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## Politicised Exemplarity: Why Ben Sira Forgets Ezra

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Ben Sira's book of wisdom (c. 198 BCE) engages with the prophetic in at least two main ways: textual reuse and explicit praise. The later strategy is concentrated in the Praise of the Fathers (Sir 44-50). The minimisation of prophets who were popular in Second Temple Judaism (Isaiah and Jeremiah) and short collective reference to the Twelve is puzzling, especially given the larger spaces dedicated to kings, priests, and pre-Solomonic prophets. Why do some prophets receive scant attention in Ben Sira, while others have more? Past studies argue for some criteria of prophetic success, in line perhaps with Ben Sira's Aaronide loyalty: that Ezra is omitted because he either failed in his mission or was too critical of the priests, even though other less impressive prophets, priests, and kings retain mention. Such a theory is problematic in light of how the prophets look in other Second Temple Jewish texts. Past focus on exemplarity and notions of prophetic success in Sir 44-50 may overlook both Ben Sira's subtle textual reuse, as well as another overarching criterion for inclusion in the Praise: leadership. Additional light is provided by the historical and literary context of Simon the High Priest in Sir 50 and the sociocultural context of Hellenistic ruler/king conceptualisation. Thus, it may be argued that Ben Sira's reasons for the omission of Ezra are simultaneously literary and political.

## The Concept of חרם in Ezra and the Dead Sea Scrolls

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The concept of חרם (*herem*) has traditionally been most closely associated with its occurrences within martial contexts, more specifically its expression in the books of Deuteronomy and Joshua. This close association has in turn given rise to the overall rendering of חרם as a form of extermination, as elucidated in the translation of חרם as "utterly destroy" and "annihilate." This close association and subsequent rendering often obscures the usages of חרם located within other phenomenological contexts and thus obfuscating a full understanding of the term and its conceptual meaning. This paper will investigate the concept of חרם within its full range of occurrences within the Hebrew Bible in order to provide illumination upon the use of חרם in Ezra's proclamation to the returned

exiles in Ezra 10:8. Special attention will be given to the conceptual development of חרם and the potential implication upon the deployment of the term in Ezra 10:8. Furthermore, we will briefly examine the usage of חרם in the non-“biblical” texts of the Qumran corpus to gain additional insight on the deployment of the concept of חרם in Second Temple literature and in Ezra.

### **The עַם הָאֶרֶץ and the Rhetoric of Othering in Ezra-Nehemiah**

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Concepts of Othering and Otherness has found its way into vibrant debates beyond the philosophical realm to that of psychology, sociology, human geography and even biblical studies. Using ‘othering’ as a technical term to describe the manner in which social dichotomies are represented in discourse (in this case an religious ancient text), I have identified one of the underlying ideological framework in Ezra-Nehemiah to be to ‘other’ the peripheral elements of their society through the rhetorical strategy of self/group legitimization and other derogation. Applying the critical discourse analysis of van Dijk and Fairclough, this papers argues that in Ezra-Nehemiah and even the wider corpus, the term is used to denote and identify those outside the boundary of the in-group from the perspective of the respective author/editor. Discursive strategies of othering such as negative lexicalisation through overt denigration, positive self-representation and negative other presentation and overgeneralisation such as stereotypes, are likewise identified variously across these texts. Among the terms of reference to the Other, one of the more ambiguous and less explored is the עַם הָאֶרֶץ (sometimes appearing occurring in double plural). This paper thus seeks to shed more light on the concept of *Am Ha'aretz* as used in Ezra-Nehemiah through a comparative study with its usage in other parts of the Hebrew Bible and other Second Temple texts, including the scant references in the Qumran corpus.

### **The Non-Appearance of Ezra at Qumran**

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Texts which refer to Ezra have not been found at Qumran. Passages from Ezra 1-6 (4Q117, or 4QEzra), representing Ezra 4.2-6, 9-11, and 5.16-6.5, have been found, however. These are from the first part of Ezra (Ezra 1-6) and describe the period of the return from Babylon to Judah and the erection of the Second Temple. They do not refer to Ezra. No passage from Ezra 7-10, in which Ezra brings the law to Judah and executes a mass divorce, has been found. Nor has any passage from Nehemiah 8 in which Ezra reads the law to the assembled populace been found. Indeed, no passage which includes the character of Ezra himself has been found at Qumran. Perhaps this absence of Ezra should not surprise. It reflects Ezra's general absence from second temple texts. The story of Ezra and his reading the law is absent from Ben Sira (49:11-13) although Nehemiah is extoled. Nehemiah is mentioned in the books of Maccabees (2 Macc. 1:18-36, 2:13), but Ezra is absent there as well. This profound silence begs for explanation, and ought not be attributed to the vagaries of finds

among the Dead Sea Scroll corpus. The answer may lie in the fact that the law which Ezra brought is at variance with the Mosaic torah. The avoidance of Ezra at Qumran may be due to their agreement with later Christian, Samaritan, and Muslim tradents who assert that Ezra had falsified the Torah.

