Religion and Society in Persian Period Judah

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To Abra,
who sometimes kept me sane
and whose insanity sometimes
gave me perspective.

With an extreme amount
of thanks and indebtedness to Ellie Beach,
who read many drafts of this paper,
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helped me work out inconsistencies,
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Abstract

The Persian period has long been recognized as the time when much of the biblical material was produced or finally edited. An analysis of events and religious perspectives in Persian period Judah will help contribute to a developmental context for Western religious thought. Certain methodological biases and ideological presuppositions have, to a large extent, conditioned this type of research resulting in an anachronistic interpretation of the past. My project is to analyze archaeological and textual studies to support the following outline.

After Judah's defeat in 586 BCE by the Babylonians, members of the ruling and priestly classes were deported to Babylon. Lacking connection to the land of Judah and unable to continue the traditional cultic Yahwism, the exiles developed different theological perspectives. With the Persian takeover of Babylon in 539 BCE, those exiles who returned to Judah found their religious beliefs to be different than those who had remained behind in Judah. These people, the "people of the land," had continued cultic worship in traditional ways while the returnees had narrowed and purified types of ritual acceptable in the worship of Yahweh during the exile. Ezra and Nehemiah were leaders of the returning group, the *golah*, whose desired religious reforms changed these traditional types of worship and led to the formation of a temple-centered urban society. As the returnees began to thrive with the assistance of the Persian throne and Persian foreign policy, political and economic conflict developed in addition to religious tension. In this centralization and consolidation of the temple's power, Persian political and economic interests met the political and religious interests of the *golah* group. Within the overall ideological and social struggle therefore, the returnees were able to secure a monopoly on both the building and use of the temple and thus gained enough control to insure that their theology would become normative Judaean religion as preserved in and imposed on the biblical tradition.

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I. Introduction

A. The Traditional Model of Postexilic Judah

The legacy of the Babylonian Exile has been considered by many scholars to be a great theological exploration that promoted Yahweh from a god of the local Jerusalem temple to the deity responsible for all creation. It seemed that the cognitive dissonance caused by the failure of locally based Judaean religion to account for the Exile led to an overwhelming sense of Yahweh's universal power among those sent into exile. Lacking connection to the land of Judah and unable to continue the traditional cultic Yahwism, the exiles developed different theological perspectives. In their minds, Yahweh had abandoned the Jerusalem temple to the Babylonians who destroyed it. The traditional interpretation focuses on the development of Yahwism from cult to "World Religion"—a transformation that is presumed to have taken place in Babylon among those who had been deported. When Babylon fell to the Persian king Cyrus the Great in 539 BCE, much of this enclave then returned to Judah with Cyrus' blessing and the new Yahwistic piety.[1]

The traditional view also holds that the return marked a renaissance of the true "Israel," both religiously and politically. Although Judah was a poor, small part of the Persian Empire, those who returned, the *golah*, were responsible for rebuilding the Jerusalem temple and establishing semi-autonomous leadership of the Yahwistic community. In addition, certain members of this group set about editing and preparing texts to distinguish the community itself and define "normative" Yahwism. As many textual scholars and historians have suggested, this creative community produced much of Judaism's foundation.[2] Further

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[1] Ezra 1: 1 - 4

[2] Carroll, Robert P. "Textual Strategies and Ideology in the Second Temple Period," p. 108. There is some evidence to suggest that certain small sections of biblical text as well as texts that have been lost were prepared or edited in Babylon. See Dandamayev, M. "The Diaspora: Babylonia in the Persian Age." The Cambridge History of Judaism, pp. 342 - 358.

analysis of the events and religious development of the *golah* contributes to a foundational context of Western religious thought.

Traditional research has followed certain methodological perspectives and ideological presuppositions resulting in anachronistic and idealistic interpretations of the past. Much of this is due to the use of the Bible as the authoritative historical source. The traditional historical viewpoint highlights the religious innovation and political leadership of the returning exiles. Given the relatively little documentation from those who did not go to and return from Babylon, these people, the *'am ha'ares*, are left out of traditional history. In addition, there is little documentation of the dynamics between those who remained in Judah, the *'am ha'ares*, and those who returned, the *golah*. The biblical record, however scant and one-sided it is, has defined the basic paradigm of this controversy for traditional research, which has failed to illuminate the motivations of those who produced the biblical texts and therefore unwittingly adopts the bias of the *golah* toward those who did not go into exile.[3] Including the *'am ha'ares* in a historical interpretation of Persian Period Judah gives a more comprehensive analysis of the historical events and cultural situations that laid the foundation of Judaism.

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[3] The range of words used by researchers who have illuminated many of the *golah's* motives varies greatly. Miller and Hayes, in A History of Ancient Israel and Judah, do not use the word suppression, but they suggest that certain historical information was left out because the editor "wished it so" (p. 423). Gösta Ahlström, in the book Who Were The Israelites? suggests that the *golah* community deliberately prepared "programmatic scripts" (p. 109) intended to justify a more immediate political agenda for leadership and land. Many researchers use the term "propaganda" to describe the *golah* re-glossing old texts and creating new ones. This word often has a negative connotation. However, given that the *golah* community did edit, produce, and preserve certain texts over others and that they surely did this for specific purposes and with certain motivations, these words are aptly used. Whether the changes the *golah* made were positive or negative is not at issue in this analysis.

B. Methodological Concerns

In an article on the many problems associated with the study of the word "Israel," Philip Davies writes of the tendency of scholars to employ the use of the idealistic and literary term "Israelite" in historical and political arenas where it is not necessarily accurate.[4] Such a practice leads to a poor, biased analysis and a misconception or exaggeration of the past. Davies suggests that scholars should focus more on the primary data that are also primary constructs, such as the material culture of the region, before analyzing the less concrete literary constructs. In the case of Judaean history, these literary constructs are the biblical texts. One should not use biblical texts to establish a paradigm in which to fit theories and evidence because the biblical texts, though primary sources, are literary in nature and are not "concrete." Instead, one should use the texts to "discern what economic, political, social, and intellectual structures [which] . . . enabled them to be produced, and then participated in producing them. . .."[5] This somewhat suspicious approach to biblical texts is exactly the approach of this analysis. Besides being a more methodologically sound approach to history in its awareness and sensitivity to context, this approach yields more from the texts.

Robert Carroll describes the rewards of such an approach in the introduction to his article, "Textual Strategies and Ideology in the Second Temple Period." Carroll writes:

> The reconstruction of the past through literature is almost always misleading in terms of historical objectivity. Literary truth is one thing, historical truth another. But, although it is full of fabrication--or for that very reason--literature presents us with a side of history which cannot be found in history books, for literature does not lie gratuitously. Its

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[4] Davies, Philip. "The Society of Biblical Israel."

[5] Ibid., p. 26.

> deceits, devices, and hyperbole all serve to express those deep-seated and disturbing truths which only come to light in this oblique way.[6]

Concrete primary data include archaeological finds such as ostraca, carvings, jewelry, tools, living patterns, evidence of destruction, and the like. Conclusions drawn from these types of evidence can then be used to interpret the less concrete primary sources such as letters and biblical literature. This approach helps to identify the devices of the people who created, edited, and preserved a given text. In such a way, the researcher does not impose a theory on the available evidence and then try and prove the theory through selective illustration of that same evidence. Instead, evidence suggests theories which are then debated and discarded as new evidence, both archaeological and literary, is discovered.

Such a methodology intends to minimize the imposition and maximize the immersion of a researcher into the world of a text. Further, it leads to a questioning of the context and motives behind a text. Throughout this analysis archaeological data and the conclusions drawn from such concrete data will be used as evidence. Such evidence will describe and support a theory that seeks to expand and discount parts of the traditional conception of Persian period Judah as described above.

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[6] Carroll, Robert P. "Textual Strategies and Ideology in the Second Temple Period," p. 108.

C. Biblical Texts as Preserved by Part of a Diverse Community

An immediate result of such a suspicion or sensitivity is an awareness of biblical context. The biblical texts are certainly not a random sample of those texts preserved by an enclave within a much larger and more diverse community. The small community that edited, created, and preserved texts was not the total community of Judah. This small, literary group had specific reasons for selecting, editing, or discarding certain texts; they had ideological (i.e. religious, political, and economic) motives for their actions. Besides the heterogeneity within Jerusalem, the Judaean community itself was much more diverse than the small group of *golah* members who did their textual work in Jerusalem. Different groups of Judaeans were under different degrees of foreign influence during the time period, others were under more or less direct *golah* religious influence, and still others differed from the Jerusalem community on political and not religious grounds. As will be shown later, many in Judah differed from the Jerusalem community in terms of ritual, theology, and the exclusive worship of Yahweh alone.

D. Religious Pluralism Within Yahwism

The Jerusalem community of the Persian period is often described de facto as being the standard of "normative" Yahwism.[7] Any analysis that seeks to characterize the ideological pluralism within Judaean Yahwism during the Persian period must be aware of the larger context of Yahwism as a whole. For example, there was a large and somewhat wealthy community of Yahwists in

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[7] Such a characterization is fair and accurate only in retrospect. What traditional research calls "normative" Yahwism is the standard only because it is the form of Yahwism that persisted and developed into Judaism. Previous to the ideological conflict between the *golah* and the *'am ha'ares* during the middle and late Persian Period, the ideas of the *golah* Jerusalem community were minority and not "normative" at all. When analysis highlights monotheistic *golah* Yahwism as "normative," it does so with a certain amount of inaccuracy.

Egypt at Elephantine.[8] There was also a large group of Yahwists in Samaria, many of whom were in positions powerful and well respected enough to marry into the line of high priests at the Jerusalem temple several times during the Persian period.[9] Due to relatively recent finds of letters and legal documents and reinterpretations of earlier finds, researchers are now better able to characterize the interaction between these three centers of Yahwism. Although it is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss this conversation per se, it is very important to note that this evidence has contributed a great deal to understanding the religious pluralism within Yahwism in the Persian period. With such a result in mind, it is necessary to discuss the shared cultural roots of these different Yahwistic forms to place the religious beliefs of the *'am ha'ares* into context.

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II. The Yahwism of Continuity

A. The Cultural Roots of Yahwism

Analysis of archeological data from the Late Bronze (1550 - 1200 BCE) and Iron I (1200 - 1000 BCE) periods discloses great similarity between Canaanite and Israelite cultures.[10] William Dever supported this continuity through two general examples.[11] First, no "Israelite" temples dating before 1000 BCE have been found, but only house-hold shrines and open air sanctuaries--the same sites used in Canaanite cultic activity. Second, the "four-horned altar," often

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[8] This garrison community is described in Bezalel Porten's book Archives from Elephantine: The Life of an Ancient Jewish Military Colony.

[9] Cross, Frank M. "A Reconstruction of the Judaean Restoration," p. 6.

[10] Dever, William G. "The Contribution of Archaeology to the Study of Canaanite and Early Israelite Religion."

