of your own community you may set as king over you; you are not permitted to put a foreigner over you, who is not of your own community." This restriction, rather unusual in the

42 Cf. Niesiołowski-Spanò 2013 and 2020.

43 See Peri 2003. Cf. also pharaoh Necho, who is said to change the name of Eliakim to Jehoiakim in 2 Kgs 23:34.

44 For an evaluation of the stories about the foundation of the holy places, see Niesiołowski-Spanò 2011 (2016).

45 Niesiołowski-Spanò 2018b.

world of the ancient Near East, probably did not refer to an abstract hypothetical situation but originated from experience instead. At any rate, every Judean leader holding the position of governor would have had a stronger position than a Persian appointed to the post. In light of these considerations, one may point to the times of Nehemiah the governor as the most plausible conditions favoring the rise of the pro-monarchic party. In this case, the Judean leader, chosen as such and supported by the Persian king, faced internal and external opposition. Nehemiah may have alluded to and supported the party considering him a king-like leader to strengthen his political position. It is not impossible to imagine the traditionally royal competencies attributed to him by the traditional members of the Jewish community.

It was not only the governor who may have considered the monarchic option attractive. It cannot be ruled out that there were considerably large groups of Judeans who would have welcomed a new king in Jerusalem. These anonymous royalists may have been the real targets of the historiography in Samuel-Kings. Hence, the Deuteronomistic historiography did not intend to cover up past kings' reputations but rather, sought to discourage the possible supporters of current candidates for the throne. The internal political situation in Yehud remains rather blurred for us. The narratives at our disposal are one-sided. That Ramat Raḥel – the most important administrative center at the time – remains unnamed in the Bible shows how tentative reconstructions based only on biblical literature are. Despite the biblical views favoring priests and disfavoring kings, we cannot assume that the political situation was so simple. It is not too hazardous to say that there may have been numerous groups that were sceptical about the power of priests. Suffice it to recall the *ʻam haʾareṣ*, the people who did not participate in the exile experience, landowners for whom the power of the temple might create an important competition, or groups of priests who did not agree to replace the king ritually with an acting high priest. The Judean elite and Judean society in general at this time should not be considered homogenous. Hence, there might have existed a pro-monarchic and probably anti-priestly party in the province of Yehud, even if its members remain unnamed, their voices cannot be heard, and their existence may only be hypothesized from a polemic about past kings. In contrast, it is not out of the question that monarchic ideas were also somehow present in the circles of the greatest antagonists of Nehemiah – Sanballat from Samaria and Tobiah from Transjordan. It may not be an accident that these two leaders managed to establish firm foundations for their local power, including the establishment of dynastic nobility for their families.

Here, we return to biblical historiography. In contrast to an open polemic against Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem the Arab, highlighting political tension

on a broader scale,[46] the biblical polemic is not directed against a single person. On the one hand, this is a more profound polemic because it is directed against an entire institution with which an individual reader might sympathize. On the other, we must ask, how could one imagine an open polemic against the acting Persian governor? Open critics would probably end up in jail or flogged. A polemic that is hidden behind past figures but which is clear to its readers fits such a situation perfectly, where the real subject of criticism remains a powerful person. The authors of the Deuteronomistic historiography did not openly attack their royalist opponents, who probably included the governor, but instead, remained on safe ground by criticizing a past institution. However, as suggested above, this should be interpreted as a contemporary political fight at the time of the writing of Samuel-Kings.

The Deuteronomistic historiography that originated in the time of Nehemiah provides a parallel to the so-called "Memoirs of Nehemiah." These two corpora present opposite views. In one, the anti-monarchists and opponents of Nehemiah use the polemic hidden behind the figures of past kings. In contrast, Nehemiah, the kinglike figure trying to counterbalance the power of the temple and the priests, presents himself as a builder of the town, protector of the weak, efficient politician avoiding political threats, and individual protected by the Persian King of Kings. This sounds like monarchic propaganda. It is impossible to know whether the "Memoirs of Nehemiah" were written as a reaction against the anti-monarchic historiographical narrative or vice versa. Regardless, in answer to this chicken-and-egg question, I would say that these two narratives may be interrelated and may establish two sides of the same debate. The real aim of this debate was to consider the present, not the past. It was not about the kings from the Davidic dynasty in Judah but rather, every kinglike leader who might challenge the power of the priests.