### **Narratives of Exclusion in Ezra-Nehemiah and the Dead Sea Scrolls**

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This paper will examine narratives of exclusion in Ezra-Nehemiah and the Dead Sea Scrolls with a particular focus on defilement through contact with gentiles. It is well known that the narrative rhetoric of Ezra-Nehemiah questions the legitimacy of the marriages with so-called “foreign women” on the part of those who had remained in the land. This rhetoric is widely recognised as reflecting a struggle for establishing a legitimate claim to the land for the returnees. We will shed fresh light on these claims by bringing a series of texts from the Dead Sea Scrolls into the debate that reflect halakhic concerns about relations with gentiles as well as questions of priestly legitimacy and exclusion.

### **Interpreters of the Torah in the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Book of Ezra**

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The paper investigates the expression „to search” or “to interpret the Torah” the Dead Sea Scrolls, mainly *Serekh ha-Yahad* and Damascus Document, and in the book of Ezra. In both corpora the expression is used differently. In the DSS we find a group which is “interpreting the Torah day and night” next to individuals who are “interpreting the Torah” both in the presence and the eschatological future. Ezra has the title „scribe and priest” but in Ezra 7:10 is also called an „interpreter of the Torah” in view of the scene of the public reading and explaining the Torah to the people in Nehemiah 8. In this paper we will explain the expression in its different literary and historical contexts and try to compare and correlate the development in the two corpora of the book of Ezra and the DSS.

### **Ezra, Nehemiah and the Angels: A Contingent History of Priestly Liturgy**

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The *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice*, a liturgical work found among the Dead Sea Scrolls, depicts the angels as priests officiating at the heavenly temple, whose main cultic duty is to praise God unceasingly. This depiction of priestly liturgy is exceptional when viewed against the Hebrew Bible. Biblical works that reflect the cultic reality of the monarchic period (especially the books of Exodus and Kings) famously make little to no mention of liturgy as part of the

regular temple service, as against irregular and private acts of non-cultic devotion. By contrast, works reflecting the post-exilic period (especially Ezra-Nehemiah and Chronicles) do describe liturgical performance—including both vocal and instrumental music—but restrict it to the Levites only. Albeit, the tradition of priestly (vs. Levitical) liturgy first surfaces with respect to the figures of Ezra and Nehemiah, which were perceived—at a relatively late stage of their literary development—not only as political leaders and law givers, but also as leading or initiating priestly liturgical performance (Neh 12:27-46; cf. 2 Macc 1:23-30). This paper will attempt to trace the early history of the notion of priestly liturgy through investigation of the compositional history of the pertinent passages.

### **Making and Remaking the Figure of Ezra**

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### **The Impact of Economic Settings on Early Pentateuchal Interpretations of Exodus 30:12-13**

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Abstract: The priestly layer of the Pentateuch calls for a tax of half a shekel in the special form of the “holy shekel,” designated at the metrological standard of twenty gerah (Exodus 30:12-13). This payment is made as an offering to the Lord for the purposes of expiation. Later, Exodus 38:27-28 shows that the deposited silver is melted to form substantive components of the tabernacle. Multiple studies have analyzed the early reception of this temple tax in both Nehemiah 10:32-33 (Fishbane, Berman, and others) as well as 4QOrdinances (Hempel, Bernstein, and others). Deeper investigation into the social settings of the Second Temple period, particularly the fifth through first centuries BCE, demonstrates the impact of wider economic systems in the early interpretation of Exodus 30:12-13. Specifically, Nehemiah 10:32-33 omits the Judah-specific shekel standard, and reduces the payment to a third of a shekel. Instead of serving for expiation, Nehemiah 10:32 declares that the offering is to the “House of our God,” supporting the temple as fiscal institution of the redistributive economy within the Persian empire. Later, under the rising monetization of the Greco-Roman economy, the temple tax of 4QOrdinances maintains the specific standard of the holy shekel and the purpose of expiation (4Q159 f1, ii, 6-7), but in association with identity and belonging (4Q159, f2-4). The language of these broken fragments suggests the Qumran perspective of the temple tax as tied to a shared identity in diaspora through purity rather than a physical temple. When examined in light of the significant coin hoard of Tyrian tetradrachmas in L120 of Khirbet Qumran, it appears that this temple(less) tax also served to amass wealth for the Yahad. The Qumran themes of purity and diaspora anticipate a much more expansive view of the temple tax in Rabbinic Literature.