[11] Ibid.

considered a diagnostic element of Yahwism in later periods, has been shown to be a Late Bronze Canaanite phenomenon. This continuity has been considered by past researchers to be a result of a syncretistic[12] process.[13] In this scenario, the supposedly distinct "Israelite/Judaean" culture adopted some of the practices and material culture of another distinct cultural group, in this case, the Canaanites. As more recent scholars have shown however, such similarity is more accurately characterized as development rather than syncretism.[14]

Michael Coogan has suggested that early Israelite religion be thought of as an outgrowth of Canaanite religion.[15] The similarities between material culture that has been labeled "Canaanite" and Israelite" point out that the cultural labels with which archaeologists and historians of the past have designated finds and interpreted data originate in a text-based interpretation that presupposes a distinction between Canaanite and Israelite. For example, it is impossible to distinguish between Canaanite and Israelite four-room houses, collared-rim store jars, and hewn cisterns. Under traditional research, this similarity is attributed to syncretism between separate cultures.[16]

An analysis by Mark Smith shows that Canaanite and Israelite written language shared the same alphabetic heritage.[17] Smith's analysis further

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[12] Syncretism is usually defined as the convergence of the religious phenomena of two historically separate culture systems.

[13] Dever, in "The Contribution of Archaeology to the Study of Canaanite and Early Israelite Religion," p. 236, writes that such evidence illustrates the "pervasive influence of the old fertility cults of Canaan" on the early Israelite cultus.

[14] Albertz, Rainer. A History of Israelite Religion in the Old Testament Period; vol. 1, p. 97.

[15] Coogan, Michael D. "Canaanite Origins and Lineage: Reflections on the Religion of Ancient Israel," p. 115.

[16] Dever William G. "The Contribution of Archaeology to the Study of Canaanite and Early Israelite Religion," p. 236.

[17] Smith, Mark S. The Early History of God: Yahweh and the Other Deities in Ancient Israel, p. 124. He considers the two scripts "indistinguishable in Iron I." Smith also points out that Isaiah 19:18

demonstrates remarkable similarity between Canaanite and Israelite terms for sacrifice and cultic personnel. Jeffrey Tigay has analyzed evidence taken from salutation formulae in letters, votive inscriptions, prayers of blessing, and other types of textual evidence to suggest more similarities.[18] Such similarities should not be understood as the result of syncretism but must rather be considered as evidence that the traditional paradigm is incorrect--Israelite and Canaanite cultures (including religions) can not be distinguished or separated from the start at the end of the Late Bronze and early Iron I periods and therefore should not be separately labeled.

By using the term "Israel" to refer to early Yahwists, researchers define this group in an anachronistic way. Although it is possible that certain early Yahwists saw themselves as distinct enough from Canaanite culture to constitute their own culture, such a view is not reflected by extant data. Gösta Ahlström has analyzed the etymology of the word "Israel," illustrating the change in meaning of the word over time.[19] Such a word, with connotations of strict monotheists who claim to have descended from Abraham, is a product of a long history. Ahlström has shown that "the name Israel began as a territorial term, and then became a political term designating the state in the central hill country north of Jerusalem which was first established by Saul."[20] Thus, it is technically incorrect to refer to early Yahwists as Israelites until after the beginning of the monarchy. Ahlström has also illustrated that in postexilic times, the word Israel "took on a theological dimension in that it represented the people of Yahweh,

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includes Hebrew as a "language of Canaan." Jeffrey Tigay, in "Israelite Religion: The Onomastic and Epigraphic Evidence," offers additional linguistic evidence.

[18] Tigay, Jeffrey H. "Israelite Religion: The Onomastic and Epigraphic Evidence." Ancient Israelite Religion.

[19] Ahlström, Gösta. "Chapter 8: Israel, An Ideological Term." Who Were the Israelites?

[20] Ibid., p.101.

the *qehal yisra'el*, the cultic congregation."[21] It was during the exile that "Israel" became a religiously significant word; referring to an early Yahwistic culture as "Israelite" is both politically and religiously incorrect.[22]

B. The Nature of Religion Among the *'am ha'ares*

Whatever word one uses to name the people, great debate surrounds the nature of early Yahwistic beliefs. It is difficult if not impossible to come to any strong conclusions about the early Yahwists' view of themselves. Furthermore, the texts that describe this early time period show much evidence of being reworked and edited, if not created, at a much later date to describe a fictitious or idealized past. This lack of scholarly consensus about literary description, however, does not weaken the argument that early Yahwistic material culture is indistinguishable from Canaanite remains. Regardless of the outcome of this debate, a brief discussion of the region's religious culture would benefit any characterization of Yahwism.

Stories preserved in Late Bronze Ugaritic religious texts from coastal Syria apparently anthropomorphized and personalized powers of nature. The head of the pantheon was El, the aged father of the gods noted for tremendous wisdom. Asherah was the "creatress of the gods"[23] and El's consort. The daughter of El and Asherah was Anat. She embodied life and pleasure, but also violence and war. Anat's partner and occasional mate was the storm-god Baal. The most active of the gods, he was a young warrior figure. As a god of fertility, Baal defeated the forces of sterility, destruction, and decay personified in the divine

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21 Ibid., p.101.

22 The use of the term Israel suggests the assembly of Yahweh, as in the "people of Israel." This, in turn suggests a common monotheistic culture, similar to that of modern Judaism albeit earlier in development. Historically, however, evidence suggests that this was not the case prior to the Exile.

23 Hunt, Ignatius. The World of the Patriarchs, p. 70.

creatures Mot (death), Yamm (sea), Nahar (river), and Lotan the dragon (possibly Leviathan). Humankind was the beneficiary of Baal's cyclical fertility.[24] Most of these Ugaritic deities are mentioned by name in the Old Testament, along with allusions to other deities and religious themes. These allusions could be elements of pre-exilic religion.[25]

Biblical accounts report that worshippers gathered in open air sanctuaries. Cultic centers were marked by a *massebah*, an oblong standing stone, or an *asherah*, an altar or sacred wooden pole. Other holy sites were marked by a sacred tree or grove of trees, sacred water in the form of a pool or spring, and sometimes an altar for burning incense. Many of these high places were staffed by priests or prophets. Mourning, feeding, and consulting the dead were all part of the cultus.[26] Mark Smith characterizes the similarities of these practices to early Yahwism as the result of a common heritage and not syncretism:

> Baal and Asherah were part of Israel's Canaanite heritage, and the process of the emergence of Israelite monolatry was an issue of Israel's breaking with its own Canaanite past and not simply one of avoiding Canaanite neighbors. Although the biblical witness accurately represented the existence of Baal and perhaps of Asherah as well, this worship was not so much a case of Israelite syncretism with the religious practices of its Canaanite neighbors, as some biblical passages depict it, as it was an instance of old Israelite [or early Yahwistic] religion. If syncretism may be said to have been involved at all, it was a syncretism of various religious traditions and practices of Israelites.[27]

This common heritage was the religious foundation of all Yahwists. Such a religious conception continued through the monarchical period to affect later

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24 Ibid., p. 72.

25 See Ackerman, Susan. Under Every Green Tree: Popular Religion in Sixth-Century Judah. A description of her argument can be found later in this paper.

26 Smith, Mark S. The Early History of God: Yahweh and the Other Deities in Ancient Israel, p. 126.

27 Ibid., p. xxiii.

religious developments. Those who went into exile developed it along different paths than those Yahwists at Elephantine, in Samaria, and than those in Judah, the *'am ha'ares*.

In a book entitled Under Every Green Tree, Susan Ackerman proposes a redefinition of traditional Yahwism that occurred during the postexilic period.[28] Ackerman's arguments are based on a reinterpretation of prophetic polemic and previous archaeological and historical scholarship. She considers the prophets to have been critical of the specific methods with which many Judaeans worshipped Yahweh, including supplementing the worship of Yahweh with the worship of other gods and goddesses. A primary example of this is the worship of Asherah as Yahweh's consort. Instead of accusing Yahwists of totally rejecting Yahweh, much of the prophetic material seeks to reform the relationship between Yahweh and his worshippers by changing the nature of religious ritual. Ackerman outlines a process whereby the scope of religious ritual is narrowed through the influence of reformer/prophets. Through analysis of specific prophetic polemic, Ackerman suggests that "taboo ritual" included fertility worship of Asherah as Yahweh's consort, child sacrifice, special observances for the dead, incubation, and necromancy. Certain aspects of these last three rites, with the possible addition of the observance of fertility rites, culminated in the celebration of the *marzeah* banquet mentioned in Amos 6:4-7, Jeremiah 16:5-9, and Ezekiel 8:7-13.[29]

The developmental model suggested above distinguishes between the different conceptions of "popular religion" among traditional Yahwists and the

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[28] A large body of previous scholarship has established this proposition. See the articles and books of the following: Ackroyd, Ahlström, Carroll, Cross, Miller and Hayes, and Morton and Mark Smith.

[29] As well as some Ugaritic texts. See Eleanor F. Beach's article entitled "The Samaria Ivories, Marzeah, and Biblical Text." There is also a good discussion of sacrificial banquets in Albertz, "A History of Israelite Religion in the Old Testament Period," pp. 100 - 102.

"reform" or "biblically normative" religion as preserved in the biblical texts. Popular religion should not be seen as the religion of the unsophisticated or uneducated lower classes, although this sometimes is suggested by the biblical record itself. Ahlström writes, "Even if some prophets tried to show a certain social pathos, the biblical writers often looked down upon the poor. For the Deuteronomist, these people, the *dallat ha'ares*, 'the lowly of the land,' lacked religious knowledge."[30] In her analysis, Ackerman uses the term "popular" to distinguish religious beliefs more widely held than the religious convictions of the more narrow-minded[31] minority opinions held by the biblical school. Ahlström again writes of this attitude in Jeremiah, "who maintained that the poor ones had no sense or understanding because they did not know the 'way of Yahweh,' *derek Yahweh*, nor did they know the *mispat*, 'law, norm,' of their god (Jer. 5:4)."[32] Hence, popular religion is not the religion "of the Deuteronomistic school, the priests, or the prophets, the three groups from whom the majority of our biblical texts come and the three groups who are the most influential in defining ... biblical religion..." [33]

As has been discussed previously, the religious heritage of the *'am ha'ares* included the personified forces of nature and the recurring cycles of birth, fertility, decay, and death. Within this paradigm, the cycles of nature were reenacted and induced with fertility rituals. Ackerman writes:

> Some ancient Israelites [Ackerman uses the term I dismiss as anachronistic but she is referring to the people of a specific geographic area--people I call early Yahwists or the *'am*

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30 Ahlström, Gösta. The History of Ancient Palestine, p. 845 (Italics added).

31 "Narrow-mindedness," in this sense, comes from the perspective of the *'am ha'ares* . It refers to an insistence of the focus of cultic ritual that excluded worship of other gods and limited the ways in which Yahweh was acceptably worshipped.