The above reasoning needs to be treated as speculative, because it is hardly possible to prove it is correct. However, if this suggestion were accepted, it would follow logically that, in the mid-fifth century BCE, the monarchic party dominated politically. The governor and his acolytes possessed the stronger position at the time. If one imagines the pro-monarchic party as supporting or even led by the governor, it is hardly possible not to think about this party's domination. It was the opposition, which in all probability was linked to the Jerusalemite Temple, that had to hide behind the historic narrative. Interestingly, it was this opposing party that used these allusive historiographical narratives to gain political control in the long term. The triumph of the anti-monarchic party was due to

46 For a Hellenistic date for the "Memoirs of Nehemiah," see Finkelstein 2015; 2018.

many factors. It resulted in part from conditions beyond Judean control, like the end of Persian power and the concomitant disappearance of local governors and priests holding sway in Jerusalem. In part, however, one may speculate that this triumph was also due to effective propaganda disguised as historiography. The strength of the narratives about the past, the strength of myths, may have played an important role in shaping the worldview of the Judean elites. The "bad-kings scenario" became so omnipresent that, with time, it became the dominant story. The historiographical, anti-monarchic view went hand in hand with the growth of the political power of the Jerusalemite priests. These narratives shaped the ideas of the generation to come in how the king finally became an unthinkable figure. This is part of the power of the text.

Conclusion

The hypothesis presented above is based on certain assumptions about the date of Deuteronomy. However, I would insist that it is time to abandon the paradigm of Deuteronomistic historiography as literature created in the Babylonian Exile. I am also convinced that the ideological anchor for the Deuteronomistic historiography – the book of Deuteronomy – should be dated to the fifth century BCE, so that the narratives depending on this book should be dated to a relatively later period. Accepting such dates, one has to re-evaluate the reasons for which this biblical historiography was composed. The genre of history-writing was not widely used in the ancient Near East, and the parallel with Greek literature may point to a possible inspiration. It is impossible to determine whether Greek historians inspired the biblical authors, but this possibility should not be ruled out.

Probably the most important aspect of the abovementioned hypothesis relates to the question about the reasons for writing the history. In light of the proposed re-dating of the Deuteronomistic historiography to the mid-fifth century BCE or later, the traditional explanation for the aim of DtrH as a means of explaining the collapse of the kingdom and destruction of the Jerusalemite temple can no longer stand or be taken for granted. More than one hundred years after the event, the defeat of the kingdom of Judah no longer could have served as a key factor in Judean society. People had found ways to handle their realities, and stories about the Israelite and Judahite kings did not contribute to their current situation. People were living normally; they managed to organize cult and economic activities in the best way they could. Questions about past kings were hardly central for them. That the Deuteronomistic historiography was written in Hebrew points to a specific aspect of this narrative, which differs from many other cases of his-

tory-writing. It was addressed to a narrow audience of Judean elites, not a broad, general audience. Thus, the account about the Judean past was not part of an informative *historiē* intending to promote past achievements to others but rather, was addressed to a narrow insider group. In this case, the aim of the narratives also would not have been informative, because all members of Jerusalem's elite probably had the same access to the memory of the local past. Instead, its purpose would have been persuasive and propagandistic. Historiography as such created the past rather than retelling it. It was not a continuation of collective memory in written form; rather, it was an anti-mnemonic account. The historian's intention was to challenge common memory and impose a new version of the past on its audience. Historiographical accounts used pieces of memory but twisted the general plot in directions that reflected their authors' agendas. As such, biblical historiography should not be considered a way of retelling the past from memory but a way of retelling the past against memory.

Furthermore, as an account about the past, historiography should not be seen solely as a way of informing the reader about what had happened in the past but also or primarily as presenting the interpretation of these events and as such, promoting a certain viewpoint and ideology. In this light, writing the history of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah during the Persian period served to promote the main Deuteronomic ideas – monotheism, monolatry, and kingless self-governance. Leaving aside the first two ideas, in this chapter, I have focused on evaluating the third. I have proposed that the anti-monarchic propaganda interwoven in the account about the past should be interpreted as part of a political struggle between the anti-monarchic and pro-monarchic parties at the time of writing. The anti-monarchic party, and the authors of the DtrH, should be linked with priestly circles, while the royalist party should be connected with the person of the governor or potentially even more precisely, with Nehemiah. On the one hand, Nehemiah tried to strengthen his political position by promoting himself as a kinglike leader. On the other, the opposition, which was unable to address its critics openly, used a hidden polemic in the form of stories about past kings. The authors of the Deuteronomistic historiography were writing about the past, but they were thinking about their contemporary times. Every anti-monarchic passage in the historiographical narratives served to weaken the contemporary kinglike leader. As a result, which may even have been surprising for the authors, the ideology promoted in the Deuteronomistic historiography achieved its goal, and Judeans started to think about kings as a useless part of the actual self-government, leaving it for the messianic future to come.

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