**Ezra's Confession and Daniel's Blessing:  
Transforming Figures through the Participatory Past**

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Prayer practices are an important means of characterizing figures in the narrative world of ancient Israel and early Judaism. Confession is prominent in the Masoretic Text of Ezra-Nehemiah, and blessing is prominent in MT Daniel. Yet we know that texts were extended and elaborated in a variety of ways in the Hellenistic-Roman era. How are the respective figures of Ezra and Daniel reshaped and contested through the inclusion of prayer in the growth of their respective traditions? To what degree do these differences reveal larger divisions or contestations within early Jewish communities, whether in theological commitments or linguistic differences?

**Nehemiah's Shaken Sash (Neh. 5:13): Clothing and Curses in Literature of the Second Temple Period**

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In the world of the biblical authors, there was no semiotic distinction between body and soul according to Western philosophical conceptions. The physical body, encompassing skin, nails, and hair, functioned as a complex boundary of the self. Since clothing was worn directly upon the physical body, it was understood as a manifestation that boundary, and as such it was thought to take on or encode the personhood of the wearer. The potential of clothing to index personhood meant that it could be utilized in order to transfer ethnicity or royal status from one individual to another, or even to sever the relationship between an individual and his or her family group. Items of dress could therefore manifest and modify the body in ritual contexts. As such, the manipulation and destruction of clothing items in the ritual context took on a heavy symbolic value. This paper will explore the ritual potential of clothing in the Second Temple Period, with implications for understanding ancient religion, ritual, and the complex understanding of the self.

**Legal Exegesis in Ezra and Nehemiah and in the Dead Sea Scrolls**

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The books of Ezra and Nehemiah contain numerous examples of early halakhic midrash of a type that occurs in the Dead Sea Scrolls. This form of interpretation assumes the unity of the Pentateuch that is in evidence already in Second Temple period books of the Hebrew Bible. This paper will present biblical examples of this form of exegesis in order to illustrate and explain its basic methodology. We will then present a variety of examples of such exegesis as found in the Dead Sea Scrolls. We will argue that in this respect the Scrolls represent a continuation of late biblical

developments. This study will conclude by reflecting on the relationship between this form of biblical and Qumran sectarian legal exegesis and the later rabbinic tradition.

### **Legal Interpretation in the Community Rule, 4QMMT and Ezra-Nehemiah**

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Josef Milik separated the material of 4Q259 (4QS<sup>e</sup>; 4Q*Serekh ha-Yahad*) and 4Q319 (4QOtot; “Signs”) into two distinct literary works and read 4QOtot in conjunction with Jubilees and Enoch. Subsequent scholarship has provided compelling material evidence that both sets of remains belong to the same scroll. But were both texts also related in thematic and legal content? When reading the material as a single work, several intriguing questions arise. Why was the calendar so significantly reworked in later *Serekh ha-Yahad* manuscripts? Why would the calendar have become less significant to the tradents of *Serekh ha-Yahad*, given the legal disputes about the calendar in the Second Temple era? I argue that an answer can be found when considering the importance of covenant language as reflected in the compositional history of *Serekh ha-Yahad* in comparison to Ezra-Nehemiah and the epilogue of 4QMMT.

### **Confession Prayers in Ezra-Nehemiah and the Dead Sea Scrolls**

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I propose to look at the confession prayer that appears in Neh 1:4–11, and then examine how the growth of confession prayers was used as a rhetorical tool in the Second Temple period, and is particularly prevalent in texts that were important at Qumran. Using Neh 1:4–11 as my primary case study, I will examine what are the key aspects of Second Temple confession prayers, which saw an upsurge in the literature of the time. This can be seen in other confession prayers, such as Daniel 9, as well as the other aspects of Ezra-Nehemiah literature, like Ezra 9 and Nehemiah 9, both of which contain elements of confession prayer.

I will demonstrate that confession prayer became more prevalent as a method to give authority to the speaker’s other actions due to the textualization of the prayer and the standardised method of worship. By comparing the different confession prayers in the Ezra-Nehemiah literature, I will assess which prayer may have had the most influence over the other prayers, and which aspects of the prayers belong uniquely to the Ezra-Nehemiah tradition. Following this assessment, I will compare the elements of the confession prayer that make Ezra-Nehemiah distinctive to the characteristics of prayer found within the Dead Sea Scrolls. Thus, through this paper, I will be able to characterise the growing custom of confession prayer in the Second Temple period as an element also prevalent in the Dead Sea Scrolls.

## **Rapporteurs**

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