32 Ahlström, Gösta. The History of Ancient Palestine, p. 845 (Italics added).

33 Ackerman, Susan. Under Every Green Tree: Popular Religion in Sixth-Century Judah, p. 1.

> *ha'ares.*] believed that the way to stimulate the production of crops and herds on the family land was through fertility rituals involving sacred sexual intercourse. That is, for those ancient Israelites fertility rituals are necessary if there is to be a proper observance of the cult of the dead. Such rituals ensure that the bounty needed to make the requisite offerings will be provided.[34]

Hence, both the dead and the living had vested interests in the continuation of the cycle of fertility and decay. The dead wanted eternal rest and happiness insured by the offering of the first fruits of land and family, dedicated by living relatives; the living wanted to preserve the family and lands to ensure their own happiness in this life while preparing for eventual eternal rest and happiness. As the first of agricultural bounty produced by the land must be sacrificed, so must the first fruits of human life--children.[35] According to Ackerman, children were "sacrificed to Yahweh, whom we should characterize here as the divine ancestor."[36]

To show how early Yahwism is part of a larger culture, Ackerman illustrates parallels between Yahweh and El to show how similar much of their cultic worship may have been. Yahweh, like El, possesses attributes of "creator, progenitor, and giver of children."[37] Child sacrifice was a regular and accepted part of El's cult; it should at least be a "possibility" in the cult of Yahweh. Further, child sacrifice was an important part of many of Judah's neighboring cultures. Given the similarities between Judaean and the Phoenician/Punic cult, Ackerman concludes that "there is no reason to distinguish between a cult of

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[34] Ibid., p. 160.

[35] Albertz, Rainer. A History of Israelite Religion in the Old Testament Period, p. 102. Albertz writes, "Historically, the offering of the first fruits is one of the earliest and most widespread kinds of sacrifice. It is much older than Yahweh religion.... It expresses the human awe at the mysterious power of fertility."

[36] Ackerman, Susan. Under Every Green Tree: Popular Religion in Sixth-Century Judah, p. 161.

[37] Ibid, p. 159.

child sacrifice" between cultures.[38] She suggests further that child sacrifice was a routine ritual and not a response to extreme crisis as has been widely thought, pointing out that Micah 6: 6 - 7 lists "my first born" as an item on a list of typical sacrifices. That child sacrifice was routine is also evidence by the fact that "the cult has a regular and well-established cult site, the Tophet in the valley of Ben-Hinnom (2 Kings 23: 10)."[39]

Another aspect of popular Judaean religion was an emphasis on fertility. These rituals were often associated with sacred groves and trees and venerated the mother goddess Asherah, whose symbol was frequently mentioned in biblical texts as a feature of the Jerusalemite temple during the monarchy. Asherah was the consort of El; as El became identified with Yahweh, it is quite possible that Asherah became associated with Yahweh. Thus, Asherah was worshipped alongside Yahweh, "in all likelihood as his consort."[40] Ackerman provides textual evidence for the association of Yahweh and Asherah as well. Deuteronomy 16:21 forbids the planting of a tree "as an Asherah" beside the altar of Yahweh. Isaiah's polemic in 65: 3 links "sacrificing" in sacred groves with burning incense on altars. Ackerman writes:

> The people who according to my analysis of 65:3bβ burned incense to Yahweh at his *bamâ* also, in my interpretation of 3bα, participated in fertility rituals associated with Asherah.[41]

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[38] Ibid, p. 137.

[39] Ackerman writes: "In both [the Phoenician/Punic and Judaean cultures], *mulk* sacrificial offerings of children were made to the god of child sacrifice, El, called in the Mediterranean by his epithet *Ba'l Hamon* and in Israel [the geographic area] by his epithet Yahweh. In short, no Semitic deity *Molech* or *Melek* received child sacrifices in the Hebrew Bible in lieu of the god of Israel. Rather, the cult of child sacrifice was felt in some circles to be a legitimate expression of Yahwistic faith." Ibid., p. 140.

[40] Ackerman, Susan. Under Every Green Tree: Popular Religion in Sixth-Century Judah, p. 185.

[41] Ibid., p. 193.

Ackerman provides archaeological evidence as well for Asherah to be considered as consort to Yahweh. At Kuntillet 'Ajrûd and Khirbet el-Qôm, some ostraca were found inscribed with dedications "to Yahweh and his Asherah."[42] Mark Smith's reconstruction asserts that both the asherah symbol and the high place were acceptable during the period of the Judges (Late Bronze) and during the monarchy (Iron I). Smith cites evidence that Samuel conducted worship at a high place (1 Samuel 9 - 10), and Solomon both worshipped at a high place at Gibeon (1 Kings 3: 4 - 5) and supported the high places as an institution (1 Kings 3:3).[43]

Other evidence suggests that the *'am ha'ares* at least supported other gods. The finds at Kuntillet 'Ajrûd and Khirbet el-Qôm have previously been mentioned. Documents found at Elephantine have allowed a very candid look at a group of Yahwists removed from the influence of the more narrow biblical worshippers of Yahweh. These Elephantine Yahwists are considered by Bezalel Porten to be dedicated Yahwists, and indeed, they wanted permission to build a temple, indicating a great devotion to Yahweh. In addition, "Oaths were sworn by YHW; the salutations of letters invoked his blessings; and money was collected on His behalf. But an oath was also sworn by the Egyptian goddess Sati and a divine appeal made to Herembethel. Epistolary salutations also invoked the blessings of other gods. Money collected for YHW was distributed to Him as well as to other gods."[44] Although the garrison at Elephantine was Yahwistic, evidence such as this suggests that Yahwists contemporary to the Persian Period had a wider definition of what was allowed in the Yahweh cult.

The polemic of the prophets also suggest that the *'am ha'ares* worshipped other gods--both in addition to and alongside Yahweh. Ackerman illustrates this

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42 Ibid.

43 Smith, Mark S. The Early History of God: Yahweh and the Other Deities in Ancient Israel, p. 125.

44 Porten, Bezalel. Archives from Elephantine: The Life of an Ancient Jewish Military Colony, p. 173.

by mentioning the threat that Baal worship made on the claims of Yahwistic religion in the late seventh and sixth centuries.[45] In addition, she interprets certain ritualistic behavior as characteristic of worship where both Yahweh and Asherah are worshipped together.[46] Smith discusses the worship of other gods through its effect on Yahweh's character. He writes that "Israelite literature incorporated some of the characteristics of other deities into the divine personage of Yahweh. Polemic against other deities even contributed to this process. For, although polemic rejected other deities, Yahwistic polemic assumed that Yahweh embodied the positive characteristics of the very deities it was condemning."[47]

A cult of the dead was another important aspect of the "popular" cult of the *'am ha'ares*. This aspect emphasized proper burial and continuous offering to ensure eternal rest and happiness of the deceased. The service was provided by relatives of the deceased who then left to their descendants the family lands that produced the bounty needed to give the dead the required offerings. Fertility rituals were important to insure enough produce to make the offerings. As the dead had interest in preserving the cycle, they were available to the living through a ritual known as incubation, by which the dead were summoned for advice and help. The living also had an obligation to sacrifice part of the bounty of their life, from both their agricultural harvest and their own offspring. As children were considered to be "first fruits," or part of the bounty of life, they were also sacrificed to Yahweh. In this way fertility cults, ancestor "worship," child sacrifice, and death cults were all aspects of the religion of the *'am ha'ares*.

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45 Ackerman, Susan. Under Every Green Tree: Popular Religion in Sixth-Century Judah, p. 92.

46 Ibid., see Ackerman's discussion of the "Abominations of Ezekiel (Chapter 8)" on pp. 66 - 75.

47 Smith, Mark S. The Early History of God: Yahweh and the Other Deities in Ancient Israel, p. xxiii - xxiv.

An important part of the cult described above was the *marzeah*, a term that refers to a social and religious association.[48] A deity or deities and/or the dead were venerated or mourned at these religious banquets, and intimacy and fertility were sometimes celebrated. Ackerman discusses the social function of the *marzeah*. She writes that Amos attacks the *marzeah* not because it is "religiously apostate," but because it is a "social abomination" and an "institution of the rich" who are rich because they oppressed lower-class members of Israelite society.[49]

As has been demonstrated, the *'am ha'ares* conceived of Yahweh in traditional ways. Yahweh was the divine ancestor who gave abundantly, receiving back "first fruits."[50] The *'am ha'ares* worshipped other gods, such as Asherah, in addition to and alongside Yahweh. These traditionalists retained worshipping the gods in common and inherited ways. This worship included a veneration for the dead, which made communication possible through necromancy and incubation rites, and which required sacrifice and gift-giving. Child sacrifice may have been part of the mandatory sacrifice of "first-fruits." Emphasis was placed on fertility and cyclical change. The *marzeah* banquet incorporates many of these ideas and rituals into a specific type of worship. During the Persian period, the religion of the *'am ha'ares*, the Yahwism of continuity and tradition, met the Yahwism of the Exile. This different form of Yahwism developed from the prophetic and priestly spirit of reform and

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48 See Ackerman, p. 92, and Beach, "The Samaria Ivories, Marzeah, and Biblical Text," p. 96.

49 Ackerman, Susan. Under Every Green Tree: Popular Religion in Sixth-Century Judah, p. 77.

50 It has been suggested that Yahweh was a local epithet to the divine ancestor El. This argument shall not be explored here. See Ackerman, Susan. Under Every Green Tree: Popular Religion in Sixth-Century Judah, Smith, Mark S. The Early History of God: Yahweh and the Other Deities in Ancient Israel, Coogan, Michael D. "Canaanite Origins and Lineage: Reflections on the Religion of Ancient Israel," and Albertz, Rainer. Translation by John Bowden. A History of Israelite Religion in the Old Testament Period. Volume 1: "From the Beginnings to the End of the Monarchy."

purification in Babylon during the Exile and was brought back to Judah by the *golah*. The redefinition shall be discussed in the final section of this paper. It is necessary first to examine the nature of *golah* Yahwism, an examination that will include a reconstruction of the Exile and Restoration.

C. The Babylonian Exile and Those who Stayed Behind

When the Assyrian empire collapsed in the late seventh century BCE, the Judaean king Jehoiakim allied his nation, no longer a vassal state, with Egypt. Egypt and Babylon were in a struggle for control and influence of areas that had been a part of the Assyrian empire. In 605 BCE, the crown prince of Babylon, Nebuchadrezzar, defeated the Egyptians at Carchemish and Hamath. These two important battles ended Egyptian influence in the western Euphrates region, leaving the new Neo-Babylonian empire to expand towards Egypt proper.[51] A year later, as king of Babylon, Nebuchadrezzar led a campaign in Syria-Palestine in which he destroyed a number of cities in northern Syria and along the Philistine coast.[52] As a result of this military pressure, Nebuchadrezzar forced Jehoiakim to begin the payment of a yearly tribute. In 601 BCE, after three years of payment,[53] Nebuchadrezzar was forced to return to Babylon after encountering heavy casualties in an attempt to conquer Egypt. There he remained for two years. At this time, Jehoiakim transferred his loyalty to Egypt.[54]

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51 Boardman, John, et al. The Assyrian and Babylonian Empires and other States of the Near East from the Eighth to the Sixth Centuries B.C., p. 398.

52 Malamat, Abraham. "The Last Years of the Kingdom of Judah," p. 394.

53 This is supported by biblical text. See 2 Kings 24:1.

54 Boardman, John, et al. The Assyrian and Babylonian Empires and other States of the Near East from the Eighth to the Sixth Centuries B.C., p. 402.

Kingship passed to Jehoiakin as Jehoiakim died only a few years later, in 598 BCE. Nebuchadrezzar captured Jerusalem in early 597 BCE when Jehoiakin surrendered with "his mother, his servants, his officers, and his palace officials."[55] This was the beginning of the Exile for some Judaeans as Jehoiakin and his court, many of Judah's skilled laborers, artisans, and soldiers were deported to Babylon. According to the Babylonian Chronicle, Nebuchadrezzar besieged and took the city, appointed a replacement king, and took a heavy tribute.[56] The replacement king was Jehoiakim's half brother Zedekiah.

During the years 595 and 594 BCE, Nebuchadrezzar returned to defend Babylon from attack from the king of Elam and a small internal rebellion. This relative instability may have been the motivation behind Zedekiah's hosting a conference of rulers of Babylonian vassal states, presumably to discuss an alliance against Babylon. In addition, Egyptian records indicate that Pharaoh Psammetichus II visited "many holy sites" in Palestine. He may also have met with Zedekiah during this time to begin planning a revolt.[57] Nebuchadrezzar moved against these rebellious states in late 590 or early 589 BCE by following the Fertile Crescent westward. Setting up his headquarters at Riblah, a point of intersection on caravan and military routes, he attacked cities in Phoenicia, Philistia and Judah.

The Babylonian attack from the north so surprised the Benjamites living in the northern part of Judah that they surrendered quickly with little fight.[58]

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[55] 2 Kings 24:12

[56] Pritchard, James. Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament, p. 564.

[57] Boardman, John, et al. The Assyrian and Babylonian Empires and other States of the Near East from the Eighth to the Sixth Centuries B.C., p. 405.

[58] Archaeologists have found little evidence of destruction debris that would correspond to this Babylonian attack. This has led some to suggest that the northern part of the kingdom of Judah fell quickly. Ibid., p. 406.

According to the biblical book of Jeremiah, the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem was interrupted by the news that an Egyptian relief force was headed north to engage the Babylonians.[59] Although it has not been corroborated by an extrabiblical source, Jeremiah 34 continues that the only walled cities remaining under Zedekiah's control were Azekah, Lachish, and Jerusalem. This situation is described by some ostraca preserved in the ruins of Lachish in a burnt layer that has been associated with its final destruction in 586 BCE.[60]

After besieging Jerusalem long enough to cause a famine, Babylon was able to breech the city walls on the northern side of the city where the walls were built near high ground are were weakest.[61] Zedekiah was taken to Riblah where he witnessed the execution of his sons, much of his court, and many officials and priests. He was then blinded, transported to Babylon, and imprisoned.[62] Both biblical records and the Babylonian Chronicle report that much of the privileged classes were taken to Babylon. This deportation included most or all of Zedekiah's surviving officials, much of the Jerusalem temple's priestly staff, and a large portion of the wealthy and skilled members of society. Such deportations changed the makeup of the society and led to land redistribution and leadership changes in favor of pro-Babylonian and the poorer classes. Those wealthy Judaeans taken in captivity would have lost their land to those left behind and "debtors may have been left suddenly without creditors to whom they were

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59 See ibid. and Miller, J. Maxwell and John H. Hayes. A History of Ancient Israel and Judah, p. 420.

60 Pritchard, James. Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament, p. 322-323

61 Salibi, Kamal. "The Flight From Jerusalem."

62 It has been suggested that Zedekiah's treatment was harsh because he was Nebuchadrezzar's nominee. See a discussion in Boardman, John, et al. The Assyrian and Babylonian Empires and other States of the Near East from the Eighth to the Sixth Centuries B.C., p. 418- 420.

indebted."[63] The city walls were razed and important and symbolic buildings such as the temple and the king's palace were destroyed.

The Babylonian takeover has long been described as a "destruction" or "crisis"--a "drastic" change in Judaean life. Indeed, it must have been that way for those who were deported to Babylon. However, there is both archaeological and textual evidence that suggests that this was not the case for the majority of Judaeans. The reconstruction of Miller and Hayes argues in favor of continuity:

> Since earlier Assyrian military installations established in the area now came under Babylonian hegemony, Nebuchadrezzar did not need to establish new major military centers or to settle the area with soldiers or foreigners. Instead, a local administration was set up drawn from the local population.[64]

This use of the local population illustrates that there were locals who were willing to collaborate with the Babylonians, suggesting that Nebuchadrezzar trusted elements of the local population enough to rule Judah for him. The "Babylonian Domination," as the period from 597 to 559 BCE is often referred or alluded to in traditional scholarship and popular culture, was certainly less oppressive and destructive that conventional wisdom suggests. This was true at least to a segment of the population sizable enough to control and run the country.

Nebuchadrezzar appointed Gedaliah to be the ruler of Judah. Even though he was not from the Davidic line, Gedaliah was probably considered king. The biblical record gives Gedaliah the title "governor," for a title such as king would have interrupted the ideologically "normal" progression and undermined future chances of Davidic restoration.[65] Miller and Hayes write that "the failure to mention any title whatever in the text suggests that the final

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[63] Miller, J. Maxwell and John H. Hayes. A History of Ancient Israel and Judah, p. 420.

[64] Ibid., p. 421.

[65] Miller, J. Maxwell and John H. Hayes. A History of Ancient Israel and Judah, p. 423.

editors of the Kings material did not wish to reveal his [Gedaliah's] real title."[66] Since Gedaliah was Judaean, he must have had strong pro-Babylonian sentiments to be appointed this position. Gedaliah came from an important family; his grandfather Shaphan had served as a high governmental official under Josiah,[67] his father had served under Jehoiakim,[68] and one of his uncles was one of Zedekiah's envoys to Babylon.[69] This suggests that for many Judaeans, including a group of nobles and elites from which Gedaliah was selected, life continued under the Babylonians much as it had under the Assyrians. The Judaeans with the strongest connections to Zedekiah's regime, the majority of the wealthy class, who had defended Judah against the Babylonians and lost, were slaughtered, deported, and deprived of property and power.

Gedaliah set up his administrative center at Mizpah, possibly with a contingent of Babylonian troops or advisors.[70] According to the biblical record Gedaliah was assassinated along with this group of foreigners, although it is not clear how soon after the appointment the assassination took place. The leader of the assassination was Ishmael, a prominent official under Gedaliah who was or claimed to be a member of the Davidic line. Ishmael's coup attempt failed and he sought refuge in Ammon while other military leaders and members of the general population fled to Egypt.[71] It is not clear what happened to the

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66 Ibid.

67 2 Kings 22:8

68 Jeremiah 36: 11 - 13

69 Jeremiah 29:3

70 2 Kings 25:22-24 and Jeremiah 40:7-13

71 Miller, J. Maxwell and John H. Hayes. A History of Ancient Israel and Judah, p. 433.

leadership of Judah, but it is possible that the land was transferred to another Babylonian province or leadership remained somewhat in Judaean control.

The continuity of life in Babylonian Judah is evidenced religiously as well as politically. Miller and Hayes suggest that cultic worship continued in Judah during the exile.[72] Evidence for this is taken from Jeremiah 41: 5, which describes 80 men arriving in Mizpah, Gedaliah's seat of power. The men arrived with beards shaved, clothes torn, and bodies gashed; they bore gifts for the "temple of Yahweh." In addition to cultic activity at Mizpah, the capital of Judah during Babylonian control, Miller and Hayes suggest that cultic activity continued at the Jerusalem temple site. No mention is made of the destruction or desecration of the outdoor Jerusalem altar and the cultic laments in the Book of Lamentations presuppose worship at the temple site. Further, the willingness of the Persians to return the Jerusalem temple vessels to Judah after defeating Babylon assumes a need for those vessels in some sort of continued cultic worship, albeit without the Jerusalem temple.[73] The continuation of cultic activity suggests a much greater continuity in the lifestyle of most Judaeans before and after the Babylonian invasion than has previously been suspected by most biblical scholars. For the minority elites taken to Babylon, the invasion meant a serious change in lifestyle that is better characterized by crisis.

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72 Ibid., p. 426.

73 Ibid.

III. The Yahwism of Crisis

A. Yahwism in Exile

The Babylonians were not the only ones to have deported Judaeans. Assyrian sources claim that Sennacherib deported 200,150 people during his successful campaign in Judah in 701 BCE. In addition, both Assyrian and biblical sources claim that large sections of the population of Ephraim, the Northern Kingdom, had been deported in 721 BCE. Those Judaeans deported by Nebuchadrezzar in 597 and 586 BCE "only increased the number of Judaeans living in the east."[74] Although the pain of losing status, influence, and wealth cannot be denied for these Babylonian Exiles, it is clear that they were not subject to a special or more distressing treatment than could be expected given the particulars.

They were settled as closed groups from individual countries, probably granted crown land.[75] According to Babylonian policy, they were treated as tenants of the king, "thus the Jews [Judaeans] received land to till and sites to rebuild and settle....[They] would have provided labor, paid taxes, and served in the military."[76] The archive of the agricultural trading and credit house of Marashu from Nippur shows that the Exiles were fully integrated into Babylonian legal systems with the same rights as Babylonian citizens, ranging in jobs from farmer to merchant to irrigation expert. Albertz's reconstruction of this success helps to explain certain religious developments among the *golah*:

> The position of the Babylonian *Gola[h]*, with its material and legal security, coupled with the intellectual potential of the former upper class and an orientation on their old homeland

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74 Ibid., p. 430.

75 Albertz, Rainer. Translation by John Bowden. A History of Israelite Religion in the Old Testament Period. Volume 2: "From the Exile to the Maccabees," p. 373.

76 Miller, J. Maxwell and John H. Hayes. A History of Ancient Israel and Judah, p. 433.

> which they never gave up, explains why they in particular constantly provided important stimuli towards the renewal of Yahweh religion.[77]

Since the Exiles were in no way pressured to assimilate or adopt Babylonian ritual, they retained their identity as Judaeans and as such yearned for a return and a restoration.

The prophets of the Exile, Ezekiel, Second Isaiah, and Jeremiah, all spoke of transformed people and a return to a renewed land (see Ezekiel 11:19-20; Jeremiah 31:31-34; 32:36-41). The period of the Exile was a purification and as such, the *golah* were the hope for the people--the "very good figs, like first-ripe figs" as opposed to those like "very bad figs, so bad that they could not be eaten,"[78] the people left in Judah who did not undergo this same process of transformation. This purification elevated the people and focused the cult upon Yahweh. Second Isaiah declared all gods besides Yahweh to be impotent idols; Yahweh was first and last, beside him there was no god (Isaiah 44:6).

Ackroyd has identified three themes within Exilic prophets--a restoration of temple as God's presence, a renewal of the people for a new age, and purity as maintained by the new law.[79] The *golah* idea of God's presence became universal as opposed to local; *golah* purity was the proper relationship with God and the new community of faith. Ahlström writes:

> The "congregational" idea of religion was born in the Exile to help deported Judaeans rationalize their circumstances. This concept would have been completely foreign to the Judahites who had not been exiled, however, and thus

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77 Albertz, Rainer. Translation by John Bowden. A History of Israelite Religion in the Old Testament Period. Volume 2: "From the Exile to the Maccabees," p. 374.

78 Jeremiah 24:2

79 Ackroyd's work is based on Jeremiah, the Deuteronomistic history, priestly sections of the Old testament Torah, Ezekiel, Second Isaiah, Haggai, and Zechariah. His work was particularly helpful in illustrating the ideas of the *golah* in Biblical texts. See Ackroyd's Exile and Restoration: A Study of Hebrew Thought of the Sixth Century B.C..

> created conflict between the two groups after the *golah* group returned.[80]

From that time, "Israel" referred to God's chosen people who share these same concepts.[81] The crisis of the Exile gave rise to such ideas; in these ideas can be seen the roots of ideological conflict when the *golah* returns to Judah, where life was best characterized by a continuity of traditional theological expression.

B. The Persian Empire and the Nature of its Control

During the first half of the sixth century, Cyrus II (the Great) dramatically increased Persian territory. Beginning his career with only the minor kingdom of Anshan, he acquired the kingdom of Media in 550 BCE. Four years later, after the fall of Sardis in 446 BCE, he gained control of virtually the entire northern part of the Middle Eastern world, from Lydia to Persia. In 540 BCE, he attacked the Babylonian empire from the west. Moving eastward between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, Cyrus was able to take much of the Babylonian empire without a fight. When Persian armies marched with little resistance into Babylon in late 539 BCE, Cyrus and Persia gained control of the entire Babylonian empire. Cyrus organized his empire by dividing it into 20 districts called satrapies. Each satrapy was made of smaller provinces, ruled by "governors," often drawn from local populations. The Persian province of Yehud, Judah, was part of the satrapy which included Mesopotamia and the Babylonian holdings west of the Euphrates river.[82] Rulers of satrapies were often members of the Persian royal family or

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[80] Ahlström, Gösta. "Chapter 8: Israel, An Ideological term." Who Were the Israelites?, p. 110-111

[81] The biblical book of Ezra uses the word "Israel" 24 times, 22 of which refer to the people rather than the region. ibid., p. 111.

[82] Ahlström, Gösta. "Chapter 21: The Persian Period." The History of Ancient Palestine, p. 821.

"some royal official well acquainted with the administration and laws of the former nation."[83]

According to Ezra 6:1-5, in 538 BCE Cyrus decreed the Jerusalem temple be rebuilt to specific dimensions, using royal funds, and that the vessels taken by the Babylonians from the old temple be returned. This decree was written in Aramaic, and supposedly stored in Ecbatana, the capital of the province of Media. A Hebrew version of this same proclamation, Ezra 1:2-4, was purportedly distributed by messenger throughout the kingdom. This second text attributed Cyrus' decree to Yahweh the God of heaven and granted permission to any Yahweh worshipper to return and work on the building. The text also stated that those not returning might contribute financially to the project. These decrees show a primary concern with the "reconstruction of the [Jerusalem] Temple, not the return of the exiles per se."[84]

The biblical text of Ezra related that the temple vessels be entrusted to Sheshbazzar, the "prince of Judah."[85] According to Miller and Hayes, this is a Babylonian name, which may suggest that Sheshbazzar was the Babylonian who had been appointed governor of Judah from the Babylonian empire and had continued in his post under Persian rule.[86] Hoglund's reconstruction proposes that Sheshbazzar was a Judaean aristocrat (the suggested connotation of the Hebrew word translated as "prince") appointed by the Persians as *pehah* (governor) of the Persian province of Yehud.[87] Whatever the case, the biblical

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83 Ibid.

84 Miller, J. Maxwell and John H. Hayes. A History of Ancient Israel and Judah, p. 445.

85 Ezra 1:7-8

86 Miller and Hayes suggest that Sheshbazzar was not necessarily Judaean nor an exile. See Miller, J. Maxwell and John H. Hayes, A History of Ancient Israel and Judah, p. 448.

87 Hoglund, Kenneth. Achaemenid Imperial Administration in Syria-Palestine and the Missions of Ezra and Nehemiah, p. 23.

texts fail to make much mention of Sheshbazzar, suggesting that he was not of Davidic descent nor responsible for the much completion of the building task. Ahlström posits that Sheshbazzar was not Judaean, suggesting further that the connection of Sheshbazzar to the laying of the Jerusalem temple foundation was most likely a literary device to combine the motif of return directly with temple reconstruction.[88] It is possible that under an official named Sheshbazzar some exiles were returned to Judah, although it is unlikely. Any return that did take place at this time was surely very limited in number and may have consisted only of a new Persian administration, led by Sheshbazzar.

Under Persian control, Judah was subject to the forces of Persian foreign policy. A discussion of the nature the Persian control over its empire is in order. Jon Berquist has written that the Persian province of Yehud can best be characterized as a "semiperipheral" colony of the Persian empire, managed by a "policy of economic extraction."[89] Yehud was clearly under political and military control of Persia, although at times this control was less than at others. Sometimes and in some specific areas, Yehud was able to exercise a great deal of freedom from direct control. As a land bridge to Egypt, Palestine was particularly important when Persian interests in Egypt were threatened. Persia always sought to make sure that Yehud could be used for certain resources and would continue sending tribute. Persian bureaucrats appointed the local governors within Jerusalem and even exercised significant influence in Jerusalem's temple religion, including granting permissions, funding, and "the appointment of priests and other temple officials."[90] Persian foreign policy was

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88 Ahlström, Gösta. "Chapter 21: The Persian Period." The History of Ancient Palestine, p. 838.

89 Berquist, Jon L. "The Shifting Frontier: The Achaemenid Empire's Treatment of Western Colonies," p. 19.

90 Ibid., p. 10.

directed at maintaining influence over Judaean affairs, whether political or religious in nature, for the sake of Persian political and economic concerns.

Biblical scholars often comment that the standing Persian religious policy was one of tolerance. Indeed, Cyrus' own inscriptions and his portrayal in biblical literature support this view.[91] This supposed "tolerance" was less the result of Persian interest in the local religious cult itself than a motive of economic advantage and political necessity. Tribute was most easily collected through a centralized temple system. Lester Grabbe describes Persia's motive of self-interest in supporting the rebuilding of the Jerusalem temple:

> On the affirmative side, the Persians continued what was already general policy in the Near Eastern empires: to tolerate local cults as long as they did not threaten insubordination. They also granted special favors (not necessarily permanent) to certain specific cults for political reasons. On the negative side, the alleged support of cults is often exaggerated in modern literature because of the propaganda of the Persian kings themselves. Overall Persian policy was rather to reduce the income of temples. Little evidence exists that cults generally received state support (as sometimes alleged), which is hardly surprising since temples usually had their own incomes. On the contrary, temples were regulated and taxed, both in good and services.[92]

Persian policy supported the Jerusalem temple to the extent that the temple financially supported Persia. By insuring that a strong Judaean cult with a single location and leadership existed, Persia made the job of monitoring and controlling Yehud's people and resources all the more easy. Certain sectors of the *golah* sought control of the Jerusalem temple for religious reasons that included a self-perception of being the purified people of Yahweh and a motif of

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[91] See discussion and catalog of inscriptions as "propaganda" in a section entitled "Cyrus as Liberator and Propagandist" in Miller, J. Maxwell and John H. Hayes. A History of Ancient Israel and Judah, p. 440-443. Ahlström discusses this same motif in The History of Ancient Palestine, p. 814-817.

[92] Grabbe, Lester. "What was Ezra's Mission?," p. 290-1.

renewal. In the centralization and consolidation of the temple's power, Persian political and economic interests met the political and religious interests of the *golah* group. The next subsection describes the return of the *golah* and history of the Judaean reconstruction under Persian control.

C. The Return of the *Golah* Under Persian Rule

Although many researchers have suggested that the *golah* community should be characterized as consisting of multiple returning groups, it is helpful, especially when beginning such a discussion, to take a socio-psychological and anthropological point of view and discuss the *golah* as a whole. This community returned to Judah with ideas of reconstituting the true people of Israel but found themselves considered foreigners by the local population. The *golah*, as reflected in certain texts of expectation, had considered itself the spiritual inheritors of the new hope and the heralds of Yahweh's return. Indeed, the *golah* had developed new theological positions including the widening of Yahweh's sphere of influence from the land of Judah to the whole of creation.

Daniel Smith has suggested, on the basis of earlier anthropological work, that the *golah* community should be compared in a general sense to modern survivors of a disaster. He writes:

> The wider anthropological work of Frederick Barth and Nelson Graburn on strategies of boundary mechanisms allows us to see that the social forms that a minority, exiled, or refugee community creates can be the result not of a desperate attempt to cling to pointless and antiquated traditions from a previous era or homeland, but rather a creative construction of a 'culture of resistance' that preserves the solidarity of the group.[93]

This "culture of resistance" had a concern to preserve the identity of the group. Thus, priestly concerns of ritual purity were important. To those most

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[93] Smith, Daniel L. "The Politics of Ezra: Sociological Indicators of Postexilic Judaean Society," p. 84.

concerned with purity, marriages with non-members of the group or foreigners would have threatened the group's survival and strict identity. Allowing those who did not entertain the ideas of the group to participate would have undermined the cohesion and success of the group.

The drawback to characterizing the *golah* as a "culture of resistance" is that it too easily creates the suggestion of monolithic thinking. One can also perceive a connotation of moral judgment against a *golah* community that seems to be paranoid, exclusionary, and ideologically tyrannical. Historically, this was not the case although it may have seemed so to elements of the *'am ha'ares*. Participation by native-born Judaeans in *golah* activities was allowed, albeit on conditions laid down by *golah* leadership.[94] In addition, divisions arose within the *golah* community.

Since the restoration of the temple was, at least to many, a restoration of the nation of Judah, it may have fueled the fires of rebellion within a certain segment of the population, possibly even including elements of both the *golah* and *'am ha'ares*. This rebellious spirit was stronger at certain times and under certain leaders than at other times. Zerubbabel, the prophet Haggai, and Nehemiah may have been *golah* leaders with rebellious sentiments, if not leaders of open revolt. Ahlström writes:

> The Jerusalem temple initially was an accepted cult place to the Persians but then things apparently got out of hand; the old pre-exilic traditions or a more independent course were followed, and a special emissary, a supervisor, had to be sent in order to re-establish the official cult in a form acceptable to the Persian court. Such an emissary was Ezra. His title, 'the scribe of the law of the God of Heaven' (Ezra 7:12) which 'is in your hand' (7:14), indicates that he was a Persian official well acquainted with the laws of the empire and that

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[94] See Ezra 6:21. A discussion sympathetic to the conditions placed upon the *golah* by historical contingency can be found in Joseph Blenkinsopp's article "Temple and Society in Achaemenid Judah," p. 46.

> he had a special law that he was commissioned to promulgate in Jerusalem.[95]

Rebellion may have been one factor that divided the *golah;* wealth and class may have been another. Morton Smith suggests a division of class when he writes that "an internal aristocracy existed within Palestine, and even possibly within the *Golah* community itself, as indicated by Ezra-Nehemiah."[96] My research to date has not led me to many concrete examples of factions within *golah* ideology,[97] but I do not advocate a characterization of the *golah* community as zealots completely unified in purpose and ideals.

In 530 BCE, Cyrus died and was replaced by his son Cambyses. Soon after becoming king, Cambyses set off to conquer Egypt. After a decisive battle in the Egyptian Delta against the army of pharaoh Psammetichus III, Cambyses gained control of Egypt in 525 BCE. According to Egyptian documents, Cambyses was a patron of the temple of the mother goddess Neith in Sais, ordering that the temple be purged of all foreigners, purified for proper ritual, and that priests be returned to the sanctuary.[98] This temple had been the official temple and dynastic center for the Saite dynasty. Cambyses was much less generous to other temples in Egypt, curtailing the revenue and power of many temples.[99] This may have been a continuation of the same policy that prompted his father Cyrus to order a re-establishment of the Jerusalem temple.

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[95] Ahlström, Gösta. "Chapter 21: The Persian Period." The History of Ancient Palestine, p. 858.

[96] Smith, Daniel L. "The Politics of Ezra: Sociological Indicators of Postexilic Judaean Society," p. 95.

[97] An interesting direction in this regard may be found in Daniel Smith-Christopher's article "The Mixed Marriage Crisis in Ezra 9-10 and Nehemiah 13: A Study of the Sociology of the Post-Exilic Judaean Community." Also see Morton Smith's book Palestinian Parties and Politics that Shaped the Old Testament. I do consider this briefly in a later section of this work, but more research is needed in this direction.

[98] Miller, J. Maxwell and John H. Hayes. A History of Ancient Israel and Judah, p. 449-450.

[99] Ibid., p. 450.

Zerubbabel was appointed Judaean governor after Sheshbazzar, although it is unclear whether this succession took place at the beginning of Cambyses' reign or whether it occurred later, as Cambyses was in Egypt.[100] The administrative center under Babylonian rule had been at Mizpah and it is most likely that Sheshbazzar served his office there. Zerubbabel is portrayed by biblical texts as being a member of the *golah* in Jerusalem. It is possible that he led a returning group to Judah before assuming his position as *pehah*. This group would have enlarged the small *golah* community in Judah established by Sheshbazzar and moved the administrative center to Jerusalem, the site of the temple in construction. After this move, Mizpah experienced a population decline in the fifth century, as supported by archaeological evidence.[101] According to biblical texts, Zerubbabel was responsible for the continued construction of the Jerusalem temple, a process which had been slow under Sheshbazzar.[102] During this time, a revolt led by Cambyses' brother broke out in Persia. As Cambyses was returning to Persia he died and the empire entered a period of relative instability where small provinces such as Judah must have enjoyed a great amount of freedom.

The biblical books of Haggai and Zechariah depict a Judah ruled by the *pehah* Zerubbabel in 520 BCE. Zerubbabel's leadership marked a change in Judaean leadership towards a *golah* oriented agenda. Ahlström writes:

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100 Miller and Hayes suggest this succession took place in 525 BCE. See ibid., 457. Cross proposes a late date; Zerubbabel may have become *pehah* as late as 522 BCE at the beginning of the reign of Darius. See Cross, Frank M. "A Reconstruction of the Judaean Restoration," p. 15.

101 Evidence also suggests that the wall at Mizpah was no longer in use in the second half of the fifth century BCE. See Ahlström, Gösta. "Chapter 21: The Persian Period." The History of Ancient Palestine, p. 865.

102 Biblical texts illustrate that there were those who opposed the reconstruction of the Jerusalem temple (Ezra 4:3). This is discussed in greater detail in the section entitled "Ideological conflict between the *golah* and the *'am ha'ares*."

> It is probable that the golah usurped the right to rebuild the temple which the Edict of Cyrus granted to the people of the sub-province (*medinah*) of Judah at large, rather than to them [the *golah*] specifically.[103]

This established the *golah* group as the new religious and political leaders of the province. *Golah* prophets such as these had given oracles that revived the old Judaean idea of king and temple. The *golah* community expected Yahweh to restore His purified people, Israel. With the temple nearing completion and Zerubbabel moving the administrative center of Judah back to Jerusalem, it must have seemed that the returnees were on the verge of restoring an independent Judah. Haggai referred to Zerubbabel as a messianic figure (Haggai 2:2-9, 20-23) and Zechariah called him one of the "anointeds" (Zechariah 4) and gave him the epithet "Branch," a term with political and messianic references (Zechariah 6:12-13). Cross has proposed that the Chronicler prepared the first edition of his work in support of this restoration movement, during the period of 520 to 515 BCE.[104] In this work, Zerubbabel was made to be a member of the Davidic family (1 Chronicles 3:17-24). Had this been the case, however, it is very strange that Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai, and Zechariah do not mention this fact.[105]

Regardless of Zerrubabel's actual heritage, expectations were high in the wake of Persian instability after the death of Cambyses. Darius I, not of the ruling line of the royal Persian family, was able to assume control of Persia in 522 and began a program of political restructuring to promote peaceful cooperation with his policies and end rebellion. Judah gained prominence when it was transferred from the wealthy Babylonian satrapy to the Samarian satrapy under

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103 Ahlström, Gösta. "Chapter 8: Israel, An Ideological term." Who Were the Israelites?, p. 112-113.

104 Cross, Frank M. "A Reconstruction of the Judaean Restoration," p. 15.

105 For this reason, many commentators doubt that Zerubbabel was of Davidic descent. See Miller, J. Maxwell and John H. Hayes. A History of Ancient Israel and Judah, p. 456.

which it was "a distinct administrative and fiscal unit...one of the smallest in the Trans-Euphrates region, with its own governor and provincial administration."[106] In addition, Darius' efforts were focused at maintaining stability in Babylon, which experienced two major rebellions in two years, 522 and 521 BCE.[107] Violence and instability in Babylon and a possibility of restoration in Judah may have led to the return of more *golah* .[108] Zechariah urged Babylonian Jews to seek safety by fleeing to Judah (Zechariah 2:10-16). During this period of unrest, religious nationalism in Judah was at a peak. The Book of Haggai ends with the oracle that Yahweh will "overthrow the kingdoms of the nations" and make Zerubbabel "like a signet ring." This was a royal epithet and call to open rebellion.[109]

Darius went to Egypt to put down a rebellion sometime between 519/8 and 510 BCE. The careers of Haggai and Zerubbabel both came to an end at this time with Zerubbabel being "dismissed or executed."[110] Morton Smith proposes that Zerubbabel may have been assassinated by a member of the Davidic dynasty who was afraid that if successful, Zerubbabel would eliminate potential rivals or, if a failure, he would cast blame and treachery on Davidic descendants.[111] Members of the priesthood may have wanted to distance

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106 Blenkinsopp, Joseph. "Temple and Society in Achaemenid Judah," p. 37.

107 Miller, J. Maxwell and John H. Hayes. A History of Ancient Israel and Judah, p. 454.

108 Blenkinsopp, Joseph. "Temple and Society in Achaemenid Judah," p. 35.

109 Ahlström, Gösta. "Chapter 21: The Persian Period." The History of Ancient Palestine, p. 820.

110 Darius' expedition in Egypt is usually dated around 518/7 BCE, but some scholars, following the lead of E. Bresciani sates this to after 510 BCE. Ibid, p. 820 text and footnote (5). Also see Miller, J. Maxwell and John H. Hayes. A History of Ancient Israel and Judah, p. 456, and Smith Morton. Palestinian Parties and Politics that Shaped the Old Testament, p. 8.

111 Smith Morton. Palestinian Parties and Politics that Shaped the Old Testament, p. 8.

themselves from Zerubbabel's claims to retain control in the expectation of sudden Persian interest in the area.

Biblical text do not record the names of the governors of Judah from the time of Zerubbabel to Ezra. Archaeological data such as seals, bullae, and stamped jar handles have offered the names of some governors, but there is not enough evidence to reconstruct whether these governors preceded or followed Ezra.[112] The names suggest that the governors were Judaean, and the Persians may have found elements of Judaean society that had not supported Zerubbabel's rebellion. If this was the case, this element of leadership may have come from the *'am ha'ares*, who did not share the same passion for restoration and purification as the *golah*.

Persian interests for the duration of the empire were focused eastward toward Greece and Egypt, which made discussion of open rebellion in Judah difficult to hide. In 499 BCE Cyprus and the Greek cities of Asia Minor rebelled, with support from Athens. Darius put down the revolt, and set out to exact revenge from Athens and Greece. Persian forces met disaster at the battle of Marathon in 490 BCE. While making preparations for renewed warfare against Greece, the Egyptians rebelled. Darius died early in 486 BCE and left the subjugation of Egypt and the planned invasion of Greece to his son and successor, Xerxes I. By 483 BCE, Egypt was again securely under Persian control. After ending a brief insurrection in Babylon in 481 BCE, Xerxes moved against Greece. The Persian fleet was routed at Salamis in 480 BCE and the Persians also faced serious defeats at Artemisium and Thermopylae.[113] Humiliated, Xerxes was murdered by his vizier in 465 BCE. A brief period of instability followed as

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112 Miller and Hayes submit the names Elnathan, Yehoezer, and Ahzai, commenting that the names seem Judaean. See Miller, J. Maxwell and John H. Hayes. A History of Ancient Israel and Judah, p. 462.

113 Ahlström, Gösta. "Chapter 21: The Persian Period." The History of Ancient Palestine, p. 858.

Xerxes' youngest son Artaxerxes I defeated his opponents to assume the throne. Egypt, with support from Athens, staged a revolt and expelled the Persian tax collectors. This revolt was not put down until 455 BCE by Megabyxos, the ruler of the satrapy that included Judah, *Abr Nahara*.[114] The unrest Persian leadership led to uncertainty in administration.

From 499 to 455 BCE, a period of loose Persian control, the *golah* faced setbacks in establishing the new Israel. The *am ha'ares* maintained control of the governorship of Judah. Putting nationalism aside, the *golah* increased the membership of the people of Yahweh by receiving new returnees and instructing native Judaeans in *golah* ideas of monotheistic Yahwism, temple and personal purity, law, and personal renewal. *Golah* messianism remained hopeful, looking for an anointed leader to establish their desired relationship with Yahweh. With increased Persian control in the middle fourth century BCE, the *golah* was able to realize some of its agenda.

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IV. Yahwism During Self-Redefinition

A. The Immediate Success of the *Golah* Under Increased Persian Control

Certain local populations within the empire were able to secure Persian favor and advance their own goals by adapting religious ideas to Persian religious and political policy. According to Thomas Bolin, Persian favor could be granted to local communities that made "the equation of the local god with the high god [the Persian god Ahura Mazda]."[115] This suggests both that the local

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114 Ibid., p. 861.

115 Bolin, Thomas. "The Temple of יהוה at Elephantine and Persian Religious Policy," p. 10.

golah community faced a need to justify on a religious level their worship of Yahweh to the Persians, and that they hoped to secure Persian favor by identifying Yahweh with the Persian god. The *'am ha'ares*, with no conception of a single heavenly deity, could not make such claims.

There is evidence that other Yahwistic communities appealed to Persia for support. When the garrison community at Elephantine in Egypt wanted to rebuild their temple which had been destroyed in an Egyptian rebellion, they appealed to the Persian satrap Bagohi. In letters, the Elephantine Yahwists described their god with the Persian epithet, "God of the Heavens." This process was reciprocal as well--Just as local communities felt the need to justify themselves and appeal for support, the Persians "were inclined to identify other heavenly gods with Ahura Mazda, such as Zeus and Yahweh."[116] Likewise, the *golah* fostered Persian patronage by describing Yahweh in the more cosmic terms of the Persian god Ahura Mazda. The *golah*'s monotheism and belief in Yahweh's place "on high" matched Persian religious conceptions; insistence on a single, central temple and a law code enforced by a hierarchy of priests played into Persian economic and political agendas of centralization and taxation.

Ezra's mission is an example of Persian religious, economic, and political control over Yehud. The decade between 460 and 450 BCE was an "extraordinary crisis" to Persian interests in the Western Mediterranean.[117] Egypt, Asia Minor, and Cyprus, all areas that had been under Persian control, were in revolt. Judah was on the periphery of areas still in Persian control and was thus a likely target for takeover or incitement to rebellion. Persia sought to consolidate its hold on its Palestinian provinces;[118] one way of doing this would

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116 Ahlström, Gösta. "Chapter 21: The Persian Period." The History of Ancient Palestine, p. 837.

117 Hoglund, Kenneth. Achaemenid Imperial Administration in Syria-Palestine and the Missions of Ezra and Nehemiah, p. 165.

118 Smith Morton. Palestinian Parties and Politics that Shaped the Old Testament, p. 92.

have been to send some "officials with extraordinary authority to these inland districts. Their task would have been to supervise the administrators of the subprovinces and to see that the sacred and civil laws were followed, perhaps also allowing traditional laws to be kept as long as they did not conflict with Persian interests."[119] Ezra's mission in 458 BCE coincides with this period of unrest and could be an expression of this policy.[120]

Ezra may have been a wealthy and important member of the Babylonian *golah* who had not yet returned to Judah. Having interests in continued property, sharing the ideology of the *golah,* and being in a position to be recognized by Persian administration his could be the circumstances behind his appointment to return to Judah as a Persian official. However, since Ezra's arrival in Jerusalem would have come as the imperial court was assembling an expeditionary force to counteract Greek intrusion into Egypt and the Egyptian revolt, it is possible that Ezra was appointed for Persian military purposes not preserved within the biblical texts.[121] According to biblical texts, Ezra set out with a group of *golah* members with a commission from Artaxerxes and "the Book of the Law of Moses."[122] Ezra was empowered to appoint judges and magistrates to judge those who knew God's laws and to teach those who did not

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[119] Ahlström, Gösta. "Chapter 21: The Persian Period." The History of Ancient Palestine, p. 873.

[120] For a longer discussion of this topic, see Hoglund, Kenneth. Achaemenid Imperial Administration in Syria-Palestine and the Missions of Ezra and Nehemiah.

[121] As has been noted by many biblical commentators, the Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah narratives seem more concerned with a theme of overcoming "opposition to restoration," and not historical account. See Miller, J. Maxwell and John H. Hayes. A History of Ancient Israel and Judah, p. 467. For a textual analysis that suggests that the entire narrative complex was edited in the early 400's for this theme, see Cross, Frank M. "A Reconstruction of the Judaean Restoration."

[122] The "Decree of Artaxerxes" can be found in Ezra 7:12-26. References to the "law" include Ezra 7:14 and 7:25-6 among others.

and to supervise the temple. Ezra also brought offerings for the temple from members of the Babylonian *golah* and the Persian government.[123]

The archaeological record suggests that in the middle fifth century Persia expanded its military presence in Palestine, including Judah. This perhaps was in response to the Egyptian revolt of 465-455 BCE. A number of small fortresses or garrisons have been discovered in Palestine which fit the Persian typology and were in use for only a few decades in the mid to late fifth century BCE. Hoglund characterizes these fortresses as creating a supply and defensive network that could support long term occupation of Egypt, an operation of which Ezra may have been an important official.[124] With an official end to Greek and Persian hostilities from about 450 BCE under the "Peace of Callais" and the end to open rebellion in Egypt, such fortresses continued to be maintained in an effort to consolidate imperial control.[125]

Biblical texts suggest that Ezra was responsible for instituting marriage reforms and breakups to preserve the integrity of the group.[126] In particular, references are made that the "holy race" is mixing with that of the "people of the land." Even important officials were guilty mixed marriages.[127] This may be an indication that Ezra and some members of the *golah* did not allow intermarriage with traditional Yahwists in Judah and neighboring areas who had not gone into exile. A commission was appointed to examine the situation and produced a list

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123 Miller, J. Maxwell and John H. Hayes. A History of Ancient Israel and Judah, p. 472.

124 See chapter 4, "Persian Fortresses?" in Kenneth Hoglund's book Achaemenid Imperial Administration in Syria-Palestine and the Missions of Ezra and Nehemiah.

125 For a discussion of the Peace of Callais, see Hoglund, Kenneth. Achaemenid Imperial Administration in Syria-Palestine and the Missions of Ezra and Nehemiah, p. 160-163.

126 See Ezra 9:2 and 10:3.

127 Ibid.

of some offenders, including some priests and Levites.[128] These reforms must have caused a great unrest, which may help explain why the biblical book of Ezra ends without describing what becomes of the guilty.[129]

With the religious and political power in leaders such as Ezra, the *golah* was further able to dominate Judaean life and the temple. *Golah* priests were appointed to the temple and earlier versions of biblical texts were edited according to *golah* religious ideals. Cross posits that much of Chronicles was completed during the time of Ezra.[130] Ahlström suggests that Ezra may have renovated the temple during his tenure.[131] The biblical book of Ezra ends abruptly, which may indicate both the fulfillment of Ezra's Persian mission not preserved in the biblical texts and the interpretation that the *golah* believed that they were finally established.[132]

In 445 BCE, Nehemiah was appointed as *pehah* of Judah, focusing on political reorganization and building projects. According to biblical texts, Nehemiah had been a cup-bearer to Artaxerxes. Upon learning that Jerusalem was poor and broken down, the people "in great trouble and shame," Nehemiah asked to be allowed to return to Judah with hopes of rebuilding the province.[133] Four years before, Egypt had rebelled again, under a revolt led by the satrap Megabyxos, so Judah was still important to the Persian garrison policy to control the far reaches of the empire. Nehemiah rebuilt Jerusalem's city walls with special military precautions against "threatening" opposition, with help from

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128 Ezra 10:16-43.

129 Grabbe, Lester. "What was Ezra's Mission?," p. 296.

130 Cross, Frank M. "A Reconstruction of the Judaean Restoration," p. 16.

131 Ahlström, Gösta. "Chapter 21: The Persian Period." The History of Ancient Palestine, p. 849-850.

132 Ibid., p. 888.

133 Nehemiah 1.

Persian forces and workers conscripted from neighboring villages.[134] This forced labor may have been part of a political reorganization where Judah was reorganized into districts based around the larger villages of Jerusalem. Mizpah, Beth-Haccerem, Beth-Zur, and Keliah.[135] Nehemiah claimed to have completed the work in fifty-two days.[136]

Nehemiah also may have instituted economic reforms that had long term benefits for the temple as the center of economy.[137] Hoglund suggests that this economic reform was to insure the paying of imperial taxes in support of the large Persian military presence in the area.[138] According to biblical texts, Nehemiah accused local men of selling fellow Judaeans into slavery and swore that he would not collect interest as others had done (Nehemiah 5:6-13).[139] He may also have stopped enforcing the collection of taxes to support his administration, the practice of other administrations (Nehemiah 5:14-16). In 433 BCE, Nehemiah returned to the Persian court, leaving his brother in his place. The book record does not account for this trip, but it may have been that after completing his planned building practices and instituting political and economic reforms as promised, Nehemiah considered his mission finished.[140] It may also

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134 Nehemiah 3 & 4.

135 Hoglund, Kenneth. Achaemenid Imperial Administration in Syria-Palestine and the Missions of Ezra and Nehemiah., p. 110.

136 Nehemiah 6:15.

137Nehemiah 5.

138 Hoglund, Kenneth. Achaemenid Imperial Administration in Syria-Palestine and the Missions of Ezra and Nehemiah., p. 226.

139 Berquist suggests that Judaeans had been sold as slaves to Greek traders. See Berquist, Jon L. "The Shifting Frontier: The Achaemenid Empire's Treatment of Western Colonies."

140 Cross, Frank M. "A Reconstruction of the Judaean Restoration," p. 17. It has also been suggested that Nehemiah had to defend himself against his opponents. See Miller, J. Maxwell and John H. Hayes. A History of Ancient Israel and Judah, p. 471.

have been that Nehemiah wanted to return to clear certain religious reforms, possibly *golah* innovations, with Artaxerxes.

Returning to Jerusalem, and presumably his position as *pehah*, Nehemiah began a series of religious reforms aimed at improving the wealth and power of the Levites and enforcing the observance of the Sabbath. The Levites were ensured offerings for their upkeep and Nehemiah placed many Levites into positions of power, further increasing the power of these "strong Yahwists" in the temple.[141] Biblical accounts report that Nehemiah also moved to prevent "foreign" marriages, especially among the priesthood (Nehemiah 13:23-29, especially v. 29).

Sheshbazzar, Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah are four examples of Persian appointees who instituted reforms that benefited the *golah*. With ideas that better matched Persian policies, and Persian support for the *golah* program of religious reforms and the accompanying centralized political control, the *golah* was better able succeed in its reforms. Additionally, certain crises in the Persian empire meant greater or lesser control over Judah. The *golah* was able to solidify its position during these high points. After a discussion of the ideological conflict between the *golah* and the *'am ha'ares* , this analysis will conclude with an elaboration on the accomplishments of the *golah*--an ideological "victory."

B. Ideological Conflict Between the *golah* and the *'am ha'ares*

This analysis has discussed the ideologies of the *golah* and the *'am ha'ares* and suggested that conflict was the result of interaction. Certain ideas were obviously the cause of more tension than others. More evidence has been preserved from the *golah* point of view than the *'am ha'ares* , and therefore more

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141 Miller, J. Maxwell and John H. Hayes. A History of Ancient Israel and Judah, p. 472.

can be concluded about elements of their program that contributed to tension. For this reason, it may seem that the *golah* has been characterized as disrupters of a traditional Judaean way of life. This was not the case. Ideological conflict in Judah during the Persian period was not the result of *golah* ideology consciously seeking to destroy *'am ha'ares* ideas--the tension was the result of a number of positions from each framework. The arguments preserved in biblical texts are the positions of the *golah* and thus the following analysis of the conflict will be largely one sided.

Many commentators suggest that the returnees entertained a notion of Judah as fallow and devoid of people.[142] Robert Carroll's analysis points out that Jeremiah 32 is "blithely ignorant of such occupiers, or chooses to ignore them."[143] Many of the returnees belonged to upper-class families that had owned Judaean lands; upon returning, they claimed ownership of these lands which had been redistributed under Babylonian control. Carroll concludes:

> Implicit in that ruling [on the meaning of the text] would be the view that those who had 'occupied' the land since the fall of Jerusalem were not the legitimate owners of that land. Only those who had come 'back' from foreign lands could claim by right of purchase an entitlement to the land.[144]

This belief was enforced by Ezra giving non-*golah* lands to the temple and Nehemiah's reforms that strengthened the power of the Levites. According to the book of Ezra, the *'am ha'ares* tried to frustrate attempts by the *golah* to take control of the land and build on it.[145] Miller and Hayes suggest that the *'am*

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142 See Ben Zvi, Ehud. "Inclusion in and Exclusion from Israel as Conveyed by the Use of the Term 'Israel' in Post-Monarchic Biblical Texts," p. 95 and Carroll, Robert P. "Textual Strategies and Ideology in the Second Temple Period."

143 Carroll, Robert P. "Textual Strategies and Ideology in the Second Temple Period," p. 113.

144 Ibid, p. 114. Carroll does qualify that his idea may be a case of "reading too much into the text." However, this reading of Jeremiah 32 "fits quite well with those strands in the book which address themselves to the legitimacy of relationship to Yahweh and Jerusalem in combative terms."

145 Ezra 4:4-5.

ha'ares tried to defend their land and privileges using legal measures.[146] This conflict over land titles suggest that the conflict was economic, but biblical literature suggests that the land was part of the *golah*'s self conception--a conception that identified the *golah* with the conquest narratives in Joshua and the exodus narratives.[147]

The *golah* viewed the *'am ha'ares* as unclean and foreign and excluded them from rebuilding the temple. Biblical texts relate that the *'am ha'ares* stopped the building of the temple and the city of Jerusalem in an effort to be included, even applying to Artaxerxes with an accusation against the *golah*.[148] The *golah* believed only in Yahweh and supported worship of him only in the Jerusalem temple. Thus, their efforts were focused towards a single goal, easily centralized with unified support for their cause. The *'am ha'ares* were willing to support the building of an important temple, but had continued traditional worship in outdoor sanctuaries. Thus, they had much less religious necessity to support the temple's completion and support the consolidation of worship into a single place.

Although this analysis has interpreted *golah* religion as being an innovation, the innovation was not so much a new paradigm as a new interpretation of their ancient faith. Yahweh may have been a local epithet to El, becoming the name of the "God of the Heavens" during the Persian period just as the priestly editors of the Old Testament thought that the Patriarchs worshipped God under the name "El Shaddai." The *golah* had focused the faith

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146 Miller, J. Maxwell and John H. Hayes. A History of Ancient Israel and Judah, p. 459.

147 See Ezra 1 and 2. Ben Zvi reports that the *golah* "identified with the Israelites who conquered Canaan and displaced the remaining Canaanites." Ben Zvi, Ehud. "Inclusion in and Exclusion from Israel as Conveyed by the Use of the Term 'Israel' in Post-Monarchic Biblical Texts," p. 96.

148 See Ezra 4: 1-5 and 7-22. This text Samaritans from the Persian province north of Yehud. They can be seen as a later development of the *am ha'ares*. See Gösta Ahlström's "Chapter 21: The Persian Period," The History of Ancient Palestine and "Chapter 8: Israel, An Ideological term." Who Were the Israelites?

on Yahweh, a local epithet with elements of nationalism. Then, the *golah* were the direct recipients of Yahweh's wrath in the form of the Babylonian Exile. As exiles, the *golah* were purified as the people of Israel, Yahweh's congregation.

This discussion of ideological conflict suggests a twofold distinction in the society, but this is not to suggest that all members of the *golah* and *'am ha'ares* shared the ideology as this analysis has classified it. It is very possible that the ideas born in Exile, labeled "*golah*" by this analysis, were connected only by a common general theology, leaving particular political and theological interpretation up to smaller groups. The mixed-marriage controversy suggests that the *golah* was not completely unified in interpretation. Ezra criticizes those, including temple priests, who had taken wives from various ethnic groups outside of Judah. Daniel Smith-Christopher, in a study of the biblical material and mixed marriage, suggests that the conflict between Ezra and those who had married "foreigners" was a conflict between "denominations" or "sects" who are "vying for the title of 'true Jew.'"[149]. The conflict may have been between factions of the *golah* who disagreed about what grounds made a marriage actually mixed. Smith writes that "the *only* basis for Ezra's objection is that the foreigners were simply Jews who were not in exile."[150] It is possible that Ezra-Nehemiah attacks non-*golah* members (*'am ha'ares*) for marrying non-Judaeans as well. In addition, certain *golah* members' responses to open rebellion must have been a dividing line in *golah* ranks.[151] Blenkinsopp has suggested that the title "Jew" may have been the description of an elite member of the *golah*.[152]

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149 Smith-Christopher, Daniel L. "The Mixed Marriage Crisis in Ezra 9-10 and Nehemiah 13: A Study of the Sociology of the Post-Exilic Judaean Community," p. 257.

150 Ibid.

151 See the sections of my analysis on Zerubbabel.

152 Blenkinsopp, Joseph. "Temple and Society in Achaemenid Judah," p. 47.

Research such as this suggests that the *golah*, though unified in their belief in the single god Yahweh, "God of the Heavens," was not necessarily unified in specific beliefs and practices.

C. Ideological "Victory" for the *golah*

When exiles returned to Judah, they returned to find a country that was different than they had expected. The Judaean population at first considered the *golah* to be foreigners. As such, the *golah* may have had to accept less desirable land, forming a "close-knit enclave which would not be absorbed by the 'strange' peoples of the land."[153] As the epitome of the exiles' ideas and expectations, the term "Israel" was adopted to mean the purified cultic congregation of the returnees which was formed during the Exile. This "purification" was in contrast to the continuity of religious belief held by the *'am ha'ares*.[154] The people who had remained behind in Judah, the *'am ha'ares*, retained traditional worship that included practices unacceptable to the purified cult of Yahweh.

To the *golah*, who viewed itself as the true people of Yahweh and bound together by the experience of the exile, it was the *'am ha'ares* who were the foreigners. Hence, the *'am ha'ares* were excluded from helping to rebuild the temple and were labeled by the biblical authors with archaic names such as "Canaanite," "Perizzite," or "Hittite," that served to emphasize their "foreigness."[155] With this exclusion, the *golah* gained leadership in temple affairs. The *golah* was able to take advantage of a Persian policy that favored "heavenly" gods and centralized religious and political control.

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153 Ahlström, Gösta. "Chapter 8: Israel, An Ideological term." Who Were the Israelites?, p. 108.

154 Ibid., p. 103.

155 Ibid., p. 107.

To the *golah*, purifying the people meant a new focus on Yahweh as universal, which inadvertently meant narrowing the range of acceptable religious ritual. As such, *'am ha'ares* rituals such as incubation, child sacrifice, fertility worship, and ancestor veneration were deemed unacceptable. The *golah* community in Jerusalem, with Persian support, asserted itself both as "normative" Yahwism and as the leaders of a renewed Judah. The ideological conflict between the *golah* and the *'am ha'ares* intensified when the established *golah* community grew in power and number. Gradually, by matching certain *golah* concerns with Persian imperialist policy and by continued zeal, the *golah* was able to influence temple affairs and religious belief.

The conflict between the *golah* and the *'am ha'ares* was more complex than the process of one ideology usurping or replacing another. Quite possibly there was consensus between the two ideologies on a number of religious and political issues. The dynamics within the society caused by tension between the *golah* and the *'am ha'ares* began a process of self-definition that eventually led to Judaism. This ideological conflict and self-definition was the setting for much of the authorship and editing of the preserved biblical texts. Through the texts as preserved, one half of the ideological arguments are presented. As scholarship of the Old Testament continues, more and more details of this dynamic will be discovered and understood.

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Summary and Conclusion of Historical Research

The *golah* community in Babylon viewed the Exile as a purificatory preparation for the establishment of the people of Israel, the chosen people of the heavenly deity Yahweh. Their agenda included a rebuilding of the Jerusalem temple and a transformation of Judah's religious heritage. For some *golah*, the restoration of Judah's Davidic monarchy and the return of Judah to autonomy and prominence may have also been important aims. Some of these goals were realized when the Persian empire, to further its own long-term and short-term goals of political control, resource extraction, garrison support, and military necessity, helped re-establish the *golah* community in Judah. The Persian plan favored centralization largely for economic gain which helped the *golah* establish the Jerusalem temple as the center for tribute and religious concerns. Ezra and Nehemiah were two examples of this policy. The *golah* was eventually able to monopolize temple leadership and institute priestly reforms to narrow the scope of the indigenous religious tradition, which the *golah* saw as "unclean" and "foreign."

Those who did not go into exile and who had continued traditional forms of worship were the *'am ha'ares*. The traditional religion was polytheistic or loosely monolatrous, and included such ritual as the *marzeah* banquet, veneration of the dead, fertility worship, and necromancy. The *'am ha'ares* may also have practiced child sacrifice. Aspects of this ritual were looked down upon by the *golah* if not considered outright apostasy. The *golah* and the *'am ha'ares* groups experienced tension through conflict over the definition of "normative" Yahwism and other religious concerns such as setting and symbolism. As *golah* power increased in Judah due to increased Persian interest in the area, tension between the *golah* and *'am ha'ares* groups increased to include issues of membership in the cult, land, taxes, and leadership of Judah.

During this tension, the Jerusalem *golah* community produced or edited many biblical texts which can be better understood as reflections in this ideological conflict. Texts such as Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Second Isaiah reflect *golah* ideas which portray Yahweh as "God of the Heavens" and offer polemic in an effort to reform or purify religious ritual. Further analysis of these sources may help to uncover the contexts of such arguments and their opposition. Traditional research has used the narratives of Ezra and Nehemiah as historical background and largely ignored the people who remained in Judah or accused them of syncretism or "foreigness." This analysis has offered a different historical picture and has characterized the *'am ha'ares* in a more sympathetic way.

It is the hope of the author that my analysis can be of help to interpreters of the Old Testament. No doubt further research will help uncover more detailed elements of the *golah/'am ha'ares* debate. Texts such as the Book of Job and Isaiah 63: 15-19a, may reflect *'am ha'ares* opinions and reactions, thereby rounding out traditional *golah*-centered research into a more complete picture of Yahwism in a state of self-definition. This research serves as a foundation for this and future textual criticism. A recent interpretation of Isaiah 63: 15-19a suggests that this portion of text was an *'am ha'ares* response to *golah* exclusion.[156] Through an examination of ideological conflict in Persian period Judah, the confusion and pain on the part of the *'am ha'ares* is made more intense and poignant through a deeper understanding and contextual awareness:

> Look down from heaven and see, from your holy and glorious habitation.
> Where are your zeal and your might? The yearning of your heart and your compassion? They are withheld from me.

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[156] This paper has not been published to my knowledge, and I have not seen a copy of it. The paper, entitled "Community, Ethnicity, and Exclusion: Protest Literature in Third Isaiah," was presented at the 1994 Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature by Ben C. Ollenburger and Harold C. Washington, and was brought to my attention by my advisor Dr. Eleanor Beach.

For you are our father, though Abraham does not know us
and Israel does not acknowledge us.
You, O Yahweh, are our father;
our Redeemer from of old is your name.
Why, O Yahweh, do you make us stray from your ways and
harden our heart, so that we do not fear you?
Turn back for the sake of your servants, for the sake of the
tribes that are your heritage.[157]

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157 Isaiah 63:15-17.

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